

Save us from the horror of read rage

 By [Llewellyn Kriel](#)

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Along with Dean Koontz, my favourite living author is Stephen King. Not only do these supreme masters scare the holy bejabbbers out of me, but they're also Stradivariuses in the use of English.

As music heightens tension in movies, Koontz's exquisite use of onomatopoeia creates real, audible soundtracks for his novels. He has made a point of including the mellifluous "susurrant" (look it up) in every one of his 60-odd (pun) novels - and I can't wait to read it in the next Odd Thomas tale.

Both King and Koontz create horror and suspense through blurring the lines between the mundane and the supra-mundane, between the commonplace and the horrific. But the one line they do not blur is that between good language and the kind of horrific dross that passes for English today.

Irritating expressions

I recently came across an article that listed some of the words and expressions that most irritate King. They include linguistic fossils such as "at this point in time" and "at the end of the day", as well as the more trendy "that's so cool" and "LOL". He detests the lame phrases that are stock fodder of our media such as "people say", "many believe" and "the consensus is", describing them as the "kind of lazy attribution" that "makes me want to kick something".

I have come to the conclusion that I suffer from "read rage". Whether as hardcopy or online, I can only read a report or opinion piece as far as the first careless spelling or grammatical error and I am so consumed with rage that I can read no further. And don't try to excuse a blatant blunder as a "typo" because that only tells me you cannot be bothered to proofread or subedit your own work adequately.

I laud the perspicacity of whoever said grammar is "the difference between knowing your sh*t and knowing you're sh*t". Grammar and accuracy are politeness and caring in print. I spend too much of my day quivering with the righteous rage of the genuinely affronted at phrases like "game changer", "according to", "awesome", "on the other hand", "decimate", "hospitalised" and "no-brainer".

Proofing your own work

When I see through the red mist, I'm left saddened by the seemingly blithe relinquishment of media's role as reputable users of English and credible custodians of grammar. The problem often starts before the subs desk, with poor copy from the journalists. Journalists, who don't know a split infinitive from a gerund and don't check their own facts, flood the

beleaguered subs desk stretched so tight that consistent grand-scale mop-ups are impossible.

And if, as many would have us believe (and with apologies to CSN), you really can't employ the best; best train the ones you have. That's why excellent on-the-job training facilities such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism exist.

After all, great journos able to proof their own work don't come out of a vending machine, they're grown that way.

Llewellyn Kriel will be facilitating Proofing and Subediting Basics, for junior subs and journos on 27, 28 October 2014. Contact Sandra on write@iaj.org.za for more information or to book.

ABOUT LLEWELLYN KRIEL

Llewellyn Kriel is CEO of TopEditor International, a media services company based in Johannesburg and serving markets in SA, the USA and United Kingdom. He has 38 years of frontline experience in journalism, corporate affairs and marketing. Vast experience, in-depth knowledge, creative solutions, exceptional writing skills, proven leader & mentor, with much to learn and more to give.

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