



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

CONTENTS *Click on any heading below to jump directly to that topic.*

GENERAL PROOFREADING STRATEGIES.....	1
SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND WORD CHOICE.....	3
SENTENCE CLARITY AND LOGICAL STRUCTURING.....	5
SUBORDINATION AND COORDINATION.....	7
ESTABLISH CLEAR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CLAUSES	8
AWKWARDNESS AND OBSCURITY	9

GENERAL PROOFREADING STRATEGIES

After you have completed a rough draft, use the proofreading strategies in this document to revise your paper.

1. **Read your paper aloud, slowly—every word—and to someone else, if possible.**

LISTEN carefully to what you say. Slide a blank sheet of paper down the page, isolating each line. Think about what you are reading. Does it make sense?

If you have problems reading a sentence because it is awkward or confusing, reword it. Did you leave out any words or sentences when you were typing? Verify each draft against your original or first rough draft.

2. **Separate yourself from your draft.**

Allow time (one or two days if possible) between each draft of your paper. This will help you to be more objective in your reading.

3. **Look at your previously-graded papers for error patterns.**

With the help of a tutor, learn how to correct the errors. Look specifically for those errors in all papers you write.



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

4. **Read your paper carefully for the following common errors.** Make notes in the margin of your paper if you have questions for the Writing Center staff.

Frequently confused words

- its or it's (it is, it has)
- their or there or they're (they are)
- two or too or to
- your or you're (you are)
- then or than
- effect or affect

Consistencies

- Capitalization
- Point of view. Check personal pronouns. Are they vague or inconsistent?
- Tense: past, present, or future

Sentences

- Fragments (incomplete sentences)
- Run-ons (sentences run together)
- Comma splices (run-on with a comma)
- Subject-verb agreement (singular or plural)
- Pronoun-antecedent (gender and number)

Modifiers and modifying phrases

- Are modifiers near the word(s) or phrases they modify?
- Are they punctuated correctly?

Punctuation

- Check every end mark and internal mark
- Periods, question marks, exclamation marks
- Commas, apostrophes, semi-colons, colons
- Recheck documentation punctuation

Spelling

- After using the spell-check on your word processor, double-check words which may have several meanings and spellings, i.e. *access/excess; effect/affect; their/there/they're; your/you're; then/than; lie/lay*, etc.

5. **Check that periods and commas are inside quotation marks.**



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND WORD CHOICE

RESTRUCTURE TO AVOID WORDINESS.

You can often use subordination to combine sentences and avoid wordiness.

Examples: WORDY: The expression "Make no bones about it" once painted a vivid mental picture of a man eager to swallow his soup. The fact that he was eager kept him from objecting to any bones he might find in his soup.

CONCISE: The expression "Make no bones about it" once painted a vivid mental picture of a man so eager to swallow his soup that he would not object to any bones he might find in it.

WORDY: Alexander Pope was a poet of the eighteenth century, and he wrote many famous lines. One of these lines was "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

CONCISE: Alexander Pope, a poet of the eighteenth century, wrote such famous lines as "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

ELIMINATE NEEDLESS REPETITION

The repetition of the same word or idea in several sentences results in monotonous writing. Use pronouns to avoid the overuse of a noun, and use subordination or write a sentence with a colon to eliminate repetition of a large part of any given sentence.

Examples: REPETITIOUS: Shakespeare was responsible for two of the expressions we hear today. Shakespeare was responsible for the expressions "milk of human kindness" and "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." We use these often even now.

CONCISE: Shakespeare was responsible for two of the expressions we hear today: "Milk of human kindness" and "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

REPETITIOUS: There are many types of airplanes. Transports and fighters are two types of airplanes. One type of airplane carries things and the other type of airplane fights other airplanes.

CONCISE: There are many types of airplanes, two of which are transports and fighters. The first carries things, while the second fights other aircraft.



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

INCLUDE NECESSARY ARTICLES, PRONOUNS, CONJUNCTIONS, AND PREPOSITIONS

Guidelines for *That*

- **That** is often omitted in student writing.

