

Your little book of
proofreading tips

Stakeholder Documents

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You may be surprised to learn that in long, complex business documents, such as annual reports, financial statements, bids and proposals, PDSs and reports, typos are actually rare.

In a typical 150 page annual report, for example, we usually find only a handful of spelling mistakes, even in the 70 pages or so of very dense, copy-heavy financial statements.

What's more common, however, is inconsistency in how phrases, titles and financial terms are presented. This is usually due to different writers' input into the document.

Following are some of the inconsistencies to look for when proofreading your major stakeholder communications to ensure your document is an easy and fluid read for readers.



Phrases, titles and financial terms

Annual financial statements and shareholder reviews involve the input of a number of different writers, so inconsistency in how phrases and financial terms are presented is the most common mistake we come across.

We see this too in lengthy white papers, tenders and proposals where parts have been copied and pasted from other documents.

As an example, “Non-controlling Interests” or “Company” may be the norm in the first sections of a document, but the initial capitals can change to lower case as the document progresses.

Along the same lines, job titles and positions can be treated inconsistently. We will find “director” with a lower case initial on one page, yet “Director” 50 pages later.



Hyphens

Misuse and inconsistent use of hyphens are also frequent features of complex documents. In annual reports, for instance, it's common to see a mix of, for example, “Black-Scholes” and “Black Scholes” in the same annual report.

Other examples are:

- **long-term**
- **long term**
- **non-executive director**
- **non executive director**

Equally, hyphens are used where en dashes need to be used. En dashes show a range of numbers, as in a sequence of dates.

Examples are:

- **David Foster Wallace (1962–2008)**
- **May–October**
- **25–45°C**
- **The Bulldogs won 21–14**



Bullet points

Watch out for bullet points as they are often punctuated in different ways. Some will have initial capitals, and some not; others will have semi colons and some not. Plus, the level of indent often differs from bullet list to bullet list.

The best approach is to decide on one style and stick to it. This is why style guides can be very useful.



Headings

Then there's the hierarchy of headings, which is easily confused by graphic designers. And who can blame them when there are so many headings and sub-headings to deal with?

It's important to check that the hierarchy of section headings and sub-headings is consistent throughout the document and also matches the table of contents.



Double check all the headings, page numbers and table of contents

As we mentioned, typos are rare. It's much more common to find mix ups where a change has been made on one page, but not updated elsewhere.

For instance, it's easy to forget to update the table of contents. With numerous changes to the copy and design, double check that the section headings and page numbers match the table of contents before you send to the printer or upload.

Likewise, check that all the fonts, colours, headings, titles and numbered sequences are consistent.



Double check all the headings, page numbers and table of contents (continued)

While inconsistencies will make your document less easy to read for your stakeholders, we know it takes just one poor mistake to cost your organisation money.

The next part of this booklet details some tips we at Proof Communications use as part of our proofreading service.



Print and read aloud

To avoid written mistakes, the first tip is to print out the document; don't read it on screen. When you read your document in a different format, you'll read it in a much fresher way and you're more likely to pick up any mistakes.

Another helpful tip is to read the document out loud. Go to a quiet room, shut the door, and slowly read it aloud so you can hear the mistakes.

You will hear when words are missing or when there are extra words. You'll hear when sentences don't sound quite right.



Know what to look for

We often repeat the same mistakes.

Examples are:

- **missing narrow letters**
(e.g. 'i' – offical, opportunites, instnctively)
- **using extra letters**
(e.g. acccountancy, narrow)
- **mis-spelling long or technical words**
(e.g. physiothearapy, implenemtation)



Beware the spell checker

Following on from “know what to look for”, also remember spell checkers won’t pick up typos that are correct spellings, or words that sound the same but have different meanings.

Examples are:

- causal/casual
- form/from
- unclear/nuclear
- their/there/they’re
- site/sight/cite



Ask someone you trust to read it

Ask someone who hasn't been involved in the writing process to proofread the document for you. They won't know what's coming next so they are more likely to find the mistakes you have missed.

However, if you find you are still sending out documents with mistakes, bring in a professional proofreader.



Protect your brand with Proof Communications' expert proofreading and editing services

From 10 pages to over 300, often with complex and sophisticated content, the documents we proofread all have one common theme: they are significant to our clients and their stakeholders – many are annual reports, RAPs, PDSs or fund raising prospectuses; others are white papers, major tenders or proposals.

Whatever the purpose of the documents, they reflect our clients' reputations and brands, and so they seek proofreading and editing of the highest possible standards.



Protect your brand with Proof Communications' expert proofreading and editing services (continued)

We work with well-known names from the world of business, including listed companies, global advisory firms and thriving SMEs.

Qantas, Lend Lease, Brambles, Stockland, Origin, Investa and Credit Corp are just some of the leading companies using our proofreading services.



For help with proofreading your documents, call
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