

Write well or fail

On Monday, I came across a letter to the editor in the Washington Post that made me nod my head vigorously. The author, David Klinger was writing about the Scripps Spelling Bee coverage, and I think you should read his letter:

I have written for a federal agency throughout a 34-year career. I had to pass a spelling test before graduating from the University of North Carolina's journalism school. Yet I turn to the dictionary half a dozen times a day to check a word or reconfirm a spelling. That's the nature of good, careful writing.

Memorization of words like "thanatophidia" (which isn't even in my Webster's) or "bondieuserie" for the Scripps spelling bee is about as relevant to me – or to today's generation of texters and youthful online denizens – as a buggy whip.

Scripps included, we desperately need to acquaint the next generation with a few, basic English grammar skills that seem to have disappeared amid society's collective cyber-mania: complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, correct punctuation and that all-important axiom that "an apostrophe does not a plural make."

David Klinger, Martinsburg, W.Va.

Basic grammar skills are disappearing left and right. I see the use of apostrophes to make plurals ALL the time. People just don't get it. However, to those in the know, using grammar poorly makes you look dumb. There is no other way to describe it. In marketing and PR, which are communications-based disciplines, writing well is key. It is key because if your grammar, spelling or sentence structure don't add up, you are probably not getting your thoughts through clearly.

Over on the Journalistics blog, Jessica Love writes "The Write Stuff: Still the #1 PR Skill." Yes, it should be, but no, many PR practitioners don't have it. We can blame many things from a failing school system to an overreliance on short form messaging, but the responsibility to straighten out your writing skills lies with you.

Write well, or fail to communicate.