

Smart Writing!

Presented by

SwanShadow
COMMUNICATIONS

Volume 2, Issue 3 June 2003

Watch Those Word Traps

"It's not just what you say, but how you say it." The words that express your ideas are as important as the ideas themselves. Be careful of the following traps when selecting the words you'll use.

"Two-dollar words." Unfamiliar words disrupt communication like a red light stops traffic. If your readers have to pause to decipher what a word means, or to look it up in a dictionary, you've lost their attention. The most common word that accurately expresses an idea is usually the best word.

In some situations, only a specific word will do. If you need that "two-dollar word"

to make your point clearly, then use it — but check your thesaurus for other options first.

Jargon. People in technical or scientific fields often communicate in a language all their own. If your audience includes readers outside your profession, be sure to write in terms they understand. If you're writing to an audience of industry "insiders," however, correctly using the language of the profession will help build your credibility.

Bottom line: the better you know your audience, the more effectively you'll address them and their needs.

Repetition. We each have "pet" words and phrases we

use frequently, often without noticing. Trust me — other people notice!

Review your writing to identify repeated words, then find alternatives in your thesaurus. A rich, varied vocabulary demonstrates thoughtfulness and competence.

Clichés. The old maxim, *"Avoid clichés like the plague,"* is a wise one. If you've heard or read an expression many times before, more than likely it's a cliché. Use clichés sparingly, and only to create a desired effect. Otherwise, find a fresh, interesting way of getting your point across using your own words.

— Michael Rankins

Enough, Already!

Most of us want our writing to be as sharp as we can make it. We'll keep adjusting a letter or memo until it sounds exactly right. In moderation, that's a good thing. But too much editing can be the writer's worst enemy. The trick is knowing when to stop revising.

If you allow the perfection-

ist within yourself to take control, it's easy to reduce a serviceable piece of writing into gobbledegook. If your letter or article includes all your key points, flows smoothly, is understandable, and is free of typos and obvious grammatical and punctuation errors, *leave it alone*. It's probably

as good as it's going to get. Further tinkering will only compromise clarity.

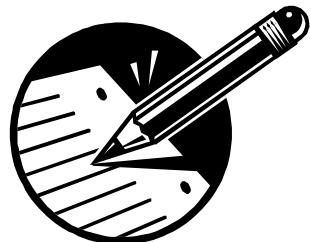
The other danger of overediting is that it prevents us from finishing our work. Is anything we write perfect? Hardly. What matters is that it does the job. Get finished and move on!

Is That Write?

Homophones — words that sound alike but differ in meaning and spelling — are bugaboos for most of us.

One pair of gremlins that strikes often: **stationary** (*immobile*) and **stationery** (*writing materials*). To help keep these two words straight, remember that the **stationery** that includes **envelopes** is the one with the "e" (as in *envelope* — get it?).

Another troublesome homophonic pair is **its** (possessive of "it") and **it's** (the contracted form of "it is"). Try a simple substitution here: if you can use "**it is**" instead, add the apostrophe. If not, don't.



Suggestions for an upcoming issue?

Share them!

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Three Keys to Marketing Success

Every written communication your business issues is a marketing tool. Even documents you might not categorize as “marketing” — such as invoices or routine correspondence — reinforce your image in the minds of your constituents, and help determine whether they continue to do business with you.

So don’t waste opportunities! Make sure everything you write — not just your ads and sales materials — addresses these *three keys to marketing success*.

Why You?

Unless you’re unusually fortunate, yours is not the only company in your industry.

You have competitors that do what you do, and who may have advantages over you in price, experience, convenience, or other concerns.

Why should a potential client choose you? Why should a current customer stick with you? *What’s your edge* — your unique advantage when compared with the competition? Is your product or service less expensive than others? Can you deliver in less time, or with superior quality? Let your audience know what makes your company the one to buy from, every time you connect with them.

Can Do!

Whatever your business,

clients want to know that you’re capable and competent. When you send a form letter that’s filled with mistakes or is poorly written, it makes the reader wonder what else you’re not doing well.

When you speak, position yourself and your company as experts. Sound as if you know what you’re talking about. (And when you don’t know, don’t bluff. Find out!)

True Blue.

A wise man once said, “*A person who wants friends must first be friendly.*” A business that wants customers should be friendly also.

Why? Because ultimately,

people “buy” people. Quality and price figure into the equation, but more often than not, we do business with people we like and trust. Every interaction with you should remind your customers that you’re the people they want to “buy.”

A number of elements contribute to your “true blue” image. Clear, direct communication is essential, as is an engaging, conversational style. Above all, fulfilling the commitments — both stated and implied — you make to your clients will hold their confidence in your business, and keep them coming back for more.

— Michael Rankins

Smart Writing! is published bimonthly by
SwanShadow Communications.

SwanShadow Communications offers a comprehensive package of writing and editing services for your business.

Whether you need advertising copy, newsletters, marketing materials, sales letters, press releases, Web site content, or research articles, we’ll produce excellent words, on time and at the right price.

SwanShadow principal **Michael Rankins** is also a veteran public speaker, with more than 2,500 lectures and seminars to his credit. As your personal speechwriter and presentation coach, Michael will help you sound like a seasoned professional.

Contact **SwanShadow Communications** today at
707-585-8224, or visit us on the World Wide Web:
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Writers Say...

“The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.”
— Edwin Schlossberg