

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Editing and Proofreading

What this handout is about

proofreading, we have left seven errors (three spelling errors, two punctuation errors, and two grammatical

Editing is what you begin doing as soon as you finish your first draft. You reread your draft to see, for example, whether the paper is well organized, the transitions between paragraphs are smooth, and your evidence really

backs up your argument. You can edit on several levels:

Content

Have you done everything the assignment requires? Are the claims you make accurate? If it is required to do so, does your paper make an argument? Is the argument complete? Are all of your claims consistent? Have you supported each point with adequate evidence? Is all of the information in your paper relevant to the assignment and/or your overall writing goal? (For additional tips, see our handouts on understanding

Citations

Have you appropriately cited quotes, paraphrases, and ideas you got from sources? Are you using the correct format? (See the UNC Libraries citation tutorial for more information.)

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As you edit at all of these levels, you will usually make significant revisions to the content and wording of your paper. Keep an eye out for patterns of error; knowing what kinds of problems you tend to have will be helpful, especially if you are editing a large document like a thesis or dissertation. Once you have identified a pattern, you can develop techniques for spotting and correcting future instances of that pattern. For example, if you notice that you often discuss several distinct topics in each paragraph, you can go through your paper and underline the key words in each paragraph, then break the paragraphs up so that each one focuses on just one main idea.

Proofreading

Proofreading is the final stage of the editing process, focusing on surface errors such as misspellings and

- **Don't rely entirely on spelling checkers.** These can be useful tools but they are far from foolproof. Spell

checkers have a limited dictionary, so some words that show up as misspelled may really just not be in their memory. In addition, spell checkers will not catch misspellings that form another valid word.

For example, *flour* is misspelled as *flower* instead of *flower* instead of *flower* instead of *flower*.

the spell checker won't catch the error.

- **Ignorance may be bliss, but it won't make you a better proofreader.** You'll often find things that don't seem quite right to you, but you may not be quite sure what's wrong either. A word looks like it might

- ~~be misread~~ but the spell checker didn't catch it. You might think it's a typo, but it's not.

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