



Description

Editors desk-reject a large share of submissions before [peer review](#), and language problems are repeatedly flagged as a top [avoidable reason](#). For early-career and experienced researchers alike, a clear final-language check can mean the difference between immediate rejection and full peer review. This article defines *proofreading* in the publication pipeline, explains how proofreading needs differ for native English, ESL, and EFL authors, and offers practical strategies researchers and proofreaders can apply to raise manuscript quality and reduce language-related desk rejections.

What is proofreading and why it matters for research manuscripts

Proofreading is the final stage in the editorial process that focuses on correcting language errors and ensuring consistency, accuracy, and readability. For research manuscripts, proofreading goes beyond fixing typos; it ensures consistency and precision in terminology that peer reviewers and editors use to judge scientific merit. A well-proofread manuscript reduces reading friction, helps reviewers focus on contribution rather than wording, and lowers the risk of language-based desk rejection.

Defining author profiles: native English, ESL, and EFL

Clarifying terms helps target proofreading strategies.

- *Native English authors* are those who acquired English as their first language and generally have intuitive command of idiom, collocation, and register.
- *ESL (English as a Second Language) authors* commonly use English in academic, social, or professional contexts alongside another native language. ESL writers often have sustained exposure to English-language research and academic conventions.
- *EFL (English as a Foreign Language) authors* typically use English mainly in formal or study settings and may have limited everyday exposure to idiomatic English or international academic norms.

These distinctions translate into predictable differences in sentence-level choices, rhetorical patterns, and common errors; proofreading should adapt accordingly.

How proofreading needs differ by author type

Native English authors

Native authors usually require light proofreading focused on typographical errors, punctuation inconsistencies, and occasional phrasing that could be tightened for concision. Emphasis often falls on polishing clarity, reducing wordiness, aligning style to journal conventions, and verifying references and figure labels. For many native authors, a single experienced proofreader or copyeditor suffices to reach submission-ready quality. Enago's [English Proofreading Service](#) is designed for native speakers who need a basic final clean-up.

ESL authors

ESL authors often benefit from substantive line-level editing in addition to proofreading. Typical issues include article use (a/an/the), preposition choice, tense and aspect consistency, and phrasing that can affect logical flow. These authors commonly write with accurate disciplinary content but need language-level restructuring to meet the rhetorical expectations of international journals. [Professional editing](#) that combines subject-matter familiarity with advanced editorial training sometimes labeled "[substantive editing](#)" or "[scientific editing](#)" helps preserve meaning while improving fluency.

EFL authors

EFL authors may present the broadest range of language-related challenges: literal translations from their first language, unfamiliarity with academic register, and structural problems in constructing arguments. Proofreading for EFL authors often overlaps with [copy editing](#) addressing paragraph-level organization, clarity of hypothesis and argumentation, and standard academic phrasing. Editors should balance rewriting for clarity with preserving the author's intended meaning and style; collaborative queries and comments help avoid misinterpretation. [Services](#) targeted at ESL/EFL authors commonly offer tailored reports and unlimited re-edits to ensure the author's intent survives language refinement.

Common error patterns and editorial focus areas

- **Sentence structure and clause linkage:** Run-on or fragmented sentences occur across groups but are more frequent where writers translate directly from another language's syntax. Editors should enforce clarity and logical connectors to improve argument flow.
- **Terminology and register:** Discipline-specific terms must be used consistently; inappropriate register (ambiguous phrasing, overly informal, or at the other extreme, overly formal or complicated wording) undermines credibility.
- **Data and units:** Misplaced symbols, inconsistent units, or errors in tables and figure legends can be fatal; proofreaders must verify consistency between text, tables, and figures.
- **Abstract and title precision:** These elements function as screening tools for editors; ambiguous abstracts increase desk-rejection risk.

- **Reference formatting and ethical statements:** Errors in citations, missing IRB or trial registration notes, and incomplete author declarations can cause [immediate rejection](#).

Strategies for proofreaders: tailored workflows for each author type

- **For native authors:** Prioritize speed and precision run spell/grammar checks, then focus on concision and ensuring journal style compliance.
- **For ESL authors:** Combine sentence-level edits with marginal comments that explain why changes were made. Offer alternative phrasings and note common patterns (e.g., article usage) so authors can learn.
- **For EFL authors:** Include a brief editorial report summarizing major organizational or rhetorical suggestions, and offer iterative re-editing. When changes go beyond surface-level language, collaborate with the author to confirm intended meaning before rephrasing.

Proofreading tools and human oversight: a budget-friendly alternative

Automated grammar and style tools accelerate routine corrections but have limits when handling discipline-specific phrasing, nuanced argumentation, or cultural register. Human editors catch context-dependent meaning, flag inconsistent data reporting, and adapt tone to audience expectations. Many publishers and [editing services](#) combine [automated checks with human review](#) to produce consistent quality manuscripts if the original content is well-written. Editors who specialize in a subject area add value by recognizing discipline-specific phraseology and typical reporting conventions.

Actionable steps for authors and supervisors

- Run an automated grammar and reference check, then follow with a subject-aware human proofreader.
- Prioritize the abstract, title, and methods for early review; these areas are most likely to determine whether a manuscript reaches peer review.
- Ask an experienced colleague in the same discipline to sanity-check argument logic and data presentation before formal editing.
- Choose a [service level](#) that matches need: basic proofreading for well-written manuscripts; substantive or scientific editing for ESL/EFL authors who require deeper structural support.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Relying solely on automated tools for final-language checks.
- Submitting without aligning the manuscript to the journal's author guidelines (formatting and declarations are common desk-rejection causes).
- Treating proofreading as a one-off step instead of as an integrated part of the manuscript-development cycle.

Conclusion and practical next steps

Proofreading plays a pivotal role in turning sound research into publishable manuscripts. Native English, ESL, and EFL authors have overlapping but distinct needs that call for different proofreading scopes from surface-level cleanup to developmental rewriting. Implementing a targeted proofreading workflow automated checks followed by subject-aware human review reduces language-related desk rejections and helps reviewers focus on scientific merit rather than wording.

For authors seeking implementation support, professional services can help bridge gaps. Enago's English [proofreading](#) and [editing services](#) provide tiered options from final-language proofreading to substantive scientific editing paired with subject-matched editors and post-editing support. Consider ordering a level of service that matches the manuscript's current state: [copy editing](#) for structurally sound drafts, and [substantive editing](#) or [developmental editing](#) for papers that need clearer argumentation or improved academic register. Using editors with subject expertise can both improve manuscript clarity and provide targeted learning for the author.

Category

1. Reporting Research

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