

PROOFREADING CHECKLIST

Cna Yuo Raed Tihs?

Wouldn't it be entertaining to write a whole novel like that? Well, maybe it would strain your brain too much—and it would definitely get you some angry reviews on Amazon! What's up with people being so uptight about mistakes in books? Don't they know you got 89,852 out of 90,000 right?



As editors, we feel your pain (nobody writes in to compliment us on our handling of the penultimate comma)! So, to make the hecklers happy, and help you come off as the professional you are, we're sharing an editorial "hack" to see you past the *terrors of the typo*. (And even more egregious blunders.)

Why the Checklist?

A skilled proofreader or copyeditor can find 100 to 300 mistakes per 100 pages of text—and often more! But human eyes and brains have a limit on how much they can track at once (and, as evidenced above, your brain can even trick you into thinking a word is correct!), so our team developed this handy resource for doing one last editorial sweep after a proofread. And because we love our authors, we're sharing it with you! (You're welcome.) While it won't reveal as many errors as a skilled proofreader can find (about 1/4 as many, depending on the manuscript), that's still dozens to possibly hundreds of baby steps toward a cleaner manuscript.

Below the how-to-replace instructions are groups of commonly missed errors you can basically fix in one fell swoop (globally, with a keystroke)! We'll share a few examples in each category so you'll have a good idea of things you can address to give your manuscript a bit of a professional polish. The good part is that you can customize this as your own master list for each book/series, and it can serve as a style guide you share with anyone helping you proofread—letting them know your preferences.

The How-To

So here's the skinny on your search-and-replace basics. In order to make global changes to your manuscript, the first step is to simply press Control + F, and when the box pops up, hit Replace (at the top of the little search box) to open all options. (On some versions of Microsoft Word you have to click on the drop-down arrow from the Find box and choose Advanced Find to show this fuller option.) On a Mac, press Command + F, and choose Replace. The second step, for both PC and Mac, is to type the item you're looking for into the Find field and type the correction into the Replace field. And voila! All alternative spellings of a character's name are fixed!

Savvy-User Cautions:

Briefly check out the chart below—or, better yet, open your Find function and play around on a *practice* document—so you have an idea of how this works, then come back to these user tips (they’ll make more sense that way).

- You’ll want to do a case-by-case search for many of these items, meaning you’ll look at each instance the search brings up. Why? While you can do a Replace All for words like *goodbye/good-bye*, you’ll want to carefully check all instances of words like *mantle/mantel* and *lay/lie/lying/laid* to make sure the word you’re correcting is used appropriately in context.)



- Pay special attention not to put additional spacing around words or punctuation you are looking for. The Find & Replace function takes your commands very literally and will miss options if you don’t consider all the ways in which you might have used a word (with a comma after it, with a space after it, with quote marks after it, etc.; also search several iterations of words you may have inadvertently spelled differently, like *capital/capitol*).
- Be careful with the direction of the quote marks you put in. Sometimes you will need to copy and paste quote marks from the text rather than just type them in, to be sure the coding translates correctly.
- If it’s a capitalization issue, make sure to go to the More option of your Find & Replace box and choose Match Case. For Mac, go to the little down arrow to the left of the Replace All button and choose Match Case from the menu displayed.

PS—you can also use the Find option to search for special coding like fonts, highlights, etc. (for instance, if you need to find a scene/word/phrase you put in italics, but can’t remember the actual word you’d italicized).

- For PC, check the More area of the Find & Replace box; near the bottom should be Formatting and Special Characters options. Play around (on a dummy manuscript!) with everything the Find & Replace can do.
- For Mac, choose the Special button at the bottom of the screen and select the item you want to find.

