Proofreading
A Guide for Students

The purpose of this guidance is to help students to understand good ethical practice in relation to third-party proofreading of academic work. The University is very clear that **it is the student's own responsibility to ensure that any proofreader or proofreading service is aware of and abides by the guidance below**.

Please note: When your Keele academic tutors give you feedback on your assessed work or on any of your drafts, this does not constitute proofreading under the terms of this guidance since this is a normal part of the academic assessment process.

The responses to Frequently Asked Questions on this topic are given below.

1. Can I use a proofreader?

Not all courses or modules allow you to use a proofreader. It is important that you check with your module tutor or consult your module handbook to determine whether the use of a proofreader is permitted. If you are uncertain, please ask your module tutor or course director.

2. Do I have to use a proofreader?

No, there is no expectation that you use a proofreader. It is entirely up to you, but see section 1. Getting your work proofread is something that you may choose to do before you submit an assignment if, for example, you know that you have problems with spelling or grammar.

3. Who can proofread my work?

It is your responsibility to ensure that any proofreader follows the guidance in this document. Experienced, qualified proofreaders may be members of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders (see http://www.sfep.org.uk/default.asp), but there are good proofreaders who may not have any special qualification, and it is possible that friends or family members may be able to proofread for you. However, it is essential that you and your proofreader understand what a proofreader may and may not do for you. Make your proofreader aware of these guidelines and give them a copy. If you choose to use a proofreading company that is available on the Internet, ensure that what they offer does not exceed what is permitted under this guidance. This is because many companies will offer to rewrite or copy-edit your

work, and this is not permitted.   If you have any doubt, ask your module tutor what can and cannot be done by the proofreader in your subject area.

4.   What can a proofreader do for me?
Unless not permitted in your subject, a proofreader can:
- Identify and correct the following types of error:
    - missing / incorrect articles (a/an and the)
    - missing / incorrect prepositions (in, to, at, e.g.)
    - missing / incorrect pronouns (he/she, e.g.)
    - spelling mistakes
    - incorrect capitalisation
    - incorrect punctuation
    - incorrect verb tense
- highlight a sentence or passage that is overly complex or where the intended meaning is not clear (but *not* rewrite it; see 5. below)
- point to formatting errors (but *not* correct them; see 5. below)
- flag errors in labelling diagrams or figures (but *not* correct them; see 5. below)

5.   What can a proofreader NOT do for me?
A proofreader cannot write your assignment for you. A proofreader cannot re-write or edit any part of your assignment. A proofreader cannot advise on the structure or the content of the assignment. In short, it is not appropriate or acceptable for you to ask or to allow someone else to make material changes to your work. The University and the wider academic community regard this as academic misconduct (collusion), which will result in disciplinary action. See section 10 of this guidance for what will happen if it is suspected you have had help which is not permitted in producing assessed work. Of course, you must not use a "ghost writer" to write parts or all of the work, whether in draft or as a final version, on your behalf. This will be seen as 'commissioning work' and is likely to result in expulsion from the University.

A proofreader CANNOT:
- translate the work into English or any other language;
- rewrite passages in order to clarify meaning;
- change the text of the work so as to develop the ideas and arguments;
- change the ideas and arguments put forward within the work;
- reduce the length of the work so that it falls within the specified word limit;
- contribute additional material to the original;
- correct information within the work;
- rewrite sections where argumentation or logic is faulty.
- entail any intervention that would substantially change the content of a piece of work;
- change the words or figures or notation (except to identify the correct spelling or verb tense of the word used);
- rearrange passages of text, sequence of code or section of other material;
- reformat the material;
- check calculations or formulae;

- rewrite formulae, equations or computer code;
- re-label figures or diagrams;
- correct faulty references or compile reference lists/bibliographies.

6. **What other sources of help are there at Keele?**
- The Study Skills Centre in the Student Support Centre can assist students with developing their writing style, but does not offer a proofreading service.

- The Language Centre does not offer a proofreading service, but can help non-English speaking students to identify areas of style and language that need attention, and offer support in developing strategies to address these.

- The Disability Services Team works with students to identify strategies to address specific learning difficulties.

7. **I am a student with a diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty or disability – do these guidelines still apply to me?**
Yes, all of these guidelines apply to you. Your study skills tutor will work with you to enable you to identify any spelling or grammatical errors but will not mark or correct your work. The role of the study skills tutor is to support you in your development of independent learning skills as part of a support plan. This will eventually enable you to proofread your own work. Study skills tutors are not subject specialists and cannot provide you with any materials or guidance that you may need for your principal subjects or electives; you should see your module tutor or course director for guidance with content material.

8. **What should I do if I use a proofreader?**
If you use a proofreader (whether a professional service, a friend or relative) you will declare this on the submission form that accompanies your final piece of work.
You will be expected to keep copies of all draft material given to the proofreader, showing your original draft and all annotations / suggested corrections made by the proofreader.

