Set the document aside. Leave your text alone for a few hours (or even a day or two), and then return to it with fresh eyes. It's hard to edit or proofread a draft that you've just finished writing—it's still too familiar, and you tend to skip over a lot of errors. The longer the piece is, the longer you should wait to proofread it.

Understand the difference between proofreading and editing. Edit first by making revisions (content, organization, etc.), and when the piece is done, proofread to check for proper grammar. That way, you can stay focused on sentence-level issues while proofreading.

Find a quiet place to work. You'll need to concentrate, so eliminate distractions. Shut your door, or put in earplugs.

Proofread when you're fresh and **wide awake.**

If possible, **do your editing and proofreading in several short blocks of time.** Your concentration may start to wane if you try to proofread the entire text at one time. Clear your mind by doing something active, and try to avoid reading or writing during these breaks.

Decide which medium lets you proofread most carefully. Some people like to work right at the computer, while others like to sit back with a printed copy that they can mark up as they read. For many writers, printing a hard copy helps them catch errors that they previously missed.

Try changing the look of your document. Altering the size, spacing, color, or style of the text may trick your brain into thinking it's seeing an unfamiliar document, and that can help you get a different perspective on what you've written. Make the font bigger or switch to a new font.

Look for one type of problem at a time. It's easier to catch errors if you aren't checking punctuation and spelling at the same time. Try concentrating on spelling errors on one pass, and then turn your attention to punctuation. Check numbers for accuracy on a separate read-through. Or, read through your text several times, concentrating first on sentence structures, then word choice, then spelling, and finally punctuation. (If you're short on time, you may wish to **prioritize** by focusing on the types of mistakes you make most often.)

Make a personalized proofreading checklist. Keep track of the mistakes that you make frequently, and then refer to that list each time you proofread. If, for example, you often use "their" when you mean "they're," use the search function on your computer to seek out these words. Add to the list any mistakes that readers have pointed out to you; you'll find that you tend to repeat the same mistakes.

Read slowly, and read every word. When you read too quickly, you may skip over errors or make unconscious corrections.

Separate the text into individual sentences. Press the return key after every period so that every line begins a new sentence. Then read each sentence separately, looking for grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. If you're working with a printed copy, try using an opaque object like a ruler to isolate the line you're working on, or place sheets of paper above and below each sentence.

Circle every punctuation mark. This forces you to look at each one. As you circle, ask yourself if the punctuation is correct.

Read the text backwards. This technique is helpful for checking spelling. Start with the last word on the last page and work your way back to the beginning, reading each word separately. Because content, punctuation, and grammar won't make any sense, your focus will be entirely on the spelling of each word. You can also read backwards sentence by sentence to check grammar; this will help you avoid becoming distracted by content issues.

Read your text aloud. Or ask a friend or colleague to read it aloud. You may hear a problem (a faulty verb ending, for example, or a missing word) that you haven't been able to see. Pronounce each word slowly and clearly as you check for

mistakes.

Examine your work from top to bottom. Don't forget titles, subheadings, and footnotes. Sometimes errors in these areas are the most difficult to spot because we assume they will be error-free, so we ignore them.

Pay attention to formatting. Use the same formatting on all paragraphs, headings, and other typographical styles. Learn how to make the formatting visible in your word processing software so it's easier to check.

Double-check facts, figures, and proper names. Make sure that all the information in your text is accurate. Look up the spelling of technical terms that you're not familiar with to make sure you're spelling them correctly.

Check your work first before handing it off to a reader...

...but do ask for help. Invite someone else to proofread your text after you have reviewed it. A new set of eyes may immediately spot errors that you've overlooked. Also, wording that seems clear to you may confuse a reader who is unfamiliar with the document.

Choose a style guide and stick with it. This will make your work more consistent, and you'll have a great resource to use when you have questions about style and formatting.

When in doubt, look it up. Don't make any assumptions. You'll often find things that don't seem quite right to you, but you may not be quite sure what's wrong either. For example, a word looks like it might be misspelled, but the spell checker didn't catch it. Or you think you need a comma between two words, but you're not sure why. Should you use "that" instead of "which"? If you're not sure, look it up.

Make it your business to develop good grammar skills. Proofreading is a learning process. You're not just looking for errors that you recognize; you're also learning to recognize and correct new errors. Start building a collection of grammar books and writing resources so when you do run into questions, you have access to reliable and credible answers. If you intentionally let grammatical mistakes slip through, do so by choice and make sure you have a good reason. It's okay to break the rules if you know why you're breaking them (e.g., choosing to use "they" as a singular pronoun out of respect for non-gendered people.)

Use a spellchecker...but be careful. Before proofreading and editing, run spelling and grammar check, and then run it again after you're done to check for any lingering typos. However, remember, it's not foolproof. Spell checkers have a limited dictionary, so some words that show up as misspelled may just not be in their memory. In addition, spell checkers will not catch misspellings that form another valid word. For example, if you type "your" instead of "you're" or "to" instead of "too," the spell checker won't catch the error. Grammar checkers can be even more problematic. They fail to give thorough explanations to help you understand why a sentence should be revised. You can use a grammar checker to help you identify potential run-on sentences or too-frequent use of the passive voice, but you need to be able to evaluate the feedback it provides.

Trust your dictionary. Your spellchecker can tell you only if a word is a word, not if it's the right word. For instance, if you're not sure whether sand is in a desert or a dessert, visit the dictionary.

Put your computer to work. Add correctly spelled words to the dictionary, including proper nouns you frequently use. Adding these words will reduce the number of red lines in the document, helping you to identify real errors. Run a regular spell-check when you are finished.

Use the "track changes" feature in Microsoft Word when you edit. This feature essentially saves your edits and marks up your document so you can go back and revert to different revisions.

When am I done proofreading? At the very least, proofread until you don't catch any more errors. If a document is long or especially important, you may find yourself proofreading it many times.

Mistakes happen. Sometimes an error will sneak through to the final draft. Don't be too hard on yourself. Just do your best.

**Compiled from internet sources and pieced together.