

Proofreading: how to save money and time

Standard for proofreading Nordic publications



Proofreading: how to save money and time
ANP 2009:723
© Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2009

ISBN 978-92-893-1853-2

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Other Nordic publications are available at www.norden.org/publications

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Nordic cooperation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and three autonomous areas: the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

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Nordic cooperation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

About proofs

This brochure is first and foremost intended to offer some advice on proofreading reports, books and other types of lengthy texts. Once mastered, you will find that you can save both time and money as clarity and less confusion speeds up production. The end results of your efforts may also prove to be more accurate.

Proofreading symbols (or proof-reader's marks) are usually quite easy to learn. They may differ a bit between countries, and there may be house styles with printers or publishers adapted to special needs or tradition, but they are just part of what proofreading is all about. What is crucial, is to go about the proofreading process in a systematic and consistent fashion.

There are national and international standards for proofreading, for example ISO 5776, the British Standard BS-5261:2 and the Swedish standard SIS 36201.

At times electronic proofing systems will be the quickest and most practical way to proof texts, and it is certainly a good option for the final go-ahead to the printer or web publisher.



Text and design: Kjell Olsson. This guide is also available in a Swedish version at www.norden.org/publikationer
(*Spar tid och pengar med korrektur*), ANP 2005:753, ISBN 92-893-1192-4

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On the origins of mistakes

Producing text is often an instant act today. More so than it used to be, before word processors and computers entered into our lives. Even if a text began life as a thoroughly planned piece of thought, once on paper it has the capacity to spark new ideas and suggest new associations. So what do you do? – You rearrange the structure a bit, move this, change that. You read it to yourself and yes, it's still logical, well argued and pretty darned good! Then a colleague stops to chat, as colleagues do; one glance at your masterpiece and he/she has pointed out a couple of typos and wonders if you really mean what you're saying...

We've all been there; you think you've read it so carefully (though we do not admit as much; in front of our colleague it's just a first draft...). Why does this happen? Partly it's because we have a tendency to read into texts what we expect them to say. Especially treacherous are texts written by ourselves. Since we are the origin of the line of thought, we have no problem adding between the lines what may be missing.

Scanning words or reading letters?

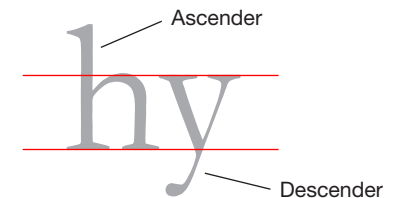
One reason why we overlook typos is that we don't read letters but words, or rather "word-patterns". Only when very young, or if we have reading difficulties, do we add letter to letter to form words. And many words can do without a letter or be spelt slightly wrong – it will often not even slow down our reading. Sinister or Sinster, militarist, miltarist...

Letters form patterns from their individual shape and who they hang out with, i.e. the combination of letters = words. Our brain decodes the pattern and translates it into what we already know they mean. As we get more proficient, we start reading groups of words, and speed-readers will perhaps use only two or three "focus points" per line.

The upper parts of letters tend to be those that carry most information. Quite often, and in languages with lots of ascenders, you can read texts without the lower part of the letters.

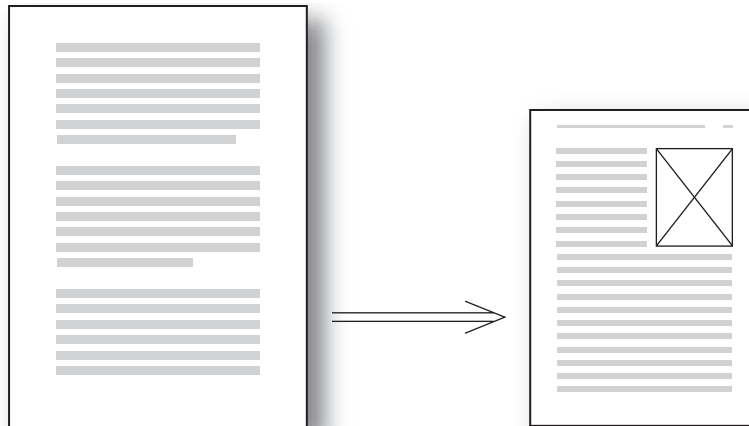
International

International



Was it any better in the good ol' days? What can we do today? In the good old days a manuscript would be scrutinised by editors, compositors and proofreaders before being printed. Rules of how to set a text properly have traditionally been trade secrets with these professions – and still are to a large extent. Of course mistakes were made before the age of desktop publishing started, but they were not seen in such abundance in the printed matter as can be seen today.

