Writing skills

Proofreading Tips

It is important that you go through your assignment carefully, to make sure you have the correct content and structure. Also check that your writing is clear and look for mistakes in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The format of your work is also very important. When you have worked hard to develop your ideas and present them, you don't want anything to distract your tutor from what you have written. Make sure that you have followed the correct formatting style. The requirements are usually set out in your assignment guidelines or marking guide.

General tips

- Try to leave at least 24 hours after you have finished writing your first draft before you start revising, editing and proofreading. This means that you can look at it with fresh eyes and a fresh mind.
- Leave yourself enough time. Rushing to finish an assignment often results in errors and a lack of time for proofreading.
- Give your assignment to a friend to look at. This has to be someone you will listen to. Remember, they are critiquing your work, not you.
- Read your work aloud slowly. This process forces you to say each word and also lets you hear how the words sound together. Often your ear will hear what your eyes did not see. When you read silently or too quickly you may miss errors or make unconscious corrections.
- Find a quiet place to revise, edit and proofread as you need to concentrate.
- If possible, do your revising, editing and proofreading in several short blocks of time rather than all at once, as otherwise your concentration is likely to decrease.
- If you are short on time, prioritise what to revise, edit and proofread to be sure that the most important sections are completed.

Content

- Check the question and marking guide again after you've completed your essay. Make sure you've answered all parts of the question and that you've used keywords from the question to signpost for the marker which specific parts you're answering.
- Make sure all the information you've quoted, paraphrased or summarised is cited correctly (if you are unsure, consult the relevant Learning Services handouts.

Structure

Overall structure: Make sure that your essay has an appropriate structure of introduction, body and conclusion (see Essay Structure handout, especially its checklist).

Paragraphs: Make sure that each paragraph in the body of your essay deals with only one main idea and that its main idea is clearly expressed in its topic sentence (see Paragraphs handout).

Spelling, grammar and punctuation

Spelling: Don't rely entirely on spell check as it has a limited dictionary, so some words that you have spelled correctly may be picked up as incorrect. Also spell check will not pick up misspellings that are valid words. For example, if you type "form" instead of "from" spell check will not pick up the error. Use a dictionary to check the spelling if you are not sure.

Grammar: Similarly, don't rely entirely on your computer's grammar check as it usually works with a limited number of rules; it cannot identify every error. Reading aloud to yourself and checking whether sentences sound right can help correct most grammatical errors.

Punctuation: Punctuation should make it easier for people to understand what you have written. Students sometimes struggle to use the following punctuation effectively:

Colons are mainly used to:
- Introduce a list (e.g. *This recipe requires several simple ingredients: eggs, butter, flour and milk*).
- Introduce a statement which explains or clarifies a previous statement in the same sentence (e.g. *There was only one builder who could do a decent job of it: Bill Fudd from Waimangu*).

Semicolons are mainly used to:
- Link two complete sentences which are closely related in meaning and turn them into one sentence (e.g. *The rap group from Auckland were the winners; they were polished, energetic and entertaining*).
- Separate elements in a long or complicated list preceded by a colon (e.g. *There are three main parts of an essay: the introduction, which introduces the topic and posits a thesis statement; the body, which is the bulk of the writing where the main ideas are organised into separate paragraphs; and the conclusion, which restates the main argument and shows how the main ideas link together*).

Apostrophes are used to show:
- Ownership or possession – when something belongs to someone. The apostrophe is placed directly after the owner's name before the s (e.g., *John's shoes* or *Elvis's voice*), which is known as the singular possessive. When there is more than one owner, the apostrophe is placed directly after the owners' names after the s (e.g. *the aunties' gift* or *the Morris' house*), which is known as the plural possessive. Exceptions: Possessive pronouns such as yours, hers, its, ours, theirs do not have apostrophes.
- That letters have been missed out of words (e.g. *it's my birthday, rockin' roun' the clock., I'm goin' home*). Because contractions like these are not acceptable in academic writing, avoid these in your assignments.

Personalising your proofreading

As well as following the guidelines above, individualising your proofreading strategies will help you become more efficient and effective. Find out what your typical problem areas are and look for each type of error carefully. You can find this out by:
- Reviewing the tutor feedback on your assignments.
- Follow the [Editing and Proofreading Learning Pathway](#) on My Ara

To access other useful Learning Services resources and handouts, use the StudySmart tab on the My Ara homepage – https://myara.ara.ac.nz/pages/academic-support/learning-resources.