

The Quarterly Query

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Editorial View

Proofreading: Self Versus Others

You could be sending out a résumé or maybe preparing a sales letter. You've always heard that it's impossible to proof your own work, but sometimes you wonder. Would you find errors someone unfamiliar with your content might miss, or does your familiarity with the text really prevent you from processing it effectively?

The answer may be "yes" on both counts. During a study by University of Toronto psychologists Meredyth Daneman and Murray

Stainton, writers were indeed less accurate in finding errors in their own works than in writings by others.

On the other hand, you may have specialized knowledge of the content that others may not have. When your document may contain errors that could easily be missed by a reader without special subject matter knowledge, obviously your proofreading will be an important component of your quality control plan in conjunction with outside proofreading.

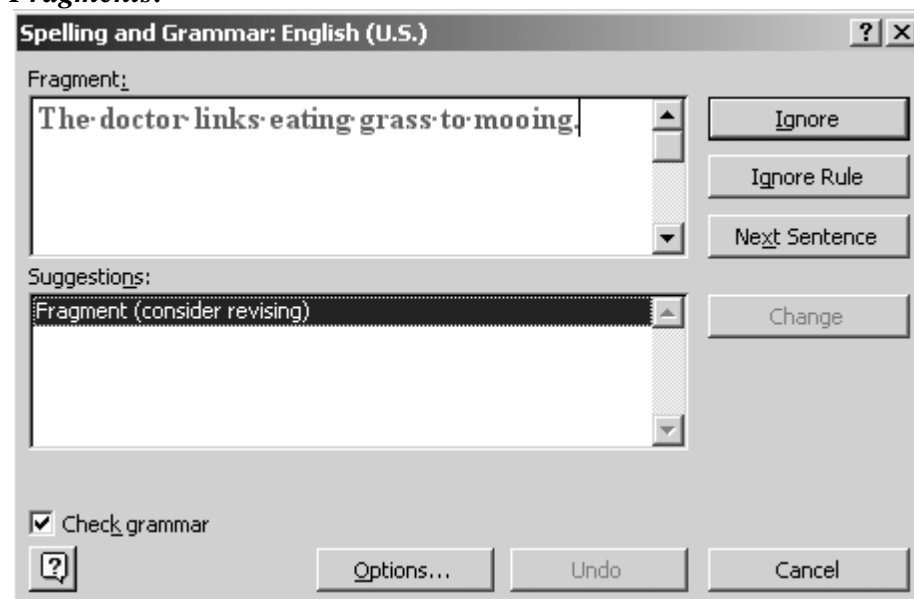


Photo: Jay Simons

Reference: Daneman, M., and Stainton, M. 1993. The generation effect in reading and proofreading: Is it easier or harder to detect errors in one's own writing? *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5, 297-313.

Grammar Query

Fragments:



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Is the grammar checker always right? Often the naïve user of a word processor can be misled into confusion, trying to sort out an error that doesn't exist.

One example of this trap might be an admonition to "consider revising" a "fragment." A fragment is an incomplete sentence. As we

learned as far back as elementary school, a sentence must have both a subject and a verb to be complete.

In this sentence, the subject is "the doctor," and the verb is "links." Is the sentence a fragment? No, the grammar checker has been fooled in this instance. With both a subject and a verb, the sentence is complete.

What led the grammar checker to question the sentence? In this case, the checker was unable to process the word "links." "Links" can be either a noun or a verb.

- *Correct:* The doctor found links between mooing and eating grass. The subject is "the doctor," and the verb is "found." "Links" is a noun.
- *Correct:* The doctor links mooing and eating grass. Here "the doctor" is the subject, and "links" is a verb.
- *Incorrect:* The links between mooing and eating grass. In this sentence, "links" is a noun, and the sentence has no verb.



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