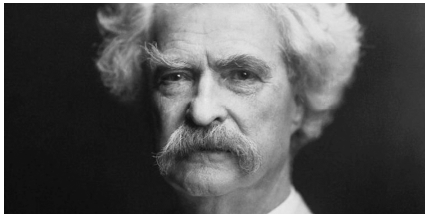


# **Boost Your Professionalism Through Better Writing**

with Barbara McNichol

November 17, 2016



*"Writing is easy. All you have to do is  
cross out the wrong words." – Mark Twain*



➤ **Take out these wobbly words whenever you can:**

- **really** "I **really** think it's time to go."
- **some** "We rely on **some** long-standing methods."
- **much** "Twitter reaches a **much** larger crowd than radio."
- **very** "Get ready to do a **very** good job."
- **that** "Find information **that** you can apply easily."

*"I try to leave out the parts ~~that~~ people skip." – Elmore Leonard*



*Note:* The word **that** doesn't substitute for the word **who** when referring to a human being.

E.g., A person **that** plays the piano should be a person **who** plays the piano.

**Your Homework: Your most meaningful challenge occurs at your desk. Follow up with these three steps.**

1. Dig out a page or two of your own writing in a report or email and select the longest paragraph on that page.
2. Count the number of words in that paragraph and then rewrite it completely, reducing the number of words by a third.
3. Yes, whack a third of what you wrote. Challenge yourself. And if you like the results, keep doing it!



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## Set Your Objectives

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Speed up your writing by organizing your thoughts using these headings:

**WHO: Target Audience**—Who will read this? What do you know about them already? Who will be affected? What are their challenges?

**WHAT: Message or takeaway, including call to action**—What do you want the reader to do, think, believe, or remember as a result of reading your piece? *E.g., Attend this important meeting. Consider this point of view. Review this proposal. Refund my money.*

**WHY: Purpose and benefits**—Why do the readers need this information? What’s in it for them? Why should they care?

**WHEN & WHERE: Logistics or offer** —What logistics need to be spelled out? *E.g., Executive meeting 3 p.m. Tuesday, Bob’s office.*

**HOW: Style and tone**—How do you want your reader to “hear” you? *E.g., polite, apologetic, excited, firm, demanding, laid back, urgent*



Outline your thoughts on these headings in point form and allow your brain to synthesize them. Then you’ll find it’s much easier to write the message.

➤ **Your Challenge: Take a hypothetical or real situation and jot down your 5 Ws and H in detail (but don’t write the message itself).**

**Who:** (reader/pain) \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** (message) \_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** (benefits) \_\_\_\_\_

**When/Where:** (logistics) \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** (tone/style) \_\_\_\_\_

## Pursue a Parallel Path

Avoid taking two different paths in your writing.

Here's what I mean: "His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and when he wants to move on."

Throwing in a non-parallel phrase at the end forces the reader's mind to shift gears too abruptly because it breaks an expected pattern. Instead, strengthen the sentence by saying this: "His attitude makes a difference in **changing, succeeding, and moving on.**"



*Non-parallel:* We created a new presentation, client delivery is the next step planned, and we need feedback so we'll do some brainstorming.

*Parallel:* We **created** a new presentation, **planned** to deliver it, and **brainstormed** ways to receive feedback.



*Non-parallel:* I'm traveling to New York City to shop, to visit friends, and maybe attending a conference would be good, too.

*Parallel:* I'm traveling to New York City to **shop**, **visit** friends, and possibly **attend** a conference.

Walk a parallel path with bullet points, too. This list is too random.

- Single (not double) space between sentences
- Change any straight quotes to curly quotes
- Ending period goes inside quotation mark (U.S. style)
- Subheads if appropriate
- Bullet points indented 5 spaces

The same part of speech starts each bullet in this list:

- **Use** a single (not double) space between sentences
- **Change** any straight quotes to curly quotes
- **Put** ending period inside quotation mark (U.S. style)
- **Add** subheads if appropriate
- **Indent** bullet points 5 spaces

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## Punctuate Like a Pro

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Read these two Dear John letters. They're exactly the same EXCEPT for the punctuation. Tell me, does punctuation make a difference in saying what you intend to convey?



