

CAN AI REPLACE A
PROFESSIONAL
PROOFREADER?



PROOF
COMMUNICATIONS

A BUSINESS WANTING TO SAVE MONEY

on **professional proofreading** services may well be tempted to abandon hiring a professional proofreader in favour of artificial intelligence – commonly known as AI – to do the job. But is this a wise idea? The short answer is no. Well, not yet anyway.

Whilst the prospect of AI taking over the – let's face it – often very tedious task of proofreading will be cause for celebration in some circles, the fact is that most people still prefer to engage a professional proofreader to look after their important business communications. Why? Two reasons. Because there's a huge care factor involved in proofreading – something that bots don't possess – and because there's still a lot of distrust about AI and just how reliable it really is.

Of course, AI is becoming more sophisticated all the time. But, as Wired editor Alan Henry points out, 'AI can be a powerful tool but right now it's still that: a tool that needs to be guided, observed and managed by human hands.' Henry's view of AI as a proofreading alternative being an exciting development but still way too prone to errors to be 100 per cent relied upon is one echoed by many writers on this hotly debated topic.

So, whilst we wait for AI proofreading capabilities to one day become perfect, let's examine some of the reasons you'd be wise not to say, 'Sayonara!' to your friendly human proofreader just yet.



THE CHATGPT TEST

ChatGPT is one of the most popular AI resources that a businessperson goes to when deciding to hand over the task of proofreading to a machine. In the interests of market research, Proof Communications recently engaged an AI expert to set up our own AI Proofreading Bot, using ChatGPT 4 to do so.

Quite cleverly, to see what AI picked up compared to a human, we tasked AI with proofreading an annual report that one of our very own proofreaders had proofread last year for a major listed company.

Here's what we found:



Blind to formatting

AI frequently failed to identify headings, titles and tables, often treating them as simply regular paragraph text. Checking formatting such as heading hierarchies is a very important aspect of proofreading, so this result was disappointing. Particularly for reports, including annual reports, the inability of AIPB to read tables means it misses the full meaning of the document, which could lead it to overlook other inconsistencies.



Page-by-page analysis

AI reads each page in isolation, rather than as one full document. In other words, it proofreads in the same way as if we'd split the report into 80 pages and given each to a separate proofreader. The big negative about this is that it makes it impossible to identify inconsistencies that occur across the document, such as 'Non-Executive Director' on one page, and 'non-executive Director' on another. To issue a report with missed errors such as these gives an impression of a lack of professionalism; of a disorganised business that lacks care. When reputation is everything, even small mistakes slipping through can make a big difference to how a business is perceived.



False positives and hallucinations

Out of a document of some 80 pages, AI flagged non-existent issues on 15. What's more, sometimes it introduced new, completely unrelated content – a phenomenon known as 'hallucinations.' These hallucinations can be difficult to spot, as the sentence still reads smoothly, despite having random information inserted.

The ramifications of unnoticed hallucinations creeping into an annual report for any of our clients just doesn't bear thinking about!



Table of contents

Some sections were formatted incorrectly, leading the AI to not recognise them and exclude them from the table of contents.

So, all in all, a disappointing performance from AI in this test case.

TRAPS FOR UNWARY PLAYERS



But of course, these issues arose from a single exercise involving just one report. However, there are many more potential limitations for AI's abilities when it comes to proofreading, so it pays to be aware of these if you're considering using ChatGPT – other AI resources are available – to proofread your documents.

Be on the lookout for these potential issues:



Language settings

Most forms of AI use US English by default. That means words such as 'liter', 'organization' and 'labor' and hundreds more will be assumed to be OK.



Structural issues

When proofreading, AI won't correct repetition or structural errors that will be glaringly obvious to the reader. When wording is clunky like this it can make it difficult to read and understand. There is also a greater risk of ambiguity.



Technical terms and jargon

Company-specific terminologies, acronyms, or industry jargon might be flagged as spelling mistakes.



Stylistic choices

Unless your chosen AI has been trained on a brand's specific tone of voice, it may 'correct' deliberate stylistic choices.



Formality

In instances where a more conversational tone is used, such as a letter from the Chair, it might flag this switch as a mistake as it's inconsistent with the rest of the document.



Word count

It often returns responses well below or above the specified limit.

HOW TO USE AI FOR PROOFREADING

Despite these limitations, AI can still be useful for some elements of proofreading. Ideally, to get the best results from a review by a professional proofreader, you should get your document in the best possible shape before handing it over. AI can help you in this regard.