The last few decades have seen the responsibility for text quality to a large extent transferred to the writer. This, obviously, is rarely a guarantee for quality.



Manuscript in A4

As far as possible, all changes should be made in the manuscript. Do, please, use the proofing tools available in for example Word.

Made-up proof

Corrections in the made-up proof add costs and a risk of new mistakes. Changes to the made-up proof can also influence the placing of illustrations, resulting in even more added costs.

Today, Word's spell-check may be the only performed control – but rather than none at all, since all corrections done in the manuscript stage will save time for both the writer and the printer (= money).

Changes in the made-up proof are always more expensive, and there's always the risk of new misunderstandings.

With the limitations that most of us have to adapt to, there are still some procedures that will help to produce a printed matter with as few mistakes as possible:

- Plan your text thoroughly, think of structure and how you arrange your text.
- Ask one or more colleagues to review.
- Leave as few corrections as possible in the manuscript.
- Use Word's spell- and grammar check.
- Send a printout of your document to the printer. If something looks odd in the ensuing layout process, the printer can check against your print out.
- Make the effort to learn to proofread and to use proofing marks...

Proofing in general ✓

To establish an effective process between writer and printer, you need to communicate without difficulty. This is where acquiring a proofing technique will help you. The rest of this brochure is all about how to ensure that your corrections are swiftly and correctly implemented.

One thing at a time

This part is particularly relevant when proofing a book or report, or any kind of lengthy text.

It's important to be systematic when proofreading. Avoid proofing all parts of a book page by page (page numbering, headline numbering, the table of contents, spelling, hyphenation, headings and so on). Instead you should do one thing at the time – pretty much in the order you prefer.

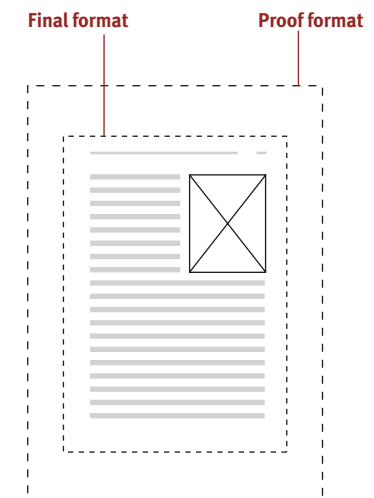
- **Table of contents:** Does the page numbering correspond to the pages in the book? Remember that if you change anything in the headlines, you need to mark the same changes in the TOC.
- **Spelling and grammar.**
- **Hyphenations** (should always follow rules in respective languages).
- **Tables/Illustrations/Footnotes** etc: Check that they are numbered correctly.
- **Headings:** Always check that they correspond to the title of the respective chapter. Also check that the spelling is correct.

It's a good idea to put a tick-mark for each TOC-line, heading etc. That way both you and the printer can see that you've checked it.

Remember that corrections can result in displacement of text and that the TOC might have to be checked again.

Make sure you have enough space

Corrections should always be written in the margins – **never between lines**. So make sure that you have enough space for this. If the final publication has small margins, the proof should be printed on a larger paper. If it's an A4 publication, you can print it in A3. For a normal sized book format, A4 is usually fine – unless you prefer to print the proof in spreads.



Be clear, crystal clear

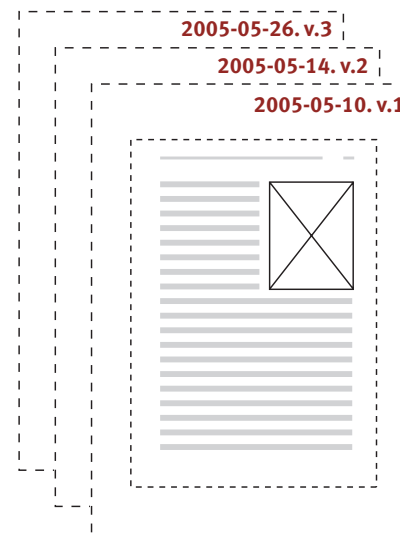
If not you, the person carrying out the changes in a document may not be familiar with the subject matter. To avoid confusion and doubt, and thereby avoiding mistakes and delays, it is important to do your corrections with care. While this may take you a bit longer as you start working with proofreading symbols, it will save you lots of time further on, not least when it's time for you to check that your corrections have been accurately performed. And it will save the graphic designer/printer plenty of (your) time.

