How to proofread

Before submitting your work you should always proofread it. The extra marks you could gain might make the difference between a higher or lower grade, or even a pass or fail.

**Step 1: Planning**

Final proofreading is an important stage, so make sure you have enough time:
- As a rough guide allow one hour per thousand words
- Build in a time lapse, at least one day, so that you have a gap between writing your final draft and proofreading
- Divide your work into sections rather than trying to proofread it all at once
- Print out your work in a font that you don’t like and make the font larger. It helps make the writing look different, so less like your own work and therefore easier to proofread. (University of Birmingham, no date)

**Step 2: Sense and Structure**

Read your work out loud as it is often easier to hear mistakes than to see them. If it helps, you could ask a friend to read it to you, or read aloud and record yourself.

Concentrate on the sense and structure:
- Does it make sense?
- Does it flow?
  - Your introduction explains what you plan to do. Make sure that it fits with what you’ve actually written.
  - Your paragraphs link your content together. Check that the first sentence of each paragraph introduces a relevant point.
  - Each paragraph should be on a single topic. Write one or two words in your margin to sum up the paragraph, then scan through your writing to make sure you haven’t repeated yourself.
  - Your conclusion summarises the main themes and states your final conclusion based on the evidence presented in the main body of the essay. Check that it answers the question in the title of the assignment.
  - Check that your introduction and conclusion match.
- Is it written in the appropriate style? Check that it’s in a formal, measured style without any slang.
- Is it as concise as possible? As you only have a limited number of words, it’s important not to waste them. Watch out for repetition, and for words or phrases which aren’t adding anything to your argument.

**Step 3: Spelling and Punctuation**
Read your work again – this time, concentrating on the **spelling** and **punctuation**:
- First check for spelling mistakes. Watch out for words spelt correctly but with the wrong meaning e.g. where and were. Don’t just rely on a spell checker; use a dictionary as well.
- Check for missing words or words you’ve written twice by mistake.
- Now check punctuation. Read each sentence out loud, pausing where necessary to identify where punctuation is needed. Circle each punctuation mark. As you circle each mark, ask yourself if it is in the correct place.

**Step 4: Follow the Guidelines**
Have a final check that your work follows any guidelines you have been given:
- Check your **references** to make sure that they are in keeping with the appropriate style.
- Check you have followed any guidelines given by your module tutor or your School. For example, there could be School guidelines on presentation e.g. font size, type face, spacing etc.

**Tip:** Create an action list for proofreading based on feedback from your assignments.

**Step 5: Submit your Assignment**
Once you have completed and submitted your assignment, there is still one more important stage to come. The feedback that you receive will help you identify priorities for your next piece of work. Keep a note of minor errors that you need to check for when proofreading and major issues you need to work on to improve your marks.

**Reference**
University of Birmingham (no date) **Editing techniques**. Available at: https://birmingham.instructure.com/courses/11842/pages/editing-techniques?module_item_id=288926 (Accessed 18 June 2019)