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## **Avoid Costly Errors with Professional Proofreading Services**

### ***Why Your Word Processor's Grammar and Spell Checkers Aren't Enough***

Your business writing documents should reflect the values and standards of your organization. You wouldn't sell a faulty product to a consumer, so why would you pitch a new product idea with a publication full of errors? While proofreading may be an age-old occupation, modern business practices have made it a necessary part of corporate communication. Whether you are composing an email or producing a company manual, your writing reinforces your professional credibility. If you aren't clear and succinct, you risk tarnishing everything your company has worked so hard to achieve.

#### **Editing vs. Proofreading—What You Need to Know**

The terms "editing" and "proofreading" are often used interchangeably in the world of business writing; however, they are two very different types of revision. A professional proofreader can help catch the following errors:

*Proofreading and editing are two very different types of revision. Editing focuses on tone and flow, while proofreading focuses on the correctness of written text.*

- spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors
- typing and formatting mistakes
- redundancy

- inconsistencies in names, times, or places
- many other inaccuracies

Proofreading differs markedly from editing. Editing aims to improve the tone, style, and flow of a manuscript or business document *prior* to proofreading. (For more information on the importance of editing in business documents, please download Scribendi's white paper "[Maximize Business Opportunities with Professional Editing Services](#)"). Proofreading is the final stage of the revision process and should be undertaken by a highly trained professional.

### **Why Business Writing is Susceptible to Errors**

Writing produced in a business-type environment is far more susceptible to errors. This is because business documents are often created through collaboration and under both time constraints and tight deadlines. Conflicting writing styles and high-stress situations can cause even the most cautious of writers to commit simple errors and overlook glaring typos. When writing your next business document, there are a few common errors that should be kept in mind:

*Don't let a tight deadline dissuade you from having your document professionally proofread. Scribendi.com offers proofreading services around the clock and has expedited turnaround times.*

- **Improper use of language, tone:** It's easy to slip into colloquial language when composing an email or drafting a document. This type of casual speech is not consistent with standard business English and should be avoided.
- **Repetition:** Simple, repetitive, or vague development of ideas can lead to a sub-par business document. If you're collaborating with a co-worker on a business project, it's imperative to compare notes in order to avoid redundancies.

*Proofreading a document that you have had a hand in writing is futile. A fresh pair of eyes will be far more successful at catching errors.*



© 2009 Alby Headrick, "Dictionary"

Dictionaries are a far better resource than word processor spell checkers.

While these common errors are often easy to recognize, there are dozens more that can easily slip by a preoccupied business mind. A professional business proofreading service can help you catch a number of problems:

- **Mechanical mistakes:** This includes things like misspelled words, incorrect or missing punctuation, and incorrect capitalization (or missing capitalization).
- **Grammatical errors:** A proofreader will catch incorrect verb tenses, shifts in tense, incorrect subject-verb agreement, unclear pronoun references, and missing words.
- **Sentence structure issues:** This includes problems with comma splices, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments.

A third-party, objective proofreading specialist can help ensure that your business writing document meets company standards.

### **Word Processing Tools Aren't Intended as Proofreaders**

If you are like the majority of business writers, you likely turn to your word processor's spell and grammar checkers. While they often provide good suggestions, these tools should not be relied upon for any kind of in-depth proofreading, especially when dealing with highly complex business documents.

### **Spell Checker Spells Disaster When Proofreading Business Documents**

A spell check cannot identify the improper use of the following English language elements:

- homonyms (there or their; here or hear)

*The poem, "Candidate for a Pullet Surprise" is more than an example of homophonous humor. It's a warning for all those who rely exclusively on spell checkers.*

- most proper names
- typos that create real words ("direction" when you meant "directing" or "untied" when you had intended to write "united")

If you need additional evidence of spell checker inadequacies, simply consider the poem "Candidate for a Pullet Surprise" (also known as "The Spell Checker Poem") by Dr. Jerrold H. Zar, based on verses by Mr. Mark Eckman.<sup>1</sup>

If you copy and paste this poem into a Microsoft Word document and run a standard spell check (i.e., without the contextual spell check or grammar check running), the spell checker will register no errors. However, by the author's count, 123 of the poem's 225 words are incorrect.