Number your proofs – and make a copy

Even if you do everything to avoid several proofing rounds, at times it's still necessary with three, four or even more proofs. Make sure you get them numbered, alternatively that you number them yourself, and that you make a copy before sending them off to the graphic designer/printer.

If a book/report starts acting as if an evil spell had been cast on it, it may soon become a somewhat impossible task to sort out what was corrected when. If you need to talk to the person doing the corrections, it is also highly practical if you keep your own copy.

If several people are proofing the same text, always make sure that someone is responsible for transferring all corrections into one main proof. This will make your life easier when you get the new proof in return from the designer/printer.



Thank you, but no lists please...

A common mistake, well-intentioned as it may be, is to make a list of the corrections. These often include page numbers, column, paragraph and line referrals – followed by instructions on what kind of correction is needed. However, it is not very practical. Frankly, it's not a good idea at all, and may well prove to be a complete waste of time.

Instead of first studying a list of corrections, the person carrying out the corrections should be able to go to the page in question, easily identify the location and carry out the correction. If it is a publication with hundreds of pages with only a few corrections, a list of page numbers with corrections is fine, as long as you remember to put in all the pages.

Note that changes may result in displacements of text, and that the table of contents may need another check.

Proofreading symbols

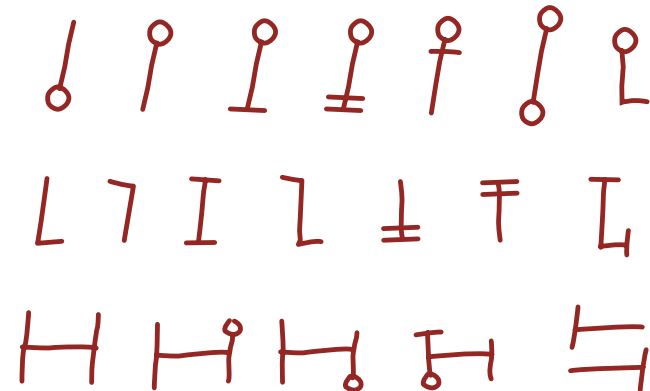
There are basically two groups of proofreading symbols, or proof reader's marks: locating and action marks. Apart from these two there's the return (go back) or "regret" mark, that often seems to be handy, and the combined locating/action marks.

Proofing symbols can take many shapes. The most important thing is to be consistent and clear. The purpose with proofing symbols is not that the person reading them should be able to interpret them. They should be understood immediately.

1. Locating marks

A locating mark indicates where in a text a correction is needed. The mark is repeated in the margin, always followed by an action mark or an instruction for the correction. If there are several corrections on the same line or in the same paragraph, you use different locating marks (see examples). If you use the same mark for several corrections, one immediately needs to identify which mark goes with which correction. A dependable source of mistakes.

If you want to change the typeface (Times instead of Helvetica), or the weight (regular, bold, italics), type size etc., the text in question is underlined, and the same kind of underlining is repeated in the margin followed by the instruction within a circle. Circled margin notes are always instructions, never for insertion in the text. See example.



Locating marks can for example look like the ones above

The marks in the first two rows are used for changing or deleting single characters.

The marks in the third row are used when several characters, or one or more lines, are to be deleted or replaced – the horizontal line is drawn as long as necessary, or over several lines. **All locating marks need an action mark or instruction.** See example on page 12.

2. Action marks

An action mark is placed in the margin after the locating mark and shows what action to take. With few exceptions, they look like these:



Delete



Increase distance/space (between paragraphs)



Increase distance/space (between characters)



Decrease distance/space



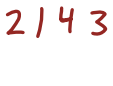
Note!

Never write between lines and never strike out or try to erase faulty text or characters, as this only makes it more difficult to identify the change.

