Read Through a Card

This suggestion might feel a little silly to some students, but most students find it helpful when they try it. Reading through a card grows from work with dyslexic students and is premised on the fact that some readers' eyes jump around the page, making focus difficult.

How It Works

Fold an index card in half. Cut two lines in the card just a quarter-inch or so apart and about two inches long each. Fold the resulting strip of paper up and cut it off. Unfold the index card, and you'll have a card with a slit in the middle. Place this card on the page and read the text through the slit, sliding the card along the page to see the next bit of text. As students notice typos or other errors, they can lift the card and correct them, then replace the card and continue reading.

I usually have a pile of these cards by my desk, and I carry them with me when we work on proofreading. Students are surprised by how many more errors they notice when they read through the card, noting that limiting their view slows them down and prevents their eyes from skipping ahead.

Make It Work

This technique works best when looking for errors in a small area (like spelling mistakes, missing apostrophes, and other localized errors) rather than larger-scale errors like tense irregularities across a whole paragraph. Even so, students will often notice broader patterns of error when reading through a card because they see their writing in a new way.

Enlarge The Font

You can achieve the same effect by enlarging the font until only a few words appear on a screen. The disadvantage is that words are often broken up and automatically hyphenated, which can prevent students from seeing errors.

Anything that visually isolates writing, however, can be useful in helping students catch errors. And their own sense of accomplishment in catching mistakes – rather than needing you to point them out – is motivating and confidence-building.