

Revising: Polishing and Proofing

If you've gotten this far, you're probably happy with your thesis and unlikely to change your paper in fundamental ways. But the final touches can seriously affect the impression your paper makes on a reader. Here's a checklist:

- Make sure your organization works well: The best way to do this is to make a "post-writing outline." That is, write down, in sequence, the main idea of each paragraph. These main ideas are the skeleton of your argument: are all the bones in the right places? Would a late paragraph be more helpful if you moved it up to p.1?
- Presumably you've already carefully edited your paper (see handouts #6-11 above on Revising). If you haven't, do it now.
- Don't make the mistake of allotting only a few minutes for proofreading. When you've spent a lot of time and thought on a paper, you don't want your reader's impression of it to be spoiled by many annoying (even if trivial) errors. That kind of carelessness subtly undermines your reader's confidence in you as a writer, so that even your best ideas won't be as convincing as you thought they'd be.

Three Suggestions For Effective Proofreading

- *Put some distance between yourself and the paper*—time if you have it, space (physical or psychological) if you don't. Don't try to proofread just after you finish writing; at that point you're still too close to what you've written. You need to find a way to come back to it with fresh eyes.?
- Read slowly and read every word. Some people actually proofread backwards, or right to left, so they see each word not as a part of a unit of meaning, but *as a word*. Others, who don't quite have the patience for this technique, separate the text into individual sentences by pressing the spacebar after each sentence.
- *Don't try to proofread for everything at once*. Read through the paper for grammatical problems, then for punctuation, then for spelling.

On the subject of spelling--don't rely on the Spell Check. If you mean "their" and write "there," the computer won't tell you. Pay special attention to the spelling of proper names: if you consistently spell Jane Austen's last name as "Austin," your English teacher may be too irritated to give your brilliant thesis about *Emma* the acclaim it deserves. Be sure you're spelling key terms correctly: your art history instructor may not applaud your point about angels and *putti* if you've called them "angles" and "putty."

Have you numbered your pages?