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The Top Five Writing Mistakes Professionals Make

By Judy Cullins

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Yes, you know your subject. You also need to think about entertaining your audience, and making your book or other writing easy to read. If your writing lacks organization and compelling, vital sentences that convince your readers to keep reading, they will leave your book or Web site immediately. There goes your "word-of-mouth" promotion.

Try my "Check and Correct" for These Top Five Mistakes

1. Stop passive sentence construction.

When you write in passive voice, your writing slides along into long sentences that slow your readers down, even bore them.

Before you put your final stamp of approval on your writing, circle all the "is," "was" and other passive verbs like: begin, start to, seems, appears, have, and could. Use your grammar check to count your passives. Aim for 2-4% only.

Correct: "Make sure that your name is included on all your household accounts and investments."
"Make" and "is included" --the culprits. Create more clarity with this revision," Include your name on all household accounts and investments to keep your own credit alive after your divorce."

2. Stop all pompous language and phrases.

Well-meaning professionals often use the word, "utilize." You see this criminal in resumes, military directives and medical or lawyer documents. "Utilize not only puts people off because we don't relate to "jargoneze," but because we want simple language. Think of Hemingway who knew that one or two syllable-words work better than longer ones.

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When you aim at 10th grade level, you make it easy for your audience to "buy." Attempts to impress your audience with research babble or long words fail because they sound unreal and create a distance from the audience. Your reader wants a savvy friend, not an expert.

3. Show, don't tell to keep your audience reading.

When you take the lazy shortcut using -ly words like suddenly, or the adverb "very," your telling makes your reader yawn a "ho hum" and stop reading. Instead show "suddenly." For example, "When she saw the pistol, she ran and slammed the door behind her, shows "suddenly." Instead of "Alice was fat," say "Alice's girth prevented her from buying just one airline seat."

Circle the -ly and very words and sit down with your Thesaurus and replace them with power words that describe or show emotion.

4. Reduce your passive -ing constructions.

Think of a title that inspired you in the past. I like "Jump Start your Book Sales" by Marilyn and Tom Ross. "Jump Starting" lacks power because it doesn't ask for action. "-Ing" construction implies passive. Next time you think heading, title, or even compelling copy, think command verbs as sentence starters as well as using other strong verbs and nouns. Keep your sentences active using verbs in either present or past tense.

5. Take the "I" out of your writing to satisfy your reader

Whether you write a book introduction, biography, chapter or web sales message (did you know these are part of the essential "hot-selling points?"), keep the "I's" to a minimum. Your audience doesn't care about you, only what you can do for them. Think about where your audience is now—their challenges or concerns. Remember to answer their question, "Why should I buy this from you?" Put a big YOU at the top of each page you write. Write three or four paragraphs. Then, circle the "I's" and vow to replace them with a "you" centered sentence or question.

So instead of telling your story, (I know that's important to you) put your story in the third person. Use another name, maybe a client's or friend's. If you think your bio is important, instead of placing a long passage on your home page, place it instead, on your "About Us" page. On your book's back cover, put your longer bio and photo inside the back cover page, so you can put more of what sells on your back cover—testimonials and benefits. Get everything you write checked by a book or writing coach to make sure it sells.

You cannot only get more sales from what you write, you can put yourself out there as the savvy friend to your audience who wants a problem solved. In the long run, these satisfied readers will return to you again and again—even buy your products and services.

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Judy Cullins, 20-year book and Internet Marketing Coach works with small business people who want

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to make a difference in people's lives, build their credibility and clients, and make a consistent life-long income. Author of 10 eBooks including "Write your eBook Fast" and "How to Market your Business on the Internet," she offers free help through her 2 monthly ezines, The Book Coach Says...and Business Tip of the Month at

and 140 free articles.

HOW DABBLER WRITERS BECOME PROFESSIONALS

By Craig Lock

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They do it regularly: with self discipline and dedication.

I may not be one of the best writers around, but I've got dedication and self discipline (which comes from motivation, because I love what I do – although it's very hard work). I try to have fun, whilst I try to earn a living.

Top writers WRITE AND REWRITE – many times over, so the words flow better each time.

They aim for perfection – very, very hard to achieve; although one can always improve.

Every time I go through a manuscript, I change things (like repetitive words, incorrect grammar and punctuation) to try to get the words to flow better... but one has to draw a halt somewhere, otherwise my books would never get published.

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HOW TO AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

What do you think are the most common mistakes of new writers?

Take a coffee break while you do this short assignment.

My immediate thoughts:

repetitive words

incorrect grammar

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incorrect punctuation

using too many words

The art of good writing, I believe lies in brevity, so omit all unnecessary words.

It makes the sentence flow more rhythmically, more swiftly.

I find reading a very cerebral (impressive word) activity, that demands a lot of concentration— so make a conscious effort to write in a style that's easy to read . Try to make your reading so easy on the eye, that a child can enjoy (and appreciate) your writing style.

Now you have all the tools and the talent there should not be anything to stop you indulging in your creative pursuits. I hope this information may be helpful to you in your creative writing

"If a man has talent and cannot use it, he has failed. If he has a talent and uses only half of it, he has partly failed. If he has a talent and learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded and has a satisfaction and a triumph few men ever know."
— Thomas Wolfe

"Everyone has a talent. What is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark place where it leads."
— Erica Jong

Craig Lock is an author of numerous books and the creator of the ORIGINAL online creative writing course. <http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.html>

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