



# Proofreading Glossary

## **abbreviations**

Shortened versions of words or word groups. Types include acronyms, clipping, contractions, and initialisms.

## **active voice**

In a sentence written in active voice, the subject performs the action, e.g., *Jimmy crashed the car*. This is the opposite of passive voice.

## **acronyms**

A type of abbreviation that reduces a phrase or the name of a group to only the first letters of each word. The letters are pronounced together as a word, e.g., *PIN* (personal identification number) or *NASA* (National Aeronautics and Space Administration).

## **articles**

Words that specify what a noun refers to. The indefinite articles are *a* or *an*, which refer to a generic or unknown item, and the definite article is *the*, which refers to a specific item.

## **bibliography**

A list of all the sources that an author has used to research their work (e.g., an academic paper or a nonfiction book).

## **cf.**

An abbreviation of the Latin word *confer*, which means *compare* or *bring together*. It is typically used in academic works, especially in endnotes or footnotes, to direct readers to works that provide a useful comparison, e.g., *These results are confirmed by previous studies (cf. Smith, 2008)*. Here, for example, *cf.* indicates that the subsequent citation provides related information.

## **citation**

An in-text note to show the attribution of a source text, e.g., *What follows in parentheses is a citation (Jones, 2016)*.

## **clipping**

A type of abbreviation that removes syllables to make words shorter, e.g., *ad* (advertisement) and *app* (application).

## **collective nouns**

A word that refers to a group of things taken as a whole, e.g., *a team* or *the police*. Groups of animals often have interesting collective nouns, e.g., *a murder of crows* or *a parade of elephants*.

## **colon**

A connective punctuation mark that introduces a definition, example, or explanation, e.g., *I'm unhappy, but I have a solution: I'll have a champagne picnic on the beach*.

## **comma splice**

A comma splice is when a comma is used to join two independent clauses, e.g., *Cher is a famous singer, she has had several top-hit singles*. The issue can be fixed by adding a conjunction, changing the comma to a semicolon, or creating separate sentences.

## **comparative adverb**

An adverb used to compare two or more things and state that one is more of the quality, e.g., *The runner ran **faster** than her friends*.

## **compare (function/tool)**

A function in Microsoft Word that allows the user to compare two versions of the same document to generate a copy that shows all edits as tracked changes.

## **compound**

Two or more words that are joined to form a new word or phrase that acts like a single word. These can be **open compounds**, such as *coffee shop* or *New Year's Eve*; **closed compounds**, such as *hairdresser* or *daydream*; or **hyphenated compounds**, such as *pop-up* or *father-in-law*.

## **conjunctions**

Words that connect words, phrases, and clauses. There are subordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions. The acronym *FANBOYS* is a useful way to remember the seven most common coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*.

## **contractions**

A type of abbreviation that combines multiple words (usually two) into a single word, e.g., *they're* (they are) or *don't* (do not).

## **countable nouns**

This term refers to items that can be counted individually, e.g., *cups* or *apples*. When reduced in number, the technically correct word to use is *fewer* rather than *less*, e.g., *There are fewer children in school today*.

## **dangling modifiers**

A word or phrase that modifies the wrong thing because the intended subject is missing from the sentence. For instance, *Looking into the distance, the sun dipped over the horizon*. Here, the person who is doing the looking has been omitted from the sentence, making it seem like the sun is gazing into the distance.

## **determiners**

These are words that precede nouns and specify what the noun refers to or is connected to. These include **articles** (e.g., *a* and *the*), **possessives** (e.g., *hers* and *their*), and **demonstratives** (e.g., *this* and *those*).

## **diacritics**

Sometimes referred to as an accent, a diacritic is a symbol or mark that when written above or below a letter, indicates a difference in pronunciation, e.g., *jalapeño* or *bête noire*.

## **dynamic lists**

This is a table of contents, charts, images, or figures that is automatically generated by dynamic elements, such as headers or captions, in a document.

## **editing**

Traditionally, this refers to all the elements that are involved with changing the words and structure of documents. Nowadays, editing typically refers to more substantial changes made to improve a document (in comparison to changes made to correct a document when proofreading). The line between editing and proofreading is often blurred, especially in areas of digital work.

## **e.g.**

Short for the Latin *exempli gratia*, which means *for example* and used to introduce an example or an incomplete list.

