



Proofreading: How to Avoid Embarrassing Mistaks^e

By Dana Burke

Proofreading your printed materials before they go to press is one of the most important parts of the process. It's also one that is often under-stressed. This is your last opportunity to cost-effectively catch typos, grammatical mistakes and other errors. You don't have to be an English major to be a good proofreader. Here are eight helpful tips for proofreading any type of document:

- When writing a long piece on deadline, the last third often gets written in a hurry and likely includes more mistakes. So it just makes sense to read the last part first when you're proofreading.
- When proofreading for spelling errors, read your sentences backwards. You don't get caught up in the meaning and can look at each word separately. Please, please, please don't just rely on your spell checker!
- Proofread out loud. A twist on this is to have one person read aloud from the finished document while another looks at the last draft. This is especially useful when dealing with numbers.
- Double check your facts. I once heard about a sign in a newsroom that said, "If your mother says she loves you, double check." Be sure names are spelled correctly, phone numbers and area codes are current, and that days and dates correspond. Again, keep a special eye on numbers, including addresses, dollar amounts and times.
- Be sure that all important information is included. Is your name on your business card? Is your phone number on your newsletter? Is your address on your promotional flyer announcing an upcoming event?
- Avoid the insider syndrome. Here's another reason that it makes sense for someone else to proofread. Be sure that you are not making assumptions about the reader's level of knowledge. When Mind Your Business does your desktop publishing for you, we will often advise you if it seems that you are using a lot of jargon or confusing terms.
- Place a ruler under each line as you read it. This will help to focus your eyes and slow you down.
- Remember that proofreading isn't reading. If you are reading for meaning, you can't concentrate on the details — and proofreading is detail work.