

GRAMMAR GIRL: Grammar girl here. Today's topic is proofreading. Here's a question from Corinne that's pertinent to a story that came out yesterday.

CORINNE: I have always had the problem of with my writing I forget the word though, or I forget to put an ED on the end of a word, and it's not because I don't know to do it, but as I type I just seem to forget to put that there. I continue to read over it, I don't find anything, but this has come back to bite me a couple times. So I'm wondering if you have any helpful suggestions that you might be able to provide me for how I could improve my writing skills.

CORINNE: So when I'm actually typing something, when I go back and reread it, if I do forget the word the, or a, or something to that extent that I actually find it. It's always hard to go back and proof your own writing. And especially with today's technology age when you have to send that emails rapidly when someone responds back. I wondered if there is a way or something that you do in particular that helps you with that function.

GRAMMAR GIRL: Well Corinne, the bank of Kazakh is probably wondering the same thing. Because Reuters and the BBC are reporting that someone at the institution misspelled the word bank on its newly released notes, and they were printed and entered into circulation. So they have a big embarrassing proofreading problem. Before we go any further, I do have some tips, but I also have to say that I feel like a fraud for covering this topic, because I make as many errors as everyone else and sometimes typos slip through.

I try so hard, but typos seem to evade me with impunity. As my father would say, if you missed one typo, all the others will know. Implying that I will forever be an easy mark for sneaky calculating typos that are out to get me. So, given my long history with typos, it's become my belief that it's nearly impossible for someone to accurately proofread their own writing, and be consistently successful. Think about it. If I produce a thousand words a day, and I let one typo slip by every week, that's actually a 99.986 percent success rate.

If you think about it in terms of letters, rather than words, since most typos happen at the level of letters, that one typo a week equates to about a 99.997 percent success rate. Anyway, I know that's kind of a silly example, because for native English speakers every letter isn't a typo waiting to happen. And typos are bad and can get you in a lot of trouble. But my point is, that even though you should do your very best to catch them, I also think it's important not to beat

yourself up too badly when they happen. And to realize that human error is inevitable.

The real key to avoiding typos is to have someone else proofread your copy. And this, actually, also relates to a question that at least one other person asked. Which is, if I could discuss the poor state of writing on the internet. In addition of the fact that most people don't get a good grammar education. I believe a significant reason you see so many typos and errors on web pages, is that most web copy never gets reviewed by anyone but the writer before it goes live.

By contrast copy that you see in newspapers and magazines, , in addition to being written by professional writers goes through an extensive editing process. After a writer turns in a story, it's usually reviewed by multiple editors, including the Department editor who assigned it, a senior editor, and a copy editor. Of course, these editors all have more training in grammar and writing than the average person writing a blog. And even if you consider text on a commercial web site, in my experience, these companies tend to run lean editorial departments and may only have one editor looking at a copy before it goes live.

So, my primary advice on avoiding typos, is to have someone else proofread your work. On the other hand, I know this isn't possible for things like email or rushed projects. So here are four proofreading tips I've collected over the years. Number one, read your work backwards, starting with the last sentence and working your way in reverse order to the beginning. Supposedly, this works better than reading through from the beginning, because your brain knows what you meant to write so you tend to skip over errors when you're reading forwards.

Number two. Read your work out loud. This forces you to read each word individually, and increases the odds that you'll find a typo. This works quite well for me, and most of the typos that make it into my transcripts seem to be things you wouldn't catch by reading aloud, such as misplaced commas. Number three. Always proofread a printed version of your work. I don't know why, but if I tried to proofread on a computer monitor, I always miss more errors than if I print out a copy and go over it on paper.

Number four. Give yourself some time. If possible, let your work sit for a while before you proofread it. I'm just speculating here, but it seems to me that if you're able to clear your mind and approach the writing from a fresh perspective, then your brain is more able to focus on the actual words, rather than seeing the words you think you wrote. That's all on proofreading. If anyone has other proofreading tips, please post them in the comments section of the

grammar Girl transcript at qdnw.com. I can always use more proofreading tips, and I'm sure everyone else would appreciate it too.

Moving on to another topic. Two people have asked me to clarify the pronunciation of the word *et cetera*. It's pronounced *et cetera*, with a *t* sound, and not *ex cetera* as I apparently said in a previous show. Two of my dictionaries define *et cetera* as meaning and so forth. And it's my understanding that in Latin, *et cetera* means and the rest, or and the others. And it's written out as two words *et* and *cetera*. Although, the use of *et cetera* in English is obviously adopted from the Latin phrase, you write it out as one word, *etcetera*, in English.

You generally use it at the end of a list of items, to indicate that the list could contain more items, and for some reason you didn't list them. Here's a title that uses *et cetera*. Question words, who, what, where, *et cetera*. And *et cetera* is abbreviated *ETC.* so I've said *et cetera* enough times now that I hope everyone is clear on the pronunciation. That's all. As always, this is grammar Girl.

I've included links in the transcripts to pictures of the Cyrillic and Kazakh alphabet, because a mix up between the two is the source of the error on the Kazakh banknotes. There's also a new poll in the grammar Girl section of qdnw.com asking whether you think you're a good proofreader or a bad proofreader. Finally, thank you for listening, and for participating in audience survey. There have been enough responses now that the results are statistically significant, which is great. And also, thank you for your reviews and donations. I really appreciate every little thing you all do.