

# Approaches to proofreading your work

If you ask someone else to check your work or use AI technologies to refine or edit it, you will need to consider what changes are appropriate, and what crosses the line.

If you choose to work with a proofreader to refine your work, it is important to ensure that the work you produce is your own. When we talk about proofreaders here, it may be a professional, a critical friend or family member, text editing software such as Grammarly Pro, or Generative AI tools, such as Microsoft Copilot. Whomever, or whatever you use to proofread your work, you will need to ensure that the suggestions made don't change your work so much that it's no longer yours, and that you are active in the process to make a decision about what suggestions to include or reject.

## Before you begin

Take some time to evaluate your drafted work and consider what you hope to improve through the proofreading process. This will help you focus on maintaining your own voice and ideas in your work and allow you to guide the person or technology to achieve your aims. You should also make sure you are familiar with the Newcastle University [Student Academic Misconduct Procedure](#) which outlines the types of academic misconduct which may result from over reliance on a proofreader or Artificial Intelligence.

If you are working with a person, discuss with your proofreader the type of changes you feel might be necessary and appropriate, and outline your understanding of the requirements of the assessment. One of the good things about Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Copilot, is they can also be used in a conversational way, so you can use your prompts to discuss the task you want it to perform too. If you aren't sure whether working with a proofreader or AI technology is appropriate for the task you have been given, ask your lecturer or supervisor.

## Retain your authorial voice

When using a proofreader or any form of technology to proof your work, the aim is for you, your ideas and your voice to remain visible in the work. To do this, you will need to make choices, to help you to retain your role as editor.

If you are working with a proofreader, or AI tool, make sure that you can see, review and approve all changes within your work. For example, when using Microsoft Word or similar software, to collaborate with a proofreader, use the [track changes and show markup functions](#) to retain control over any changes made. This collaborative way of working is especially useful as it allows you to use

proofreading as a developmental opportunity, to identify your own common mistakes or stylistic quirks to improve, so that you become independent of the need for a proofreader.

When working with AI tools, the same principles apply. Rather than asking the tool to re-write or edit your words, use prompts that will result in suggestions that you can make decisions on whether to use them or not. If you chose to use technology enhanced by Artificial Intelligence or Generative AI to proofread, you will also need to be cautious to ensure that the outputs created stand up to scrutiny. We know that material created by Generative AI can include errors, be factually incorrect, make incorrect assumptions about your meaning, and include hallucinations. Whilst AI can be an invaluable tool to help you refine your writing, improve the clarity of your wording and build your confidence, it does need to be used with a critical mindset, to question and evaluate the edits it suggests. Focus on developing prompts that allow you to engage in a critical dialogue that helps you develop your writing, and not replace it.

When thinking about working with a proofreader, there are different levels of input into your work that we need to consider.

## Proofreading

These levels involve correcting accidental or minor features of the text and its language:

### Level 1 errors

- Typing errors (typos)
- Inconsistencies (e.g. capitalisation, variant spellings, use of font and effects such as bold or italics, formatting issues such as margins, indents and line breaks, consistent presentation of references).
- Omitted elements (e.g. subheadings, labels for figures etc, page numbers, incomplete references)
- Adherence to house style in your assignment or module guide, or School handbook. This includes referencing styles.

### Level 2 mistakes (language competence)

- Spelling (including confusion of homophones which are those words that sound the same but have different meanings, such as there/their/they're).
- Grammar (including syntax, incomplete or run-on sentences, verb formation, subject/verb matching etc)
- Punctuation (including apostrophes, commas, semi-colons etc)
- Inappropriate word choice (including malapropisms).

In most instances, your proofreader, software or Generative AI tool can correct these issues without collusion, as it doesn't change the substance of your work or the meaning. However, to develop your writing confidence, why not ask the proofreader or tool to identify the errors without

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correcting them on your behalf. Ask for feedback or an overview of the most common errors in your writing to so that you can improve these areas in future.

For those students who have been referred by their Disability Practitioner, the Specialist Learning Team can support with developing proofreading and editing skills within a study skills session/s.

Check that language competence isn't part of the assessment criteria; in some subjects, for example, Modern Languages, this is what you're being tested on and corrections by someone else might constitute collusion.

Some mistakes, for example, the position of commas or choice of words, can actually change the meaning of your text. This is an area where it is useful to ask the proofreader, or tool to highlight mistakes without correcting them. Work with the proofreader to explain the two possible alternative meanings so that you are able to make a decision about your intended meaning, so that your original ideas are conveyed.

If someone or something makes extensive changes to how you have expressed your ideas in English language there is a danger that the changes may not accurately represent your writing skills or your intended meaning. Over reliance on a proofreader or technology can have unintended consequences for students learning in English as second language. Therefore, if you like to improve your language fluency, it may be useful to seek advice from Newcastle University International Study Centre who run [in-session support](#) or the University's [Language Resource Centre](#).

## Editing

The following two levels involve more major changes to the text's style and content:

### Level 3 academic style

- Inappropriate style for UK academic writing (which might include colloquialisms, emotive language, personal language where inappropriate, but also overly formal registers etc.)
- Lack of cohesion or 'flow' in structure or argument
- Clumsy, repetitive or wordy expression
- Ambiguous or unclear meaning
- Lack of structure, inappropriate, repetitive or unclear structure

Academic writing is a specific style, and one of the skills that you learn at university. It reflects the objective, logical and critical nature of your thinking, and the structure of your argument. It also varies between different genres of assignment, and according to the subject you're studying and level of study. It's important that any proofreader is familiar with UK academic writing in your discipline so they don't make inappropriate suggestions. If you choose to use Generative AI within this level, this information is vital to feed into the initial and follow up conversational prompts you input. It's important that the writing genuinely represents your voice, and your structure.

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Again, think about collaborating with your proofreader or the AI technology to highlight and identify areas where your writing wasn't clear or sounded wordy, and avoid changes being made on your behalf. Anything which begins to change the meaning or structure of your writing might be problematic. In terms of collusion, your proofreader or the tools you use might make suggestions, but take these critically and reflect on them before you implement them.

## **Level 4: content and meaning**

- Factual and interpretative accuracy
- Content and meaning
- Irrelevant or missing material
- Missing references or other evidence, plagiarism
- Quality of aim, discussion, argument or conclusions
- Selecting material to delete to meet word count (beyond making style more concise)
- Accurate paraphrasing of sources
- Whether it meets the aims/assessment question or marking criteria

These should only be undertaken by yourself, in discussion with a lecturer, Specialist Learning Advisor or Academic Skills Team tutor.

The University doesn't offer a proofreading service. You may feel however that you need a second pair of eyes to proofread your work before you submit it to pick up anything you've missed. To enable you to do this independently, the Academic Skills Team can teach you strategies to proofread and edit your own work. For students who have been referred by their Disability Practitioner, the Specialist Learning Team can support with developing proofreading and editing skills within a study skills session/s.