

Writing a Research Paper

Proofreading

The final touches

Believe it or not, now that you've hopefully finished major revisions, the hardest part is really over! Your goal at this point is not so much to focus on content but on nitpicky copyediting which is so great for catching those careless mistakes that distract your readers (including <ahem> markers) from your main ideas.

Here's a checklist for some finishing touches:

Check out your verb tenses. Don't feel you have to completely avoid the "passive" tense (e.g., "the ball was caught") but definitely try to have **MORE subject-verb "active" sentences**; they add power and agency to your writing (e.g., "Billy caught the ball"). Purdue's Active/Passive Handout should help you here.

Also make sure your **verbs are in the right tense**. If you're talking about literature, keep the tense in what is called "the literary present." So a sentence in your essay to set up an example would read "When Hana *tells* Caravaggio about the English patient..." If you're writing a historical paper though, past tense is more suitable.

Check for **non-sexist language**, especially in pronoun situations (e.g., "What does an artist look for in his (er, her...er, their...ARRRGHHH) imagery?"). The best way is to talk to your professors. You'll find some that say they don't mind the awkward "him/her" (or "him or her") split, others who prefer one over the other, and still others who want you to avoid the sticky scenario altogether. Figure out preferences. Otherwise, read up on other strategies in Purdue's Non-Sexist Language Handout

Read your essay out loud to listen for either awkward or long sentences that could be clarified or broken up to read better.

Check your **punctuation**. If you have problems with quotation marks, commas, semicolons, colons, or dashes, visit Paradigm Online Writing Assistant's Basic Punctuation Guide as well as Purdue's Catalogue of Punctuation Handouts.

Look for glaring **grammatical flaws**. Strunk's Elements of Style and Purdue's catalogues for Parts of Speech and Sentence Construction are great resources, as are any handbooks you use in your English courses. Be especially on the alert for mistakes you make often.

Check your **diction (word choice)**. If you're looking for a better word, look up some possibilities in Roget's online Thesaurus or if you're having usage problems (affect vs. effect for example), then check out But I didn't Mean to Say That! by editor Pat Robidoux of the Writer's Depot.

Prepare a **Works Cited** or References list. Set up footnotes or endnotes if you need them too. A Guide to Kate Turabian's A Manual for Writers from the Writer's Web gives you great advice on preparing all these pages. The University of Calgary even offers a Sample Works Cited page.

Now you can check your **spelling** both with a computer spell-checker and with your own eyes to catch those words that are spelled right but used in the wrong context (like there vs. their vs. they're). For common problems, visit Purdue's Spelling Handouts . Someone else's eyes are great at this point because you're probably too close to your own writing. You can also check words out the old-fashioned way--with a dictionary. Dictionary.com or the Merriam-Webster WWWebster Dictionary are both good choices.

Work on the **presentation** of your paper: use a laser-printer if you can (or else your best ink-jet) on 8.5 x 11 inch paper, double space your lines, maintain 1 inch margins, start numbering pages on the second page of actual text, and prepare a title page with an original title somewhere in the centre and your vital student info in the bottom right hand corner. No duotangs needed; just a staple will do. Also make sure your font is very readable (Times New Roman is the most common) and in 12 point. For more on the subject, visit UVic's Essay Presentation page and The Format of the Manuscript guidelines from the University of Calgary.