



# RADIOWORLD

The News Source for Radio Managers and Engineers

WWW.RADIOWORLD.COM

## Dont U Make These Mistake's

Pro communicators have no excuse for sloppy spelling and bad grammar

### SALES

BY ROD SCHWARTZ

Working in radio, a non-visual medium, does not give us license to trash the written English language.

After all, we're supposed to be professional communicators, right? We radio folks may find it easier to hide our misspellings, grammatical and punctuation errors behind a microphone; but sooner or later they're bound to be a source of embarrassment.

I was an English major in college, aspiring to be a teacher. I ended up in advertising — go figure.

or blog, etc., you're investing time and effort to build your credibility and career. Sloppiness in this area can have unintended consequences, leaving your reader with a poor impression of you.

I happen to live in a college town, where one might reasonably expect to find a higher level of education among its citizens, or at least a proclivity for maintaining high standards in communication in our mother tongue.

One had better be prepared for disappointment.

With astonishing frequency I see newspaper headlines, articles and advertisements (created by the newspaper's own employees),



James Hart; used under a Creative Commons license.

*i mean after all its just email right? hey see you later 'K? bye*

Ugh.

Should an email, particularly a business email, be accorded the same treatment as a conventional letter, typed or handwritten?

Absolutely.

Should a blog post be checked for spelling, grammar and punctuation before sending it into the ether?

Of course.

Should your tweets and Facebook posts convey the same conscientiousness as your other communications?

Yes, if your personal brand is that of a professional communicator.

### 'PEOPLE JUDGE YOU BY THE WORDS YOU USE'

Do you recall hearing the radio spot for a learning product called Verbal Advantage? It began: "People do judge you by the words you use." Why? Because it's true. They do.

The famous direct response copywriter Maxwell Sackheim made a fortune selling the mail-order Sherwin Cody English Course through clever newspaper and magazine ads that grabbed readers with the headline: "Do You Make These Mistakes in English?"

**Spelling and grammar matter.** Our work in advertising and marketing involves a great deal of reading and writing, consulting and coaching.

Mind you, I'm not complaining. Advertising and marketing involve a great deal of reading and writing, consulting and coaching. So it's not all that far removed from teaching. I just work in a different kind of classroom.

Reason I mention the English major thing is because I'm going to climb up on my soapbox and rant a bit.

- About grammar.
- And spelling.
- And punctuation.

### 'THEIR YOU GO AGAIN'

Whether you're creating sales presentation materials, corresponding with advertising prospects or clients, writing a newsletter

reader board signs on businesses, posters on bulletin boards, business cards, brochures, newsletters and professional correspondence — you name it — rife with errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax.

The widespread use of texting and email has fostered a tendency toward sloppiness, the former through its use of abominable abbreviations ("Hpe UR w/me on ths, K?") and the latter by its disdain for proper punctuation, e.g., the lack of capital letters at the beginning of sentences and of periods when bringing that sentence to a full stop.

Instead, we like just run our thoughts together kind of like this and *i hope you're following what i'm sayin OK because i havent got a lot of time to be treating this like a letter*

Considered one of the top advertising campaigns of all time, the Sherwin Cody ad ran (largely unchanged) for more than 40 years, because it pulled in business. And why? *Because most people make mistakes in English!*

That doesn't mean you and I have to do so. But we can't fix something if we don't recognize it as broken. So let's look at some of the most common errors, with a view toward eliminating them in our advertising and correspondence.

### **ITS vs. IT'S**

*It's* is a contraction of "it is," whereas *its* is the possessive form of the neuter pronoun. If in doubt, remember that there should be consistency with its masculine and feminine counterparts. Think: "his, hers, its," or "he's, she's, it's." See how nicely they fit?

### **CONFUSING POSSESSIVES WITH PLURALS**

Don't abuse the apostrophe.

