Guidelines for Proofreading Student Texts

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Contents

Introduction

This set of documents is intended to help SENSE members who take on assignments to edit, proofread, or correct the English of texts that are to be submitted for academic assessment in an educational context. The documents are publicly available so as to clarify how language professionals can approach such assignments and to promote transparency around their involvement in such work.

Notes:

- This document uses 'proofreading' in the general sense defined by Harwood et al. 2012[1]: 'third party interventions (that entail some level of written alteration) on assessed work in progress.' In the present context, the interventions involved are taken to be limited to low-level alterations that stop clearly short of what is generally called substantive editing.

- These guidelines can be used by proofreaders, students and supervisors.

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[1] * Nigel Harwood, Liz Austin & Rowena Macaulay (2012) Cleaner, helper, teacher? The role of proofreaders of student writing, *Studies in Higher Education*, 37:5, 569-584
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.531462
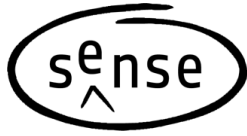
Definitions and Proofreader Tasks

Definitions

In the SENSE Guidelines documentation, 'proofreading' is used as in Harwood et al. (2012) to mean: 'third party interventions (that entail some level of written alteration) on assessed work in progress'.[2]

Proofreader activities fall under three categories:

- **Fixing**: Entails changes made directly to a document in order to correct a straightforward error of spelling, grammar, etc.

- **Flagging**: Entails suggesting a course of action to the author. For example:

  o The text is unclear and the proofreader suggests an alteration, and gives the author the responsibility of deciding whether this change is correct and if so, of applying it.

  o There is an issue with the text that falls outside the proofreader's remit to correct, but he or she draws the author's attention to the issue for follow-up.

  o There is a recurrent issue with the text (e.g. a formatting issue), and the proofreader flags this for the author to make the changes.

- **Fixing and flagging**: Entails a correction made to a document with an explanation given. Used when the reason for the change may not be immediately clear, or when the proofreader sees the opportunity to guide the author on some matter of usage.
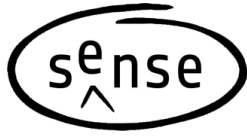
Proofreader tasks

1. Check for style and other requirements such as US/UK English, a house style, word limit.

2. Fix/flag language errors/problems, applying the distinction between 'we don't say this in English' (correctness) and 'we don't say this in academia' (formulation).

   a. Correctness:

      i. spelling;

      ii. grammar;

      iii. vocabulary (i.e. wrong word);

      iv. punctuation (including consistency);

      v. typing errors.

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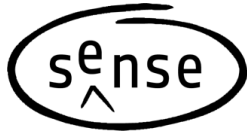
    b. Formulation: style, expression, register, sentence construction and word order. This is governed by clarity, genre, the type of text, as well as correctness.

        i. Academic conventions, such as those relating to:

            1. register: language formality (e.g. not using contractions); standard academic formulations (e.g. as reported by…);

            2. vocabulary (i.e. nuances in word choice);

            3. verb tense.

        ii. Clarity:

            1. meaning at sentence/paragraph/section levels (if unclear, suggest or implement reformulation);

            2. wordiness (redundancy/repetition).

3. Layout/structural features, with the aim of enhancing consistency and readability:

    a. Layout: headings, line spacing, paragraphs, justification, bullets.

    b. Figures and tables: captions, layout of tables, completeness, legends.

    c. In-text quoting and references:

        i. Follow house or standard style for in-text references, long/short quotes, etc.

        ii. Only flag obvious problems in direct quotes (e.g. the text is enclosed in quote marks, but no page numbers are given in the reference). The rest is the responsibility of the student in conjunction with the supervisor.

        iii. Cross-check in-text references against the reference list.

    d. Reference list/bibliography – consistency of style.

        i. Only fix minor inconsistencies (missing commas or full stops, incorrect use of italics, etc.), or flag other problems (e.g. missing information such as date, page numbers or publisher details). The student is expected to have put the list in the required referencing style.

        ii. Flag references in the list that are not mentioned in the text (unless the list is headed 'Bibliography').

Guidelines for language professionals

Contact persons

The proofreader should:

- establish whether communication concerning the assignment will proceed directly with the student, or via the supervisor.

Format

The proofreader should:

- agree with the student whether the latter requires corrections written by hand on hard copy or as track changes in an electronic document;
- establish whether the text is to be standardized to UK or US English;
- establish the required number of words and whether a particular house style is to be followed.