## **ellipsis**

A set of three periods (...), which can be spaced or unspaced, used to indicate omitted text in a quotation, suggest an incomplete thought, or show that a sentence has trailed off (usually in fictional dialogue).

## **en dash**

A punctuation mark (–) that's slightly longer than a hyphen and traditionally as wide as the letter *N*, used to indicate a range of numbers, scores, connection, or conflict, e.g., *1914–1918* or *the Mason–Dixon line*. A spaced en dash can also be used for parenthetical information – like this – in a sentence, especially in UK English.

## **em dash**

A punctuation mark (—) that's longer than a hyphen and traditionally as wide as the letter *M*. Most often unspaced, an em dash is used typically in US English to indicate parenthetical or extra information, e.g., *Miranda walked to work—the same route as every day—humming a tune*.

## **ESL (also EAL or EFL)**

This stands for *English as a Second Language* (or *English as an Additional Language* or *English as a Foreign Language*) and refers to a person who does not have English as their first language or to writing by the same.

## **et al.**

Short for the Latin *et alia*, meaning *and others*. This term is used to show that names have been left out when citing a work by several authors, e.g., *Ford et al. (2004) examined the topic in detail*. Typically, the full author names would be provided in a reference list or bibliography.

## **et cetera**

Commonly written as *etc.*, this Latin term means *and so on* or *and the rest*. It is used when the items omitted from a sentence are not essential to understanding the overall meaning, e.g., *We're going camping, so make sure to bring a tent, sleeping bag, etc.*

## **faulty agreement**

This refers to when terms or words in a sentence are not grammatically consistent, most

commonly when one part is singular and another plural, e.g., *The mayor sign the contract* or *The mix of three ingredients cause a reaction*.

### **faulty parallelism**

This occurs when the clauses in a sentence or the items in a list do not have matching forms. This can include mixing verb tenses, infinitives and gerunds, nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. For example, *I like swimming and to run* or *This example is clear, helpful, and works well*.

### **footer**

The space at the bottom of each page in a document, which is separate from the main central area. Most commonly, this is used for page numbers.

### **formatting**

This refers to all aspects related to a document's presentation, including line and paragraph spacing, margins, headings, fonts, and page numbering.

### **fragments**

A sentence fragment lacks a main clause, verb, or subject, e.g., *Because it was sunny outside*. They can be used in fiction writing, but they would be considered errors in formal writing.

### **gendered language**

The use of male/female pronouns (*his* or *she*) or the use of masculine/feminine terms (*policeman* or *fireman*) instead of a gender-neutral alternative.

### **gerund**

Verbs that end in *-ing* and function as nouns, typically to describe actions, e.g., *Painting a picture is more relaxing than running a race*.

### **grammatical person**

This describes the point of view from which a document is written. In academic writing, a third-person, impersonal approach is typically preferred. This means that using first- and second-person pronouns (e.g., *I*, *we*, *you*) is usually discouraged.

### **header**

The space at the top of each page in a document, which is separate from the main central area. This can be used for document titles, page numbers, company information, chapter titles, and other additional information.

### **homophones**

Words that sound the same but have different meanings, e.g., *tier* and *tear*. Less common are **homographs**, which are words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings, e.g., *tear* (when you rip something) and *tear* (when you cry).

### **hyphen**

A punctuation mark (-) used to link parts of words or multiple words, especially in compound terms, e.g., *free-range eggs*.

**ibid.**

This is short for the Latin *ibidem*, meaning *in the same place*. It can be used when citing the same source twice in a row.

**i.e.**

Short for the Latin *id est*, which means *that is*. This is used to rephrase or explain something that has already been said, e.g., *She's a Scouser (i.e., she's from Liverpool)*.

**infinitive**

The simple form of a verb used with *to*, e.g., *To sing*.

**initialisms**

A type of abbreviation that reduces a phrase or the name of a group to only the first letters of each word. Each letter is pronounced separately, e.g., *FBI* (Federal Bureau of Investigation) or *UFO* (unidentified flying object).

**libel**

This refers to any false accusation in the public sphere that could damage someone's reputation. Proofreaders should be aware of this so that they can politely point out potential issues they spot to the client.

**markup**

Another name for tracked changes, this refers to the visible markings denoting various changes in a document: comments, insertions, deletions, and formatting. When working in Microsoft Word, you can choose which of these elements you'd like to see, as well as changes by specific people, in the markup options.

