The Review Process

Notes for Second-Language Learners of English

Your ears will detect more errors than your eyes will see, so you should use your ears to help you learn. This is because the brain learns language through speech and hearing long before it learns to write. Follow the protocol below in order to teach your brain to write accurately in English.

1. Print out two copies of your final draft, one for you and one for a reader. Make sure that your copy is double- or triple-spaced. You will be using it to correct your errors.
2. Select a reader whose birth language is English.
3. Instruct the reader first to read your paper silently, and then to read it aloud exactly as you have written it, inserting pauses where you have used punctuation, and pronouncing the words exactly as you have written them.
4. While the reader is reading aloud, you will hear errors. As you hear each error, use a highlighter or colored pen/pencil and mark the words, phrases, and sentences that you wish to change. Do not attempt to correct your errors at this time. Just mark them.
5. You may need to have the reader read your work aloud more than once so you can catch and correct all your errors.
6. Alternatively, you may tape record a reader reading your paper aloud, and then play the tape back as many times as you like in order to catch all of your errors.
7. When you are finished with this process, add the errors that you are prone to make to your Hot Spot List.
8. The next time you write a paper, use the Hot Spot List before you seek the help of a reader so you can try to catch and correct your errors earlier and earlier in the process.
9. You will find that you will be able to catch and correct your own errors earlier and earlier in the writing process.
10. Eventually, you will find that you will stop making certain kinds of errors altogether.

A Word about Using Writing Tutors

Feel free to use a writing tutor, but make sure that the tutor follows the read-aloud protocol above. Keep in mind that most tutors are not used to working in this manner, so be patient with your tutor! Once you and the tutor have worked through the process of reading and catching errors, then you can work with the tutor to correct the errors you detected. Ask the tutor to help you find and correct errors that your ears did not hear.

Be sure to add the errors you detected to your Hot Spot List, and be sure to asterisk the errors that you did not hear when you used the protocol above! These errors are the tricky ones!

If you find that you are persistently making errors in your writing that you cannot detect with your ears, make a standing appointment with a tutor to help you understand the error, the rule that it is violating, and then work to eradicate it.

Be patient, kind, and understanding with yourself! Your writing in English will improve if you systematically work on it!