3. Combined locating/action marks

These marks are placed where the correction should be made and repeated in the margin. They are normally self-explanatory.

	New line/new paragraph, depending on where it is inserted
	En suit (run on): Not new line/not new paragraph
	Move character, group of characters, line(s) to the left – to the opening
	Indent to the right/move to the right
	Centre. The symbols are placed one on each side of what is to be centred
	Raise matter
	Lower matter
	Transpose letters, words or groups of words

	Move the underlined words/groups of words according to the numbering. In the margin, write <u>1 2 3 4</u>
	Transpose lines
	Straighten horizontally, vertically
	Move the encircled matter according to the arrow

4. Revert mark

If a correction is mistakenly marked, draw a dashed line under the text. In the margin, put a big X over the correction.

- - - - -

5. What to do if there are masses of changes

If a text needs lots of changes, you can ease the correction process by following one or more of these steps:

- a) Remember to vary the proofing symbols
- b) Use different colours for different changes (doesn't work if you're faxing the proof...)
- c) Send a new text. If it becomes too complicated to mark up changes in a paragraph, it might, in some circumstances, be better to replace the paragraph(s). Use a location mark, repeat the mark in the margin and write RIDER A. If you need to do the same thing again, this will be RIDER B, and so on.

The riders are sent in a Word document, indicating the page like this:

RIDER A, page xx

(new text)

Of course you put all your riders in one document. Note that it's only rational to use riders when it is very complicated to mark up the changes in a paragraph or on a page. If the text contains a lot of formatting (small caps, italics, bold, typographic adjustments and so on), it may be better to use a regular proof. If in doubt, contact the person doing the proof in order to agree on the best way forward.

6. When you simply don't have enough space

Say that your proof is printed on a relatively small paper, and that the margins aren't large enough for your corrections, one solution is to number the corrections – on the proof and then on a loose sheet of paper, which can also be affixed to the proof.

Examples

12

There were four of us – George, and William Samuel Harris, and myself, ^{had} Montmorency. We were sitting in my room, smoking, and talking about how bad we were – bad from a medical point of view I mean, of course.

We were all feeling seedy, and we were getting quite nervous about it. Harris said he felt such extraordinary fits of giddiness come over him at times, that he hardly knew what he was doing; and then George said that he had fits of giddiness too, and hardly knew what he was doing. ~~With me, it was my liver that was out of order.~~ With me, it was my liver that was out of order. I knew it was my liver that was out of order, because I had just been reading a patent liver-pill circular, in which were detailed the various symptoms by which a man could tell when his liver was out of order. I had them all.

It is a most extraordinary thing, but I never read a patent medicine advertisement without being impelled to the conclusion that I am suffering from the particular disease therein dealt with in its most virulent form. The diagnosis seems in every ~~fast~~ case to correspond exactly with all the sensations that I have ever felt.

I remember going to the British Museum one day to read up the treatment for some slight ailment of which I had a touch – hay fever, I fancy it was. I got down the book, and read all I came to read; and then, in unthinking an moment, I idly turned the leaves, and began to indolently study diseases, generally. I forget which was the first distemper I plunged into – some fearful, devastating scourge, I know – and, before I had glanced half down the list of ‘premonitory symptoms,’ it was borne in upon me that I had fairly got it.

I sat for a while frozen with horror; and then in the listlessness of despair, I again turned over the pages. I came to typhoid fever – read the symptoms – discovered that I had typhoid fever, must have had it for without months knowing it – wondered what else I had got; turned up St Vitus’s Dance – found, as I expected, that I had that too – began to get interested in my case, and determined to sift it to the bottom, and so started alphabetically – read up ague, and learnt that I was sickening for it, and that the acute stage would commence in about another fortnight. Bright’s disease, I was find to relieved, I had only in a modified form, and, so far as that was concerned, I might live for years. Cholera I had, with severe complications; and diphtheria I seemed to have been born with. I plodded conscientiously through the twenty-six letters, and the only malady I could conclude I had not got was housemaid’s knee.

I felt rather hurt about this at first; it seemed somehow to be a sort of slight. ~~Why hadn’t I got housemaid’s knee? Why this invidious reservation? After a while, however, less grasping feelings prevailed.~~ I reflected that I had every other known malady in the

Rider A