

The importance of good proofreading

Typing errors, even for professionals, are too easily overlooked. A chance message from a proofreader in Glasgow got us thinking about the importance of good proofreading.

“We’re running a news story in our next newspaper about your school. In checking the spelling, I discovered that both Edgebarrow and Edgbarrow are in use. I would be much obliged if you could tell me which spelling I should use...”
. And sure enough, on checking the BinB account for Edgbarrow school, we discovered 2 different spellings. Who made the original mistake? It’s impossible to say, but oddly enough it has sat there unnoticed for well over a year!

Spell checking your documents is always a good idea, but doesn’t catch every mistake – and it wouldn’t have picked up the Edgbarrow mistake.

Words such as: too and to, accept and except, there and their, were and we’re, right and write, reign and rain – won’t be picked up by your spell checker. Neither will missing words.

Interestingly, it seems we are less able to spot mistakes in our own writing than in somebody else’s. Why is this? Because we see what we expect to see. Self-written text is already familiar with the writer, making it that much harder to spot errors.

There’s another thing to add here. Bizarre as it seems, the brain looks at the first and last letter of each word first before interpreting the meaning - making it one step harder to iron out all the potential mistakes. Take a look at this sentence: “It deosn’t mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are; the iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer is at the rghit pclae.” The first and last letters in each word are correct, so the brain reads the text the way it believes it should be.

Of course, writing errors can impact negatively on your customers’ perception of you and your company, harming your credibility in the process. A simple mistake can make you look hasty, uninformed, careless or just plain uncaring (“if he can’t be bothered to check his work, it can’t be that important to him, so why should he care about me and my business?”).

Most writers advise never trying to finish a piece of writing in one sitting. The longer you stare at a computer screen, the easier it is to miss mistakes that others can see at a glance. Sound advice is to finish your writing, but check and re-check the following day with fresh eyes. If you can, run it past someone else too. Preferably a proofreader....



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