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Management Toolkit

10 flagrant grammar mistakes that make you look stupid

- Tags:
- Email,
- Grammar,
- Spelling



Jody Gilbert
Published: 06 Jun 2006 16:00 BST

These days, we tend to communicate via the keyboard as much as we do verbally. Often, we're

in a hurry, quickly dashing off emails with typos, grammatical shortcuts (I'm being kind here), and that breezy, e.e. cummings, no-caps look. It's expected. It's no big deal. But other times, we try to invest a little care, avoiding mistakes so that there's no confusion about what we're saying and so that we look professional and reasonably bright.

In general, we can slip up in a verbal conversation and get away with it. A colleague may be thinking, "Did she just say 'irregardless'?", but the words flow on, and our worst transgressions are carried away and with luck, forgotten.

That's not the case with written communications. When we commit a grammatical crime in emails, discussion posts, reports, memos, and other professional documents, there's no going back. We've just officially gone on record as being careless or clueless. And here's the worst thing. It's not necessary to be an editor or a language whiz or a spelling bee triathlete to spot such mistakes. They have a way of doing a little wiggle dance on the screen and then reaching out to grab the reader by the throat.

So here we are in the era of Word's red-underline "wrong spelling, dumb ass" feature and Outlook's Always Check Spelling Before Sending option, and still the mistakes proliferate. Catching typos is easy (although not everyone does it). It's the other stuff — correctly spelled but incorrectly wielded — that sneaks through and makes us look stupid. Here's a quick review of some of the big ones.

#1: Loose for lose

No: I always loose the product key.

Yes: I always lose the product key.

#2: It's for its (or god forbid, its')

No: Download the HTA, along with it's readme file.

Yes: Download the HTA, along with its readme file.

No: The laptop is overheating and its making that funny noise again.

Yes: The laptop is overheating and it's making that funny noise again.

#3: They're for their for there

No: The managers are in they're weekly planning meeting.

Yes: The managers are in their weekly planning meeting.

No: The techs have to check there cell phones at the door, and their not happy about it.

Yes: The techs have to check their cell phones at the door, and they're not happy about it.

#4: i.e. for e.g.

No: Use an anti-spyware program (i.e., Ad-Aware).

Yes: Use an anti-spyware program (e.g., Ad-Aware).

Note: The term i.e. means "that is"; e.g. means "for example". And a comma follows both of them.

#5: Effect for affect

No: The outage shouldn't effect any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't affect any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't have any effect on users.

Yes: We will effect several changes during the downtime.

Note: Impact is not a verb. Purists, at least, beg you to use affect instead:

No: The outage shouldn't impact any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage shouldn't affect any users during work hours.

Yes: The outage should have no impact on users during work hours.

#6: You're for your

No: Remember to defrag you're machine on a regular basis.

Yes: Remember to defrag your machine on a regular basis.

No: Your right about the changes.

Yes: You're right about the changes.

#7: Different than for different from

No: This setup is different than the one at the main office.

Yes: This setup is different from the one at the main office.

Yes: This setup is better than the one at the main office.

#8 Lay for lie

No: I got dizzy and had to lay down.

Yes: I got dizzy and had to lie down.

Yes: Just lay those books over there.

#9: Then for than

No: The accounting department had more problems then we did.

Yes: The accounting department had more problems than we did.

Note: Here's a sub-peeve. When a sentence construction begins with If, you don't need a then. Then is implicit, so it's superfluous and wordy:

No: If you can't get Windows to boot, then you'll need to call Ted.

Yes: If you can't get Windows to boot, you'll need to call Ted.

#10: Could of, would of for could have, would have

No: I could of installed that app by mistake.

Yes: I could have installed that app by mistake.

No: I would of sent you a meeting notice, but you were out of town.

Yes: I would have sent you a meeting notice, but you were out of town.

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- A sentence should not end with a verb! 336657**
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- What bugs me : tara123**
- Whose / Who's No: Who's owl is biggest? Yes: Who...** Dean
- No: I could care less Yes: I couldn't care le...** Anonymous
- (Note: Outlook picks up on each of these erro...** Bubba
- Urgent, british people help needed!!!** Doris W
- Whose / Who's No: Who's owl is biggest?...** Goodbattery
- The "could of/ would of/ should of" error results...** Ben M. Mullen
- How about an error that appears in nearly eve...** C. Deruisseau
 - The number of comments this article has...** Writer
- [Quote] Note: The term i.e. means "that is"; e.g....** Anonymous
- Personally, I avoid commas with i.e. because...** Anonymous
- "Not at thing." Who wants to be the first to...** miya garza
- Marc Koltun 1000220092**
- Um...impact is most certainly a verb. Check the OE...** MAB
- Though "impact" should have minimal uses as a...** Joseph Myers
- One of my biggest pet peeves is using "good" when...** Rob
- How about "unique"? No such thing as very, r...** Anonymous
- More common errors: Word's for plural instead of w...** Anonymous
- No: what are you inferring? Yes:what are you imply...** Robert Morley
- Yeah, see my web page (created July 1998) that cov...** David Tribble
- When it comes to "impact" not being a verb, the au...** Bill
- You've created a great list, but I can't believe y...** Ed Vanderlinden
- Many of these are homophones; they only show...** J CHIARAVALLOTI

