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6 Reasons Why Grammar Still Matters in the Digital Age

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By Andrew Hindes, The In-House Writer

The written word has staged an astonishing comeback over the past decade. After years of hand-wringing about its impending demise, writing is once again an unavoidable part of our daily lives, thanks to ubiquitous digital technologies such as e-mail, texting, social media and blogging software. In fact, we communicate through written text more today than at any time in the history of mankind.



Andrew Hindes

But the use of these digital tools has also changed *how* we write. Much of our communication now takes the form of cryptic half-sentences packed with hashtags, LOLs, smiley faces and the other shorthand devices we use to shoehorn a coherent thought into a hastily, thumb-typed 140-character tweet or a 160-character text.

Which raises the question: Do grammar and punctuation still matter when it comes to writing press materials? In other words, do PR professionals really need to worry about whether the period goes inside or outside the quotation marks when crafting an e-mail pitch?

The answer, at least for now, is a resounding yes.

But why is this so? Journalistic style has become increasingly casual and conversational, and the demands of the 24-hour news cycle mean that online media outlets tend to shoot first and copyedit later—if ever. Bloggers and social media pundits are often even more lax in their adherence to standard writing conventions.

Despite these changes, however, the basic rules of usage, punctuation and style are still observed by most major publications, and PR pros flout them at their own peril.

Here are six reasons these seemingly antiquated rules are still important in the digital age:

- Credibility:** Press materials with grammatical errors indicate ignorance or carelessness on the part of the writer, which may cause journalists to question the accuracy of the content.
- Professionalism:** Similarly, sloppily-written materials can create a negative impression on clients and corporate higher-ups.
- Respect:** Underpaid and overworked journalists may resent receiving a document filled with errors that would earn them a stern rebuke from the copy desk.
- Clarity:** Grammar and punctuation errors can result in ambiguities or misunderstandings.
- Convenience:** Harried journalists often opt to copy whole sentences or even paragraphs of PR materials verbatim. If your grammatical gaffe slips through, it makes them look bad.
- Posterity:** Press materials distributed across the Internet live on forever—along with any mistakes they contain.

Someday, technology may make grammar—or even language as we know it—obsolete. Until then, being meticulous in your writing reflects well on you as a professional and increases your chances of getting media coverage for your company or clients.

Andrew Hindes is president of Los Angeles-based PR and marketing copywriting firm *The In-House Writer* as well as a sought-after business writing coach and instructor. He can be reached at andrew@theinhousewriter.com. You can follow him on Twitter @inhousewriter.

July 17, 2012

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COMMENTS

- A resounding "hear hear" from me.
 Posted by **Amanda Stebbing** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:09 AM
- Just above the list, you used the word "flaunt" incorrectly. Flaunt means to show off something. I think you meant "forego" or something similar. Certainly, we see your point on credibility in effect here.
 Posted by **Brandon** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:11 AM
- I think you mean 'flout'. It's a common error
 Posted by **Mark Williams** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:21 AM
- Writer should have used 'flout' which means to 'treat with contemptuous disregard.'
 Posted by **vanda killeen** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:24 AM
- Flaunt can also mean "to treat contemptuously" according to Merriam-Webster. But certainly forego would work

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just as well.

Posted by **PR News** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:32 AM

- 3rd para 'Does grammar and punctuation still matter...'
Should have read: 'Do grammar and punctuation still matter...'
Posted by **OK** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:38 AM
- Thanks OK. That's been fixed.
Posted by **PR News** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 11:54 AM
- PR hoist (sic: NOT hoisted)by his own petard. I do feel a tinge of sympathy for Andrew: such mistakes are easy to make, and usually discovered immediately after hitting Enter. Nevertheless, and to mix metaphors, people who live in glass houses have to be whiter than white.
Posted by **Richard Street** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 12:07 PM
- how embarrassing that such an article even has to be written. Whether the venue is social media or traditional channels, the communication profession hikes a leg on its own credibility when grammar becomes passe.
Posted by **Alex Lekas** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 12:24 PM
- Thanks to all who caught my misuse of the word "flaunt." It has been changed to "flout." I stand corrected!
Posted by **Andrew Hinds** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 12:33 PM
- What a sad commentary that this issue even has to be raised.
Posted by **Alex Lekas** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 12:45 PM
- I've been preaching this for years so good on you, Andrew. However, with all due respect to him, can I PLEASE urgeeveryone not to use Americanisms. For example, can we please not use visitwith when we mean visit, meet with when we mean meet and so on, Know wha' I mean?
Posted by **Peter Corbett** on Wednesday, July 18, 2012 @ 02:50 PM

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