

Using the proofreading marks: a sneak preview

There are more than sixty proofreading marks. Further, copy-editors use them differently from proofreaders. So what follows does not pretend to be comprehensive. This document shows you how the main proofreading marks work, which serves to demonstrate how most of the others work.

Every proofreading mark tells the typesetter to change something – to delete something, or add something in, or move something around. It could be as small as deleting a single comma, or as large as moving chunks of text around to fit the available space on a page.

One of the most frequently used symbols is the delete ~~symbol~~ symbol. You can see how it works. You just put a line through whatever it is you want to delete and put the 'delete' symbol – which looks like a drunken proofreader's efforts to write a 9 – in the margin (it is actually a combination of a speedy, simplified 'd' and a closing stroke, explained in the next paragraph). Extra letters can be dealt with in the same way and even rogue punctuation.

Suppose you want to replace something with something? Suppose you want to change a ~~cabbage~~? Well, you can see how that works, too. Just strike through the wrong ~~cabbage~~ and write the correct one in the margin, followed by a / mark (which indicates the end of that particular correction). You can also replace letters, as well as punctuation, using this method. Notice that:

- A full stop and a colon are indicated by ⓪ and Ⓜ, whereas a comma and a semi-colon are just shown as , and ; . This is just to prevent them from getting muddled up or being mistaken for ink blots; and
- You should, if possible, write your proofreading instruction in the margin nearest where it occurs and, if there is more than one instruction in a line, write them in the order in which they occur.

If you want to insert something into the text, use what is known as the 'caret' symbol. Put the symbol where you want to insert your ~~cabbage~~, letter, punctuation mark, and you can see for yourself what to write in the margin.

Other useful symbols allow you to capitalise an important thing, or decapitalise a thing that isn't as important as it thinks it is; to make something italics, or to de-italicise something that ought not to be; and to de-bold something or, conversely, to embolden it.

That's enough to be getting on with. The principle is to use the relevant symbols in the text and write in the nearest margin what needs to be done. There are lots of other symbols and some work a bit differently. But you should now have the general idea, and perhaps appreciate how the symbols facilitate passing information about corrections from A to B, whether A is a proofreader or a tutor, or B is a typesetter or student.