9. **Why do I need to keep a copy of all my drafts and correspondence with the proofreader?**
Sometimes a marker may be concerned that the work is not your own. When this happens, an Academic Conduct Officer may ask you to provide evidence of how you produced the work. So, if you use a proofreader it is very important that you keep your draft material and evidence of the changes suggested by the proofreader, so that you can show these to staff. If you don't keep copies of your drafts or you are unable to produce them when requested to do so by an Academic Conduct Officer, this may weigh against you as it will be more difficult for you to prove that the work is your own. You can read the University's regulations on academic misconduct by following this link.
http://www.keele.ac.uk/regulations/regulation8/#d.en.19990

See section 10 for what will happen if it is suspected that you have had unpermitted assistance.

10. What will happen if I am suspected of having unpermitted assistance?

If this is the case, your work will be referred to the Academic Conduct Officer in your School who will instigate an investigation of academic misconduct under Regulation 8 12. (http://www.keele.ac.uk/regulations/regulation8/#d.en.19990). If the Academic Conduct Officer decides you have received unpermitted assistance, at the very least you will receive a mark of 0 for the work with the normal consequences, if any, for reassessment. Serious or repeat offences could result in being expelled from the University. The integrity of the awards the University makes rests upon the principle that work submitted for assessment represents your own effort and your own understanding, without falsification of any kind.

11. Who is responsible for keeping the work safe?

It is your responsibility to keep copies of software files, queries and correspondence relating to all of your assessed work. You should ensure against loss of original material by always keeping copies.

12. How long will proofreading take?

Proofreading can represent quite a lengthy stage in the process of text completion. Experienced proofreaders will be able to advise on a typical turn-around time, but it is wise to begin the process of consulting with your tutors and contacting potential proofreaders well in advance of sending a text. Begin any consultations with a proofreader well in advance of deadlines, and draw up a clear agreement between you and the proofreader covering expectations relating to time and cost (as far as these can be estimated). The University will not accept delays in the return of work from the proofreader as a legitimate reason to grant an extension.

13. If I decide to use a proofreader, when should I give my work to them?

To minimise the risk of proofreader interventions adding to or unduly affecting the meaning or content of your work, text should normally be submitted for proofreading at completion stage only, when you have finished your final draft.

Your work should always have been written and edited to the best of your ability before you ask anyone to proofread it. On no account should proofreading be based on initial or fragmentary texts such as outlines or notes to essays, assignments or dissertation chapters. This will be regarded as Academic Misconduct and dealt with accordingly under Regulation 8 12 (see section 10).

14. Who makes the final decision about what changes will be made to the text?

It is important to note that proofreaders should not take responsibility for making the final decision on any changes to your text. You are always ultimately responsible for the work submitted. On receiving work back from a proofreader, you should therefore allow yourself good time to consider each suggested correction very carefully in order to make the final decision on if and how to change the original text.

Both proofreader and student have responsibilities in the proofreading process as set out in this guidance. **However, the final responsibility for any adjustment to a text is borne by**

the student writer alone, and the document will be assessed on this basis - as the work of the student.

15. Do I need to tell my School that I have used a proofreader when I submit my work?

Yes, if you have had any proofreading assistance, paid or unpaid, you must declare this when you submit the work. Failure to declare you have used a proofreader will be classed as academic misconduct if there are doubts regarding the authenticity of your work.

ANNEX: Dealing with Proofreaders

What arrangements should I make with a paid proofreader?
Discussions and agreement on terms and conditions of paid proofreading typically should as a minimum cover the following points:
The type of corrections required - this may have a bearing on cost, although you should bear in mind that even 'final editing' can be time-consuming.
The format – the means by which the work will be delivered to the proofreader and the mode employed by the proofreader for corrections.
Communications - the extent of anticipated contact between you and the proofreader.
Dates and deadlines - The date for delivery of scripts to the proofreader and return of completed corrections and comments to you. This should allow good time in advance of a deadline for you to make the suggested corrections and follow up on potential queries.
Financial arrangements - fees for the work, arrangements for payment, the date payment is due, and any extra expenses you may need to pay. Where the fee is agreed as an estimate, the proofreader must advise you as soon as possible if any significant increase becomes likely once work is underway.

How should I agree a fee with a paid proofreader?
Proofreaders typically charge by the hour (the amount of time taken) or by the page (the length of text to be proofread). The method of calculating fees should be agreed in advance and at least a parameter of costs agreed upon (e.g. upper and lower limits).
It is good practice - for the purpose of clarifying the work required and the likely fee - for the prospective proofreader to mark up a sample of your work (two or three pages is recommended). It is up to the proofreader whether to require payment for this sample, but either way this should also be agreed in advance. You should take care to offer a representative sample of work (i.e. typical of the whole text, in terms of number of words per page, and the level of editing already undertaken by yourself and, possibly, your supervisor).

How should I communicate with a proofreader?
Both you and your proofreaders have equal responsibility for effective communication. While a job is in progress, you should both have easy means of getting in touch and should keep each other informed as necessary. This is especially important where any aspect of an original agreement changes.
Both you and your proofreader are advised to keep careful note of all arrangements and an original of all documents submitted for proofreading. In this way:

- you both have a clear understanding of the work to be undertaken and terms and conditions agreed upon.

- you will be able to demonstrate that no part of the text's academic content has been changed or added to in the proofreading process.