

# Proofing Guide

*Some basic rules for proofreading your formal essays. These are common mistakes that appear in a lot of your writing, mistakes that we can eliminate with careful proofing.*

## Item One: Contractions

- In formal writing, don't use them
- Seriously ☺

## Item Two: Gender Inclusive Language

- Employ gender inclusive language in all of your writing. Avoid terms such as “man,” “man’s”. Instead use human, persons, people, humans.
- Feminists attempted to expose the absurdity of this view with sentences like these:
  - Man, like the other mammals, breast-feeds his young.
  - Everyone should be able to decide for himself whether to have an abortion.
- Sexist language has a powerful negative impact on women: It makes women invisible, reinforces stereotypical gender roles, and limits women’s opportunities and even their aspirations.
- Should you use his/her? Maybe. Another option is to alternate. I use her as frequently as I use him in my writing. This really depends on taste.

## Item Three: Possessives

- Be clear on the difference between ITS and IT’S. ITS shows possession: “Look at that dog; its owner must not feed it very well.” The possessive IT’S is a contraction for IT IS. See rule one. ☺
- In all other cases, when indicating possession be sure to employ an apostrophe + “s.” For example: *Father Ridgway’s sense of humor*, or *the problem’s solution*. With possessive **plurals**, the apostrophe **follows** the terminal “s.” For instance, *the pioneers’ hopes* or *the animals’ tails*.
- For compounds or to show **joint ownership**, add the apostrophe + “s” only to the **last word**: *his father-in-law’s company* or *Gus and Sybil’s house*.
- Mark the difference between THEIR and THERE. THEIR shows possession: e.g., *See those people; their clothes are wet from the rain*. THERE is an adverb, often indicating a time or place. Examples: *Jennifer is over there (across the room);* or *There are 33 people in this class.*

## Item Four: Colloquialisms

- AVOID “a lot” in **formal** writing. Substitutes include: “a great deal,” “greatly,” “many,” “much,” or “really.” When used in **informal** writing, please remember that A LOT is *two words—never* ALOT. Also AVOID “OK” or “Okay” in formal writing.
- When referring to people in general, shun using the expression YOU. Instead, use PEOPLE, HUMANS, ONE, etc.
- Limit the use of “I”, but when you do use it, follow the next rule
- When referring to **ideas** or **thoughts**, do not say “I FEEL . . . .” Rather, use verbs like THINK, ARGUE, JUDGE, REGARD, or CONSIDER. For example, instead of saying “I FEEL that Karl Marx’s criticism of religion is erroneous,” say “I THINK (or JUDGE) that Karl Marx’s criticism of religion is erroneous.”

## Item Five: Sentence Structure

- Avoid **sentence fragments**. Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences, generally lacking a subject or verb. Fragment examples: *Thinking about the value of religion. Now that his point is clear.*
- Likewise, avoid **run-on** or **fused** sentences. These sentences result when two or more complete sentences are incorrectly expressed as one. Examples: *Steve Largent was an exceptional wide-receiver he caught over 76 passes in one season. OR The snow storm quickly worsened, it changed its course and headed toward Honolulu.*
- A **singular subject** must have a **singular verb**, and a **plural subject** must have a **plural verb**.
- A long introductory phrase or clause—generally of SEVEN OR EIGHT words or more—in a sentence is set off by a comma. Example: *When the end of the work week finally arrives, people are anxious to begin relaxing.*
- If an introductory phrase or clause can result in the **misreading** of a sentence, then that phrase or clause should be set off by a comma. Example: *For safety reasons all cyclists are required to wear helmets.* Here the sentence's meaning is clear without the use of a comma after "reasons."
- Avoid writing ". . . the reason why . . ." or "the reason . . . is because." Write instead: ". . . the **reason that** . . ." Example: *The **reason** the team had such a successful season was **that** the players were very dedicated and disciplined.*
- There is **only ONE blank space** after these marks of punctuation: *commas*, *colons* (:), and *semicolons* (;). According to MLA, it is acceptable to use EITHER ONE OR TWO SPACES IN THE TEXT OF YOUR PAPER after a **period**. Be **consistent** in this spacing in all your writing, especially when you choose to use ONE or TWO spaces after periods; do **not** mix your spacing format.

## Item Six: Punctuation

- **Periods** and **commas** are placed **INSIDE** quotation marks. **Colons** (:) and **semicolons** (;) go **OUTSIDE**. Example: *After the little girl screamed "Watch out," her brother shouted back, "Thanks Chantel."* Example: *The chairperson declared, "Meeting adjourned"; then the board members took off their rubber noses.*
- Generally use a comma or colon to introduce a direct quotation. Examples: *Black Elk's sense of failure is evident when he says, "And now when I look about me upon my people in despair, I feel like crying" (180).* OR *Black Elk Speaks ends on an apparent note of failure: "There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead" (270).*
- A **hyphen** (-) is used, for example, in between page numbers and to divide words into syllables. Example: *The idea of utopia is found on page thirty-seven.* A **dash** is printed either as a symbol in a word-processor character set (–) or as **two hyphens** printed one after the other with **no space** in between them (--). In either case, **there is no space before or after a dash**. Example: *It is important to note—for the purposes of this paper—that the topics of the authorship, date, and purpose of the Book of Genesis will be analyzed.*
- The omission of words **WITHIN** a quoted sentence is indicated by **three ellipsis points, with one space before and after** each point: *"And now when I look about me upon my beloved people in despair . . . I wish and wish my vision could have been given to a man more worthy" (180).*
- The omission of words **BETWEEN TWO OR MORE** quoted sentences is indicated by a **period (or other mark of terminal punctuation) and three spaced points**: *Original two sentences: "I was sick the entire night, and the next day I had to run a marathon race. Because I was still ill the next morning, I decided to forego the race." The quoted portion reads thus: "I was sick the entire night . . . Because I was still ill the next morning, I decided to forego the race."*

## Deconstructing Pogreba's Proofreading Remarks

<p>ONW          NAS          MM          //          w/c          agr.          Colloq          n/v          Awk          Ugh          Sp          Wdy          R/O          Frag</p>	<p>Omit Needless Words          Not a sentence          Misplaced Modifier          Parallelism Problem          Word choice needs work          Agreement problem          Slang, conversational language. Use academic tone          Noun/verb agreement          Awkward phrasing/construction          I really hate this!          Spelling problem          Wordy—try to condense/rewrite          Run-on sentence          Fragment that doesn't serve a purpose</p>
<p><del>In conclusion</del>          (strikethrough or circled)</p>	<p>An error that needs to be fixed will either be shown by striking through or circling the word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph</p>
<p>✓</p>	<p>A check mark means great!</p>
<p>D</p>	<p>Needs further development [See Development sheet]</p>
<p>TS</p>	<p>Topic Sentence</p>
<p>T</p>	<p>Thesis Statement</p>