

Banishing Business Jargon

QUICK HELP

BASIC

EXPANDED

PROFESSIONAL

K.D. SULLIVAN

The purpose of words is to communicate ideas. When you use plain language, you'll be understood more clearly, and you'll also enhance your credibility; many people think those who say things in a more "complicated" way are either pretentious or trying to hide their lack of real knowledge.

Jargon in the form of technical terminology has value when it's shorthand for specific, complex concepts understood by a relative few. Used sparingly, it can also assure clients and business associates that you're familiar with the industry and with issues they care about. But a little jargon goes a long way. In most cases, you'll communicate more clearly using well-known, time-tested words.

This aid will help you avoid wordiness and redundancy, lighten the load of jargon and buzzwords in your business communications, and use simple, standard language instead. It will make your writing more succinct, clearer, and better received.



Watch for Wordiness and Redundancy

To tighten and simplify your writing, ask yourself if you could say the same thing with one or two words instead of six or seven. Make sure every word is necessary and eliminate those that aren't. Here are some phrases that might sound professional or proper to some but that simply contain too many words:

Wordy or Redundant Phrase	Suggested Alternative
advance planning	planning
assembled together	assembled
at some juncture	when
at this point in time	now
circle around back	regroup
cooperate together	cooperate
due to the fact that	because
enclosed herewith	enclosed
for the purpose of	to

continued



Wordy or Redundant Phrase	Suggested Alternative
fully cognizant of	know
in spite of the fact that	although
in the affirmative/negative	yes/no
in the field of	In
in the not too distant future	soon
in view of the fact that	because
join together	join
my personal choice	my choice
rarely ever	rarely
return back	return
small in size	small
the present incumbent	the incumbent

Tip: Is it a technical term, or just jargon? Here's how to decide: If there's a standard English word or brief phrase that means the same thing, you're probably dealing with jargon. If there's no ready synonym, you may need to use the special term.

Reword the Buzzwords

Whether they're called buzzwords, catchphrases, or jargon, these words are used for many reasons. People may hear them so often that they come to mind automatically, they may feel that they're expected to use a certain vocabulary in their work, or they may see jargon as a time-saving way to communicate. And sometimes it is.

Unfortunately, some catchphrases are used so frequently, they become anything but catchy. Instead, they often convey only vague meaning—or different meanings—to different people. People also hear them so often they tune them out—so these overworked terms can actually hinder clear communication.

Here are just some of the many buzzwords abroad in business today, with definitions and some possible substitutions:

Buzzword/Jargon	Meaning/Alternative Wording
800-pound gorilla	largest or most important item, feature, person, etc.

continued

Buzzword/Jargon	Meaning/Alternative Wording
actionable	can be readily done (<i>actionable</i> has a different, specific legal meaning)
at the end of the day	in the end, finally
Band-Aid	temporary fix
bandwidth	capacity
boot camp	training program
bounce x off y	ask for y 's thoughts or opinion on x
bring to the table	have to offer
bring x along	include, persuade
buy in (verb), buy-in (noun)	cooperate, cooperation; agree, agreement; consent
core competencies	what we do best
create energy around	promote
deep pockets	wealthy, has abundant resources
deliverable	a promised product or item
dialogue (verb)	talk with, speak to, discuss
dog and pony show	presentation
driver	agent of change
end-to-end	complete, comprehensive
enterprise	business
facilitate	help, make possible
from day one	from the start
functionality	functions, features
gain traction	gain influence or popularity
get a handle on	understand
going forward	in the future, from now on
granular	detailed
grow (a business, etc.)	enlarge, enhance, expand
hired gun	expert, consultant
incent, incentivize	encourage, influence
intellectual capital	knowledge
leverage	use an existing resource for another purpose
mission-critical	vital
net-net	final result
no-brainer	easy decision
offline	in private

continued

Buzzword/Jargon	Meaning/Alternative Wording
on board	hired; committed to
on the same page	understand or talk about the same thing
paradigm shift	change in approach or thinking
push back (verb), pushback (noun)	resist, resistance
push the envelope	test the limits
ramp up/ramp down	increase/decrease
robust	reliable, works well
run it up the flagpole	test it for approval
scalable	flexible, expandable
solution	product or service
space	niche or market segment
step up to the plate	take responsibility
talking point	subject for discussion
turnkey	ready to operate
win-win	mutually beneficial
work-around	way to circumvent to a problem

If you liked *Banishing Business Jargon*, you might also be interested in *15 Tips for Effective Writing*, *Words Most Often Confused*, *Words Most Often Misspelled*, and *Writing for the World—A Guide to Globalization*. And for more help in the world of words, see our entire set of easy-to-use [Job Aids for Effective Communication](#) that give you quick, clear guidance as you prepare anything from a memo to a manual to a web page.