

Write-Brained Notions in a Left-Brained World

RANDI MAYES

2013 Annual Education Conference & Resource Center Exhibition

Tampa, Florida • April 24 - 27

My inner child was a word lover!



Our Agenda

- You Are What You Write
- The Five W's of the Information Age
- Form over Function? Never!
- The Words Matter!
- Cramming the Grammar Lesson
- Release Your Inner Copyeditor
- The Art and Science of Writing



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You Are What You Write

Words convey:

Intellect, wit, education (or lack thereof)

Words create perceptions of:

Experience, knowledge, style (or lack thereof)

Words sell/promote:

Ideas, concepts, campaigns (or lack thereof)

Words have POWER – wield them carefully!



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Tools That Aid Spoken Messages

Body Language

Vocal Inflection

Feedback from the Listener(s)

**These same tools, applied properly, improve
your written communication, too!**



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The Body Language of Prose

Tone is the “body language” of the written word:

Engage your reader
(make “written” eye contact)

Respect your reader
(use verbal gestures to show interest)

Entertain and enlighten your reader
(use gestures to show humor and commonality)



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Vocal Direction (Voice)

Voice conveys your style, personality and “attitude”

Be the CWO (Chief Writing Officer!)

Clarity and Conciseness

Courtesy and Consideration

Consistency

Cleverness (but not Conceit)

Correctness

Curiosity and (Careful) Contentiousness



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Five W's of the Information Age

Don't forget the journalistic model:

who, what, where, when, why (and **how**)

You will improve your writing by attending this presentation today and following my advice to the letter; and you'll be a better professional as a result.

Add elements of:

Worth

Wit

Warmth

Whimsy

Weight-(or Waste-)Reduction

Good writing signals professionalism. Learn to love well-crafted prose, especially your own.



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Ditch These Five W's

- Weirdness
- Weakness (of Prose)
- Word-Wastefulness
- Wrongs (Usage and Grammar Errors)
- Wretched Wordiness



Actual Press Release Text

NewWorld is focused on evolving global competitive strategy — the emerging innovation and integration potential derived from consumer search and social media technologies to business driven initiatives. According to John Doe, NewWorld CEO, by establishing structured/unstructured information management and emerging technology strategies, businesses can move in tandem with consumer social technology approaches and leverage big data analytics in their competitive and collaborative business path forward.

Form over Function? Never!

Know your audience

- Tailor the language accordingly
- Utilize their time effectively

Solve a problem or sell an idea

- Open with a strong thesis
- Use language that telegraphs your thesis
- Be specific and direct
- Make every “key” word carry weight
- Observe “parallel” constructions

Write in a conversational style

Emphasize unique qualities

Do more with less (clarity/brevity)



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Edit for “Weight”
Make your work “Waste-Free”

Our solemn vow:
We will be clear; we will be brief.



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Mark Twain (or Pascal)?? Quote

“If I had more time, I would write a shorter letter.”



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The Words Matter!

“Any language where the unassuming word *fly* signifies an annoying insect, a means of travel, and a critical part of a gentleman’s apparel is clearly asking to be mangled.”

From Bill Bryson’s “The Mother Tongue”



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Down with Verbal Clutter (VC)

VC is a “waste of language.”

It takes up space at the beginning of sentences:

- *It is important to note that...*
- *We cannot emphasize strongly enough...*
- *To repeat the points made above...*

Writing that is “fixing to” write:

- *This article will cover . . .*
- *I’m going to write about*



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Verbal Clutter cont’d

It lurks in trite phrasing:

- *At this point in time / now*
- *Due to the fact that / because*
- *For the purpose of / for*
- *Whether or not / whether*
- *At the point that / when*
- *With regard to / regarding*
- *Came to the conclusion that / decided*
- *Arrived at a decision / decided*



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Verbal Clutter cont'd

It lurks in redundant words and phrases:

- *Our panel of experts with years of experience . . .*
/ *Our experts . . .*
- *The product suite, including all the applications, . . .*
/ *The application suite . . .*



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Verbal Clutter c

Prepositional clutter:

- Off of / off
- In between / between
- Together with / with

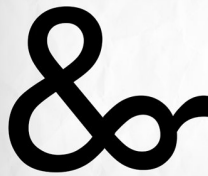
Conjunction dysfunction

- “And also” / use just “**and**” (or “also”)
- “And too” / use just “**and**” (or “too”)

“**And/or**” / can only be used when both/either options will work

- *Bring beer and/or wine.*
- **But not . . .**
You can wear your red sneakers and/or your blue boots.

Andorpersand



Usage:

One simple symbol for “and/or”

Example:

Some people hate the very existence of the phrase “and/or,” but these people are uptight & stupid.

CollegeHumor



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Verbal Clutter cont'd

Limit the use of passive verbs – they're breeding grounds for verbal clutter.

Don't bury your verbs by turning them into nouns:

☹️The panel will have a discussion. / The panel will discuss.😊

☹️Our speaker has knowledge. / Our speaker knows.😊

Identify the subject (the focus of your sentence), and let the subject carry the verb:

☹️Success is ensured by careful planning. / Careful planning ensures success.😊



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Cramming the Grammar Lesson

The Lesson Plan:

- Pronouns
- Common errors with possessives and contractions
- Common errors with word usage
- Adverb placement
- Subject/verb agreement
- Split infinitives
- Prepositions at the end of sentences
- Misplaced modifiers



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Pronouns

Subjective

I

He/She/They

We

Objective

Me

Him/Her/Them

Us

Reflexive

Myself

Himself, etc.

Ourselves

She and I are the speakers, and we are talking about grammar. Listen to her and me as we speak.

Between you and me . . .



