



## PROOF-READING

Has anyone made a quip about a 'burden of proofreading'? Probably not; a little laboured! Nevertheless, proofreading does feel like a burden: part art, part science, part chore! Here are some tips to help, since we'd love to see more proofreaders' inaction. Sorry! Sorry; that should read: we'd love to see more proofreaders in action...

**Make something of it!** Is it possible to chat on the phone and proofread properly? Is it possible to keep one eye on the telly and one eye on a document? Is it possible to do a quick but thorough check before you dash on to the next thing? In our experience, the answers to these questions are no, no and no respectively! Dedicate some serious time and attention to proofreading: it's as important to the process as writing!

**Spell: 'Check': C - H - E - C - K... That is correct!** There hasn't been a beloved spelling machine since Texas Instruments made 'Speak and Spell'! In fact, some people loathe computer spellcheckers. They complain they don't do this and can't do that; they say they're useless and can't be trusted to spot all your mistakes... Switch it off, they say, and have done with it, regardless of the fact that they actually catch a lot of mistakes and makes useful suggestions...

**Now try: 'Rigorously':** So rather than ranting at, and switching off, automatic spellcheckers, we let them take care of the first wave of errors, then use other methods to proofread more rigorously. In other words, use spellcheck – but don't depend on it.

**Backwards thing whole the read:** Here's a little tip that qualifies as one such rigorous tool! Read your entire document backwards... To see this working now, read the next sentence normally and count the number of times the letter 'f' appears:

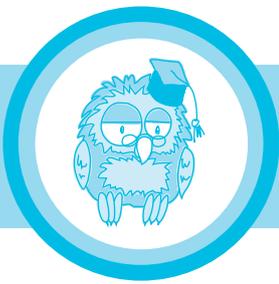
Finished files are the result of years of scientific study combined with the experience of years...

Regardless of how many times you found an 'f', or how tricky they were, read the same sentence again but this time start at the end and read it backwards, one word at a time...  
Years, of, experience, the, etc...

How many f's that time? If you noticed all six, or found them easier to spot at least, then you can now appreciate how reading things backwards stops words flowing in a logical manner. That in itself makes many, many spelling errors much easier to spot.

**Me and my Shadow:** One of our Info Sheets – 'Get that Job: Applications' – points out that having someone else check your work helps avoid a sort of 'expectation blindness' that occurs when we know what we should be seeing. It goes on to say: "Our brains can mke snse of wrds wth ltrrs mssng, or eeavn jmbled up, so we often get wrods cmpltely wrng and neevr nticoe!"

For that reason, make sure someone else gives your writing the once over... And absolutely make that 'someone' a person who has had no input until that point!



“Let’s eat Grandad!” vs. “Let’s eat, Grandad!” Ever seen that illustrative letter that can be read two very different ways depending on how it’s been punctuated? Take a look here and see the degree to which punctuation and capitalization contribute toward your message:

Dear Ernie,

I want someone who knows what love is all about: you are generous, kind and thoughtful... People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior! You have ruined me for other partners. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we’re apart... I can be forever happy – will you let me be yours?

Sue

Perhaps even Sue would be surprised to see her words read like this:

Dear Ernie,

I want someone who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind and thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior! You have ruined me. For other partners, I yearn; for you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we’re apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be? Yours,

Sue

Poor Ernie! So what’s to be done about all this? Well...

**Eats shoots and leaves:** Recognizing the value of better punctuation, Lynn Truss wrote an excellent and highly amusing book on its usage. It should be on every reference shelf but, if you’re caught short, make time to look at the DMI ‘Punctuation’ Info Sheet here: [www.dmi productions.co.uk/infosheet/pdfs/punctuation.pdf](http://www.dmi productions.co.uk/infosheet/pdfs/punctuation.pdf)

**He’s got the whole world in His hands:** Sometimes it seems that printing out a sheet of paper is considered an act of environmental terrorism! Only with the best will in the world, then, do we say that people tend to find more mistakes in their work when they’re physically reading from a piece of paper. Print it out, proofread it – then recycle!

**Homophones and heterographs and little lambs eat ivy:** Homophones and heterographs are groups of words that are pronounced the same but have different meanings: bear and bare; to, two and too, for example. Spellcheck sometimes accepts these words, even though they might be completely wrong in the context. Wee knead too bee shore Wii chews the rite words!



Here are some of the most common of these 'look similar, sound alike' errors:

**Accept:** You receive something when you accept it...

**Except:** Means omit or exclude.

**Affect:** This means 'to cause'.

**Effect:** This is the result! The only exception to this rule is if you effect a change!

**A Lot:** Means many of.

**Alot:** There's no such word!

**All right:** Means all is well.

**Alright:** Some people insist it's not a word but the Oxford English Dictionary lists it as a variant spelling of 'all right'. And if it's alright with them, it's alright with us... We'll add that 'alright' is often used to express the idea that something is only okay rather than that all things are correct.