**mechanical editing**

A term used in publishing for a form of editing that can involve tasks such as correcting spelling, grammar, and punctuation; checking headings, abbreviations, and terminology; and amending some aspects of formatting.

**misplaced modifiers**

A word or phrase that modifies the wrong thing because the intended subject is placed incorrectly in the sentence. This can make a sentence confusing or ambiguous, e.g., *Established 20 years ago, the pizzas at our restaurant are the best in town*. A misplaced modifier can also be used intentionally for humorous effect, e.g., *Intelligent but hairy and smelly, the minister visited the orangutan enclosure at the zoo*.

**nominalization**

The term for when a longer noun form is used in place of a verb, e.g., *His policies could bring about the destruction of our society*. In this sentence, *bring about the destruction of* is a nominalization. To make it shorter, we could use the verb *destroy* instead, e.g., *His policies could destroy our society*. Note that nominalization can make a sentence longer than strictly necessary, but it can also be used to avoid repetition or to create a particular tone or effect.

**nonrestrictive clauses**

These are clauses that provide nonessential or additional information in a sentence. They can be set apart from the main part of the sentence using parenthetical commas, e.g., *The man, who is carrying a parcel, is waiting outside*. Since the clause about the parcel is nonrestrictive, it gives us extra information, and it could be removed without affecting the meaning of the sentence. Here, the implication is that there is only one man waiting outside, and he is carrying a parcel. This is the opposite of a restrictive clause.

### **parenthesis/parentheses**

A punctuation mark ( ) that is used in pairs to add information in a sentence. In UK English, *parentheses* are typically known as *brackets* (with *square brackets* used for the angular form).

### **parenthetical clauses**

This is a part of a sentence that offers extra information, usually indicated with commas, parentheses (brackets), or dashes, e.g., *The mayor, as well as many people in the city, cares about pollution*.

### **passive voice**

In a sentence written in passive voice, the object or the action is the primary focus over the subject. It may be that the subject is acted upon or that the subject is unknown. The passive construction consists of a form of the verb *to be* (*am* or *was*) paired with a verb, e.g., *The award was won by Janet* (emphasis is placed on the object – *the award*) or *The house was broken into* (the subject – the perpetrator – is unknown).

### **possessive apostrophe**

An apostrophe used to indicate ownership, e.g., *Where is the dog's ball?*

### **possessives**

Words such as *your* and *their*, which indicate possession.

### **plagiarism**

This is when an author uses someone else's work without attribution or copies work created by another. This can happen by mistake when an author forgets to reference the source of a quotation. Academic plagiarism extends the definition to include when a student submits work that someone else has written or significantly altered for them, and this can result in severe penalties – such as the student being refused their degree. For this reason, it's important that proofreaders know how much they can alter in a student's work without crossing the line into plagiarism.

### **plural**

A word that refers to more than one of something, e.g., *formulae* or *buses*. Also, plural verbs are the verb forms used to refer to more than one thing, e.g., *Jo and Chris go to work at 9 a.m.* (in contrast to *Jo goes to work at 9 a.m.*).

### **prepositions**

These words show the relationship between a noun (or pronoun) and other words in a sentence. These include words such as *upon*, *through*, *on*, *under*, *into*, and *beside*.

## **proofing language**

The language and dialect used by the spellchecker in word-processing software. The most common dialects of English are US and UK, but there are many others as well.

## **proofreading**

This term traditionally refers to the final check on a typeset document before it goes to print and involves spotting errors while making minimal changes to the text. Nowadays, it refers to the tasks common to modern-day digital proofreading, which go somewhat beyond the traditional level. The distinction between proofreading and editing is still preserved in publishing, but for digital work, proofreading can refer to correcting spelling, grammar, and punctuation, making changes to improve sentence flow, amending inappropriate language or misused terms, and checking references and citations against a set style in academic work.

## **quotations**

When another author's words are used in a text. A quotation (or quote) can consist of anything from a single word to a lengthy section. It should be formatted to ensure it is set apart from the writer's own content and meets the standards of the style sheet or referencing guide. A source should be provided for each quotation.