**Dear John,**

***I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy – will you let me be yours? Gloria***

**Dear John,**

***I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn. For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be? Yours, Gloria***

1) Before going to lunch; take care of the recently-sent emails.

Before going to lunch, take care of the recently sent emails.

2) The buildings interior was remodeled however the façade wasnt changed.

The building's interior was remodeled; however, the façade wasn't changed.

3) The supervisor said 'Give it your best'

The supervisor said, "Give it your best."

4) I need a few items from the store; legal pads, scotch tape and ink toner.

I need a few items from the store: legal pads, Scotch tape, and ink toner.

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## Match the Word to the Meaning with Word Trippers

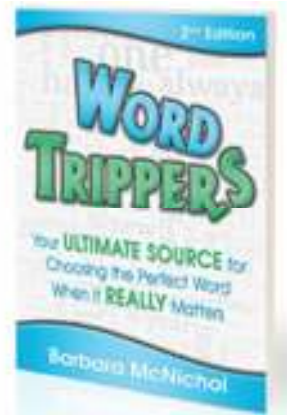
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**Advice, advise** – “Advice” is a noun; “advise” is a verb. “The *advice* you receive is only as good as the people who *advise* you.” To remember the difference, think of the word “ice,” which is a thing (a noun) and not an action (a verb).

**Number, amount** – You’ve likely heard people say, “Consider the amount of amount of stores or the amount of muffins, etc.” In these phrases, the word “number” should be used instead of “amount.” Hint: If you can quantify or count the objects, use “number,” not “amount.” The correct phrases are “Consider the *number* of stores, the *number* of muffins, etc.”

**That, which** – Use “that” when the phrase that follows is essential to the meaning of the sentence. “We provide guides that serve as an alternative to our programs.”

Use “which” when the phrase gives information but isn’t critical to understanding the sentence. “The self-teaching guides, which complement services we offer, provide an alternative to our programs.”



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## Quickly Find the *Right* Word When It Matters Most



Imagine having a resource at your fingertips that allows you to quickly find the right word when it really matters. Then imagine refreshing your knowledge *every week* so you can confidently use English words correctly.

As an admin professional, you know people pay attention to your ability to communicate accurately. Others rely on you for that! But having the right word selection at your fingertips hasn't always been easy—until now. ODI presents Word Trippers Tips, a solution that enhances your work every day (not everyday).

### How will Word Trippers Tips benefit you?

- Shines a light on what you didn't know you didn't know. You may have been using a word incorrectly all along and never realized it!
- Keeps you “in the know” as a language resource in your office
- Ensures you're using the right word properly—a confidence builder
- Builds respect among your colleagues and self-assurance for you
- Boosts your reputation for competence and excellence in your world

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- An ebook featuring 390+ pesky pairings of words that can trip you up (e.g., except vs. accept, advise vs. advice, further vs. farther)
- A Word Tripper of the Week in your in-box for 52 weeks (see sample at [www.WordTrippers.com/odi](http://www.WordTrippers.com/odi))
- Bonus PDFs on grammar, writing, and punctuation tips every quarter
- A 38-minute webinar on better writing
- A fun crossword puzzle using previous Word Trippers of the Week

Only **\$99/year** through ODI at [www.WordTrippers.com/odi](http://www.WordTrippers.com/odi)

*"My time is incredibly limited, and the last thing I need is useless email clogging up my in-box. Truth be told, I was highly skeptical that Word Trippers would be of any benefit. WRONG! In less than 30 seconds, I learned I was using an incorrect word to describe something. As a new subscriber, I'm now looking forward to all the Word Trippers." - Mike Spremulli*

**Gain a better grasp of the English language every week!**