

Why is writing so hard?

And writing clearly even harder? As a writer, I make mistakes and my stuff has typos. Occasionally, I use the wrong word. But most of the time, I catch these mistakes. However, most people seem to have no idea. Recently, through my work, I encountered the frequent misuse of the following words: effect/affect and ensure/assure. Check out this useful post on Copyblogger about frequently misused words, which is helpful for reference. Another frequent mistake is using the word which instead of that or vice versa. In general terms, we use which only after a comma, to set off a separate phrase. Also, referring to businesses or corporations as “them” or “they.” Use it/it’s (the corporation, although employing people, is an entity not a person or a collection of people). Another pet peeve of mine is when people use that instead of who when referring to other human beings, as in: “you know Julie that lives in DC?” It should be “you know Julie who lives in DC.”

But what is most sad to me is how infrequently people even recognize mistakes. Grammatical mistakes abound in spoken English, especially on TV. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard an anchor or reporter use a completely convoluted sentence. We are human and we make mistakes, but we can also correct mistakes and improve, right? In my opinion, this dearth of writing skills is linked directly to lack of reading. Readers, especially avid readers, are exposed to good writing. Readers can recognize spelling, grammar, usage by exposure. I know that this is true for me. I don’t often know the grammatical terminology for something, but I recognize if it is used correctly.

I may start keeping a log of writing goofs. If you would like to share some, please do so in the comments.