

## How an English Lit major got it really wrong...

By the time I decided I wanted to try my hand at the family business, I'd spent 6 years at university studying History and English Literature. That's 6 years of having various experts constantly critiquing my work and correcting my grammar. So by the time I left, I had a pretty good grasp of the English language.

When I started practicing as a Financial Adviser, I wrote the most grammatically correct financial plans you could possibly imagine. I also - very kindly - corrected the content and grammar of my colleagues' work.

But is writing "correctly" all it's cracked up to be when it comes to business?

Well no...

In fact, a few years back I asked a business coach and friend of mine to audit our marketing material. Now I'd written most of it so I was expecting him to come back and say it was pretty well spot on, with perhaps a few suggestions to make it even better. I was anticipating some strategic advice, but no way was I expecting him to criticise my grammar or writing style. After all it was *me!*

Imagine my surprise when he came back and the ONLY criticism he had of ALL our marketing material was the way it was written. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!

## The importance of being you

After I'd stopped hyperventilating, he gently told me that whilst the text itself was almost word perfect, it wasn't representative of our business.

He explained that the way I wrote was precise and formal, whereas The Hendrie Group team are fun and friendly. The marketing was giving a false impression of who we were. The same went for many of our letters and emails.

More importantly, the way I was writing wasn't appealing to our existing clients or the type of clients we were trying to attract. Because the types of clients we were, and still are, trying to attract, are like us - fun and friendly. Family oriented rather than formal.

Which brings me to an old cliché about writing from the heart...

What I learned from this valuable insight was the importance of making sure my writing was appropriate to my target audience.

My usual style of writing had been okay at uni, because my audience were English and History Professors, but when writing to clients or potential clients about finance and business, the LAST thing this audience wants is stiff and formal language because we all know what that is - **jargon!**

## Like Frankie says - relax.

As you can probably tell, I've relaxed a lot since I was given that valuable piece of advice. And subsequently, *my* advice when talking to business owners about writing is quite simply to relax! Your clients and customers are much more interested in what you have to say than how you say it, and they want to hear it from *you* - the person they like and trust.

You need to really consider your target market and write accordingly. A great rule of thumb is to write to your target market in the same way as you would speak to them.

Look at some examples of language that's commonly used in emails and letters every day:

- "...attached please find our brochure for your perusal"
- "...assuring you of our best attention at all times"
- "...we refer to your letter of the 6th and wish to advise that..."
- "...trusting that our action meets with your approval"
- "...we've sent, under separate cover..."
- "...enclosed herewith..."

Who actually speaks like that????

Can you imagine going up to someone in the street and saying, "Herewith is our brochure for your perusal!"

Furthermore, imagine your shock if you got the reply, "Well, thank you, sir. I remain your trusted servant."

It wouldn't happen!

So unless you're writing to a target market who expect and relate to that type of language - and most of them aren't - then we need review some of the supposed "rules" of writing and break free of them.

## Breaking the rules (and loving it!)

The Old Rules— Actually "Myths"	The New Rules
Always be grammatically correct. For example: Never use a preposition with which to end a sentence.	Tell it like it is. For example: Sir Winston Churchill is attributed as saying, "This is the sort of English up with which I will not put."

Never begin a sentence with “and” or “but.”	Begin sentences with “and” or “but” if it carries the reader along. And not only that, you need to recognise that it can add impact to a point...can’t it?
A sentence must have a subject, object, and verb.	Nonsense. Enough said? Short, one-word “sentences” really are very powerful. You can change to this new style today. Right now. And be amazed with the results.

## Breaking through the clutter

We’re not just breaking the rules for the sake of it, we’re doing it to be the one that gets through to our clients or customers. The test of a good letter, email, or article is simply the answer to this question:

**Did it achieve the result you wanted?** And increasingly that means: **Did you break through the clutter?**

**Remember...** the average person is confronted with over 7,000 sales and marketing images every single day! Which begs the questions:

Did you break through the clutter caused by all the other emails, letters, or adverts your reader received today?

Did he/she receive 6 letters (that’s another “rule” I’ve broken about numbers, isn’t it?) demanding money, and so was yours put on the bottom of the stack?

Did he/she receive 3 emails today asking him to invest time and/or money in some new product or idea? And yours happened to be the fourth one opened and was discarded with the comment, “All this annoying junk mail.”

Clearly, one way to stand out in that clutter is to be different.

Now that doesn’t mean you should break the rules just to be different.

What I’m really suggesting is this. You’ll be different just by being yourself—the normal “you” who talks with people one-on-one.

This may mean un-learning some restricting ideas so

that you can make way for the new ones, but it’ll be worth it.

With that in mind, here’s a list of some words to avoid and some possible words to use in their place.

Avoid These	Use These
Herewith	You’ll see I’ve attached your...
Commence	Get underway, start
Ascertain	Discover, find out, you’ll see
Acquire	When you use, when you own, get
Endeavour	Will, try
Expeditious	Quick
Facilitate	Make it easier for you
In the event of	If
In order to	So, so that you’ll
With regard to	About
Prior to	Before
Due to the fact that	Because
In the amount of	For
Cost	Investment, budget
Contract	Paperwork, agreement

The words and phrases in the “use” list are much less formal. You’ll notice, too, that they can form the basis of more powerful, easy-to-read phrases.

Using them (and many more phrases you’ll discover soon) will give your marketing that “me-to-you,” or personal, touch. And that’s a touch that will make it so much more effective.

## And finally

Always remember that the language of sales is all about the WIIFM. **What’s in it for me?!**

Write to your audience using language they can understand.

Write in language that’s representative of you and your business.

Most importantly, write about what’s valuable to *them*.

AND you’ll be an expert business writer in no time!



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**Winner** Madison Financial Planning Practice of the Year Award; **Winner** Grosvenor Securities Adviser of the Year Award; **Winner** Count Financial Planning Practice of the Year Award; 7th Place IFA National Best Practice Award (of more than 300 firms).