

## 5 Top Tips For Catching Errors in Your Writing

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It's finally finished and you're eager to publish your writing. But is it ready? Use these five simple suggestions to catch errors before your work is published, increasing your credibility as a writer.

### 5 Top Tips For Catching Errors in Your Writing

Whether you are an author writing a book, an entrepreneur with a website, or a "Web 2.0" aficionado with a blog, errors in your writing cause readers to question your credibility. Let me give you an example: I recently read an online article that began with the question, "What is your worse fear?"

While the article itself was filled with valuable information, the majority of the responses and feedback focused on whether the proper word was "worse" or "worst." English majors came out of the woodwork to plead their case, camps were divided, and flame wars began. Sure, the article garnered a lot of attention, but perhaps not the best kind of attention for the author. These people were not divided on the subject matter; they were divided on whether or not the writer was proficient with the English language. By the way, I tend to think "worst" is more grammatically correct as it defines the very worst of something, rather than a comparison between something that is bad and something that is worse.

The point is that the wrong word devalued the article and as a result, discredited the writer. Don't make the same mistake. Below are five tips you can employ to drastically decrease the chance of mistakes finding their way into your business writing, whether it be a proposal, a website, or a newsletter.

1 - Utilize an editor The most common mistakes are minor, such as misspellings or incorrect use of punctuation. Other common errors are incorrect word use (their, they're, there; or worse, worst, borscht, etc.). A professional editor is adept at noticing and correcting these kinds of mistakes. If your professional writing will be seen by many (like a website, for example, or an emailed newsletter) do not make the mistake of relying solely upon a computerized spell-checker, which cannot tell the difference between "worse" and "worst" since they are both properly spelled words. Use an editor - a human one.

2 - Get a second (and third) set of eyes Even if you do not wish to pay a professional, anyone who reviews your writing will find mistakes you invariably miss. Since you are overly familiar with your own work you are much more likely to miss obvious mistakes because your mind already knows what it is supposed to say, rather than what it actually says. When someone else reads your work, they have no preconceived notions about your writing. At the same time, human behavior will often motivate them to find fault. Use that to your advantage. In addition to finding mistakes, other people may offer helpful suggestions to make your business writing stronger.

3 - Come back to it later Do you wait long enough after writing something to begin editing it? Many writers edit their work as they write it. Not only does this slow down the creative process, it increases the chance that your mind will ignore blatant errors in deference to your intentions. Once your brain thinks a paragraph is free from errors, it tends to overlook any new errors that are introduced during the rewriting process. Put your writing away for several hours, days, or weeks (depending upon your deadlines) and revisit it later. After some time away from your work, you will be more likely to read the words as they appear on the page, not as you envisioned them in your mind. The mind is error-free, the page is not.

4 - Read your material backwards Fortunately, you are only familiar with your writing in one direction - forward. Reading your material backwards makes it seem entirely different and fools your mind into ignoring the intention and only concentrating on the reality. Furthermore, your critical view of the writing at its most technical level will not be corrupted by the flowing exposition you have

massaged into sparkling prose. When you read your manuscript backwards, it becomes a collection of words. Without contextual meaning, the brain has nothing to focus upon other than the words themselves. Mistakes literally jump off the page.

5 - Read your material out loud When you read words aloud, your brain must slow down and concentrate on the material. How fast can you read the following sentence? The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs. Now how fast can you read it out loud? It takes at least twice as long, and those precious milliseconds sometimes make all the difference between a typo that is missed, and one that is caught and corrected. As a popular Internet posting informed us in 2003, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter be in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without any problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole. But try reading this out loud and see how far you get. An extra bonus for reading your material out loud is that you may discover stumbling blocks like awkward sentence structure and choppy dialogue. Strong business writing is not only dependent on error-free prose; it must be crisp and clear.

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