**Are:** Relates to the present state of being: things are fine!

**Our:** Means belonging to us! There's no excuse for mixing these up!

**Complement:** If it enhances something, or comes as an extra, it's with an 'e'!

**Compliment:** An expression of praise or admiration is with an 'i'.

**Council:** A body of people that runs things!

**Counsel:** Advice.

**Its and it's:** We have given a really thorough explanation of this in our 'Punctuation' Info Sheet under 'Apostrophes'! Check it out here: [www.dmi productions.co.uk/infosheet/pdfs/punctuation.pdf](http://www.dmi productions.co.uk/infosheet/pdfs/punctuation.pdf)

**Passed:** Went by.

**Past:** Any period of time that has gone by!

**Precede:** Come or go before.

**Proceed:** Continue forward.

**Stationery:** Pens, paper, etc. The 'e' is for envelope.

**Stationary:** Not moving – the 'a' is for 'anging around'!

**Their:** Belonging to them.

**There:** Not here!

**They're:** They are.

**Through:** Via

**Threw:** The past tense of throw.

**Thorough:** Detailed.

**Though:** Means 'despite'. 'Although' means the same thing; they're completely interchangeable.

**Thru:** A ghastly way of writing 'through'; it's to be avoided!

**To:** Is the preposition: to do, to go, to be...

**Too:** Means 'as well' and 'very'.

**Two:** Is the number!

**Who and whom:** Take a look at our 'Better Grammar' Info Sheet for a thorough explanation of this!



**Capital punishment:** There's an old joke about a fella who phones his bank to tell them he's getting an 'Access Denied' message when he tries to login online. The support clerk asks if he's typing his username and password in capital letters. The fella says: "I guess so – my keyboard only has capital letters on it".

Hey – we said it was old, not good! Either way, this is our way of saying that more and more people seem confused about upper and lower case letters... The most common mistakes are:

- USING THEM ALL THE TIME
- abandoning capital letters altogether
- Employing Capitals At The Start Of Every Word

Broadly speaking, it's necessary to use capital letters:

- For the first word of a sentence
- To start a line of poetry
- For the pronoun 'I' – you should never write 'i' meaning yourself!
- In many book, film, play and other titles: it's quite common to capitalize the important words – 'War and Peace', 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader', 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'.
- When using proper nouns and the names of months, days of the week; many brand names, holidays such as Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter; places, areas, buildings, landmarks, etc; also for any adjectives derived from proper nouns... French, German, Elizabethan, Dickensian.
- In titles: Lord, Mr., Mrs., Miss., Dr., Sir
- When referring to God and His derivatives; His, Him and He; Jesus is also afforded this courtesy! The Holy Ghost doesn't get enough press to warrant it as best we can make out...

Capitals aren't required if:

- The word follows a semi-colon or a colon in the middle of a sentence: thus!
- You're writing about a collective: bishops, princes, soldiers and so on.
- You're writing about spring, summer, autumn and winter, surprisingly; also when writing the directions north, east, south and west... Unless talking about going up North, etc.

**Five... Four... Three... Two... One...** Numbers from one to ten are generally represented as typed words. Larger numbers, monetary values, measurements and the like are better nominated as digits. So, for example, we might write: "On two days last week, we had 150 clicks on the DMI Showreel"



**In the beginning was the word...** And the word was 'misspelled'! Ah, the irony of misspelled being one of the most frequently misspelled words! When all's said and done, though, one of the most frustrating aspects of proofreading is making decisions over silly little things, then forgetting what you decided and looking it up again two weeks later! For that reason, we suggest you make your own proofreading guide...

To do this, simply record decisions you make about your style of writing and keep it somewhere where it can easily be found. If, for example, you find that 'The Oxford Comma' is acceptable, or that you prefer to use open speech marks to indicate the spoken word, and single speech marks for the titles of books, etc., then make a note of these things... And stay consistent!

**And finally...** Just for fun, here's an 'Ode to the Computer Spellchecker' which illustrates the points we made about spellcheckers, homophones and heterographs:

Aye have a spelling checker -  
It came with my knew pea sea.  
It plane lee Marx, four my revue  
Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,  
Yawl shore bee glad two no!  
Its vary polished in it's weigh,  
My checker tolled me sew!

This soft wear is a bless sing,  
It freeze yew lodes off thyme.  
It helps me right awl stiles eye kneed,  
And aides me when aye rime.  
Too rite with care is quite a feet  
Of witch won Canne bee proud.  
And wee mused dew the best wee can,  
Ass floors are knot aloud.

And now bee cause my spelling  
Is chequed with such grate flare,  
Their are know faults with in my cite -  
Of nun eye am a wear.

Each frays come posed up on my screen,  
Aye trussed to bee a joule.  
The checker pawed o'er every word,  
Two cheque the spelling rules.

That's why aye brake in two averse  
By righting words too pleas  
Sow now ewe sea why wee mused prays  
Such soft wear for pea seas.