

## 6 ways my dog taught me how to be a better proofreader

'Mr. Muddy Paws' has a lot to say about keeping copy clean.

By Julie A. Jacob | Posted: February 14, 2013



When I take my red poodle, Asta, for a walk on rainy days and forget to wipe his paws when we return, his muddy feet track mud across the kitchen floor. That's why one of my many nicknames for the little guy is, "Mr. Muddy Paws."

are blots on your copy that distract your readers from your brilliant content and scintillating prose. And just as it's easier to wipe your dog's feet before he dashes across the floor than to wipe the floor afterwards, it's much simpler to correct errors before they appear online or in print than it is to publish a corrected version with an apology after the fact.

As communicators, the work we produce is supposed to be flawless, but it's tough to spot every stray comma, missing capital letter, or misspelled word that has slipped through spellcheck—especially when you're rushing to finish an article, post a comment, tweet a link, and pin a photo, all in the next fifteen minutes.

Inspired by "Mr. Muddy Paws," here are six tips for better proofreading:

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### **M is for magnify**

Zoom in to at least 150 percent on your screen. If you're over 40, surrender your vanity and slip on those reading glasses. You can't correct what you can't see.

### **R is for reading out loud**

It's easy to unconsciously correct a typo or supply a missing word when you're reading silently. However, errors that slip by when you're reading quietly leap off the page when you read the same text out loud. Using your sense of hearing along with your sense of sight helps you catch errors you may not otherwise notice.

### **P is for print**

Yes, we're all trying to save trees by using less paper. Nonetheless, print what you're proofreading. It's easier to spot mistakes on a piece of paper than on a computer screen.

### **A is for alter the way you read the text**

Instead of reading straight through from beginning to end, read your text in sections. First, read the headline and subheads, then go back and read the rest of the text.

### **W is for wait**

Set your article aside for a few hours or, at the minimum, a few minutes. Work on something else, get some coffee, or answer some emails, and then come back and proofread your copy with a fresh perspective.

### **S is for a second pair of eyes**

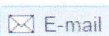
It's impossible to catch every error in every single piece of copy that you write. No one is perfect and immune to mistakes. Whenever possible, ask a co-worker to read your copy—and return the favor by offering to proofread your colleague's work in return.

So, there you have it: a few proofreading tips, courtesy of Asta the poodle. Hopefully, these will help keep your copy free from muddy paw prints and typos.

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