AI is very sharp at identifying the kinds of glaringly obvious spelling errors that seem to become invisible to writers who are very familiar with the document, having read it multiple times. Additionally, if you give it some guidance on your preferences for spelling and so on – such as whether to use UK or Australian English – AI can highlight basic punctuation and grammar errors for you. Another thing you can do is ask it to highlight any particularly lengthy or complex sentences. Bear in mind though, that replacement text can sometimes be a bit dodgy.

Still, all of these things will help get that document into better shape for the proofreader.



THE HUMAN TOUCH OF A PROFESSIONAL PROOFREADER

Irrespective of what you've asked your friendly AI bot to do for you, a human should always review its corrections. A **living, breathing proofreader** will get out their fine-toothed comb and minutely examine your document for grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and formatting errors.

This exercise includes spotting those annoying typos (manager/manger, initiative/initiative, definitely/defiantly – you get the picture), capitalisations that seem to have a mind of their own, formatting and style inconsistencies, headaches with heading hierarchies, flagging up content that is uber-wordy, or that simply doesn't sit well with the document's overall style and tone.

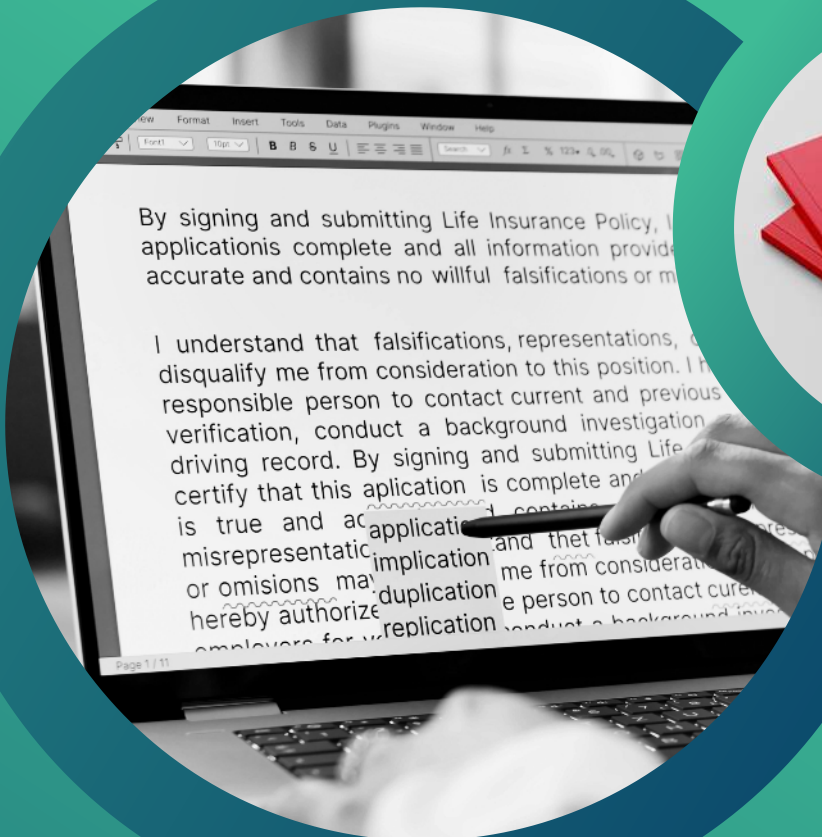


MAKE A PASS

If you've used the spell check function in Word, you'll know that whilst it picks up some errors that don't follow a set pattern, it often makes mistakes or ignores them altogether. It's the same with any AI program you might consider using for proofreading.

Our recommendation is that you think of AI as being a good tool to make a 'first pass' at a document. It will certainly make your life easier by identifying glaring errors and making some basic corrections. But absolutely do not stop there.

