PUTTING WRITING TOOLS TO THE TEST

A workshop hosted by Kate Stollmann (FZHB)
Putting Things in Context

• In academia, writing is the ultimate act of communication – a means to join the discourse in a field of studies.

• In the globalized academia of today, English is widely used as the chosen language of most publications.

• A majority of scholars around the world publishing in English are not native speakers, and have had to acquire writing skills in English as a second language.
The writing process in a second language can prove to be frustrating for many, and often requires additional tools, as well as extra proofreading and editing steps.
As a writing consultant for the FZHB at Bremen University, I am often asked by PhD students and staff members whether I can recommend some kind of tool that will just fix their writing...
FOR A LONG TIME MY REACTION TO THIS QUESTION WAS...

No. You have to actually work hard. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! Proofreading is a skill that can be learned, but you have to put the time and effort into it.
THEN LAST YEAR, I CAME ACROSS THIS POST ➔

- My interest was piqued!
- There were proofreading tools mentioned that I had never heard of... and even more when I started looking further afield.
- Should I check them out or even recommend that my writing clients use them?

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I made a list of tools that were free and easy to use, which I wanted to try out with some of my clients to see if they could prove useful for second language writers in an academic context.

- The Hemmingway App  [www.hemmingwayapp.com](http://www.hemmingwayapp.com)
- Slickwrite  [www.slickwrite.com](http://www.slickwrite.com)
- Expresso  [www.expresso-app.org](http://www.expresso-app.org)
But first…

**WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?**

**WHAT IS USUALLY INVOLVED IN PROOFREADING FOR ESL SPEAKERS?**

What proofreading steps do you recommend to your writers / students?
CLOSE-READING APPROACH TO PROOFREADING THAT I ADVISE MY CLIENTS TO USE

- Sentence length (over 30?)
- Word order (subject and verb together?)
- Unnecessary parenthetical elements
- Not more than two ideas per sentence
- Old → New progression within sentence
- General use and variety of linking/transition words

- Clarity of meaning for all demonstrative pronouns (it, this, that, these, those...)
- Parallel verb forms for verbs that share a subject word
- Subject verb agreement
- Use of active verbs whenever possible
- Commas to set off introductory elements, separate clauses or parenthetical information, or also separate list items.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE TEST OUT THE WEB-BASED PROOFREADING TOOLS ON A CLIENT’S ABSTRACT?

Please refer to your handout to see the original text.
OVERLAP IN FEEDBACK ON TOPICS ALSO COVERED BY MY STANDARD PROOFREADING STRATEGY

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1. Select a student writing sample.
2. Team up with a partner if you wish.
3. Think about what kind of feedback you would give the student on this text.
4. Try it out with the 5 tools, and compare the feedback with your own.
5. Share your impressions and thoughts with the group at the end.