

# Unforced errors (in the copy)

Unforced copy errors are errors (i.e., typos, misspellings, grammatical flubs, etc.) that would have been caught if either you gave yourself enough time to take a second (and third) look at what you were doing; or you had someone else check your copy.

Many people don't notice or even care about copy errors. But if you are like me, errors just jump out at you, no matter where they are—on the TV chyron, on a menu, in the newspaper, in a book.

Errors can reflect poorly on you and your organization. Errors in printed or published copy show that you either didn't care enough or didn't know enough to notice. When you are producing marketing materials or anything that will have a longer shelf life than a social media post, errors will last and you must be careful to eliminate them.

Following are four examples I found in the past ten days:

## **Program flyer**

Error: Headline does not match with body of flyer. Whoever produced this flyer, copied the previous flyer from the January program, put in the description of the February program featuring journalist Ruth Marcus, not Ambassador Susan Rice, and then neglected to update the headline.

Talk of the Hill with Bill Press featuring  
Susan Rice, former UN Ambassador  
Tuesday, January 18, 7 pm

Award winning journalist Bill Press talks to Ruth Marcus, a deputy editor of the Washington Post editorial page and regular columnist. With a law degree as well as her journalism credentials, Marcus was perfectly situated to write "Supreme Ambition: Brett Kavanaugh and the Conservative Takeover," which The New York Times called "impressively reported, highly insightful and a rollicking good read."

**Bill Press** is host of the nationally syndicated "Bill Press Show" on talk radio, and his weekly column is distributed by Tribune Media Services. A well-known political commentator, Press began his career on KABC-TV and KCOP-TV, both in Los Angeles. Over the course of his career, he has received numerous awards for his work, including four Emmys and a Golden Mike Award. Press is the author of six books: "Spin This!", "Bush Must Go!", "How The Republicans Stole Christmas", "Trainwreck", "Toxic Talk", "The Obama Hate Machine", and his latest, "From the Left."

Error: A man is not “them.” If you know the gender of the person, there is nothing wrong with using the right pronoun, in this case, “him.” It seems that this story was updated when it became known that the victim was male, but the writer did not bother to read the rest of the sentence.

Montgomery County firefighters are seen on the tracks of Metro after rescuing a woman from under a Metro train. (Courtesy Montgomery County Fire and Rescue)

Share This Gallery:

A man suffered life-threatening, traumatic injuries after a Metro train struck them not far from the Rockville, Maryland, station Tuesday morning.

Metro Transit police said in a tweet that the man had climbed a fence next to the Metro tracks in Montgomery County.

The train struck the man about a quarter of a mile from the Rockville station around 5:40 a.m., according to Montgomery County Fire and Rescue spokesman Pete Piringer.

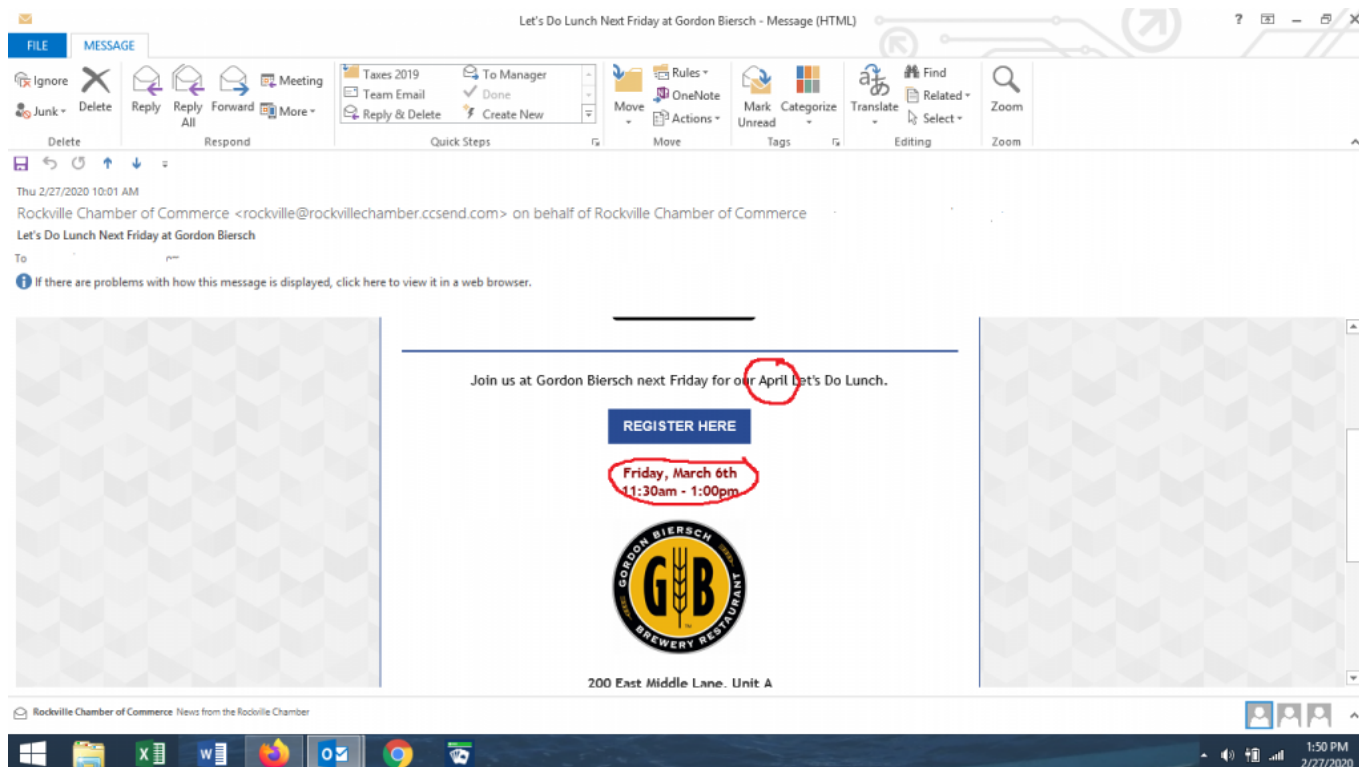
Firefighters rescued the man from under the train as passengers stayed on board.

Backyard Band performs at DC go-go bill signing

Deposit \$25,000 today and EARN

## Email invitation

Error: This email is an invitation to a program taking place in March, yet calls it the April program. The organization sent out a corrected email a few minutes later. I would bet speed was the main culprit here. Instead of making this task take less time, the speediness ended up taking more time and effort to correct. Is this a fatal mistake? Not nearly, but it is increasingly common to get emails listing the wrong dates, locations, days of the week, etc.



**Words that sound the same don't mean the same...**

Error: The owner of this Twitter profile used "principle" instead of "principal." This person wrote the description years ago when first setting up the Twitter account and has never bothered to review it.



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**Bottom line:** All of these errors are small, unforced and most importantly, *avoidable*. Next time you are writing something that will be public-facing, take a breath, slow down, and hit pause before you publish. Always read over what you wrote (I like to read out loud so I can hear the errors) or ask someone else to take a look. If you made a mistake and it has already been publicized, fix it if possible.