

How to ...

**PROOFREAD
YOUR
WRITING
TEN TOP TIPS**

DENISE COWLE

www.denisecowleeditorial.com



WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

So you've written your blog, or your new landing page, or your latest marketing copy. You're pleased with it. It reads well. It gets your message across. You're hovering over the publish/print/send button ... but, WAIT!

Are you confident that it's perfect, with no errors: no typos, no missed words, no copy-and-paste mistakes, no grammar slip-ups? Have you dealt with spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and hyphenation consistently?

Yes? Well done. Hit that button and give yourself a pat on the back.

Not so sure? Then check out my ten tips to clean up your writing!

Denise



LET IT BREATHE

PUT SOME SPACE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR WORDS

If you can, put your writing to one side. Let it sit for a day or two if at all possible - even a couple of hours can give you a fresh perspective.

You'll be surprised at what you can catch when you come back to it. Mistakes will seem to jump off the page at you, or you'll think of a better way to word a sentence.

It's much better that you catch errors than your readers.



1



DON'T TRUST SPELL CHECK

SOFTWARE ISN'T PERFECT

Automated spelling and grammar checks have their uses, but they're fairly limited.

They tell you if you've spelled a word incorrectly, but not whether it was the correct word to use in that context.

Did you mean ***emphasise*** or ***empathise***? ***Form*** or ***from***? ***Public*** or ***pubic***? (Seriously, that's a really common one.)



2

And, frankly, some of the grammar suggestions that Word can make are just ... weird.



CHANGE THE FONT

SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Changing the font and/or the point size will force words onto different lines.

This gives your words a fresh look and lets your brain see the text differently.

You'll pick up different errors this way, and you can change back to your preferred style once you're finished.

3



PRINT IT OUT

HARD COPY HELPS

We read differently when we look at a page of print rather than a screen.

Many editors will print out hard copy to catch things they would have otherwise missed on-screen.

Just make sure that you do something kind for the planet to make up for the trees you're using!



4



USE A RULER

LINE IT UP

Stop yourself from skimming along, reading what you expect to see rather than what's on the page.

Place a ruler (or a sheet of paper) below the line you're reading to block what comes after.

This forces you to slow down and read line by line, really taking in each individual word.



5



MAKE SEVERAL PASSES

FOCUS ON SPECIFICS

Rather than trying to do everything in one go, separate the various points you want to check into several passes.

Read through for spelling first, then look again at the grammar, then check the punctuation.

In a longer document take a separate pass to check the formatting of subtitles, page numbers, headers and footers.



6



READ IT BACKWARDS

CATCH THE UNEXPECTED

As weird as it sounds, starting from the end of a document and reading backwards, word by word, focuses you on spelling and word choice.

You'll also pick up repeated words that you may otherwise have missed.



7



READ IT OUT LOUD

HOW DOES IT SOUND?

If you're alone you can read your writing out loud to hear how the rhythm of the text sounds.

If you're in a busy office, put in your headphones and use the text-to-speech facility.

You'll pick up whether your sentences are long and rambling and in need of breaking down into more easily digestible parts.

Or if they're short. And all about the same length. Which can sound monotonous. And will quickly turn your reader off. No matter how great the content.



8

A photograph of two children, a girl and a boy, crouching by a small pond. The girl is on the left, wearing a blue patterned shirt and a blue cap. The boy is on the right, wearing a red patterned shirt and a grey cap. They are both looking down at the water in the pond. The text 'ASK A FRIEND TO CHECK IT' is overlaid in a large, bold, grey font on a semi-transparent white background.

ASK A FRIEND TO CHECK IT

A FRESH PAIR OF EYES

This can work well if you can set up a reciprocal arrangement with a colleague to check each other's writing.

However, it can quickly unravel if you're producing a lot of content to check - how long can you keep relying on someone's goodwill?

After all, they've got their own work to do. And can you be sure that they're going to do the job to a high standard?



There's much more to proofreading than picking up typos.



CALL IN A PROFESSIONAL

SEND TO YOUR EDITORIAL EXPERT

OK, so this isn't exactly a DIY solution.

But if, despite all of these tips, you still worry that you're missing things, or that you need help to tighten up your writing, then call in an expert. Just as you would to rewire your house, or cut your hair, or service your car.

You can search the online directories of professional organisations, such as the Society for Editors and Proofreaders.



10

AND FINALLY

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

So there you have it.

Ten ideas for cleaning up your writing.

You certainly won't need to use all of them. You might find that just one of these techniques is all it takes to give your writing that final polish.

I'd love to know which ones work for you, so drop me a message and let me know!





GET IN TOUCH

READY FOR EDITING OR PROOFREADING?

If you'd like to discuss help with editing or proofreading, please drop me a line.

Tell me:

- what form of writing
- approximate word count
- who the audience is
- where it's published



We can arrange a free discovery call to have a chat about your plans and what level of editing you need.

email: denise@denisecowleeditorial.com