

Proofreading Pointers

An RR Donnelley TipLine publication

- Best idea you'll read here: hire a professional proofreader. If they catch only a few errors that would have made it to contract proofs, your net cost will be lower at the end of the day. If they catch an error that would have made it to distribution, their service is priceless.
- Get away from distractions. Hold your calls, close your email, turn off your Blackberry or cell phone, turn down the death metal. Find a room with a door and close it behind you.
- Ask a colleague to proofread. We have a natural tendency to skip ahead when reading familiar material, and the person most familiar with a project is also the one least likely to catch errors.
- Proofread from a hard copy. Studies have proven we read printed text more carefully than electronic text.
- View pages upside-down to get a better view of spacing, elements gone missing, type color (ask someone over fifty), alignment, and other layout issues.
- Read it aloud.
- Read backwards. This technique will short circuit your natural tendency to skip ahead, and you will be better able to concentrate on the correct spelling of individual words.
- Read the last word of each line to catch unwanted re-flow. Better yet, have a colleague read aloud the end-of-line word on revised pages while you follow on the original. It will sound like Finnegans Wake, but you can accurately check even a long document in a very short time.
- Use style sheets to assure that font selection is consistent for similar elements, like captions, heads and subheads.
- Use spellcheckers, but never trust them completely, as they not always write.
- Break text links between pages to avoid unexpected re-flow of type. It is a good idea to do this before turning files over to your printer anyway.
- Keep a list of your own most common errors and double check your soft spots.
- Take special care in reading words in tiny fonts.

--more--

Checklist

Use a checklist and scan the whole document for one kind of error at a time:

Spelling. Pay particular attention to headlines, proper names and homonyms: to/too, their/they're, complementary/complimentary, its/it's, your/you're, accept/except, principle/principal, effect/affect. Look them up in a dictionary if you are unsure which is which.

Format and alignment. Watch vertical spacing of similar elements and look for extra letter spaces—a common typo.

Fonts. Check for consistency in size and weight.

Folios and other master page elements. Keep folios an absolute minimum of 1/8" from trim, ideally 1/4" from trim. By convention, right hand pages should always be odd.

Punctuation. Especially apostrophes, quotation marks, and inch marks.

Photo crops. Look for irrelevant but distracting elements at the edge of crops and for live matter too close to binding.

Numbers. Check numbers for dollar signs, commas, and order of magnitude. Annual reports have been distributed with earnings under-reported by 1,000 percent.

Charts and graphs. Look at actual values in bar charts and graphs, and confirm that they are correctly represented in the graphic, and current with their partners in the text.

Stylistic consistency. Some things, like whether job titles are abbreviated, or capitalized, are arbitrary. The same is true of capitalization in heads and subheads. Confirm they are consistent throughout the document.

Color breaks. Check consistent use and value of background screens and colored text.

Spot colors. Are they used consistently? PMS 410U and PMS 410C are two different colors to the RIP software, and will cause definite confusion and possible errors.

Widows and orphans. Avoid ending a paragraph with a single word on a line by itself, or worse, half a hyphenated word.

Hyphenation. Avoid two hyphenated lines in a row, or too much hyphenation in a single paragraph.

Dial phone numbers.

Visit web sites.

Print out and save this handy checklist

Here is a customizable checklist you should print out and tape somewhere close at hand. Add your own bugaboos, or even issues peculiar to a particular document, like whether product SKU's are consistent in style, whether initial caps are used consistently, whether trademarks and copyrights are properly noted.

<p>RR Donnelley Hoechstetter Proofreading Checklist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Spelling<input type="checkbox"/> Format and alignment<input type="checkbox"/> Fonts<input type="checkbox"/> Folios/master page elements<input type="checkbox"/> Punctuation<input type="checkbox"/> Photo crops<input type="checkbox"/> Numbers<input type="checkbox"/> Charts and graphs<input type="checkbox"/> Stylistic consistency<input type="checkbox"/> Color breaks<input type="checkbox"/> Spot colors<input type="checkbox"/> Widows and orphans<input type="checkbox"/> Hyphenation<input type="checkbox"/> Dial phone numbers<input type="checkbox"/> Visit web sites<input type="checkbox"/> _____<input type="checkbox"/> _____<input type="checkbox"/> _____<input type="checkbox"/> _____