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Reflexive Pronouns

Many consider Chris a jerk, but I myself tolerate him. Which brings me to ask myself, why?

She herself is to blame for the accident.

Never use one of the “self” pronouns without a preceding noun or pronoun as its companion.

Don’t use “myself” when you should use “me.”



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Possessives/Contractions

- Possessive pronouns don't have an apostrophe: its/his/hers/ours/theirs/yours
- It's contracts "it is" or "it has"
- Their / they're
- Your / you're



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There's a Growing Problem

Be very sensitive to improper use of "there's" to introduce PLURAL subjects

CORRECT

- There's an epidemic afoot
- There are too many examples to list
- There're too many "re's" in that word

INCORRECT

- There's too many examples to list



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Common Usage Errors

- Affect / Effect
- A while / Awhile
- Comprised / Composed of
- Continuously / Continually / Constantly
- Criterion / Criteria
- Different from / Different than
- Imply / Infer



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Adverb Placement

Watch the placement of adverbs that quantify something . . .

- *Almost*
- *Even*
- *Hardly*
- *Just*
- *Only*
- *Nearly*



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Adverb Placement

- Spoken: I only saw your **mother** (I saw no one else except your mother)
- Written: I saw *only* your mother.
- Spoken: I only **saw** your mother ("saw" is emphasized; seeing her is the only thing I did)
- Written: I *only* saw your mother.
- Spoken: I only saw **your** mother (Of all the mothers, I only saw yours, not mine, Jack's, etc.)
- Written: I saw your mother *only*.



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Subject/Verb Agreement

A single subject **takes** a singular verb. Plural subjects **take** a plural verb.

The application **suite was** difficult to install.

The application **suite and** its companion **products were** difficult to install.

The application **suite**, comprising an array of tools to modify our attorneys' desktops, reconfigure our printers and manage other products, **was** difficult to install.



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“Misquantified” Nouns

INCORRECT

–Lawyers each have an iPad.

CORRECT

–Each lawyer has an iPad.

–All lawyers have iPads.



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Plural and Collective Nouns

- **None** can take a singular or plural verb.
 - None of the pizza is left.
 - None of the children were toddlers.
- Collective nouns like Staff / Team / Group / Herd can be singular or plural
 - The hospital **staff is** taking a holiday on Friday.
 - The hospital **staff are** going about their duties.
 - The **team is** ready to take the field.
 - The debate **team are** taking different sides on the topic.



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Noun Oddities

Duet, pair, trio, foursome, etc. take a singular verb (The trio is rehearsing.)

Binary nouns take a plural verb.

Scissors / Pants / Binoculars / Glasses / Tweezers

My new **glasses are** in the car . . .

but . . . My new **pair of glasses is** in the car.

These nouns require a singular verb:

Every dog has his day.

Everybody is leaving tomorrow.

Everyone is excited.



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Split Infinitives

Infinitives are the “to” forms of verbs.

To split or not to split . . . that is the question.

If correction is desirable, place the adverb where it doesn’t alter the meaning.

His first reaction was **to immediately hit** the delete key.

His first reaction was **to hit** the delete key immediately. . . .

or

His immediate reaction was **to hit** the delete key.

Don’t sacrifice clarity in trying to “obey” a rule which shouldn’t exist.



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Ending Sentences in Prepositions

*Ending a sentence with a preposition is
something up with which I will not put.*

Winston Churchill

Ending a sentence in a preposition is something
I will not put up with.

Put up with = tolerate



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Ending Sentences in Prepositions

Who did you hear that from?
From whom did you hear that?
Where did you hear that?

Where are you going to?
Where are you going?

Where's it at?
Where is it?

I don't know where you're coming from.
I don't understand your approach.
I can't relate.
I don't understand.



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Misplaced Modifiers

Clumsy placement of phrases results in chaos

Sizzling on the grill, I could smell the brisket for miles.

(Am I on the grill?)

Quick Fix: *Sizzling on the grill, **the brisket** could be smelled for miles.*

Good: I could smell the brisket sizzling on the grill for miles.

Better: The aroma of the sizzling brisket wafted for miles. (I shifted the subject from “I” to the aroma.)

Best: The sizzling brisket’s aroma wafted for miles.



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Wrangle the Danglers!

Reviewing Mary’s usage log, hundreds of hours of eBay shopping were identified.

Reviewing the usage logs, the **web administrator** noted Mary’s excessive online shopping.

Mary’s **excessive online shopping** was revealed by the usage log.



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Release Your Inner Copyeditor

Establish your goal and stay on target
The thesis establishes the goal
Know your audience and respect them
Start with the “big idea(s)” and hone
Read your work s-l-o-w-l-y
Hug your editor
See with the eyes of the reader
Be clear; be brief (ax another five words)



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The Art and Science of Writing

Telegraph a strong thesis
Identify strong subjects in each sentence
Embrace brevity; it lends clarity
Seek out authorities
Find your voice
Apply proper grammar and usage



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From “The Elements of Style”

There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rule by which writers may shape their course. Writers will often find themselves steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion.



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Our New Press Release

John Doe, CEO of NewWorld, explains the company's focus on delivering technology that helps firms succeed in an increasingly competitive global environment. Strategic business objectives can be aided by NewWorld's innovative mixture of social media tools, powerful search mechanisms and data analytics.



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The Write Clique

My favorite online authority:

"Common Errors in English" by Paul Brians

www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html

Other great resources:

"The Elements of Style" by Strunk and White

GrammarBook.com

<http://www.grammarbook.com>

Ask Betty

<http://depts.washington.edu/engl/askbetty/>

About.com: Grammar and Composition

<http://grammar.about.com/>



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