POLISHED PROOFREADING:
AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

SPELLING MISTAKES

1. Keep a list of words you commonly misspell. Studies show individuals usually misspell the same words repeatedly. Once you have established a list, study it, practice spelling the words properly, and have someone test you on the words.
2. Consult a Canadian dictionary.
3. Don’t be tyrannized by computer spell checkers. Use them as an aid, but remember that they cannot think: YOU must proofread.

WORDINESS

1. Do not let the number of words prescribed to an assignment preoccupy you in the early stages of the writing process. You might – consciously or unconsciously – produce a very wordy draft in fear of producing a short paper.
2. Avoid tautology (redundancy). Example: Commuters going back and forth to school formed carpools.
3. Do not use many words when a few will express the idea more clearly. Example: In the event that the grading system is changed, expect complaints on the part of students
4. Avoid passive constructions. Example: The boy was bitten by the dog.
5. Try sentence combining. Example: He has a distinct way of telling a story. He really emphasizes small details. They sound like they are very important.

RUN-ON SENTENCES AND COMMA SPLICES

Examples: Early Sunday morning we walked in the woods it was a bright and clear morning.

Early Sunday morning we walked in the woods, it was a bright and clear morning.

1. Remember that a sentence expresses one complete idea.
2. Remember that pronouns (as in the above examples) can be subjects.
3. Use periods or semi-colons to correct the error.
4. If you know you are prone to this error, proofread your paper -- slowly and carefully -- checking for run-on sentences and comma splices.
SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Example: Although it is cold outside.

1. The three words which most frequently lead students to write incomplete sentences are and, because, and so.
2. If you are prone to writing sentences fragments, look for a pattern. For example, should the fragment be attached to the preceding sentence?

GENERAL WORDS OF ADVICE

1. Don’t be concerned about common errors in the early stages of writing. That can stifle your creativity.
2. Develop an awareness of your writing strengths and weaknesses. Pay attention to your professors’ comments, consult with your professor, visit the Writing Centre, and use handbooks.
3. Remember that writing well takes time. Allow yourself time for several revisions.

PROOFREADING

1. Do not reply on technology to proofread for you; the spell check mechanism on our word processors cannot discern context.
2. Do not give short shrift to the proofreading stage: proofread, get someone else to proofread, and proofread again, and allow time between readings.
3. Proofread a paper copy; apparently, most of us are more able to spot errors in a paper copy than on the screen.
4. Proofread aloud. This may give you a clearer picture of what is actually on the page, as opposed to what you think you see.
5. Consider proofreading from end to beginning. This is another technique that shifts your perspective on your paper.
6. When you have developed an awareness of your individual problem areas, you are able to productively proofread: rather than looking at every aspect of your writing each time you read, focus on a single problem area.