

Proofreading at a Glance

Individual teachers, schools, style manuals, and dictionaries all suggest different ways to indicate errors in written work. The notation given here includes symbols that many teachers and students find useful as shorthand to mark errors and suggest improvements. Examples follow the error or writing weakness when appropriate.

Usages	Symbol	Example
Spelling error	sp	We <u>woud</u> like more broccoli. [would]
Close up space; print as one word	()	Every <u>body</u> ; basket <u>ball</u> .
Delete, or word crossed out; take it out	↘	The squirrels <u>up</u> in our attic are an annoying nuisance.
Insert missing word or needed punctuation	^	The troll at the bridge would not let <u>^</u> pass. <i>the goats</i>
Insert space	#	Afterschool, we headed for Great Falls.
Transpose elements; change the order	~	rec <u>ieve</u> ; After <u>a</u> many/sleepless night
Punctuation error(s)	ρ and ^	Men, women, and children ran in all directions. The twins were chanting <u>^</u> Ants! Ants! Ants wear underpants. <u>^</u>
Use a lowercase letter	LC and /	I plan to study <u>S</u> ociology and <u>B</u> asket <u>W</u> eaving in <u>C</u> ollege.
Capitalization error(s); use a capital letter	c, cap, and ≡	In <u>english</u> I'm reading a novel about <u>indians</u> .
Begin a new paragraph; indent	¶	... Vonnegut's novel <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> has been banned time after time. ¶ Bruce Severy, a teacher at Drake High School in North Dakota who taught <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> , defended it ...
Do not begin a new paragraph	no ¶	... Vonnegut's novel <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> has been banned time after time. no ¶ Bruce Severy, a teacher at Drake High School in North Dakota who taught <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> , defended it ...

Symbol	Usages
shift/t	Shift from one tense to another—e.g., past to present.
shift/pov	Shift from one point of view to another—e.g., first person to third. Be consistent in the use of verb tenses and point of view.
?	Vague or ambiguous; make the meaning clear.
awk	Awkward; clumsy phrasing or sentence structure; rewrite sentence, striving for grace, balance, and clarity.
trans	Transition needed; provide transitional words or phrases to link ideas, sentences, and paragraphs.
coh	Problems with coherence; paragraph lacks unity and organization; does not hang together. Rethink the focus; re-examine the thesis statement (Th S), topic sentence (TS), and supporting ideas.

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Usages	Symbol	Example
Sentence fragment or incomplete sentence; add the missing parts, often the main verb	<i>frag</i>	Because our teamwork was superior. Under the stairway, where no one had looked.
Run-on sentence, also called comma splice; two sentences run together with no punctuation or joined only by a comma; provide the correct punctuation	<i>r-o</i>	We're planning a party, we've invited everyone. Jane wrote the lyrics, Carlos composed the music.
Dangling or misplaced modifier; rearrange the sentence	<i>dm</i> <i>mm</i>	Racing toward the finish, a pothole made him stumble. Samantha saw a dog gnawing a bone on her way to school.

Usages	Symbol	Example
Faulty parallel structure; when presenting a series be consistent in the use of specific parts of speech, infinitives, and verbs	<i>//</i>	We held a bake sale, a car wash, and we sold raffle tickets. The club president's duties include planning the program, running the meetings, and to make sure that new members feel welcome.
Passive voice; make the verbs active; give the grammatical subject of the sentence the action	<i>pv</i>	Active: The aardvark ate my birthday cake. Passive: My birthday cake was eaten by the aardvark.
Lack of agreement between subject and verb (s-v) or between pronoun and antecedent (p-a); make both singular or both plural	<i>agr</i>	Neither Matthew nor Hannah know the answer. Everyone should open their books to page 17.
Wrong word; word does not have the meaning suggested	<i>ww</i>	He flaunted the rules until the principal expelled him. [The writer means <i>flout</i> , not <i>flaunt</i>].
Weak word choice; tone or level of language inappropriate	<i>wc</i>	A bunch of guys started harassing us kids; the thing about it was, the fight became pretty interesting.
Grammatical error	<i>gr</i>	Between you and I, she is a liar and a thief. When I saw him laying on the floor, I almost died.
Faulty logic	<i>log</i>	It's not true that smoking causes cancer; my grandfather smokes a pack a day and he's 85. The astronauts saw no angels in outer space, so obviously angels don't exist.
Wordiness	<i>w</i>	The alarm, which I set the night before, went off extremely early at 6 a.m. before the sun came up at dawn.
Needless repetition	<i>rep</i>	In Salinger's novel, Salinger shows many of the problems of adolescents and young people.
Redundancy	<i>red</i>	salty brine; hot water heater; pizza pie
Indefinite reference	<i>ir or ref</i>	As the creature emerged from the black lagoon, it was silent. [The reference of it is unclear].