

Proofread Like a Pro: your guide to finding and fixing mistakes in business writing.

By Lana Christian

(Five stars)

I often treated proofreading as an unpleasant final chore to get off the desk as soon as possible. Perhaps that's why I missed so many errors! In truth, proofreading is the most important task for any writer or editor because it ensures that your work gets to the client in the form you intended. But without a system to guide you, proofreading can be a hit-and-miss affair and mistakes can still get through.

That is why I was thrilled to discover Lana Christian's book. Her 3/9/3 system takes you through a logical step-by-step process that makes proofreading systematic, efficient, and stress-free. First, you address three questions before you start proofing: (1) Have I finished making all changes to the document? (2) Have I followed my organization's guidelines for word usage? (3) Have I run a spell-check? Then she presents nine guidelines on how to proof; for example: eliminate distractions, print it to read it, allow more time than you think you will need, and don't look for all types of errors at once. That last bit of advice was worth the price of the book because my normal procedure was to go through the copy just once, trying to catch errors in spelling, punctuation, and formatting all in one pass. Invariably, I would miss things. Proofing the document several times is necessary, and as Lana says, it will actually *shorten* your proofing time because you free yourself from looking for too much at once. If you happen to catch a formatting error while scanning for spelling errors, just mark it so you can deal with it on your formatting scan.

The book is filled with handy tips that even professional proofreaders may not have considered. For instance, reading a document back-to-front, or out loud, can prevent desensitization to errors. She also has dozens of examples of the most common errors in spelling, usage, punctuation, and formatting, with solutions. Do you work extensively with tables and charts? Lana shows you what to look for. Checklists help you make sure you haven't missed something. Short documents and long documents each require their own approach to proofing and Lana has chapters on each. Have you ever sweated over a grant proposal, hoping you haven't missed a stupid mistake that will blow your chance of getting funded? Sweat no more because Lana addresses that too. For the many of us who must proof online documents, such as PowerPoint presentations, chapter 6 is a Godsend.

Proofreading is like meditation. Each requires meticulous, steady attention, and Lana Christian is like the kindly Zen master who presses you to do it right, all in 160 pages. If working with words is your livelihood, you can't go wrong with this compact little manual. It sits on my desktop for easy access, right next to my dictionary, my *AMA Manual of Style*, and my *Strunk & White*.

—Bruce Wilson
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