

Student Guide on Proofreading and Editing



Purpose and summary

Proofreading and editing are important skills to develop over the course of your undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research studies. Regardless of what the assessment is, your marker or assessor will expect you to have spent some time editing and proofreading your work to make sure it is comprehensible and well-presented. This guide is designed to help you understand what editing and proofreading are, how to avoid academic misconduct, and the distinction between in-person interactions and technology.

What is editing and what is proofreading?

<i>Editing</i>	<i>Proofreading</i>
Editing is the ongoing process of checking and refining the content, organisation and logic of a piece of writing – this includes writing code, mathematical proofs and graphics.	Proofreading is the final stage of checking to ensure a text is free of all errors. This includes correcting spelling mistakes, typographical errors (typos), and grammatical issues. Proofreading can also include checking that a piece of work is in line with style and presentational requirements.
Editing involves modifying the structure and ideas in your writing.	A key distinction is that proofreading corrects errors without changing meaning.

Do I have to get my coursework proofread? Is it essential to have my dissertation or thesis proofread?

You are encouraged to learn how to edit and proofread your own work. This is a useful skill to learn because:

- It helps you to critically cross-examine your own work. You might catch some points which need more explanation or find ways of making connections between ideas.

- It demonstrates that you are familiar with the academic conventions of your subject, using the correct style of referencing and citation.
- Being able to spot your own mistakes will help strengthen your skills as a writer as well as a critical reader of others' work as a student and later in your career and the workplace.

Getting your written work proofread is not expected practice for undergraduate or postgraduate taught students. However, a researcher or PhD student who is working on a longer piece of work like a thesis, may be looking into a professional proofreading service. If you are thinking about taking this route, bear in mind that professional proofreading can be expensive. A professional proofreader will be able to correct spelling, grammar, and formatting errors. They may also highlight sentences or sections of text which may not make sense, though it will be up to you to correct these as substantial changes to the original work may occur. It is still important that you **declare** you have used a proofreader when submitting your work.

You still need to have the skills to check your work even if you use a service or a tool. Proofreaders are not subject specialists and so you will have to thoroughly check and approve their changes before submitting.

When can you use technology?

There are some basic proofreading tools available that are free or inexpensive and will help you identify smaller spelling and grammar mistakes. Using tools like a spelling and grammar checker in Microsoft Office (including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel) are acceptable aids because they do not make substantial changes to the original work. Minor edits are permitted using this type of technology  Major edits using technology that generate sentences and change structure are generally not permitted .

Technology is generally acceptable when it is used for basic proofreading and formatting assistance such as:

1. Spellcheckers and grammar tools, which flag minor errors but **do not rewrite sentences or change meaning**. For example, Microsoft Word's spellchecker or Grammarly's free version only.
2. Reference Management software which helps to organise and format citations and references but does not generate original new content. For example, EndNote.
3. Translation tools for understanding, for example, Google Translate. This is acceptable if used to understand instructions but **not for writing content**.

Unless your course has explicitly stated otherwise, technology is **not** allowed when it produces content that goes beyond basic corrections.

Some Artificial Intelligence technologies can be used for proofreading and/or editing. Students should take care that they follow the Student guidance on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in Learning and Teaching that is available on the [Skills Hub](#).

Typical examples

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Proofreading or editing?</i>	<i>Academic misconduct?</i>	<i>Notes</i>
A student uses the spelling and grammar checker in Microsoft Word for their assessment.	Proofreading	No	Allowed. The spelling and grammar checker highlights basic spelling and grammar errors that need to be corrected by the author.
A non-native English speaker uses GenAI tools to fix grammar and spelling.	Proofreading	No	Allowed, but GenAI-generated rewrites must be avoided.
A student asks a flatmate to look at their essay. The friend suggests switching sentences to improve meaning and adds a section in the conclusion to summarise the various points that have been made.	Editing	Yes	Not allowed. This is collusion. Proofreading should not alter content. Adding new material to the conclusion is collusion as it is not the original work of the author. A suggestion to improve coherence can be acceptable, as long as the content is not rewritten by the proofreader.

A student uses GenAI tools to paraphrase large portions of their assignment, making significant changes.	Editing	Yes	Not allowed unless explicitly permitted by the course team. GenAI-generated paraphrasing alters the original content.
A student claims they used ChatGPT to format their references, but the references turn out to be false and the journal articles don't exist.	Editing	Yes	Not allowed. GenAI tools can make up references that turn out to be false. Never cite or reference anything you haven't read yourself.

How can misunderstanding be avoided?

If someone else is helping you to improve your written work, it is important that you understand the difference between what is permitted, and what is not. Make sure you read the information in this guide carefully. In most cases, the difference between proofreading (such as the elimination of spelling errors) and more substantial editing (such as restructuring of the text) will be clear. However, in some cases it may not be obvious. Someone providing a paid “proofreading” service may offer additional suggestions that go beyond simple proofreading by a friend or a family member for example. In any situation where you aren't clear if something is permitted, it is essential that you get advice from the course team or your PhD supervisor. **If in doubt, always ask!**

What is falsifying references?

Falsifying references is presenting references for coursework or dissertations that are inaccurate or do not exist and is a form of academic misconduct. The reader should be able to find and read the references you present in order to gain a deeper understanding of your work. Therefore, the references you provide should be relevant to the work you produce. Academic staff are familiar with the existing literature and can determine whether statements and arguments you make can be logically linked to the sources you cite.

Using references that you have not read is poor practice, creating references that do not exist is a serious breach of the academic misconduct policy and could result in that component, whole course or dissertation being voided.

What happens if academic misconduct is discovered in students' work?

If your work is flagged for academic misconduct either from [collusion](#), falsifying references, plagiarism, a misuse of GenAI technologies or there are any other misconduct concerns then the following steps are taken:

1. Preliminary review – your School's Discipline Committee will assess the allegation case.
2. Formal investigation – the University Student Conduct Office will notify you and request a statement.
3. Formal meeting (if required) – you may be asked to present your case in person or via Microsoft Teams.
4. Outcome and penalties can range from a warning to voiding the component, whole course or dissertation being voided depending on the severity and repeat offenses.

For further information on penalties, refer to the [Student Academic Misconduct Policy](#).

Support

Support is available from the [Student Wellbeing Services](#) and the [Student Advice Hub](#) who can provide free and confidential assistance.

If you have or think you have a disability that may affect your spelling and grammar and want further support, contact the Disability Service at disability@hw.ac.uk.

Further help

Skills Hub <https://go.hw.ac.uk/studyskills>

Effective Learning Services <https://go.hw.ac.uk/EffectiveLearningAppointments>

Liaison Librarians <https://go.hw.ac.uk/librarians>

English Gym <https://go.hw.ac.uk/english-gym>

Academic Writing Centre <https://go.hw.ac.uk/awc>

Student Academic Misconduct Policy <https://go.hw.ac.uk/student-academic-misconduct>

Student Wellbeing Services <https://go.hw.ac.uk/student-wellbeing>

Student Union Advice Hub <https://go.hw.ac.uk/advice-hub>