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Prevent Sloppy Writing: 8 Proofreading Tips

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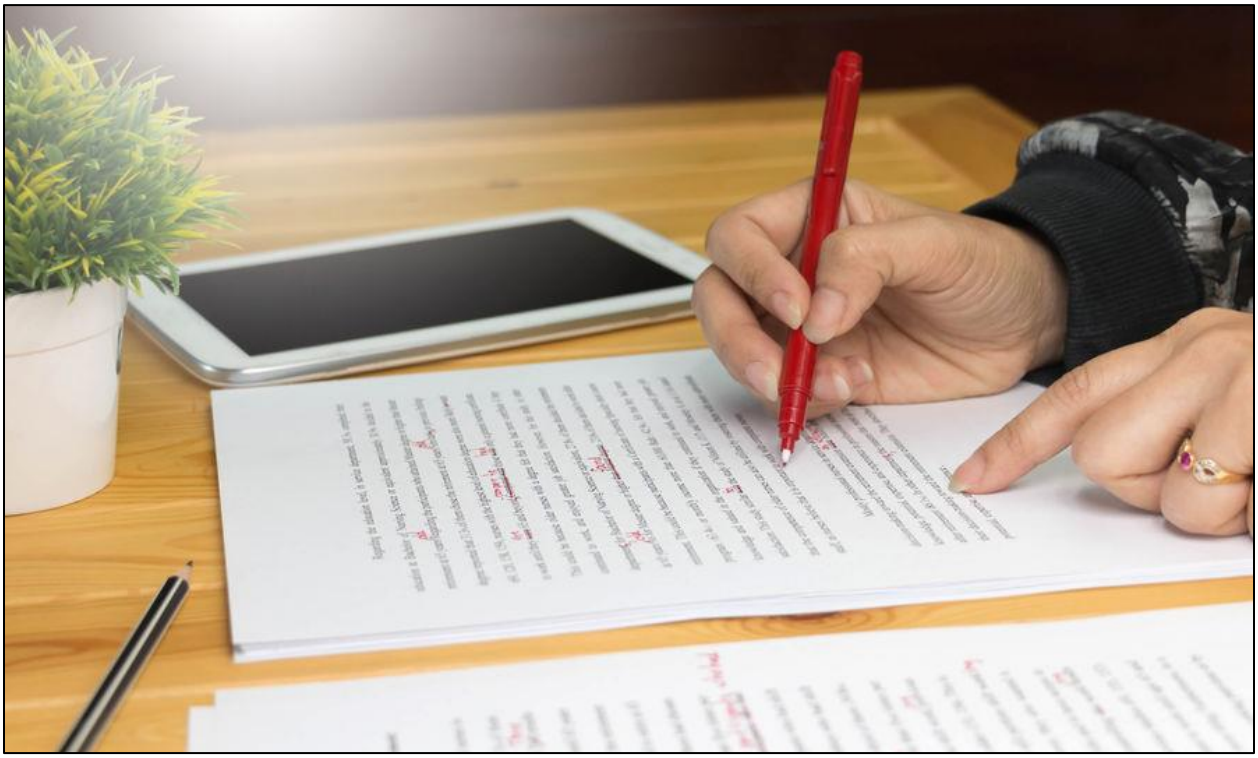

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Working quickly is a virtue … unless you're proofreading. You'll likely glide over grammar errors and speed past misspellings. Instead, slow down and follow these tips:

1. Take your time. You can't proofread a document at the same speed you read a novel, and you definitely can't proofread while talking on the telephone.

2. Increase the text size. Slow yourself down and catch more errors by printing out the document and reading one line at a time. If you're proofreading on the screen, enlarge the document — say to 130% — to make it easier to proof.

3. Read it backward. To slow yourself down on short pieces, read the piece word-for-word backward, from end to beginning. This forces you to examine each word. You may not catch grammar mistakes, but you will catch misspellings.

4. Read it aloud. Reading aloud helps you hear grammar errors, in particular.

5. Use different colors. If several people need to review the same document, use different colors to mark changes, making it easier to track.

6. Play a mind game. Each sentence has an error, and it's your job to find it. Find and destroy the error, and you win a trip to Paris!

7. Use the buddy system. Team up with a co-worker to "cross-proof." Often, you can't see your own mistakes, but someone else can. When a co-worker catches an error that you missed, don't be defensive or angry. Be thankful that someone caught it.

8. Use in-house style. Having your own style guide allows you to customize your rules, and it also provides a concise reference for the most frequently used items. Disperse your in-house style guide throughout the company and customize your computer's spell-check dictionary to reflect the in-house style guide.

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