

Redundancies, clichés and buzzwords that are *killing* your professional image



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Businesses tend to use their own language, separate from the layperson. People say *improve*, businesses prefer *growth* – for everything. We say *open*, companies use *transparent*.

Certain terms and phrases are often repeated simply because they are popular. People use them because they think it makes them sound intelligent. Yet true intelligence involves knowing how to be succinct and accurate. Using phrases the general population can understand can help you avoid misunderstandings down the road.

The point is to leave out any words that are unnecessary. Avoid phrases and terms that are not well defined.

The following are some of the more common words and phrases that, if used, will tarnish your business image.

Month of, year of

Unless you're referring to someone's personal name, it's a guarantee that the majority of your audience will understand that when you say September, you mean the month. When you say 2012, you mean the year. Don't add extra verbiage, such as: "in the month of September." Or: "in the year 2012, this event happened." Simply state the month and the year.

"The report was finalized in September."

"In 2012, our second quarter returns were outstanding."

"This year, we will see growth" (not: "In 2016, we will see growth").



Challenge the status quo

The status quo is what is current. When you challenge it, you mean to do things differently. This can be interpreted as either positive or negative. When you say your company or team needs to *challenge the status quo*, you are being vague. The status quo needs to be defined, followed by what you intend to do differently.

Again, be specific.

Each and every one, each and every day

Each and every one contradict one another and are confusing. They should never be used. *Each* and *one* are singular, yet people attempt to make them plural with the above-mentioned phrasing. *Each person, each team* – is singular and specific. *Every person, every team member, every smart person* – includes all of a specific group. Pick one to be clear.

Another wrinkle: *Everyone* refers to “every person” whereas *every one* means “every single person or thing.”

Also of note: when using *everyone, everybody, anybody* or *anyone*, the verb that follows is singular.

It's not: “Everyone is involved, whether *they* know it or not.”
But rather: “Everyone is involved, whether *he* knows it or not.”

Some are leery about specifying gender, so companies use “they” to remain politically correct. However, it is grammatically incorrect. The solution? Change the sentence: “Everyone is involved.” “The team members are involved.”

Each and every day is another contradiction. Every day means “each day,” so there's no need for repetition.

Each day has the possibility of being wonderful (singular).
Every day might not be wonderful, but we can try (plural).



Transparent

Businesses use this term to describe themselves as honest and open. This kind of transparency, they claim, is an indication they have nothing to hide. Which is fine, except that it isn't the case. To be transparent is beyond naked. It's the invisible man. You can see through something that is transparent. But in business, there is always something hiding because it wouldn't be business smart to reveal every detail. You'd have too many demands for explanations and too many judging your decisions. Others are not going to hear every conversation, attend every meeting or review each person's bank account related to that business. Although in some cases, that might be a good idea.

What businesses really mean when they say *transparency* is that they are honest, open and approachable. They try not to hide everything, even though there are a few closets. Don't say transparent, because it isn't true. Say *open* and *approachable*. The *honest* part needs to be earned.

To be transparent
is beyond naked.
It's the invisible man.

Think outside the box

This cliché left the box and never stopped running. And no one really has ever seen that box. This is just a lazy, overused term that doesn't clearly define what you really mean. And that's the key: say what you mean. Be specific. By using that clichéd phrase, you're assuming every person understands what you mean and they're all in agreement.

What you need to do is address the box – what it is – and explain the details that need to be changed and what you want that is different.

“Our latest advertising campaign (the box) didn't achieve our end goal. Let's review our core values and see if we can enhance that campaign. Maybe we should hire a copywriter. That would be different.” Or something along those lines.



Take it to the next level

This phrase is running with the thought that left the box. Again, be specific. What level do you mean? Define it.

Literally, figurative

Literally is used more than is necessary. First, let's define this puppy. *Literally* means “as is” and should be thought of in the literal sense. “This literally is a puppy” because it is a puppy. Literally is best used when certain phrases might otherwise be considered metaphoric or ironic.

For example, you might be “in the dark” because you lack knowledge.

But, you are “literally in the dark” if someone turns off the light.

However, literally is put in front of all kinds of phrases, which, if you literally mean what you say, then just say it without the extra adverb. “I literally cried tears” is extra verbiage to mean you cried.

“He literally knocked my socks off.” Now we know this isn't true because for one thing, it's difficult to “knock” someone's socks off. You can pull them off. What you meant was: “He figuratively knocked my socks off.”

Figurative is the opposite of literal. You use this word to create an interesting mental image.

Literally means “as is.”
Figurative means “a figure of speech,” a metaphor.