1. First, do a search for punctuation problems.

Search	Replace	Notes
-- or ---	—	
— [space]	—	
[space] —	—	
“	“	Correct any straight quotes; fix feet and inch signs
‘	‘	Correct any straight apostrophes, single quotes
.”/, ”	.”/, ”	Delete extra space (must copy the correct-angle quote mark, not just type in a quote or will pull up correct ones too)
”. or ’.	”. or ’.	(same with commas)
....	Fix these one at a time (nonfiction: proper spacing to use between sentences in quotes)
...	. . .	Fix these one at a time (nonfiction: proper spacing to use within a sentence in quotes)
..	.	Be sure to replace the ellipses first
,.		Check these individually (and their reverse)
[Block quotes]		Put spaces before and after; indent left and right margins by .5
A.M., P.M.	a.m., p.m.	Replace one at a time (there may be other abbreviations with these letters)
b.c., a.d.	BC, AD	Replace one at a time (there may be other abbreviations with these letters); remember, BC comes after the year, AD before.
....	. . .	In fiction (proper spacing for trailing dialogue)

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2. Next, perform a search for terms like these, where usage/spelling is the issue. (Take “voice” into consideration on these, but look up the rules for correct usage on the following, should they apply to your book.)

<p><i>tight</i> (pulled tight) vs. <i>tightly</i> <i>bad</i> (feel bad) vs. <i>badly</i> <i>resume</i> vs. <i>résumé</i> (latin 1 on symbol chart) <i>good-bye</i> <i>reforming</i> vs. <i>re-forming</i> <i>email</i> <i>recreate</i> vs. <i>re-create</i> <i>anymore</i> vs. <i>any more</i> <i>for a while</i> vs. <i>awhile</i> <i>get ahold</i> vs. <i>get ahold of</i> (not get hold of) <i>towards</i> vs. <i>toward/backward/afterward</i> <i>in</i> vs. <i>into</i> (<i>going in something, always go into</i>)</p>	<p><i>on to</i> vs. <i>onto</i> (went on to Canada/ held on to vs. went onto the boat); Ex: drove onto the road (turned car on road); drove on to the road (drove toward destination of the road)</p> <p><i>lay, lie, lying, laid</i> <i>who/whom</i> ‘em, ‘tis, ‘40s (reverse apostrophes) <i>too</i> vs. <i>to</i> vs. <i>two</i> <i>apprised</i> vs. <i>appraised</i></p>
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3. Watch out for sneaky homonyms/homophones (a word spelled or pronounced like another word but with a different meaning) like these:

<p><i>reign, rein, rain</i> <i>hoard</i> vs. <i>horde</i> <i>herd</i> vs. <i>heard</i> <i>rifled</i> vs. <i>riffled</i> <i>horse</i> vs. <i>hoarse</i> <i>shone</i> vs. <i>shown</i> <i>precede/proceed</i> <i>marquis</i> vs. <i>marquee</i></p>	<p><i>envelope</i> vs. <i>envelop</i> <i>led</i> vs. <i>lead</i> <i>break</i> vs. <i>brake</i> <i>bear</i> vs. <i>bare</i> <i>affect</i> vs. <i>effect</i> <i>their, there, they’re</i> <i>hear</i> vs. <i>here</i></p>
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4. Lastly, be sure to look for these types of content inconsistencies:

- 1 Foreign place names—make a list and check for consistency and spelling consistency
- 2 Names—make a list and check each for consistency and spelling consistency
- 3 Consistent narrator use of same form of name or nickname
- 4 Time usage—no hyphens when spelled out (three thirty)
- 5 Check facts (geography specific = types of guns, temperatures, time zones, dates, distances between locales, government rules)
- 6 Timelines and character ages, eye color, hair color, etc.
- 7 Scene changes (dingbats): same spacing above and below and between asterisks
- 8 Formatting—chapter order, table of contents (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and page numbering identical to that in text), footnotes/endnotes, sources (citations need to be formatted consistently according to the style guide—APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.,—you're using, and block quote formatting)

(Expand the lists above to include words/issues relevant to your own works.)

Resources

A couple of invaluable resources you can use to brush up on your skills and to make sure you're doing it right are *The Chicago Manual of Style*, edition 16, *The Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White, and, of course, Merriam-Webster's dictionary (m-w.com).

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