Spell check

The spelling and grammar checking tool in Microsoft Word and other word processing programs, often referred to as "spell-check" or "the spell-checker," can be immensely helpful as you proofread a piece of writing. However, spell-check is not foolproof; using it incorrectly can even lead to errors in your translation that you never would have committed on your own. You must learn to recognize when it is like a wise friend whose advice can be trusted and when you would be better off to politely ignore its suggestions.

Spell-check can be a lifesaver for basic spelling mistakes, typos and punctuation errors and simple grammar problems. Particularly if you have done a lot of revising, errors may have occurred as you have moved phrases around and cut/pasted sentences. Spell-check is usually good at identifying problems with subject-verb agreement, a problem that arises when your subject is plural and your verb is singular, or vice versa.

Spell-check cannot necessarily be trusted when your misspelling of one word happens to be the correct spelling of another word, you are writing in a specific context or for a specific audience, and therefore with specific rules, the errors involve capitalization or punctuation, rather than spelling or you have written something that simply does not make any sense. You can tell spell-check that the dog bit into the kitchen and it will just smile and nod. There is nothing grammatically wrong with this sentence, nor does it have any spelling errors. Spell-check means well, but it just does not know any better.

Spell-check does not know what you *meant* to say! Some sound-alike words that readers often confuse include: there, their, and they're; your and you're; our and are; then and than; its and it's; loose and lose. Spell-check will not catch your mistake if you choose the wrong one of these words. Sometimes even reading aloud will not help you catch errors like these, because they will sound "right" to your ear. When you are unsure whether you have used the right word, use a dictionary to look it up.

Spell-check should probably just mind its own business when it comes to proper nouns, such as the names of people and places, wordplay, or newly coined words that have not yet been added to spell-check's dictionary, or academic jargon.

It is worth taking a second look at sentences that spell-check marks, but you should not automatically accept its grammatical suggestions; doing so may lead you to include a bunch of nonsense in your translation. Spell-check does not understand the meaning of your sentences and can be confused by complex constructions.

Tips for making spell-check a helpful companion instead of a presumptuous intruder:

- It is usually most efficient to run spell-check as part of your final editing and "touching-up" process, after you have made major content revisions. That way, you will not be constantly interrupting your translation (or revising) process by puzzling over spelling and punctuation.

- Customize your Microsoft Word dictionary. You can tell spell-check to add a word, as you have spelled it, to your dictionary. Forever after, it will leave you alone as long as you spell this word correctly. If you spell the word incorrectly, it will tap you on the shoulder and suggest how you can fix the error.

- Spell-check can support you, but it cannot do your job for you. It is there to help you use your writing and editing skills by giving you reminders and suggestions about spelling, grammar, and so on. But on the journey of your translating process, you must never fall asleep at the wheel and expect spell-check to steer you to a perfect translation. If you are not confident about your spelling, grammar, or punctuation, look things up, or check out our handouts. Remember: you are smarter than spell-check!

How to run spell-check:

First, you will need to be sure your word processing program is set up to run spelling and grammar checks. In Microsoft Word, go to the "Tools" menu and choose "Options." Click on the tab that says "Spelling & Grammar." You can now decide what you would like to have spell-check examine. (If spell-check is getting on your nerves, you can use this menu to turn it off.)

Now that the program is set up, you are ready to use it to check your document. Open up your paper. On the "Tools" menu, select "Spelling and Grammar." (There may also be a button on your toolbar that says "ABC"—if so, you can click this instead.) A window will pop up and display a highlighted word or portion of your text. This window is where spell-check will point out words and phrases that may be incorrect. Ideally, it will also explain what is wrong and/or propose a solution, in the lower box under the heading "Suggestions."

The buttons on the right represent your options about how to respond to spell-check's comments. Not all of these will appear every time; which ones show up depends on the nature of the (possible) error. You need to decide whether to accept its advice. Here is an overview of your options:

- **"Ignore Once"** means you choose to leave this particular word or phrase as is, but that if spell-check notices something similar again later, you want to know about it.

- **"Ignore All"** means that you want to leave the word or phrase alone here and in any other place where it may show up in this document.

- **"Change"** means that you are taking spell-check's advice and want to switch the current spelling or grammatical construction to one of the suggestions it has generated for you. If you press change, the spelling or construction that is highlighted under "Suggestions" will be automatically substituted into your paper.

- **"Change All"** performs the same function instantly in every place the error appears throughout the document.

- **"Ignore Rule"** means that you do not want to hear any more about this particular issue anywhere in the paper.

- **"Explain"** will make spell-check tell you why it thinks there is a problem here. This option is usually only available for grammatical or punctuation issues.

- **"Add to Dictionary"** means to leave a word exactly as you typed it, and to add it to your personal dictionary in Word. Once a word has been added, spell-check will always count this word as correct, and will even try to correct you if you misspell it in the future.

You may notice as you work that coloured squiggly lines appear under certain words or phrases that you write. That is spell-check trying to call your attention to something it thinks may be problematic. If you right-click on the squiggly line, a pop-up window will give you an abbreviated menu of the above options.

On-line spell-check available via: http://www.spellchecker.net/spellcheck/.

(http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/check-spelling-and-grammar-HP010117963.aspx)