

LUCKY 7  
WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN PROOFREADING

Your writing is a reflection of how well you communicate. If your writing is filled with errors and disjointed, you lose credibility. What follows are some tips on how to make your legal writing clear, concise, and to the point.

1. **REWRITE** – Never share work that has not been edited, edited, and edited some more. I suggest looking for errors one at a time; for example, read first for punctuation errors, second for grammatical, typos, and spelling errors, third clarity and organization, and fourth citations. If you know you have a weakness such as pronoun disagreement, check specifically for that. The best thing you can do for your work is to **PUT FRESH EYES** on your paper. Wait several hours, overnight, or twenty-four hours before editing your paper. **READ IT OUTLOUD.**
2. **PROOFING MEANS REWRITING** – Don't expect it to be enough to add or take away a comma. **REWRITING** means just that. Look for gaps in your argument – do you need to add or take away? Are your sentences structured clearly and concisely? Does each paragraph have a topic sentence? Are your paragraphs organized for optimal understanding?
3. **BE WARY OF PASSIVE VOICE** – Show don't tell. Do this by using active voice. Put the subject at the beginning of the sentence with the verb following the subject. The landlord broke the lease not The lease was broken by the landlord. Passive voice may not be incorrect, but it can lead to longer papers with excessive wordiness. Watch out for a form of "to be" followed by the past participle of a verb.
4. **FRONT LOAD YOUR ARGUMENT** – No one wants to wander through a paper looking for the writer's point. State your main point and then ask yourself is this the bottom-line? It should be. Now explain how you got there.
5. **SHORT IS BEST** – Use concise clear sentences, but remember to vary sentence length too. A very short sentence can pack a big punch when it follows a longer one.
6. **STRONG SUBJECTS AND VERBS** – Avoid adjectives and adverbs. In most cases, a clear or concise verb can eliminate the need for adjectives and adverbs.
7. **MAKE QUOTES COUNT.** No one wants to read a paper that is a long string of quotations.