

## Visiting Scholar Program – Research Writing

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### Writing wizardry 101: Finding mistakes in your own writing

This blog post was inspired by comments during the launch event for the Visiting Scholar Program. Several people commented that they could spot writing problems much more easily in someone else's writing.

**Your dilemma:** You need to proofread your writing, to avoid sending important documents with embarrassing typos and mistakes in them.

- You've already used tools to check spelling and grammar.
- You've read through your document over and over.

BUT, you're worried that you've still missed some problems. You probably have—it's a result of the way human brains work. We see what we expect to see, not what's actually on the screen or the page (scientific explanation [here](#)). What to do?

#### 1) Take a break

If you have the luxury of time, set the document aside for at least a few hours. A few days is even better. When you return to the document, your brain is more likely to see it as something new. Mistakes will pop out at you more easily.

#### 2) Change up the view

You can make a document look new to your brain with some simple tricks.

- Change the background colour temporarily. In Word, use the Page Color option under the [Design tab](#). In Pages, follow [these instructions](#). **Bonus:** A pale yellow or green background can soothe tired eyes.
- Change the font or font size temporarily. Try an odd font like Chalkboard or Eurostile or Papyrus. Again, your brain sees "new" text.
- Change the size of your margins temporarily, so that lines of text break in different places.

#### 3) Read out loud

Reading out loud forces you to slow down, giving your brain a better chance to spot mistakes. You're also more likely to say what you see and hear what you say. You'll say repeated words and notice awkward or unclear phrasing.

#### 4) Make your computer read out loud

Computers read exactly what they see, typos and all.

#### 5) Find a proofreading buddy

You can exchange documents to find each other's typos and mistakes.

