

Proofreading checklist

The mistakes spellcheck misses

A spellchecker only asks whether each word is in its dictionary. Run it first, then work through these passes.

1. Spellcheck, done properly

- ☐ Set one language variety (British or American) and fix every flag.
Then run it once in the other variety: the words it flags now are the ones spelled in the wrong variety.
- ☐ Look at every capitalised word and every lower-case name (london, english).
Our test: one checker let lower-case 'english' through; another flagged it.

2. Homophones and real-word slips: search, do not read

- ☐ Use Find (Ctrl+F, whole word) for each pair below. At every hit, try the substitution test.
- ☐ **their / there / they're** 'belonging to them' / 'in that place' / 'they are'
- ☐ **its / it's** 'it is' fits? then it's. Otherwise its.
- ☐ **your / you're** 'you are' fits? then you're.
- ☐ **to / too / two** too = also or excessively
- ☐ **then / than** than compares; then is time or consequence
- ☐ **lose / loose** loose rhymes with goose and is an adjective
- ☐ **affect / effect** affect is usually the verb, effect the noun
- ☐ **principle / principal** a principle is a rule; principal = main, or the head
- ☐ **passed / past** passed is the verb; walk past, in the past
- ☐ **lead / led** led is the past tense; lead (verb) rhymes with need
- ☐ **form / from** one-letter slip: search for the one you did not mean
- ☐ **quite / quiet casual / causal** same again: quiet is silence; causal is cause and effect
- ☐ **accept / except** accept = receive; except = apart from
- ☐ **advice / advise whose / who's** advise is the verb; who's = who is
- ☐ **bored / board brake / break weather / whether**

3. Things no dictionary lookup can see

- ☐ Search for could of / would of / should of / must of / might of and change 'of' to 'have'.
- ☐ Search for doubled words: 'the the', 'and and', 'to to', 'a a', 'is is', 'of of', 'in in'.
In an editor with regular expressions, the pattern `\b(\w+)\1\b` finds every doubled word at once.
- ☐ Agreement: for each verb, find its subject. Watch 'people', 'children', 'this/these' + noun.
- ☐ Rare words: look up any word you use less than once a month (refectory or refractory?).
- ☐ Read the whole text aloud, slowly, or have the computer read it to you.
Missing words, extra words and wrong plurals are heard more easily than seen.

In a 155-word test passage with 29 planted errors, Hunspell flagged 7 and Aspell 8.

Every homophone, doubled word and agreement slip passed. Full test: theverbarium.com/what-spellcheck-misses/