Proofread Like a Pro: Your Guide to Finding and Fixing Mistakes in Business Writing
Lana Christian
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I hate to proofread. It's difficult and tedious work. But I also know how important it is. Even if someone else is responsible for proofreading a document, the author is almost always held responsible for its accuracy. As a teacher of writing and director of writing tutors, I advise students to make and support their points, think about organization, revise for coherence, clarity, and correctness—and always, *always* to proofread. However, few students know how to proofread, and it can be hard to convince them that a letter, PowerPoint, or other document riddled with errors they might consider minor—or might not see at all—can seriously undermine their credibility. However, they do understand this after having been disqualified for a position (not as a writer, but as an engineer or manager) because they had failed to fully proofread their application materials. And they do understand it after taking jobs or internships that show them how much of business involves writing.

Here's the problem: since proofreading takes place at the end of the writing process, which is when Lana Christian as well as most other writing instructors assert it should be done, it often is done at the last minute, in a hurry, and without a coherent approach. Except in a few courses in which learning to proofread is the specific goal, proofreading is almost universally advocated, but barely taught. Few people, even those who have proofread great quantities of their own writing, can articulate a clear sense of how to do it. This is what Lana Christian's *Proofread Like a Pro: Your Guide to Finding and Fixing Mistakes in Business Writing* offers.

The first three chapters outline what Christian calls the 3-9-3 approach: "Before you start: 3 questions to ask," "9 guidelines for how to proofread," and "3 categories of what to proofread." Each chapter ends with a checklist. The first three questions determine when a document is ready for proofreading. The nine guidelines offer a combination of common sense and professional knowledge, such as the amount of time proofreading can be expected to take and ways to keep the eyes and mind focused on the material. The three categories are text; tables, charts, and graphics; and formatting. For each category,

Christian provides simple answers to questions that can puzzle even experienced readers and writers and presents examples to illustrate them. The rest of the book offers tips for proofreading different kinds of business documents, both print and onscreen; examples of how specific kinds of documents should look; and some specifications for what they should contain. A particularly useful chapter, “How to handle special proofreading situations,” includes a section on “eleventh-hour proofreading,” which advocates proofing those parts of the document that will be most noticed: headings and opening sentences, sections, and paragraphs. This is a useful approach to the panic that every writer on deadline occasionally faces when proofing the entire document is not feasible.

Proofread Like a Pro is specifically about proofreading, not about learning to write. Descriptions of and prescriptions for conventional business genres are directed at “finding and fixing mistakes.” Because this is a book clearly aimed at business writing, some of her specific instructions (such as appropriate sentence and paragraph length) would not be appropriate in other contexts. The book is far too formulaic for inexperienced writers, but they are not her intended audience. *Proofread Like a Pro* is for writers whose work is about to go public, and, as such, it is a useful and easy-to-use reference work that I will keep on my own desk.