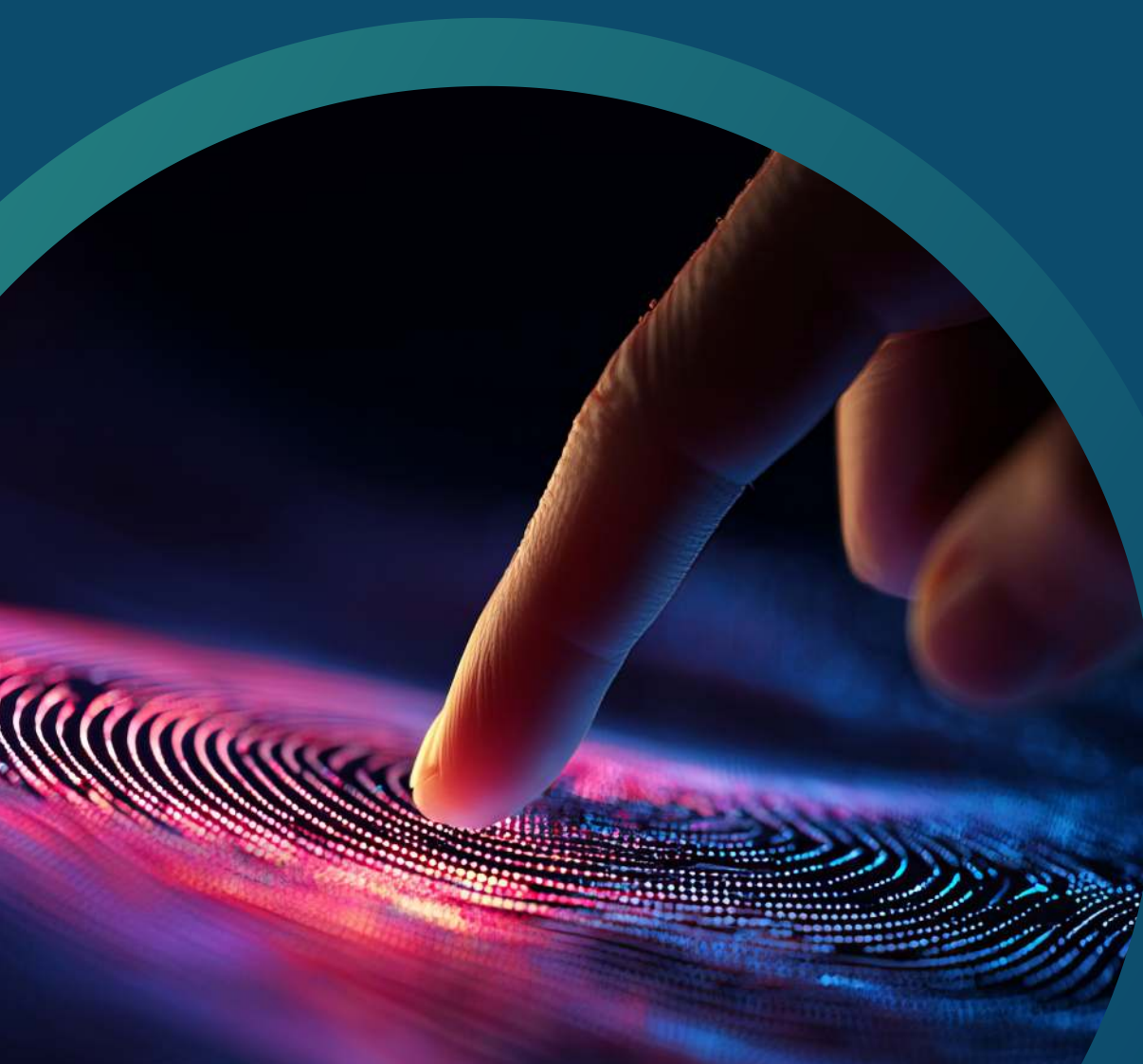
Enter the human proofreader. They'll not only review the changes made by AI; they'll pick up all that it missed. They'll also further refine your document's content, focusing on flow, tone, voice and context.



THE FUTURE FOR A PROFESSIONAL PROOFREADER

What then for the future of a professional proofreader? Will they suddenly find themselves at a loose end, wondering where all the annual reports have gone? Unlikely.

However, what may well be likely is that the proofreading role as we know it today will evolve. It's possible that as AI becomes more sophisticated and able to pick up more typos and grammatical howlers, for example, the expert proofreader's focus will shift to the more complex aspects of a business document, such as quality, coherence and impact. Time will tell.



GOOD NEWS

The very good news indeed is that the Proof Communications team of expert proofreaders is always at the ready, able to assist you with the professional proofreading of your important business communications. Our clients love our meticulous approach to the review of their public-facing documents because they know they are in the safest of hands.

If you'd like to see what a difference we can make to the accuracy and professionalism of your annual report, sustainability report, white paper or any other kind of business communication, then we're here to assist.



We proof all business documents from:

- ✓ Annual reports
- ✓ Tenders
- ✓ Corporate literature
- ✓ Technical manuals
- ✓ Policy and procedure documents
- ✓ and more

WHY DO IT YOURSELF WHEN YOU CAN GET EXPERT HELP?

Proofread by humans – not AI!

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