



Improve Your Website Copy – Five Common Mistakes

Introduction

The website is often the first introduction a potential customer will have to your company. So if your site is written in English make sure it's in English.

This paper looks at some of the most common grammatical and stylistic errors made when writing copy for websites. Correctly written English helps the reader understand the content and increases your credibility.

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 Verb and Noun are not the same

Often the verb ie the action of doing something sounds the same as the noun ie the object that is being acted upon. Eg the verb to give permission to someone, or to allow something is to license. A person is licensed to sell for example a product, or can be licensed to use a software program. The document a person receives is a licence (or a permit or a certificate).

So a person is never licenced and does not receive a license. They can however be licensed and receive a licence. Equally a person can advise (verb) and in turn receive advice (noun). Also a doctor practises (verb) medicine in a practice (noun).

3 Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that are normally singular in form but are referred to as a group or a collection. The family is a group but is referred to in the singular. The family is on holiday. But it is also correct (or acceptable) to say; the family are on holiday.

To also send best wishes you can say the following. The family is (singular) on holiday and sends its (singular) best wishes or the family are (plural) on holiday and send their (plural) best wishes.

The following is incorrect as you should not mix and match singular and plural in the same sentence. The family is (singular) on holiday and send their (plural) best wishes or the family are (plural) on holiday and sends its (singular) best wishes.



Companies, councils and government are made up of many individuals but are referred to as singular items. Eg the government **is** looking at the possibility of ... , Westminster City Council **is** ... BP **is** issuing more shares ...

Sports teams, pop groups and the police are plural. Manchester United **are** buying new players ... , Oasis **are** releasing a new record ... , the police **are** keen to interview several suspects ...

4 Possessive nouns

The placement of the ' and the **s** can cause confusion and depends on which item is plural, the team or the football ground or both.

If the team has a football ground and it is waterlogged; the team's football ground is waterlogged.

If there are many teams each with their own football grounds, the teams' football grounds are waterlogged.

If many teams share the same football ground, the teams' football ground is waterlogged.

If a team has many football grounds, the team's football grounds are waterlogged.

The dogs' bone is ... (many dogs, one bone) the dogs' bones are (many dogs and many bones), the dog's bones are ... (one dog, many bones).

5 Used or utilised

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 based languages such as French and Germanic languages including Swedish and Norwegian with a smattering of Arabic and Indian. This adds to the diversity and richness of the language but it is also easy to complicate descriptive content by the use of 'meticulous sesquipedalianism' - or to complicate descriptive content by the 'precise use of long words'. In most cases a simple approach is best, there is no need to use unusual or complex words when there are perfectly acceptable alternatives available.

Eg the information you supply **will be utilised in conjunction with** ... could be, the information you supply **will be used together with** ... The meaning is the same.

Summary

The company website is now a key marketing tool and in many cases a company will be judged by the quality of its website and the website content. Getting the site wrong is easy but with some thought and attention to detail, the website content can be both informative and pleasant to read.

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