

CRINGEWORTHY

The other day a superintendent responded to an e-mail I sent him with the one-liner that sends shudders down my spine. For me, it's like the sound of nails on a chalkboard or the thought of chewing on tissue. It's just plain cringeworthy.

"Your welcome," the superintendent wrote.

Many of you are cringing yourselves. The rest of you are probably scratching your heads, wondering what's wrong. Those of you in the latter group are missing the point, and it may be hurting your careers. Why? It's "you're welcome." Always. It's never, ever "your welcome."

Again, many of you – most of you, hopefully – know this. The rest of you likely fire off grammatically incorrect notes on a daily basis that make you look sloppy at best.

People at all levels of the business world are guilty of grammatical incorrectness – it's not just the occasional superintendent. It's my coworkers (not fellow editors, though!), marketing practitioners and personal acquaintances. It's older folks, middle-aged people and young professionals, too. Although those who've come of age texting, Facebooking, Tweeting are entering the workforce more grammatically challenged than the generations before them (soon we'll be worrying about the widespread use of "ur welcome").

You may be thinking that proper grammar doesn't matter because it doesn't affect how well you grow grass or manage a budget. You're wrong.

Grammar is about credibility. If your resume and cover letter are fraught with *yours* that should be *you're*s or *theres* that should be *theirs*, it reflects poorly on you and it might prevent you from landing an interview. Potential employers know that grammatical mistakes may reflect several things: You're careless, you're not well educated or you're unprofessional. Any or all of these may mean you have other bad habits, you're not detail-oriented or that you'd present badly at green committee meetings or in your interactions with owners. You don't want any of those assumptions being made about you, do you?



Marisa Palmieri Senior editor

As a takeaway message, I offer my Most Cringeworthy Grammar Mistakes List:

YOUR/YOU'RE

- *Your* is a possessive pronoun ("your course").
- *You're* is a contraction for *you are* ("you're welcome"). Contractions are easy if you remember that the apostrophe replaces the omitted letter. In *you're*, the apostrophe replaces the *a* in *are*, which is why it's always "you're welcome."

PLURALS & POSSESSIVES

- In almost all cases, you make words plural by adding an *s* or *ies*. Apostrophes don't make words plural; they indicate possessiveness. Hence, the plural of *employee* is *employees*, not *employee's*.
- To make a singular word possessive, simply add an apostrophe ("crew's equipment").
- It gets tricky when the word ends in *s*. For proper nouns like names, add an apostrophe ("Russ' computer"). Add an *'s* to make a singular common noun possessive ("boss's plan"). However, if the next word starts with an *s*, only add an apostrophe ("boss' schedule").

THERE/THERE/THEY'RE

- *There* refers to a place ("over there"). This may be a silly way to remember it, but an English teacher once taught me that *there* refers to a place, and both words end in the letter *e*.
- *Their* is a plural possessive pronoun ("their house"). Again, a weird tip: *Their* refers to people, it contains the letter *i* and I am a person.
- *They're* is a contraction for "they are." In *they're*, the apostrophe replaces the letter *a* in *are*.

IT'S/ITS

- *It's* is a contraction for *it is*. ("It's my job.")
 - *Its* is a possessive pronoun, which means it functions like other pronouns such as *his*, *her* and *their*. ("The mower was at the end of its life.")
- Got it? Now that we have that settled, I feel much better. You're welcome. **GCI**

Marisa Palmieri

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EDITORIAL

GIE Media, Inc.
4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor
Richfield, OH 44286
Phone: 800-456-0707
Fax: 330-659-0823

Mike Zawacki
Editor
mzawacki@gie.net

Marisa Palmieri
Senior editor
mpalmieri@gie.net

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