

Civil Engineering Writing Project - Mechanics Lesson 9

Proofreading

Does proofreading really matter?

Despite what many people believe, professional engineers usually do produce writing that uses error-free standard written English (see our research results)! If you are like most people, you will find it impossible to catch errors when you first write a document because you are focused on the content. But before you give the document to other people to read, you need to proofread to catch errors. Misspelled words, grammar errors, and nonstandard punctuation can make your ideas less clear, and - even worse - they can inadvertently change your meaning, cause liability for your firm, or be taken as a sign of carelessness. Even if you are in your first year of engineering school, start making proofing a habit now.

When to proofread

Proofread at the end of a process that includes multiple rounds of composing, reviewing your own work, and revising. Deal with large issues of content and organization before you proofread. Then, begin proofing.

How to proofread

Note: If you have dyslexia or another condition that makes written words especially challenging, work with the Disability Resource Center on campus (or a similar facility) to find techniques that can work for you.

1. If you aren't confident about standard written English, have a good resource at hand. (Some are listed on the References page of the Civil Engineering Writing Project.)
2. Take at least a short break before you begin proofing so you bring a fresh eye to the paper.
3. Pick a technique to make you read every word. Many people read aloud or point to every word as they read it.
4. Pay attention. If you notice your mind has wandered, go back to the last point you remember proofing.
5. Use multiple readings to catch different types of problems. For example, read once to check sentence structure, another time to catch superlatives and absolute words, another time to check spelling, etc. If you are working in a team, give each team member something to proof in the final report.
6. Proof all the information and the captions of tables and figures.
7. Proof emails and text messages, too. Don't let the speed of transmission stop you from taking the time to proofread. Little words like "not" are especially easy to skip when you type fast. Proofing now will save you having to clarify confusion later.
8. Most people cannot proof on a monitor as well as they can on paper. If a document is very important, proof a printed paper.

9. Some people are not effective at proofing their own work no matter what techniques they try. In that case, find a partner to trade papers with and proof each other's papers. Remember, however, that you are ultimately responsible for your own paper.

*****Most important: Read what you actually wrote, not what you know you meant.*****

Practice

Identify and correct the mistakes in these excerpts from real student papers.

1. The questions that will to be addressed are the size, shape, and material for the storage facilities, the quantity of pipe needing repair and the quantity of new piping needed.
2. Attachments are provided in this report which, include a vicinity map, sit plan, subsurface investigation logs...
3. The larges tank has a volume of 9121 gallons, the base slab is 11x11 feet and the height is 10 feet.43.
4. A factory of safety of 1.5 for static conditions and 1.1 for seismic conditions will be considered acceptable for the slope after the implementation of the soil nail wall.
5. To predict the horizontal deflection of the pile the flexural stiffness must be calculated.
6. The Filtron system seem to fit the components that...

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