- ⊖ **What about "myself?" We've all been taught t...** David Honsinger
- ⊖ **I cannot believe that there has been no menti...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **-Whose / Who'sNo: Who's owl is biggest? Yes:...** leon0909
- ⊖ **In general your article points out some common uni...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **For the "its / it's" mistake, there is an easy rul...** Larry Pedrick
- ⊖ **For a description of the "impact" issue, see the u...** Fitz
- ⊖ **My favorite grammer faux pas, in speech not w...** David
- ⊖ **I have always been confused about "insure" and "en...** Brenda Helverson
- ⊖ **To Guard or Guarantee; Both are confused with...** bookbabe
- ⊖ **Great article. I wish it was the top 15 or 20 gram...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **If I were you, I wouldn't forget the subjunctive....** Zurg the Merciless
- ⊖ **Re: "insure" vs. "ensure:" To insure somethin...** Anonymous
 - ⊖ **According to Merriam-Webster, both insur...** Peeved
 - ⊖ **Remember though 351668**
- ⊖ **Good article. A common mistake I notice, mostly i...** Cathy
- ⊖ **But what about: That's me? And You and me?** Herbert Brenne
- ⊖ **I agree that people's dependence on spell checkers...** Jody Hudson
- ⊖ **Great article, and oh, so true. However, I would...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **I kind of question the wisdom of writing an articl...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **"Begg the question". My teeth begin to automatica...** grammar nazi
- ⊖ **I am so relieved to see that someone else kno...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **YES! It is so nice to know someone else cares abou...** Craig Durham
- ⊖ **"Could care less"- if that is the case, then...** B Durham
- ⊖ **Few people really know the difference between i.e....** Jason Coleman
- ⊖ **I agree wholeheartedly with all but item #4. In co...** John Albrecht
- ⊖ **Ending sentences in 'at" is one I see frequen...** Patrick
- ⊖ **The most common error I see is using "to" for "too...** Michael Westbrook
- ⊖ **Using the word gender where sex is correct. People...** David Denny
- ⊖ **You should live here in NC, where they say "...** Carol Ellis
- ⊖ **Education, Education, Education... 67435**
- ⊖ **My personal pet peeve: "congradulations" instead o...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **My pet peeve, and it's not so much grammar as gene...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **No: "don't set children on the counter"; Yes:...** hikinthru
- ⊖ **I really like number 10. It shows how what we say...** Graham
- ⊖ **This is nuts (nut'z). So, you expect everyone to w...** Gerard ter Beke
- ⊖ **Gerard, We do not expect non-native English s...** Chris Cosby
- ⊖ **If we -as non native English speakers/writers...** DARTHDarka
- ⊖ **The contractions are easy, and I'm amazed tha...** Markus Berg
 - ⊖ **People who confuse Do and Have. There us...** David B. Wildgoose

- You forgot the possessive "apostrophe s" misused on...** Anonymous
- How about "where it's at" instead of "where it is"...** Anonymous
- how about the old "you and I" vs. "You and me"?** Ja-el
- RE: Larry Pedrick's comment - "One never uses...** Adrian
 - Here, here... 67435**
- I have noticed that people are saying bring when t...** Peter
- Dear Jody, That is a great article. Unfortunately...** Lester Zan
- A glaring omission: "Breath" for "Breathe". As in...** Joe Meredith
- What is the difference between, "everyone" and "ev...** Anonymous
- There is no difference between everyone and e...** Grammar Queen
- No: "try and" - Yes: "try to" - This one annoys me...** George
- Oh, Joe.....this could be an entire show! But, be...** Anonymous
- If an author inflicts one of his pet peeves on the...** Extra Character
- Given the dumbing of America, it is pointless to p...** Jonathan Swift
- Thank you for publishing this article. We need ref...** Paul Buchman
- Many people don't know when to use "fewer" and whe...** Dan
- The author, Jody Gilbert, states that "impact is n...** Mike Abbott
- Gadfly wrote "Given the dumbing of America, it is...** Peter
- Shouldn't your title have been "10 flagrant gramma...** TPua
- The most ubiquitous sin is the mistake of using "m...** Anonymous
- I/Me - You need a subject, a verb and an obje... 1000010331**
- You need a comma in this sentence since you have t...** Chris Biermann
- You left out my #1 pet peeve of all time, plurals....** Chip Stone
- I've noticed people don't use adverbs anymore...** Geoff
- Grocers' plurals 1000177273**
- You missed another primary mistake people make all...** Arthur T. College II
- I love the article and it's about time someone wro...** Stevo Danger
- Excellent report. However, you left out the I/me s...** Anonymous
- see, saw, have seen. This drives me crazy. People...** jim kittelberger
- Wrong: SUV's. Also wrong: CD's. when will people r...** Anonymous
- Apostrophes Only for Contraction and Ownershi... Sakinah77**
- You missed the most prevalent mistake: using an ap...** Anonymous
- There is another mistake I commonly see even on bu...** Melanie Cummings
- THANK YOU!!! "Would of" has been one of my pet pee...** Susan Grenier
- I don't see what the major issue is. So peopl... Who cares?**
 - Part of the problem, not the solution badbart**
- With the exception of number 9, all of the suppose...** Ed Tapanes
- okay here are mine: 'monies' the pleural of money...** erin kennedy
- Yikes, Erin Kennedy. I think you're misinform...** Stella Cotton

