Critical Intersections: the 12th Biennial Conference of the Association for Academic Language and Learning

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Drawing the line: Views from academic staff and skills advisers on acceptable proofreading with low proficiency writers

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About ACPE

- Located at Olympic Park, NSW

- Student demographic
  - Mainly under 25 and domestic
  - Degrees in dance, fitness and sports coaching as well as business and education
  - High proportion of students coming in on BAND 3 (HSC 60-69) or below
Can a Language and Learning Adviser or Writing Mentor edit my essay?

No. Neither Writing Mentors nor Language and Learning Advisers edit or proofread essays. The aim of these consultation is to assist you to identify areas for improvement and give you advice on how to improve your writing. For this reason it is important that you come prepared with a specific question about your essay.

What we can help with:
- understanding and planning assignments
- structuring and writing assignments
- English language
- mathematical skills
- oral presentations
- research and referencing skills
- time management
- critical thinking
- general study concerns

What we can't do for you:
- Edit or proofread your whole document/essay/report
- Teach English language (grammar, vocabulary, business language program
- Law referencing assistance (see law librarian)

What we do not offer:
- course content tuition
- editing or proofreading
- private tuition

Things we can do:
- While we can help you to structure, argue and communicate your ideas more effectively, we cannot give you assistance with the actual academic content of your work or provide you with an expected grade for your work.
- We are unable to provide an editing, proofreading or grammar-checking service.
- We do not provide assistance on take-home exams, although we can discuss how they may be different to course assessments.
- We do not see written work by non-ACIS students (Australian Community and International Studies) without faculty or academic staff. Note students are welcome to drop in and discuss their work.

A Learning Adviser is available at the Library Information Desk to answer students’ questions about academic writing and study strategies. It is helpful to bring your assignment question, unit guide, and/or marked assignment.

Note: Learning Advisers do not (proof)read assignments prior to submission.
Hi,

Could I get please get my essay proof read and also the referencing checked 😊

Hi Declan,

Attached is my ED392 essay for proof reading which is due this sunday.
The main areas I struggle with is grammar and sentence structure.

Hey guys just wondering if i can get a proof read on my essay just to see if my formatting is okay.

Good Morning ADO team,

I have attached my final assessment (report) for my Research in Action (sport) subject.

Can you please help me by proof reading my work.

Hi there,

I've attached one part of my assignment for advanced curriculum (DipEd). Just wondering if i could get it proof read.

Hello!
I'm not sure if my message sent last night my computer has been playing up so I've just resent this message sorry if you already received it!! Just wondering is someone can proof read my draft 😊

Thank you!
Non-directive vs. Directive intervention
Non-directive paradigm

• “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (North, 1985, p. 76)
• Key features:
  • Focus on student and the writing process, not the text (product)
  • Tutor student conference should be dialogic, Socratic, minimalist: “The less we do to the paper, the better” (Brooks, 1991, p. 4)
  • Proofreading does not develop independent writing skills
  • Proofreading is ethically suspect and academically dishonest
  • Proofreading devalues support centres to status of academic nursery, Fix-it shop, and launderette
New Landscape…

Widening participation in HE from 0-15% (elite model) to 16-50% (mass model) of total population

Heterogeneous cohort

- low SES
- NESB
- International
- Mature
- Indigenous
- Non-traditional
- First in family
- Part-time
- Disadvantaged
- Unprepared
- Learning difficulties

Retention & completion agenda requires a more flexible first year transition pedagogy
New landscape, new approach?

- A more directive, hands-on approach may mitigate attrition and decrease likelihood of failure/withdrawal for first-year, low–proficiency, and disadvantaged students.

- Centres have an ethical responsibility to provide more explicit and directive support for unprepared students that have been accepted into university.
Directive paradigm

• Proofreading
  • Aids retention by keeping disadvantaged students “in the game” as they find their feet
  • Helps improve students’ confidence through success: “grades correlate with students’ perception of self-worth” (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013, p. 44)
  • Levels the playing field for disadvantaged students so that their papers get a fair hearing
  • Can be a developmental and formative process
  • Aligned with social constructivist pedagogies of scaffolding, modelling, and collaborative learning
On a more practical note…

• Proofreading is also consistent with service/support orientation of writing centres

• In light of recent events, better to proofread in-house than drive students to use online proofreaders or ghostwriters

• In addition, “Writers may visit the centre for proofreading but return for other kinds of help. Proofreading may just be the entrée” (Young, 2000, p. 141)
Where do we draw the line?
PLEASE BE OUR GOLDILOCKS AND RATE OUR SAMPLE COMMENTS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Enough</th>
<th>Just Right</th>
<th>Too Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Unhelpful
- Not clear
- Too much grammar jargon
- Taking control
- Replacing my voice
- Too directive
Intervention creates false...

Acknowledge intervention

The level of feedback should...

Acceptable to fix surface errors...

Acceptable to make...

Acceptable to rewrite.

Proofreading gives a fair...

Intervention provides model

Errors highlighted, never "fixed"

Intervention depends on level...

Acceptable to fix surface errors...

Agree
Disagree
Unsure

%
Key findings

• In principle, many staff support generic examples of proofreading, contrary to common rhetoric.

• Staff and students commonly agree on what constitutes appropriate feedback.

• Staff mostly agree that comments which simply indicate an issue but do not elaborate on it are insufficient.

• Staff reluctant to provide written examples for students.

• Statements with the word “fix” were most contentious, suggesting the line between acceptable and unacceptable intervention may be a matter of phrasing.
Suggestions for good practice

• The approach to proofreading should be pragmatic, not dogmatic, particularly with low proficiency student writers in transition to university

• Under-prepared, last minute drafts should not be proofread

• Proofreading should not involve unilateral substantive revisions

• Recurring errors in a text should be “fixed” once, but not throughout

• Changes to the text should be posed as questions or suggestions
• Students should collaborate in identifying and self-correcting errors

• Proofreading support should be limited (e.g. 2 drafts) and tapered over time as student learns to self-edit

• Proofreading support should be acknowledged

• Students who rely on proofreading support must commit to regular writing development tutorials

• The issue of where to draw the line should be negotiated between ALL staff, students, and academic staff
Bibliography