This is a close relative of the previous problem. I alluded to it in the title of this article, writing "Mistake's" instead of "Mistakes." This problem is so pervasive there are websites (e.g., [www.apostropheabuse.com](http://www.apostropheabuse.com)) dedicated to exposing it. This more than any other error in punctuation makes the offender look like ... well, a hick. There, I said it. I'm sorry. But it's true.

Honestly, if this needs further explanation, a class in remedial English may be worth considering.

### **THERE, THEIR, THEY'RE**

One's a place, one's a possessive, one's a contraction. No reason to confuse or misuse them.

### **ACCEPT vs. EXCEPT**

The former means to take; the latter means to leave out. Accept no exceptions.

### **AFFECT vs. EFFECT**

When used as verbs, the former means to influence, the latter to bring about a result. Both also can be nouns with distinct meanings of which you should be aware.

My words may affect your next blog post

but their effect remains to be seen.

### **PRINCIPAL vs. PRINCIPLE**

Principal means main or first in importance; principal is also the title given to heads of schools or business partnerships; it can also have a financial meaning. Principle is a rule, proposition or governing belief.

### **OF vs. HAVE**

I would have preferred not to bring this up, but whenever I see something like "I would of come to your party if I'd known about it," I want to throttle the person who wrote it, bless her heart. Need I say more?

### **DIFFERENT THAN vs. DIFFERENT FROM**

This will be a bone of contention in some quarters but I side with the purists. Technically, one thing differs FROM another. It does not differ THAN another. Therefore, my opinion will be different from the opinions of others who don't see the problem.

### **PHRASEOLOGY 101**

Beware mangled and misconstrued expressions:

It's "one and the same" rather than "one in the same."

Say "by and large" not "by in large" (although if you're giving somebody shopping instructions, as for clothing, "buy in large" might fly).

"For all intents and purposes" is correct; notice the symmetry between intent and purpose. There's no such thing as an intensive purpose. So please don't say "for all intensive purposes," okay?

"Unique" means "one of a kind." Literally (another much misconstrued word). Unique is not a comparative. It is not a superlative. It is an absolute. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that something is "more unique" or "one of the most unique ..."

### **JUST IN CASE, NO MIXED CASES**

When used as the subjects of a sentence, personal pronouns are "he," "she," "I," "we" and "they."

When used as objects, direct or indirect,

they are "him," "her," "me," "us" and "them."

Be careful, if combining pronouns in a sentence, to keep the cases consistent. For example, you might be inclined to say, "They're going to meet Sheila and I after work." But it should be "Sheila and me." Nor should we say "Me and Sheila are going there after work."

An easy technique to avoid these mistakes: Leave Sheila out of it.

You wouldn't say, "They're going to meet I after work" or "Me am going there after work." It sounds stupid. Adding "Sheila and" to the sentence won't make it any less so.

We say "They're going to meet me after work" or "I am going there after work." You can insert "Sheila and," and these will still be right.

### **FOR FURTHER REFERENCE**

I keep quite a few resources on hand when I sit down to write. Some, like my 30-year-old "Songwriter's Rhyming Dictionary" (which, after the 1987 fire that gutted the radio station, I had rebound) might not be useful to you unless you are writing poetry or a radio commercial.

But I can recommend without hesitation two excellent and accessible volumes:

"Eats Shoots & Leaves" by Lynne Truss is an engaging read and a valuable guide to proper punctuation.

"Common Errors in English Usage" by Paul Brians, a former Pullman resident and Professor of English at Washington State University, is a gem. It will enable you to avoid the most common pitfalls in spelling, grammar, pronunciation and usage.

Words, whether spoken or written, are the currency of communication. Invest them wisely; spend them well.

*Rod Schwartz, a 40-year radio advertising sales veteran, is owner and creative director of Grace Broadcast Sales, a firm providing short-form syndicated radio features, and an administrator at RadioSalesCafe.com, a specialized networking site for radio advertising sales professionals. Reach out to Rod: rod@gracebroadcast.com.*