

Four ways to use specificity in your communication



By [Tiffany Markman](#)

25 Nov 2011

My grandmother was a remarkable woman. Outspoken. Opinionated.

She did yoga years before it was chic. She grew bean sprouts in jars under the sink before they were considered health food. When my grandpa proposed, she asked for a fridge instead of a diamond ring. She was English-speaking but she taught me Afrikaans. And to read. When I was three.

She was deeply practical. And she was known for a passionate attachment to nuance. To detail. Nothing drove her more crazy than inaccuracy.

She had a tracksuit. (And she wasn't a tracksuit person. She was a patterned-dress-with-matching-belt person. She wore cardigans. And sensible shoes.) The tracksuit was blue. But every time you suggested she wear her blue tracksuit, she'd say, "It's not *blue*. It's *turquoise*, dammit!" She was right.

1. If there's a more accurate way to say something, say it

Don't tell your audience you're a blogger. Tell them you're a travel blogger, a food blogger, a fashion blogger. Don't say you're in the financial sector; say you're an investment banker. Don't write about your year-end function. Write about the company's summer picnic. Its gala banquet. Its Arabian night.

I've always believed that the best communication is the kind that happens via detail. People buy into ideas, concepts, brands and messages much more quickly when they are (or seem) real and intricate. Or genuine and random.

2. Don't give your reader an 'either-or'. Just give one option.

If you're honest with yourself, it's a waste of words to write things such as:

- "It's either right or it's wrong."
- "Use short sentences, not long sentences."
- "Would you like to proceed, or not?"

Give a single option. The positive one. And let people assume the alternative.

3. Don't say things that are the opposite of what you mean

"Where are my car keys? *I'm sure* I left them on the entrance hall table."

But I'm not sure. In fact, I'm completely unsure. We do this a lot. We say, "I'm a bit hungry," when we mean, "I'm bleedin' ravenous." We write, "It was literally freezing." But guess what? It wasn't. It was just a bit overcast. At most.

Get into the habit of using words that accurately reflect your meaning and the extent to which what you are saying is true. So if you're completely uncertain about the location of your keys, say, "I have no idea where my keys are."

This technique of taking ownership of, and responsibility for, your meaning injects your writing and speaking with a lot of credibility and a lot of gravity.

4. Wherever possible, draw the reader or listener a picture

If I tell you about a "big tree", can you imagine the tree I mean? Is it spiky or feathery? Leafy or stark? Straight or crooked? You don't really know.

But if I say "Jacaranda", you see a picture in your head. It's probably purple. And in a few seconds, we're both seeing the same thing. We're connected.

Remember that when you use accurate and specific nouns, and proper nouns (names) wherever possible, your readers or listeners can create pictures in their minds. And then they know exactly what you mean. Message: received.

So, it's not a tiny puppy; it's a Yorkshire terrier. It's not a fancy car; it's a Bentley. It's not a delicious meal; it's a mezze platter. Got it? Thanks. Enjoy.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.
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