### **How Spell Checkers Work**

Remember, an electronic dictionary is not a thinking human being. The suggestions that a spell checker provides are not discovered through careful thought and consideration; instead, the checker relies on a series of algorithms to generate suggestions.

In essence, a spell checker operates on individual words by comparing each of them against the contents of an internal dictionary. If the word cannot be located, it is flagged as an error and an attempt is made to provide alternative word suggestions via a suggestion algorithm. This algorithm functions by listing those words in the dictionary that have a small Levenshtein

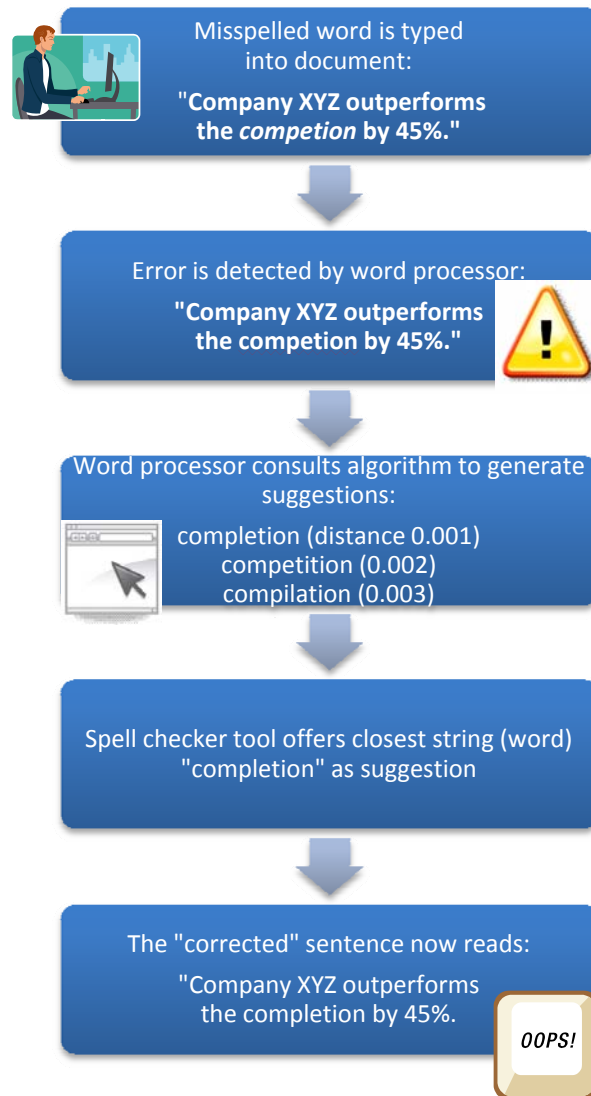
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1. Jerrold H. Zar, "Candidate for a Pullet Surprise," *Journal of Irreproducible Results* (January/February 1994): 13.

distance from the original word.<sup>2</sup> More often than not, these suggestions introduce errors, as can be seen in the chart below.

*The spell checker in your computer utilizes algorithms in order to come up with possible spelling suggestions, whereas human proofreaders rely on language and meaning.*

### Spell Checker Process



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2. The Levenshtein distance between two words is given by the minimum number of operations needed to transform one word into another, where an operation is an insertion, deletion, or substitution of a single character.

## Professional Business Writing is too Complex for Grammar Checkers

*A human proofreader can understand nuance and context—your word processor’s spell checker cannot.*

If you are relying on the grammar check in your word processor to catch grammatical errors, you are likely putting many hours of hard work in jeopardy. Grammar tools are only designed to catch basic errors, and even then, they are far from foolproof. Daniel Kies from the Department of English at the College of DuPage recently conducted a study evaluating how well the grammar checker tools in some of the top word processing software packages (Microsoft’s Word, Corel’s WordPerfect, Grammarian Pro X, and Open Office Writer with the LanguageTool extension) performed. Of twenty commonly identified usage errors, **all** of the word processors had considerable difficulty identifying and correcting the errors. So who was the worst offender? Microsoft Word versions 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2007 all earned a staggering 0 out of 80 possible points.<sup>3</sup>

Whether you are checking a simple email or a complex manual, the grammar tool should not be your sole proofreading source:

- The rules that are implemented in your grammar checking tool are rudimentary and cannot allow for the complex sentence structures of business writing. This can often lead to the grammar check identifying errors where there are none.
- Grammar tools often skip over simple mistypes because they do not check for correct endings (agreements). For example, “The ends result was” is a

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3. Daniel Kies, “Evaluating Grammar Checkers: A Comparative Ten-Year Study,” *Hyper Text Books*, May 20, 2009, <http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/grammar/gramchek.htm>.

relatively easy mistake to make. However, Microsoft Word will not recognize the unnecessary “s” on “ends.”

