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PEDANTRY: A SIMPLE WAY TO IMPRESS CURRENT OR FUTURE EMPLOYERS

I'm a pedant when it comes to the English language. That's a word that usually has a negative connotation, but I wear the label proudly. From Wikipedia: *"A pedant is a person who is overly concerned with formalism and precision, or who makes a show of learning... The term in English is typically used with a negative connotation, indicating someone overly concerned with minutiae and whose tone is perceived as condescending."* Condescending? Is it condescending to point out when an adult professional is violating rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling that they should have mastered in the third grade? A lot of people seem to think proper English usage is unnecessary, especially online. They are wrong. There are a number of reasons to speak and write properly -- clarity, for instance. But in the workplace, proper language usage is vital. Especially in this new, disastrous economy, you need to do anything you can to put yourself ahead of other employees and applicants. Even people who themselves are incapable of forming a correct sentence can recognize when someone else is writing or speaking properly. It's impressive. It says "I am a well-educated professional person, and I take my job seriously." You don't have to be pedantic like me, and point out everyone's mistakes, unless that's part of your job (it's part of mine). But by employing proper usage, you're making a statement about yourself. It's as important as business-appropriate clothing and personal hygiene, or showing up to work on time. If you're not a writer and editor like me, you may have fallen out of practice, or you may be making mistakes you don't know are mistakes. You don't have to take classes or read grammar guides to improve your business English, although that would help. You just need to start consciously paying attention to your speaking and writing. By eliminating carelessness, I assure you your English will improve quickly. Here are some tips to get you started, based on common mistakes I see in my job. 1.) Use your computer's spell check function, but never rely on it. If the spell check in your word processing software or on your web browser identifies a word as misspelled, don't just let the program fix it. Check it yourself -- sometimes the spell checker makes mistakes. Also, read through and edit your text even if you've used the spell check. When I originally typed this very paragraph, I wrote "word precessing." Since "precessing" is a real word, the spell check didn't catch it. 2.) Pluralize properly. The plural of "mouse" is "mice," but the plural of "computer mouse" is "computer mouses." Yes, really. Words that end in "s" just get an apostrophe, so it's "my boss' car," not "my boss's car," unless you're in England. There is no such word as "mediums." The plural of "medium" is "media." So say "I am an artist in several different media." "Data" is always plural; the singular form is "datum" (isn't Latin fun?). And proper pluralization brings us to: 3.) Subject verb agreement. What's wrong with this sentence? "The group of high school seniors and sophomores were late for the big game." The problem is that "group" is the subject of the sentence, not "seniors" and "sophomores." And group is singular -- "the group WAS late for the big game." Always make sure your verb matches your subject. Likewise, "the mainstream media are castigating Obama," not "is castigating." 4.) Only use quotation marks for quotes. That's it. Don't use them for emphasis. Some people will put quotes around a word when they're using the word sarcastically -- "Jane went to see her so-called 'boyfriend.'" This is okay on occasion, but don't do it all the time. And as that last sentence showed, a quote within a quote gets 'these marks,' whatever they're called (I didn't claim to know everything). The final quotation mark goes after the punctuation. "Understand me?" 5.) Another pet peeve. "Literally" does not mean "a whole lot." It means "take what I saw as literal, not figurative." So "his head literally exploded" is wrong, if you mean he got angry. It's only correct if his head *literally* exploded -- like in the movie *Scanners*. Say "he jumped the gun" if someone started something too early, and "he literally jumped the gun" if the person was in a footrace, and started running before the starter pistol fired. 6.) I'll leave you with this quote, apocryphally attributed to Winston Churchill:"Ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with which I will not put!" I could go on for days, but this is a good start. This stuff is really easy, and following these "minutiae" will make you, your writing, and any work you do seem more professional. Oh, and please don't confuse "its" and "it's." *It's* really annoying, and English has *its* rules for a reason!