

So, what is PROOFREADING anyway, and why should I bother?

When you take a Job Quest Résumé Writing or Cover Letter Writing workshop, your facilitator will tell you to proofread your résumé or cover letter before submitting it to a potential employer. So, what is proofreading anyway, and why should you bother?

What is proofreading

Proofreading means carefully reading (and re-reading) a draft copy of a document either printed or on your computer screen, to find and correct any last-minute mistakes. The main types of things you look for are errors in:

- spelling and word usage
- sentence structure
- punctuation
- capitalization
- numbers (*it's easy to go cross-eyed reviewing a long list of numbers*)
- inconsistencies in formatting and layout

★ Proofread by reading backwards, word for word, from the end of your paper to the beginning, because if you go with the flow of your paper you're less likely to catch mistakes.

Prior to this you should have already reread and edited your document to identify and fix any errors in writing style, organization, and content. Proofreading is the last step in creating your mailable, submittable résumé and cover letter. Mailable means error-free—100% accuracy is your top priority.

Why should I bother

You are not writing for you—you are writing for another reader, your potential employer. The first reason you should bother to proofread is you need to show them the most professional image of yourself and your potential, and you need to show them your written communication skills—this is what these two documents do!

A single misspelled word in your résumé or cover letter could cost you an interview, and the job! I remember applying for my “dream” job and spending a lot of time working on my résumé. It was for a development education position. In my résumé and cover letter I repeatedly spelled their key word development as “developement.” I knew I had an “in” and a good chance at the position, but that nasty little extra “e” mistake completely put me out of the running. Here I was an educator and couldn't spell “development” (and my spell checker didn't catch it either)! What kind of message did I send them with that error? Don't you blow it the way I did—I still have regrets about it and wonder “what if.” Proofread, *proofread*, proofread.

★ To expand on the boxed tip above, proofread by reading material from right to left or from the bottom of the page to the top. This forces you to look at individual words. Reading backward helps when checking details such as spelling; however, it is not effective for checking content accuracy.

Another reason why you should bother to proofread is that these two job search documents must contain all necessary information (from the reader's point of view). Proofreading helps you catch any of these errors and omissions, and fix them *before* you put that envelope with your résumé and cover letter in the mail.

★ Proofread by reading aloud. You are forced to slow down and read each word as you move your lips and form each word. You hear and listen for sentence correctness.

★ Proofreading tips

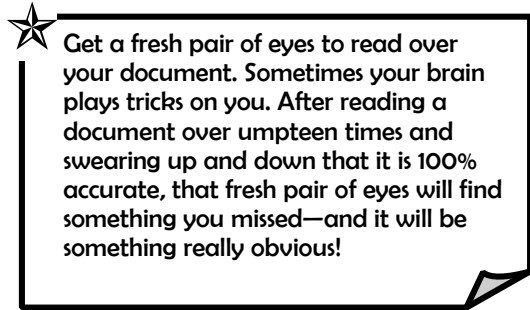
- Use your computer's spell checker and print preview to correct any obvious errors in spelling and layout before printing a draft copy to go over more closely.

NOTE: Spell checkers only check words against the computer's dictionary, and it only finds *those* misspelled words. It does not find incorrectly used words or misspelled words that are *not* in the computer's dictionary. There is no substitute for proofreading and using our brains!
- Print a draft copy of your document and make corrections; it is easier to see errors on paper than on your computer screen.
- Proofread when you are "at your best" or most alert; and remove any distractions so you can concentrate on just proofreading.
- Keep a dictionary, grammar guide, thesaurus, or business reference manual within arm's reach and refer to them when you are not sure about spelling or document layout, etc.
- Plan on proofreading each document at least 3 times:
 1. Give it a visual check to look at layout and formatting; (spacing, margins, visual attractiveness, formatting consistency)
 2. Read words, check for typos, errors in punctuation and capitalization;
 3. Read for content accuracy—especially names, dates, and numbers.
- Put at least 2 – 24 hours between writing and proofreading; you will be more objective when you return to correct your work. At the very least, do *something* in between these 2 stages.
- Don't use pencil or black ink to write your corrections or proofreader's marks; they are not easy to see. Use red (or purple or green) so the corrections you've made jump out at you once you are back at your computer to make the changes.

★ Visual proofread your document to check alignment. Use these 3 techniques:

1. Hold the document at arm's length.
2. Turn it upside down.
3. Run a straightedge down the left and right margins to see how things line up.

- ❑ Don't mark overtop your text; rather, write corrections in the margins or in the spaces between lines. It's difficult to double-space paragraphs in your draft résumé and cover letter; but when proofreading draft copies of other types of documents, this is a good thing to do.



- ❑ Place a straightedge (ruler or piece of paper) below the line you are reading to avoid skipping words or lines of text. Never be in a rush when you are proofreading!

Proofreading online resources and links

OWL at Purdue – Online Writing Lab

(An excellent resource for any writing—I've used this resource for years as a university student and as a Business Education teacher and like it very much)

Proofreading Your Writing

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/01/>

Also check out the information on *Job Search Writing: Cover Letters 1: Quick Tips* and *Résumés 1: Introduction to Résumés*

University of Calgary – Assistive Technology for Written Language Difficulties
(Check out the very cool online tasks to test your proofreading abilities—under the Editing and Proofreading Tasks section of the page)

Self-Assessment of Writing Strengths and Needs

http://commons.ucalgary.ca/at-wld/students/WritingDiff01_21st.html

University of North Carolina – Writing Center – Handouts and Links

Proofreading

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html>

CMU proofmarks image you can print

<http://www.cmu.edu/styleguide/proofmarks.gif>

Either print the image on legal-sized paper or save the image to your computer, insert the image file into a Word (or other word processing program) document and size to fit a letter-sized page, then print.

Free online article

The Proof is in the Proofing: 7 Tips to Develop Great Proofreading Skills

<http://dhtmlnirvana.com/michiebaby/archives/231-The-Proof-Is-In-The-Proofing-7-Tips-To-Develop-Great-Proofreading-Skills.html>

★ Quick tips

★ Proofreading errors are often found:

- Near beginnings or endings of sentences
- In proper nouns (people and place names)
- In long words
- In the lower ¼ of the page
- In number combinations

★ Watch for the following errors:

- Doubling small words (if, in, as, by, be)
- Omission of one of a pair of doubled letters (omitted)
- Substitution of one small word for another (an for on, in for on, by for be)
- Transposition (reversing positions) of words within sentences
- Transposition of letters within words
- Omission of a closing quotation mark, bracket, or parenthesis

★ 4 tips for proofing numbers:

1. Never assume a number is typed correctly.
2. Read through your documents once just to verify numbers.
3. Check each number, and make sure it's logical. (10 years experience providing personalized customer service in 21 dentists' office. It should read **12**).
4. When proofing columns of numbers, add the numbers in the original and then the final copy. Your totals should be the same.

★ 4 tips for proofing names:

1. Read through your document once just to verify names. (People hate to see their names spelled incorrectly!)
2. Check for possible alternate spellings of names (Steven or Stephen, Terri or Terry).
3. Use appropriate courtesy titles (Ms, Miss, Mrs., Mrs., Dr.).
4. Check the spelling of each part of a person's name (first, middle, last).

★ 4 tips for proofing phone numbers:

1. Break the number into its parts (area code, first 3 digits, final 4 digits, extension).
2. Read aloud with a partner to check phone numbers.
3. Anticipate and check for transpositions.
4. Line up columns of phone numbers and check the parentheses, hyphens, spaces, and digits.