Example: The world will never forget **that** Socrates died rather than give up his right to speak freely. (*Without **that** to introduce the subordinate clause, the reader may think that **Socrates** is the direct object of forget.*)

- **That** may be omitted when the meaning of the sentence would be clear without it.

Example: Socrates felt he could not give in to the jury.

- Indirect quotations are usually introduced by **that**.

Example: DIRECT QUOTATION: My instructor pointed out, "Socrates was the teacher of Plato."

INDIRECT QUOTATION: My instructor pointed out **that** Socrates was the teacher of Plato.

- Intensifiers like **so**, **such**, and **too** are usually completed by a **that** clause.

Example: Socrates was so convinced of the rightness of his position **that** he drank the hemlock rather than agree to the demands of the jury.

Omitted Prepositions Can Lead to Unidiomatic Phrasing

Examples: Socrates believed **in** and died for free speech. (***Believed for** free speech is not idiomatic.*)

The type **of** stand taken by Socrates has served as a model for many people of the twentieth century. (***Type** is not an adjective.*)

An Omitted Article Often Results in Disagreement with the Noun Modified

Example: Socrates believed in a free and **an** open society. (***a** should not precede a word beginning with a vowel—in this case **open**.*)



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

INCLUDE NECESSARY VERBS AND AUXILIARIES

Example: Free people have always **admired** and will continue to admire Socrates' stand. (*admire would be an error in tense.*)

INCLUDE NECESSARY WORDS TO COMPLETE A COMPARISON

Examples: Most students know more about Plato than **they do about** Socrates.
Plato was as brilliant **as**, if not more brilliant, than any **other** philosopher.

SENTENCE CLARITY AND LOGICAL STRUCTURING

Subjects and predicates should be clearly and logically related.

ENSURE THAT THE SUBJECTS AND PREDICATES OF YOUR SENTENCES FIT TOGETHER LOGICALLY

An inappropriate structure for the subject or predicate can create errors.

Examples: ILLOGICAL: An early example of astrology is the Babylonians, who studied the entrails of freshly slaughtered animals. (*The early example of astrology is not **the Babylonians**.*)

LOGICAL: An early example of astrology is the Babylonian practice of studying the entrails of freshly slaughtered animals. (*The early example of astrology is **the practice**.*)

ILLOGICAL: Because the priest had asked the gods to write messages on the entrails of animals to be sacrificed was the source of the interpretation of coming events. (*A **because** clause cannot function as the subject of a sentence.*)

LOGICAL: The Babylonian priest was able to interpret coming events because he asked the gods to write messages on the entrails of animals to be sacrificed.



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

LINKING VERBS

The use of a linking verb—**is, are, was, can be**, etc.—can sometimes lead to faulty predication, particularly when the linking verb is followed by **when** or **where**.

Examples: ILLOGICAL: Evidence of the Babylonian practice was when hundreds of clay tablets that set forth detailed instructions for entrail interpretation were found. (*A **when** clause cannot function as a subject complement.*)

LOGICAL: Evidence of the Babylonian practice is found in the hundreds of clay tablets that set forth detailed instructions for entrail interpretation.

KEEP THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF SENTENCES CLEAR

The addition of too much subordination or detail, even if it is relevant, will obscure the central focus of a sentence, and could make it difficult for the reader to keep the main ideas in mind.

It's often better, for the sake of clarity, to write two or more sentences to communicate the information.

Examples: UNFOCUSED: In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, we find evidence that the Babylonians, the earliest practitioners of astrology, believed that the stars and the planets were symbols of divine power, or were even the gods themselves, and thus were observed carefully by the priests, who kept detailed records of their movements.

FOCUSED: The *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, sets forth the importance of the stars and the planets to the Babylonians, the earliest practitioners of astrology. The Babylonian priests kept detailed records of the movements of the celestial bodies because they were viewed as symbols of divine power or even as the gods themselves



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

SUBORDINATION AND COORDINATION

USE SUBORDINATION TO SHOW EXACT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IDEAS

Subordination helps to create an interesting style by extending sentences and varying their beginnings.