Get, Got

These words must be removed from the English language. But until then, let's clarify their place.

Today's frequent common usage of *get* and *got* are inaccurate. As well, they explain nothing. When you say you *get* something, what exactly do you get?

When you *get* something off the shelf, you *retrieve* it. When you *get* the message, you *have* it or you *understand* it. When people say: "I've got it," what they're really saying is: "I have got it." Say it like the latter, and you know you've repeated yourself, so you wouldn't say that. But say it like the former, and you've fooled yourself into thinking you *have gotten* away with something, but really, you didn't *get* away with anything.

"I've got," "we've got," "you've got," are all the same as saying: "have got." The word is *have*. "I have," "we have," "you have." The easiest way to figure out if you're using it correctly is to separate the contraction. Say it in your head or out loud both ways, and think about which sounds smoother and not necessarily popular. Popular doesn't mean correct. It really is okay if you *get it*, but only if 've isn't in front of it. Do you understand it now?

"It's got" is a grammar irritation almost on its own. What you mean is "it has," as in: "it has to be better," except you need to define *it*. Therefore, it's better to avoid the phrase altogether.

Get and *Got*
are inaccurate and
explain nothing.



Of course, obviously

When you say *of course* and *obviously*, you indicate to the reader that he or she should know something already. But if he doesn't, you've made him feel small. Of course, you knew that yourself, right? Obviously this should make sense, especially if you realize you've been left behind.

These words are another way of saying, "duh."

Basically, actually

Setting aside the fact that I've included two adverbs here, these are words that should be avoided in business writing. The reason? They are not solid; they indicate a lack of knowledge, and they emphasize superiority, which turns off most people.

When you use *actually* following someone else's statement, what you're doing is correcting that statement. "Actually, our servers have been down for two hours." *Actually* is also a weak word. When you use it before making a statement, you're saying your statement isn't true unless you *actually* mean it. *Actually* isn't necessary to whatever you're trying to say, so drop it.

Basically is the weakest. Use this word, and you're telling the reader it could be *either/or*, but even you're not sure. It either is or it isn't, but it isn't both. Be an authority: pick one and stick to it.



Like, surreal

These words are used so much today they are clichés. Worse, they have become common word whiskers. Word whiskers are words that are haphazardly thrown into your sentences typically as an indication of nervousness, such as *um*, *ah* and *so*. Unfortunately, *like* and *surreal* have had a similar affect.

It is difficult to have a conversation without *like* thrown into every sentence as if it's an awkward routine. "So, *like* I was *like* talking with my friend *like* the other day and *like*..." While it's doubtful you would use it in writing, it takes fervent concentration to avoid using it in conversation. Try to make it a habit to catch yourself if you can.

Surreal, on the other hand, can slip into writing because it's become the shiny word of the decade. *Surreal* means "strange, bizarre or unusual," but most are using it in the context of a "fantastic dream." To stop using this cliché, simply say what you mean. "The event was unbelievable." "The moment was strange." "I thought I was dreaming."

You can avoid word whiskers by thinking about what you want to say before you say it. Sound familiar? We all need to work on this one.

Like and surreal
have become
common word
whiskers.



Centered around

Let's clarify this from the start. This phrase is an oxymoron, a contradiction – two words which work against each other. You can be centered and everything else is around you or you can go around the center. But you can't be centered and go around something. You can turn around in the center, but you'd be very dizzy. Your company goals *are centered* on the main purpose. The main purpose is *at the center* of your goals. Or your main purpose is *in the center* while the goals work around this, but this might be going a bit far.

Think of it in terms of our planet. The core of the Earth is in the center. Everything else is around it.

So, very, really, totally

These words are unnecessary to your end thought. “So that's why we needed...” Just say: “That's why we needed...”

So has also become the new “introductory” word to a sentence and falls in line with word whiskers. We have seen a rise in its usage even among so-called educated people. When asked a question, for example, they begin their response with “so.” Drop the nervous tick.

Words like *very*, *really* and others are often used as descriptive terms, but they don't belong. Instead of *very good*, use *excellent*. Instead of *really great*, say *great*, because we understand great is better than good. When you say you *totally understand*, does that mean you don't *really* understand unless you *totally* do? Unlikely. You either understand or you don't. If you *totaled* your car, we might understand your pain.

End thoughts

Did you notice the common theme? Be specific and clear when communicating either through the written word or orally. It is best to avoid using phrases and words that are based on popularity, especially if they will downplay your company's intelligence.



Concerned that your business documents might not be giving the right impression?
Send me a note at jmlacey@jmlacey.com.