

Why You Need a “SPOE”

Some say that proofreading and editing are no longer necessary. As long as you have “spell check,” you’re okay. And yet, nothing could be farther from the truth.

I’m discouraged by the notion that editing is slowly, but surely, becoming a lost art form. With the pressure of quick turnarounds and tight deadlines, skillful communication has deteriorated. Some say that a second pair of eyes (SPOE) is not necessary. “As long as you have ‘spell check’ you’re okay,” they say.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. And here’s why ... If you’re the one who is writing and typing the words of a book, term paper, business document, brochure, or catalog, it is difficult to do an effective job editing and proofreading your own material.

Why? Because you’ve seen it over and over and over. You already have it committed to memory (so to speak). Your mind already knows what you mean to say. When you read back over the same material, your eyes will only see what your mind instructs—and here are some of the things you can’t afford to miss:

Punctuation

Most people have become very lazy in their use of punctuation. Often times, a punctuation mark is misused or over used. Every little mark has a meaning of its own. Where these marks are placed (or misplaced) can make a big difference in how people interpret your message.

Capitalization

There is a rhyme and reason to capitalization, but many of us do not take the time to check it out. Any of the industry-standard style and usage guides can assist you with this mystery. Capitalization isn’t the only culprit. Italicizing, bolding, and underlining often pose additional challenges.

Using the wrong word

These are the words that sound alike and are close relatives in spelling, but their meanings are different. Using the wrong word often reveals that we’re in a rush. And, spell check doesn’t catch these “bloops.” If you spelled it correctly, it won’t catch the wrong meaning. Classic examples: **there, they’re, their** or **there’s, theirs**.



Leaving words out

This is another indication of a rushed job. It’s easy to leave a word out, and almost impossible to catch these omissions when you proofread your own copy. A missing letter from a word can be just as caustic as omitting an entire word.

Sentence completion

From one extreme to the other, we can go from “run-ons” to “fragments” and back again. Incomplete sentences are equivalent to someone who, while speaking, jumps from one subject to the next without completing their first thought. And, you guessed it, spell check doesn’t usually catch this either.

Using the right word

The use of our words should allow us to clearly convey a message. Unfortunately, many times a writer does not use the right word to make their point. Your words don’t have to be large or extravagant to be effective. It’s as simple as referring to your Thesaurus.

There are many other mishaps that occur when writing, and this is where I can offer you my skills. I’ve endured a handful of embarrassing moments as I’ve printed off large quantities of a brochure or catalog, only to find a glaring mistake. Yikes!

I do a lot of writing and designing, so I understand the importance of having a second pair of eyes (SPOE). As a matter of fact, if you see a bloop or blunder or two on my website or in any of my material, please don’t hesitate to bring it to my attention.

We will all make mistakes in writing, but many of them (like the ones mentioned above) often stem from lack of knowledge, laziness, or even overconfidence. May I encourage you to make an investment in your work ... get a SPOE!

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About the author

Donna M. Murphy is an editorial specialist, a veteran writer and a published author who has written, edited, and designed extensive collateral and key solutions products for print and the web. Training manuals, operating procedures, business documents and content quality assurance encompass a large portion of her assignments. Donna is the creative force behind Summit Publication Design, LLC, and has specialized in content organization, quality assurance and publication design since 1997. Visit Donna's website at <http://www.summitpubdesign.com> for information on her comprehensive services, helpful resources, more articles like this one, and strategies to help you improve the quality and effectiveness of your publications.

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