

~~Introuction~~

Introduction

About twelve months ago I placed a classified ad in a national magazine for my website, English Banana.com. A member of the classified team took the wording I wanted over the phone and agreed to design the ad, using my site's logo, copied from the website. The wording I asked for was:

Quality photocopiable worksheets for English lessons

www.englishbanana.com

Now available from bookshops

The ad cost almost £100, but I was happy to pay because of the exposure I believed it would bring to my website. When I bought a copy of the finished magazine I was initially pleased with the layout of the ad but then horrified by the spelling mistake. The wording read:

Quality photocopyable worksheets for English lessons

www.englishbanana.com

Now Available from bookshops

Apart from the unnecessary capital letter on "Available", the misspelled "photocopyable" jumped out at me from the page. Since I had already paid for the ad there was nothing I could do. What would you have felt like doing, if you had paid £100 for the ad? When I phoned up to find out what had happened the classified ads manager was blasé about the error. He said, "Does it really make that much of a difference?" I asked for a discount on the next ad and he started to haggle, saying, "What's the price of an 'i' or a 'y'?" What he meant, I suppose, was how could you quantify what a mistake like that was worth? I explained that my website is aimed at people learning English and that its reputation and authority as a teaching tool could be damaged by an ad that showed that we ourselves have problems with spelling. It is human nature that a reader would probably attribute the mistake of "photocopyable" to the company which the ad represents, despite the fault lying with the ad designer. In the end he gave me a discount of £25 on the

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next ad, which didn't run, because a few weeks later I had the chance to cancel it. I have not advertised in that esteemed organ since, which means that they have lost a trade customer due to a "y" instead of an "i". The classified ads manager raised a good question, though. Does it really make that much of a difference?

It seems that almost everyone has read *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. But would you have picked up the book – let alone bought it – if the title on the cover had been spelled *The Da Vinci Cod*? Even though the entire contents of the book may have been mistake-free in terms of spelling and grammar, the misspelled title on the cover would have put off the majority of people from buying it. Why? Because it's wrong. Everyone knows that the correct title is *The Da Vinci Code*. There is general agreement about the spelling of the word "Code".

If the title wasn't spelled right, how could you be sure that the rest of the book wasn't also full of mistakes? We need to have confidence that what we are reading is *right*. We all make mistakes when writing English. Some of them can be spotted if we take time to check our work. Other mistakes are made because our spelling skills need improving or there is a lack of understanding about certain areas of use in grammar; for example when and how to use a comma.

All of the examples in this book are *adapted* from actual examples of English that I have spotted during the past twelve months. This is English as written by people who speak and write English as their first language (and, no doubt in many cases, their *only* language). Educated people. People who have, in most cases, enjoyed as many as sixteen years of full-time education. People who have been to university and graduated with first- and second-class degrees. People who have achieved high-paying jobs in advertising and marketing without ever really fully understanding the possessive role of the apostrophe.

So as not to infringe the copyright of the original authors, I have re-written each text in my own words, but kept the original mistake as well as the context in which it was found. So as not to confuse things, there is only one mistake in each text – so that means one mistake per page. Your challenge is to find the mistake, state which kind of mistake it is (out of the six categories – *apostrophes*, *articles*, *doesn't make sense*, *punctuation*, *singular/plural* and *spelling*), then write a corrected version. If you can't find a mistake, check the answers at the back of the book, starting on page 61. If you need help with any of the terms used in the book, for example 'common noun' or 'adverb', there is an A-Z of English Grammar Words, which starts on page 77.

I should perhaps say at this point that I'm not a hopelessly pedantic busybody who goes around looking for errors and taking pleasure in other people's mistakes. I'm an English teacher who is interested in helping others to learn

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about words and how to use them more successfully. I have found all the texts from which my examples are adapted during normal reading of newspapers, magazines, books, leaflets, posters and websites, rather than scanning material endlessly in search of mistakes. Since we all make mistakes and don't always use good grammar and spelling in private correspondence, e.g. emails, letters and text messages, I have excluded this kind of writing from the book and focused instead on *English which has been written for a wider audience* – i.e. for the general public to read.

This is English that is looking for an audience, be it an advert, travel book or leaflet, newspaper article or website. These examples all come from texts that have been designed to communicate with more than one person. Perhaps this makes the mistakes more surprising. Many of these mistakes – perhaps even the majority – could have been avoided if their authors had checked and re-checked their work before publishing it or sending it off to be printed. By doing so they would have improved the level of communication (the primary aim of any piece of writing – *to tell the reader something*) and avoided making the organisation they represent look less professional.

The sources for these texts are wide-ranging: they are not simply misprints culled from humble parish magazines. They reflect what I have been reading over the past twelve months. I ended up finding so many mistakes that I thought they would form the basis of a useful workbook for anyone who wants to improve their written English. Not just students of English, but anyone who writes with the hope of someone reading their work – i.e. anyone who writes with the purpose of communication. The examples in this book include professional texts written by employees of major organisations, such as a national broadcaster, an international bank and a popular film monthly. There are also examples adapted from texts produced by smaller organisations, such as a large further education college, a regional tourism marketing group and a specialist publishing company. Amateur texts, written by people who don't write for a living, are represented by material adapted from the likes of a local folk club's "What's On?" flyer, a local carnival brochure and a large cathedral's weekly newsletter.

I hope that this new book will help you as you aim to make your written English:

- a) clearer (and therefore more valuable to both you and your reader)
- b) more impressive (making you or your company look more professional)

When you go to a supermarket you will usually see enormous signs outside the store, made from huge Perspex letters several feet high. Often they light up at night and you can see them from far and wide. You can be certain that these words will be spelled correctly – for a reason. What about *your* English?

Check it again! Then, if in doubt, check it again.

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