Nature of services

Various services may be offered:

- The proofreader can offer and distinguish between two possible types of correction:
  - 'fixing', i.e. straightforward corrections (only one correct answer possible) pertaining to spelling, grammar, punctuation, basic vocabulary);
  - 'flagging', i.e. points for the student to address relating to nuanced corrections where more than one solution is possible, pertaining to register (proper formality and academic style), word choice, clarity, word order, and consistency/correctness of layout and formatting.
- The proofreader may offer to check illustrative material such as tables, figures, and maps, fixing language errors and flagging shortcomings for the student to address.
- The proofreader is not responsible for the accuracy of references or factual information.

Time frame

The proofreader and the student should agree in advance:

- when the student will supply the material;
- whether the document is to be delivered as a whole or in instalments;
- when the document is to be delivered.

Financial considerations

The proofreader should:

- establish who is responsible for payment: the student or the university department;
- agree with the student on rates and provide appropriate estimates, stating *BTW* (VAT) applicability;
- state the maximum interval between final delivery and payment.

Follow-ups

The proofreader should:

- agree with the student on the extent of post-consultation included in the service and point out that extended post-consultations may require further payment;
- establish with whom post-delivery communication is to take place: the student or the supervisor.

Ethics

The proofreader should make it clear to the student that it is the student's responsibility (and not the proofreader's) to:

- ensure originality of the work and to be aware that educational institutes frequently use anti-plagiarism software;
- establish that his/her supervisor approves of the proofreader's involvement;
- be able at all times to show what was his/her own original work;
- acknowledge the contribution of the proofreader if the text is to be published or presented as a degree requirement. The student should consult with the proofreader on the wording of the acknowledgment and the acknowledgment should make it clear whether the document has been altered since the proofreading. Suggested wordings of acknowledgments are available on page 7 of this document.

Documentation

- As a precaution in case of disputes concerning quality or accuracy of delivered work, the proofreader should retain copies of the document in question at all stages of the work process (original, track changes copy with markings, track changes final, etc.)
- For the protection of all parties, all matters pertaining to the above points should be set out in writing. See the form on page 6, this form is also available as a separate editable document.

Best Practice Information
## Form to confirm proofreading[1] service for a student thesis/paper

This form accompanies the SENSE Guidelines for Proofreading of Student Texts, which clarify what proofreaders[1] can do to help students in preparing their English-language theses or papers. The form can be sent by the proofreader to prospective students/clients and their supervisors.

Title of text to be submitted for proofreading
Nature of document
  No. of words
  No. of figures & tables
	e.g. paper/essay/thesis/internship report

Date request made	
Signature of student	signature
Student's name Email Phone no. Full postal address	
Name/type of study course or internship Degree/diploma level of course University/college/institute	Bachelor's / Master's / PhD / Other . . . .
Student's supervisor/education coordinator Email	
Delivery date to proofreader Return date to student (in full / in instalments)	
Estimated cost of proofreading + *BTW* (VAT) if applicable Terms of payment (interval between submitting invoice and payment)	
Name and address of person responsible for paying the invoice if different from above.	
Are corrections to be written by hand on hard copy or as track changes in an electronic document?	

What type of proofreading service is required? [2]
  Fixing
  Flagging
  Fixing and flagging	

What will the proofreading cover? [3]
  Formatting
  Figures
  Tables
  References
  Appendices
  Any other material to be checked
  Consultation, answering student's queries
	e.g. maps/supplementary information

What is the word or page limit? What house style should be used? UK or US English?	

[1] NB This form uses "proofreading" as defined by Harwood et al. 2012: "third party interventions (that entail some level of written alteration) on assessed work in progress." http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.531462. The student remains responsible for the originality of the work and the factual information.

[2] "Fixing", i.e. straightforward corrections pertaining to spelling, grammar, punctuation, basic vocabulary (basically only one correct answer possible). "Flagging", i.e. nuanced corrections pertaining to register (proper formality and academic style), word choice, clarity, word order, and/or consistency/correctness of layout, where more than one solution is possible.

[3] The proofreader is not responsible for the accuracy of references or factual information. It is the student's responsibility to avoid plagiarism.
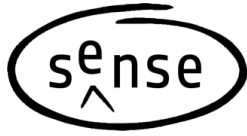
Suggested wordings of acknowledgments

Edited documents should contain an acknowledgments paragraph. Suggested wordings of acknowledgments for the work done by the language professional are as follows:

General

- Professional advice on the English was given by X.
- The professional English editor of a near-final draft was X

Specifically for scientific/academic assignments

- The professional authors' editor was X.
- We are grateful to X, for professionally advising on the English of a near-final version of the manuscript.

Specifically for student work (theses and dissertations)

- The English of this thesis was corrected professionally by X.
- I am grateful to X, who professionally corrected the English of this thesis and suggested improvements of style and structure.