- Use subordinated elements—subordinate clauses, verbal phrases, appositives, and prepositional phrases—to extend a sentence base or independent clause.
- Choose one idea for the sentence base, or independent clause, and subordinate other ideas.
- Use subordination instead of the conjunctions **and**, **so**, **or**, **but**, **for**, **nor** or with conjunctive adverbs like **however** and **therefore** to extend sentences.

Example: **Adopting Babylonian astrology**, the Greeks kept many of the Babylonian names for the signs but gave new names to others. They organized them into a complex system **that was best explained by Ptolemy** in *The Tetrabiblos*, a work which became the **handbook for all future writings about astrology**.

- If the paragraph contains several short, choppy sentences, no one idea stands out, and the primary effect is monotony.

Example: CHOPPY: Hawaii became the fiftieth state. It is a series of islands. It includes many small islands. There are eight major islands.

SUBORDINATION: Hawaii, **the fiftieth state**, is a series of islands **that include many small islands and eight major islands**. (*The subordinated elements are an appositive and a subordinate clause.*)

- When ideas have a time, place, or cause relationship, use subordination to indicate the connection.

Examples: STRINGY: Scuba diving is a popular pastime for tourists in many of Hawaii's bays, and highly trained diver-guides are available, so even small children can scuba-dive.

RELATED: In many of Hawaii's bays, where highly trained diver-guides are available, scuba diving is a popular pastime for tourists, even for small children.



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Guide to Proofreading Strategies

- Excessive or overlapping subordination can create difficulty in determining what the sentence base, or independent clause, is.

Examples: UNCLEAR: An added attraction on the island of Hawaii, the "Big Island," where the Volcano Pele, which erupted violently in 1960, still stirs, is a volcanic eruption which, although seldom dangerous, may shoot lava fountains as high as 1900 feet.

CLEAR: An added attraction on the island of Hawaii is a volcanic eruption which, although seldom dangerous, may shoot lava fountains as high as 1900 feet.

- Keep a logical relationship between subordinate and independent clauses.

Examples: ILLOGICAL Because volcanic activity is an added tourist attraction, the volcano Pele may shoot a lava fountain as high as 1900 feet. (*Pele doesn't shoot lava because it's a tourist attraction.*)

LOGICAL The volcano Pele, an added tourist attraction, may shoot a lava fountain as high as 1900 feet.

COORDINATION

Coordination gives equal emphasis to two ideas.

Example: On the island of Hawaii there are some beaches with pearl-white sand, but there are others with jet-black sand.

ESTABLISH CLEAR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CLAUSES

Develop Unrelated Ideas in Separate Sentences.

In a compound sentence, the ideas in the two independent clauses are closely related. In a complex sentence, a relationship exists between the independent and the subordinate clauses. If the relationship is not clear—or if the ideas are not related—the reader may be confused.

Examples: UNCLEAR: The Babylonians lived in what is now Iraq, and by 450 B.C. a cosmic system was developed to explain the influence of the stars and the planets on human life.

CLEAR: By 450 B.C. the Babylonians, who lived in what is now Iraq, developed a cosmic system to explain the influence of the stars and the planets on human life.



WRITING CENTER

Guide to Proofreading Strategies

AWKWARDNESS AND OBSCURITY

Sometimes sentences are clumsy, meaningless, or simply absurd. Often it is difficult to determine exactly which violations of grammar are involved. The reason may be a combination of violations or it may be a heavy-handed, vague, or illogical style.

One common cause of awkwardness is the improper use of **is**, followed by **when, where, what, or because**, in definitions and explanations. The linking verb **is** functions as an equal sign between the subject and the words that rename or define it.

- Examples:** ILLOGICAL: Embarrassment is when your face turns red.
LOGICAL: Embarrassment has occurred when your face turns red.
- ILLOGICAL: Skydiving is where people parachute from airplanes.
LOGICAL: Skydiving is parachuting from an airplane.

The best way to avoid writing awkward or illogical sentences is to read everything you write out loud, listen to what you say, and then evaluate each statement critically.

- Is it clear?
- Is it precise?
- Is it sensible?
- Is it to the point?