- ⊖ **The worst is Wan't. Where do they go to school?** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Bring/Take are opposite of what I learned in high...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **I haven't seen anyone post this pet peeve: u...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **my personal favorite annoyance is when people say...** Justin
- ⊖ **"Setup" vs. "set up". I see this all the time! T...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Great Article... I'm glad IT'S not such a small gr...** ahoooi
- ⊖ **"...really helped me alot." - no, it's "a lot" ".....** Flagrant Wordpick
- ⊖ **Good article - here's one more: 'less' used when '...** Ken Burgin
- ⊖ **On "fewer" vs. "less" -- Use the former for coun...** Tim Mc
- ⊖ **On a can of Pringles Fat Free chips, the bann...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **I was really starting to think I was the only one...** Alan
- ⊖ **how about using insure when you mean ensure? that...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **I don't agree that i.e. and e.g. always requires a...** Mark B. Boen, J.D.
- ⊖ **"All the time cards must be with no corrections" H...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Surely the key issue here is that the whole p...** Conan the Grammarian
- ⊖ **How about the midwestern US favorite -- I borrowed...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **My biggest pet peeve: lists of pet peeves that the...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Calvary and cavalry. Calvary is a place, John Way...** Phil Wade
- ⊖ **#10 is my personal peeve out of that list. Here is...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **You are incorrect in your statment about different...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **youre right. They're are so many stupid poeple wh...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **In the following, there should be a period after '...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **I once wrote 'admired by his piers' on a guy's eva...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **I like you Brits humor. Funny reading your remark...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **I hate that leet speak crap. lol** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **'You've got mail' should be 'You have mail'.** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **It is rebellion that causes each generation to dep...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **I'm going to bring it where I'm going at. That's...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **David Wildgoose wrote: People who confuse Do and H...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **How about 'verbal' rather than 'oral' - this is no...** Jenny Cant
- ⊖ **You should add the incorrect use of "As per". It...** Rick Brown
- ⊖ **You wrote: These days, we tend to communicate via...** Marc Lombart
- ⊖ **Verbal versus Oral katmann**
- ⊖ **Attempting to use "leverage" as a verb. Shows you...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Thank you thank you THANK YOU for your entry "Impa...** M D Spangler
- ⊖ **How many times do you inform others that, "I am on...** KenD
- ⊖ **No: "I am waiting on line for tickets." Yes: "I a...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **"A better way to Internet" says peoplepc online....** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **Brought instead of bought? Where, UK only? I kno...** Alawishus McAllibur III

- ⊖ **"Brought instead of bought? Where, UK only?"...** Nina
 - ⊖ **Nina - you would only say "I brought a f...** Bob Fry
- ⊖ **Thank you for the article, I am thrilled to see at...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **I see this all the time katmann**
- ⊖ **NO: We have been lead to this conclusion. YES: We...** Ant
- ⊖ **"Brought instead of bought? Where, UK only?" Hi N...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **This is obviously not a site for people who don't...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **Why care? If for no other reason, you should...** Bob Fry
- ⊖ **I can make up bad sentences and then put them thou...** sadfsdfsdafig
- ⊖ **If a person's content is good I overlook grammer m...** Aerek
- ⊖ **It is interesting, but not unexpected, that the pe...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **How about people using 'less' when they mean 'fewe...** Darren Stephens
- ⊖ **I cringe whenever supposedly learned people u...** saul
- ⊖ **Totally! I can get a bee in my bonnet seeing commo...** Anonymous
- ⊖ **Dear Peeved: Merriam-Webster actually says: ENSURE...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **Also, please note that Merriam-Webster is a libera...** Alawishus McAllibur III
- ⊖ **OK, I will. "Not at thing." 1) is not a sentence,...** Alawishus McCalibur III
- ⊖ **They're laying their heads over there, where the w...** bookbabe
- ⊖ **I could go on and on...** 18302
- ⊖ **"Data is" or "Data are" ZorbaEisenhower**
- ⊖ **ie & eg 68181**
- ⊖ **10 flagrant grammar putu**
- ⊖ **More Brain Stuff . . From Cambridge University . glenburdis**
- ⊖ **Online Versus In Line katmann**
- ⊖ **The Difference Between a Subject and the an Object...** Sakinah77
- ⊖ **"Data" *is* a mass n...** Butaneko
 - ⊖ **erm, excuse me but tara123**
 - ⊖ **"Data" is not a mass noun... 1000091309**

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