- Like the spell checker tool, **grammar checkers will often offer suggestions that substantially change the meaning of your words.**

### **Business Proofreading Services Could Save Your Company Millions**

Contracting your company’s draft documents to a professional proofreading service can help protect your business against careless errors that have the potential to cost you millions. The following are real-life examples of simple grammar and spelling errors that could have easily been captured by a professional proofreader:



© 2009 Brownpau, “Fortune Fail”

Proofreaders can help catch errors anywhere—even inside fortune cookies.

- December 2006: British retailer Marks & Spencer was embarrassed by a BBC News story revealing that **an entire line of pajamas** had a spelling error in the shirt’s slogan.<sup>4</sup>
- August 2006: A grammatical blunder forced Rogers Communications, Inc. to pay an extra **\$2.13 million** to use utility poles in the Maritimes after the placement of a comma in a contract permitted the deal’s cancellation.<sup>5</sup>

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4. “M&S in ‘Silly’ Festive Blunder,” *BBC News*, May 26, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6208295.stm>.

5. Ian Austen, “The Comma That Costs 1 Million Dollars (Canadian),” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/25/business/worldbusiness/25comma.html>.

Careless mistakes can also humiliate your company, causing extensive damage to your reputation and turning off prospective clients:

- May 2009: UK Supermarket Morrisons is forced to remove a **misspelled children’s educational toy** from store shelves after multiple customer complaints.<sup>6</sup>
- May 2009: Weston, Massachusetts Town Council was embarrassed when the phrase **“loving quarters” was mistakenly used in place of “living quarters”** in a proposed change to a zoning bylaw.<sup>7</sup>

The expense associated with hiring a professional business proofreader is trivial in comparison to the revenue and corporate integrity you risk losing by producing an error-laden product.

### **Why Scribendi’s Proofreading Service Will Work for Your Business**

*Scribendi provides a variety of proofreading services to business writers, provides B2B services, caters to cyclical requirements, and offers value-added packages.*

As your proofreading outsource partner, Scribendi can ensure that your business documents are free of spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. Our human proofreaders will catch the errors your word processor has been missing, and then some. Our corporate services include the following features:

- **Customizable accounts:** Our proofreaders will work to your deadlines and apply your house style guide.
- **Company pages:** Scribendi will create a separate, custom service page exclusive to your company.

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6. “Educational Toy Withdrawn by Morrisons Due to Spelling Errors,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, May 24, 2009, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/education\\_news/5272548/Educational-toy-withdrawn-by-Morrisons-due-to-spelling-errors.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/education_news/5272548/Educational-toy-withdrawn-by-Morrisons-due-to-spelling-errors.html).

7. Elizabeth Banks, “Word on the Street,” *Metrowest Daily News*, May 26, 2009, <http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/news/x72362779/Word-on-the-Street>.



- **Company profiles:** Your company profile will contain a detailed order history and a breakdown of your company's custom account settings.
- **Express deadlines:** Do you need documents turned around fast? Scribendi has express turnaround times of 24, 12, and eight hours on business writing services.
- **24/7 service:** Whether you drop your online document off at three in the morning, or just before noon, a qualified proofreader will be waiting to get started.
- **Varied payment options:** We offer pricing in several major currencies with the option of pay-as-you-go plans or monthly invoicing.
- **Enhanced safety and security:** Scribendi was one of the first companies in the world to adopt VeriSign Extended Validation SSL (128-bit SSL) encryption for communication between clients' computers and its e-commerce website.
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To find out more about Scribendi's corporate and business proofreading services, visit [www.scribendi.com](http://www.scribendi.com).

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