



A Proofreader’s Checklist

Proofreading written material is a crucial step that must be taken before a document can be considered complete. Failure to proofread can result in embarrassing errors that can compromise even the most well-argued legal work. The following checklist is a basic guide that will help you polish any written work-product. Because this guide focuses on fixing common problems found in most students’ work, it should not be the only source that you consult while editing.

Key Grammar

	Are you using the active voice? When you use the passive voice, are you doing so for a specific reason?
	Have you ended sentences with prepositions?
	Does your piece have any split infinitives (e.g., “to boldly go”)?
	Do you say in one long or confusing sentence what you could say in two concise and clear sentences? Do not be afraid to start sentences with conjunctions!
	Do you use the singular form of the verb for singular nouns? Do you use the plural form of the verb for plural nouns?
	Are there contractions (“don’t, won’t”) in your piece? (Ctrl+F: ’ to check)
	Are you using “nor” when both options are negative?
	Are you using dangling modifiers?
	Are you using i.e. and e.g. correctly? i.e. roughly means “that is,” while e.g. means “for example.” The former is used to clarify something you’ve said, while the latter adds color to a story through an example.
	Are you using “that” with restrictive clauses and “which” with nonrestrictive clauses?
	Are you setting off nonrestrictive clauses (clauses beginning with “which”) with a comma?

Effective Punctuation

	Are you consistent with your use (or lack of use) of Oxford commas?
	Do you appropriately set off parenthetical phrases with commas, parentheses, or em-dashes? Remember to close these phrases with the same punctuation mark if the phrase does not end the sentence.
	Do you appropriately separate independent clauses with a semicolon, a period, or a conjunction + comma?

	When a period or comma ending a quotation is needed, have you placed said period or comma <i>inside</i> the closing quotation mark? Have you placed all other punctuation marks to close the quotation outside the closing quotation mark, unless that punctuation mark appears in the original source?
	Have you consulted with Bluebook Rule 5 in order to correctly indicate omissions in quotations? (. . . , not ...)
	Have you utilized em-dashes effectively to replace parentheses, commas, and colons to emphasize a sudden break in thought or a key point?
	Did you use en-dashes to represent a range of numbers, dates, or time? (–, not -)
	Did you single space after periods? Do a Ctrl+F for “[period][space][space]” to check and fix double spacing between sentences.
	When using a colon, have you checked whether you should capitalize the first letter after the colon?
	Have you omitted unnecessary words such as “the following” or “as follows” preceding colons?
	For quotations within quotations, have you used single quotation marks (‘)?
	Have you consulted with Bluebook Rule B8 to ensure you have capitalized “court” only in appropriate situations?

Commonly Misused Words and Phrases

Do a Ctrl+F search for the following words/phrases to make sure you are using each correctly:

	Word	Use/Definition	Word	Use/Definition
	Affect	Generally a verb	Effect	Generally a noun
	Among	Relationship in a group	Between	Direct one-to-one relationship
	As such	<u>Not</u> a synonym for therefore		
	Attain	Achieve a goal	Obtain	Acquire an object
	Begs the question	Delete this and substitute a different phrase		
	Consequent(ly)	Indicates cause-and-effect relationship	Subsequent(ly)	Indicates chronological relationship
	Farther	Indicates physical distance	Further	Indicates time or metaphorical distance
	Felt	Emotions and physical contact; <u>not</u> a synonym for thought or a concluded		
	Forego	Come before	Forgo	Reject
	Imply	The speaker or writer implies	Infer	The listener or reader infers
	Irregardless	Drop the “lr”; the correct word is “regardless”		
	Less	Uncountable nouns	Fewer	Countable nouns
	Principle	Rule	Principal	Superior position (n.); first or main (adj.)
	Proscribe	Forbid	Prescribe	Lay out a rule
	With regards to	Drop the “s”; the correct word is “regard”		
	Than	Used for comparisons	Then	Indicates chronological order
	While	Indicates simultaneous action		
	Since	Indicates a preceding event		
	Towards	Drop the “s”; the correct word is “toward”		
	Tortious	Relating to torts	Tortuous	Full of twists and turns
	Very	Delete this word – it is a meaningless intensifier!	Really	This means “truly”; it is not a synonym for “very”