

PROOFREADING AND EDITING

WRITING SERVICES - UNCW DEPAOLO HALL, 1ST FLOOR - 962-7857

Using Spell Check

A spell checker is a useful ally: it will flag words that are spelled incorrectly and suggest alternative spellings. However, this ally also has the potential to undermine your writing because of its limitations. Be aware of accidental errors when using a spelling checker.

For example:

- The spell check may flag a word you've spelled correctly, just because the word does not appear in its dictionary.
- The spell check may suggest incorrect alternatives. You must verify any alternative and make sure that it is the actual word that you intended to use.
- Most importantly, a spelling checker will not flag words that you have misused because they appear in its dictionary, ie. there and their, or here and hear.

To emphasize this last point, a spelling checker failed to catch any of the twelve errors in the jingle shown below.

I have a spell checker,
It came with my PC;
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.
I've run this poem threw it,
I'm sure your please too no.
Its letter perfect in its weigh,
My spell check tolled me sew.

In the end, *the only way to rid your papers of spelling errors is to proofread them carefully.*

Using a grammar and style checker

This program is capable of flagging incorrect grammar or punctuation and wordy or awkward sentences. However, these programs can call your attention only to passages that *may* be faulty. They miss many errors because they are not yet capable of analyzing language in all of its complexity. For instance, they cannot accurately distinguish a word's part of speech when there are different possibilities, as *light* can be a noun, a verb, or an adjective.

(over)

Proofreading strategies

- **Read a printed copy**, even if you will eventually submit the paper electronically. Most people proofread more accurately when reading the essay on paper than when reading it on a computer screen.
- **Read the paper aloud**, very slowly, and distinctively pronounce exactly what you see, and be conscious of the punctuation used.
- **Read with a pen or pencil in hand**. Mark anything that sounds confusing or just not quite right.
- **Place a ruler under each line as you read it**.
- **Read “against the copy,”** comparing your final draft one sentence at a time against the edited draft.
- **Ignore content**. To keep the content of your writing from distracting you while you proofread, read the essay backward, end to beginning, examining each sentence as a separate unit. Or, taking advantage of a word processor, isolate each paragraph from its context by printing it on a separate page. Of course, reassemble the paragraphs before submitting the paper.
- **Read aloud to an audience**. Ask your roommate, a friend, or a family member to listen to your paper. Tell them to stop you anywhere they are confused. Or, ask them to read the paper aloud to you. Take notes as they read.