## **redundancy**

The term used when a word is superfluous because it has the same meaning as another. This can take the form of a word following an abbreviation (e.g., *ATM machine*), a term taken from another language being duplicated in English (e.g., *naan bread*), a verb paired with an unnecessary adverb (e.g., *to whisper quietly*), or an adjective paired with a noun that already contains its meaning (e.g., *free gift*). Redundancies can create unnecessary wordiness (e.g., *I believe the witness to be truthful and honest*), but they can also be used for emphasis or other effect, as in the case of well-known phrases and sayings (e.g., *first and foremost*).

## **reference (or reference list)**

An item on a list of entries showing where an author retrieved the information to write an academic or other nonfiction text. Each entry supplies the author and publication details for each piece of reference material, with the aim of helping the reader pinpoint the source of the information if necessary.

## **restrictive clauses**

These are clauses that provide essential information or vital context in a sentence. In contrast to nonrestrictive clauses, they are not set apart with commas, e.g., *The man who is carrying a parcel is waiting outside*. Since the clause about the parcel is restrictive, it gives us important information, and it could not be removed without affecting the meaning of the sentence. Here, the implication may be that there are many men, and the parcel sets this one apart, or that the parcel is the most important thing.

## **sic**

Based on the Latin phrase *sic eras scriptum* (i.e., *thus it was written*), this term is used to show that a quote has been reproduced exactly as it appears in the source text. This is most commonly necessary to mark out an error or typo that is a part of the original material to show it is not a mistake by the writer.

## **semicolon**

A connective punctuation mark (;) most often used to link related independent clauses, e.g., *John loves musical theater most; however, his friend Theresa prefers the ballet*. A semicolon can also be used to separate list items when the items already contain commas, e.g., *I want to visit Paris, France; Rome, Italy; and Oslo, Norway*.

## **singular**

Words that refer to just one of something, e.g., *formula* or *bus*. Also, singular verbs are the verb forms used to refer to a single thing, e.g., *Jo goes to work at 9 a.m.* (in contrast to *Jo and Chris go to work at 9 a.m.*).

## **square bracket**

A punctuation mark [ ] that is used in pairs to set apart information that is already within parentheses or to alter, add to, or correct minor errors in an original quotation, e.g., *“The president explained the list [of complaints] had reached unprecedented levels.”*

## **style guide**

A document or guide detailing how to present writing, giving stipulations for formatting, vocabulary, punctuation, and more. It can be an in-house resource for a company or institution, or it can refer to a general, accessible guide, such as the AP Stylebook or Chicago Manual of Style. In academic work, a referencing style guide, such as APA or MLA, also describes how to format citations and references.

## **styles**

The tool for predefined formatting in Microsoft Word. A Style includes settings for font, size, line spacing, and everything else about how text appears. There can also be preset options for different parts of the text, such as captions and headers. A special Style can then be used to create lists of contents or images in a document.

## **style sheet**

More concise than a style guide, a style sheet is most commonly created by a particular company or institution to set out its rules for writing and formatting documents.

## **subjunctive mood**

Used to write about a wish, hope, or possibility, this verb form differs from the standard and so is commonly overlooked, e.g., *If I were rich, I would buy a Rolls-Royce* (here, the verb *were* is in the subjunctive mood).

## **substantive editing**

A form of editing that involves making significant changes to a text. This could include tasks such as revising paragraphs to improve flow, suggesting changes to the structure of a document, or altering the tone and language of a text to better align with its purpose.

## **superlative adverb**

A word used to compare two or more things and state that one is the most of the quality, e.g., *That slice of cake is big, and that one is bigger, but I want the **biggest** piece*.



### **terminal punctuation**

Any punctuation used to mark the end of a sentence, such as a period (full stop), question mark, or exclamation point (exclamation mark).

### **textspeak** or **textese**

Informal terms for the abbreviations common to SMS or chat messages, which aim to reduce the character count of the message, e.g., *lol* (laugh out loud), *2moro* (tomorrow), or *imo* (in my opinion).

### **track changes**

The name of a function in Microsoft Word that shows edits that have been made to a document.

### **uncountable nouns**

Also referred to as **mass nouns**, this refers to items that cannot be counted individually, e.g., *milk* or *luggage*. When reduced in number, the technically correct word to use is *less* rather than *fewer*, e.g., *There is less sand on the beach after the storm.*

### **user name**

The name that shows who has made comments or tracked changes in a document. This is set through the user preferences of the program.