

# PROOFREADING

Proofreading **takes time and you should allow ideally a week** between writing and doing this. **Read the paper slowly to avoid missing mistakes** and if possible, ask a friend to read over it too.

**Proofreading is the last stage in the editing process.** It needs to be done **thoroughly and systematically**, otherwise it is very easy to miss details that need to be changed.

## Q TOP TIP

Use a checklist to help you identify mistakes. The first step is to make a list of your common errors. This can be created by checking your tutors' feedback and making a list of recurring errors. You can then use this list to focus your proofreading.

## Common Errors

### Q TOP TIP

Take a structured approach: focus on specific potential problems, rather than trying to identify everything at one go.

## Spelling

Spell check is not perfect! You should not rely on it to proofread because it may not highlight the following:

- Incorrect words (e.g. Its /it's or their/there)
- American spelling (e.g. summarize)
- Compound words (e.g. every day or everyday)
- Punctuation errors
- Redundant redundancy
- Correct verb tenses
- Formatting errors
- Words in capital letters

## Run-On Sentences

These **occur when two full sentences are joined without a break**. For example,

- **X** "I need to study for my exams no one passed the exam last year."
- **should become**
- **✓** "I need to study for my exams, because no one passed last year."

# Subject/Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in number. Here are some of the rules to follow:

<p><b>1. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular too</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>She</u> writes every day.</p>
<p><b>2. If the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>They</u> write every day.</p>
<p><b>3. When the subject of the sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by and, use a plural verb</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ The <u>doctoral student</u> and the <u>committee members</u> write every day.</p> <p>✓ The <u>percentage of employees</u> who called in sick and <u>the number of employees</u> who left their jobs within 2 years are reflective of the level of job satisfaction.</p>
<p><b>4. When there is one subject and more than one verb, the verbs throughout the sentence must agree with the subject</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>Interviews</u> are one way to collect data and <i>allow</i> researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants.</p>
<p><b>5. When a phrase comes between the subject and the verb, remember that the verb still agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase following the subject of the sentence</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>The student</u>, as well as the committee members, <i>is</i> excited.</p>
<p><b>6. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by "or" / "nor", use a singular verb</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>The chairperson</u> or the <u>CEO</u> <i>approves</i> the proposal before proceeding.</p>
<p><b>7. When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is closest to the verb.</b> This is also called <b>the rule of proximity</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>The student</u> or the <u>committee members</u> write every day.</p> <p>✓ <u>The committee members</u> or the <u>student</u> writes every day.</p>
<p><b>8. The words "each", "each one", "either", "neither", "everyone", "everybody", "anyone", "anybody", "nobody", "somebody", "someone", and "no one", are singular and require a singular verb</b>, e.g.:</p> <p>✓ <u>Each</u> of the participants <i>was</i> willing to be recorded.</p> <p>✓ <u>Neither</u> alternative hypothesis <i>was</i> accepted.</p> <p>✓ I will offer a \$5 gift card to <u>everybody</u> who <i>participates</i> in the study.</p> <p>✓ <u>No one</u> <i>was</i> available to meet with me at the preferred times.</p>

9. In sentences beginning with **there is** or **there are**, the subject follows the verb.

Since **there is not the subject**, the verb agrees with what follows the verb, e.g.:

- ✓ There *is* little administrative support.
- ✓ There *are* many factors affecting teacher retention.

10. **Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but are considered singular and taken as a singular verb.** Some examples are “group”, “team, committee”, “family”, and “class”, e.g.:

- ✓ The group *meets* every week.
- ✓ The committee *agrees* on the quality of the writing.

## Sentence Fragments

**Every sentence needs a subject.** If the subject is missing it is called a sentence fragment. For example, the following are sentence fragments:

- ✗ “Learned the material.” – a sentence that is missing a subject.

**and**

- ✗ “That is why we learned the material.” cannot stand on its own because it lacks information. What is the reason they learned the material?

## Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns such as: “her”, “his”, “their”, “it” and “they”, **need to refer to a preceding noun**, and if it isn’t clear who or what they refer to change them to a noun, e.g.:

- ✗ John met Mary and Sue and said that he liked her. (It isn’t clear who he likes.)
- ✓ John met both Mary and Sue, and said that he only liked Sue.

## Plural, Singular Possessives and Apostrophes

The general rule is that **the possessive of a singular noun is formed by adding an apostrophe and s, whether the singular noun ends in s or not.** The possessive of a **plural noun is formed by adding only an apostrophe when the noun ends in s, and by adding both an apostrophe and s when it ends in a letter other than s**, e.g.:

- ✓ Their mothers are all over 60. (plural)
- ✓ Their mother’s handbag is green. (singular possessive)
- ✓ Their mothers’ houses were small. (plural possessive)

## Comma Splices

This involves **using a comma to link two parts of a sentence, instead of a linker** and it is usually an attempt to avoid repetition, e.g.:

- X** He liked to visit the beach, he enjoyed surfing and swimming all day.  
**should become**
- ✓** Solved: He liked to visit the beach and he enjoyed surfing and swimming all day.

## Parallelism

**A sentence isn't parallel when the forms of the verb are different in the sentence, e.g.:**

- X** "I like to eat chocolate and drinking beer."  
**should become**
- ✓** "I like to eat chocolate and drink beer."  
**or**
- ✓** "I like eating chocolate and drinking beer."

### **TOP TIP**

Proofreading job will get easier with practice. It is a habit that you have to create rather than a natural skill.

## Useful Links

- <https://slideplayer.com/slide/5266655/>
- <https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/subjectverb-agreement>
- <https://www.thepunctuationguide.com/apostrophe.html>

## Other Relevant Online PDFs

- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Sentence Structure
- Editing