



Common Grammatical Errors

Introduction

Your website is often the first experience a potential customer will have to your company. In many respects it is like your CV (curriculum vitae) and needs to make a good first impression. The spelling and grammar should be correct and ideally the writing should have a style. But even if you do not have a good writing style you can at least write in English.

This paper looks at some of the most common grammatical errors made when writing copy for websites.

1 Your or you're

Your is something belonging to, associated with or owned by a person eg your house, your dog etc. **You're** is a shortened or contracted version of **you are**, with the ' character replacing the missing letter; in this case the missing letter is **a**. In English the ' is often used to indicate that a letter is missing or has simply not been used any more. The ' can also represent a number of letters, so; **six o'clock** was originally **six of the clock**. On websites and for written documents it is better to use **you are** instead of **you're**. This also applies to other shortened phrases such as we'll, we've etc.

2 Their, they're, there.

Their is the possessive eg it is their house. **There** is a place or position, eg over there. **They're** is a shortened or contracted version of **they are**.

Although the words sound the same when spoken, they have significant differences when written and even though the reader will understand that **we are going to there house** or **they're house is over their** it creates a bad impression.

3 Its and it's

Is it its or it's? or even its'? This short word causes great confusion. **It's** is a shortened or contracted version of **it is** or **it has** – it uses the ' rule and in this instance it is the letter **i** that is being replaced. **It's** been a long day. (It has been a long day). **It's** always raining.

Its is a possessive, the team did **its** best. The stately home opened **its** doors to the public. Every dog has its day. There is no **its'** even though some people use it.

4 Effect and affect

Affect is a verb and means to influence eg the bad weather **affected** the way he played. Effect is used mainly as a noun but is also a verb and means to cause an outcome or bring about something. Effect or an effect is something that is a result of an action eg the effect (of an action) is an increase in the temperature ...



5 Trade Marks

Sometimes the brand or make joins the language as the definitive word for an activity or product. Hoover is a brand but many people will say that they Hoover even if they use a vacuum cleaner made by Dyson. They also apparently use Sellotape made by the Scotch tape company. Parker makes ballpoint pens not Birus. Hoover, Sellotape and Biro are all brand names, which are registered trade names but have entered general usage.

6 Superlatives

The superlative of an adjective means the best, the highest, the top or that which cannot be surpassed. The superlative is normally the adjective plus the extension or suffix **–est**. And by definition there can only be one. Mount Everest is the **highest** mountain in the world. Concorde is (or was) the **fastest** passenger aircraft. There is only one **cheapest**, one **lowest**, one **highest**. If you are going to claim an **–est** be prepared to prove it. In the same way something cannot be **fairly unique** – it is either unique or it is not.

7 Common spelling mistakes

Advice is a noun and something you can receive or give. Advise is a verb and is something you can do.

Canvas is a cloth, whereas to canvass is to conduct a survey of opinion.

Dependant is a noun and is eg someone who depends on someone else. Dependent is an adjective – eg counting upon.

Licence is a noun eg a software licence or driving licence. License is the verb to allow something.

Principal is the head of a college – a noun. The principal can also be an adjective meaning the main or chief. The principle is a noun and means the rule or law.

Weather is the rain and sunshine etc, whereas whether is used to indicate a choice eg he does not know whether he is in London or whether he is in Glasgow.

Summary

According to the Oxford English Dictionary there are more than 600,000 words in the English language. Shakespeare knew around 90,000 words and many people know 30,000. English has words from Latin and Latin based languages such as French plus words from Germanic languages including Swedish and Norwegian. This adds to the diversity and richness of the English language but also makes it more complicated.

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