

words to avoid

IN ADVERTISING & NEWSPAPER

1) “THING” WORDS (and “Stuff”)

(thing, something, anything, etc.) “Thing” words because often don’t mean anything!

EXAMPLE: Fran’s Flower Shop carries many things.

CORRECTED: Fran’s Flower Shop carries bridal bouquets, summer center pieces, and gift baskets for special occasions.

2) “ALL OR NOTHING” WORDS

(always, never, everywhere, nowhere, everything, nothing, etc.) Avoid using absolutes because they are usually untrue (notice I didn’t say “always”) and lack credibility.

INCORRECT: My kids never eat. (They must be dead.)

CORRECT: My kids are picky eaters.

3) PERSONAL JUDGEMENT WORDS

(good, better, best, great, wonderful, bad, worse, worst, terrible, etc.) These words depend on your personal taste, which your reader might not find to be credible or understandable.

NOT CREDIBLE: Alfredo’s has the best food in town. (says who?)

CREDIBLE: Alfredo’s gourmet Italian cuisine is “Best of the Bay”, according to Weekly Planet.

VAGUE ADVERTISING: Helman’s mayonnaise is the best.

VIVID ADVERTISING: Helman’s mayonnaise is the creamiest.

4) BLAND ACTION WORDS

(do, did, have done, go, went, have gone, put, have put, is, are, was, were, have, had, etc.) Use vivid action words.

BLAND: ABC Store has . . .

VIVID: ABC Store delivers/features/offers/provides . . .

BLAND: She does her hair with Vitalee Mousse.

NEWS/FACTUAL: She styles her hair with Vitalee Mousse.

ADVERTISING: Volumize with Vitalee Mousse.

BLAND: ABC Restaurant has steak specials Friday nights.

NEWS: ABC Restaurant serves steak specials Friday nights.

ADVERTISING: ABC Restaurant sizzles with steak specials Friday nights.

5) ABOUT SLANG

In essay-writing standard English is usually expected (no slang).

In newspaper writing, A.P. style is required (no slang).

In advertising writing, use conversational language (slang your target audience would use in conversational language, as well as fragments, contractions, etc.).

SLANG: The accused embezzler says he hung out with a notorious gang.

NEWS COPY: The accused embezzler claims ties to a notorious gang.

6) BOGGY INTRODUCTORY PHRASES & CLAUSES. Get to the point.

BOGGY: With summer on its way, Burdine’s winter clearance sale offers 30% off.

BOGGY: If you’re tired of winter, you’ll be glad to hear about Burdine’s winter clearance sale.

DIRECT: Burdine’s winter clearance sale offers 30% off.

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7) CLICHÉS. Avoid clichés and phrases you’ve heard before, in ALL writing.

CLICHÉ ADVERTISING: Disney's Cyclone Tunnel is fun for the whole family.

VIVID ADVERTISING: Disney's Cyclone Tunnel is a whirlwind adventure.

EXCEPTION: You can use a cliché when it has an unexpected twist:

Before you go on vacation, do a little site seeing. (visual of a web page on a computer screen with hotel rates.)

8) THERE ARE / IT IS (and any variations in tenses) Stop yourself if you begin to use these phrases unthinkingly, especially at the beginnings of sentences. They are boring and bland and are often used out of laziness. Instead, begin the sentence with a different word.

LAZY: There are five-star restaurants on the avenue.

CORRECTED: Five-star restaurants flank the avenue.

9) USING "WE"

News stories avoid first person because it doesn't sound objective. Many advertisers also avoid "we" because it sounds folksy and doesn't project credibility, sophistication, and/or prestige. However, companies that want to adopt a folksy, local feel in ads do use "we".

TOO FOLKSY: We offer year-round auto service discounts.

TOO FOLKSY AND WORDY: At Sears, we offer year-round auto service discounts.

THIRD PERSON: Sears offers year-round auto service discounts.

10) VAGUE LANGUAGE. Be specific.

VAGUE: Lose weight fast.

SPECIFIC: Lose 10 pounds in 2 weeks.

VAGUE: A lot of people gathered to search for the missing girl.

SPECIFIC: More than a hundred people gathered to search for the missing girl.

11) NEGATIVE PHRASING. Use positive phrasing instead.

NEGATIVE: The mayor says he will not be staying in the hospital much longer.

POSITIVE: The mayor says he will be leaving the hospital soon.

12) WORDINESS

WORDY: Paul gets a lot of things done in a short period of time.

CONCISE: Paul is efficient.

WORDY: Police say John Smith robbed the man at gunpoint. The victim was a clerk at 7-11.

COMBINE: Police say John Smith robbed the Walgreen's clerk at gunpoint.

13) PASSIVE VOICE: To use or not to use?

We usually avoid passive voice in essays, advertising and news because it's weak construction. However, in ads and news, it's important to put the important product or person in the subject position, even if it's not committing the action.

USUALLY, WE AVOID PASSIVE VOICE:

Thousands of mothers use the new BabyWave infant monitor.

BUT IT'S SOMETIMES USED TO PLACE THE PRODUCT FIRST:

The new BabyWave infant monitor is used by thousands of mothers.

14) A NOTE ABOUT CREDITING SOURCES: News copy, like a research paper, must credit sources of arguable statements, research, and little known facts—but sources are credited in the text itself and do not usually involve bibliography, footnotes, etc. Advertisements do not have to credit sources in the ad itself, but advertisers must be prepared to produce resources if asked, and identifying sources often increases credibility.

ADVERTISING: 4 out of 5 dentists surveyed choose Crest.

NEWS: 4 out of 5 dentists recommend Crest, according to an Indiana University survey.

ALLEGATIONS: Police say Patricia Nullens kidnapped the child Thursday night.

WORKSHEET

(Words to Avoid in advertising and newspaper)

ADVERTISING COPY

Rewrite the following sentences:

- 1) In our after-Christmas sale, we here at Lowe's have discounts on many things.
- 2) Topel is recommended by four out of five dentists.
- 3) Now Jena is liked by many people and goes to social events.
- 4) Don't say no to a healthy diet.
- 5) New homes in your price range.
- 6) If you're tired of a dirty kitchen, try Orange Magic. It makes a kitchen sparkle.
- 7) There are four roller coasters at Discovery Mountain.
- 8) Krispy Kreme has great doughnuts.
- 9) Have the time of your life at Disney.

NEWSPAPER WRITING

Rewrite the following sentences:

- 1) There are three new products by RONCO.
- 2) Some federal programs really enhance people's lives by benefiting them.
- 3) A new program has been introduced by University of Tampa. The program is called Electronic Media Art and Technology (EMAT). It is a bachelor degree program.
- 4) Congress is debating many things.
- 5) Biking the Berkshire mountain trails, you'll have a blast.
- 6) New Laundrolux detergent does not irritate allergies.
- 7) The new phone service will be available in a variety of areas starting October 5th.
- 8) The hot weather these days just keeps getting worse and worse.
- 9) They finally got John Smith, the guy accused of robbing the Walgreens store.