

Creating credibility at the word level

Words to use	Words to avoid	Note
Concrete words that link to specific objects. Not <i>We installed a new facility in the office</i> BUT <i>We installed a new printer in the office.</i>	abstract (<i>resource, aspect, item, facility</i>)	You can visualise concrete words. You can't visualise abstract words with confidence unless they are connected to concrete words. For example, 'The first item (abstract word) on the agenda about the new way of claiming payment (concrete) needs urgent attention'.
Concise, economical, not pompous words or redundant words.	verbose (<i>scintillate, scintillate, globule vivific</i>) redundant (<i>recur again, cooperate together</i>)	Use words economically. Don't say the same thing twice (or more). This is called 'redundancy'. For example, 'Let's collaborate together' because 'collaborate' means 'to work together'. Another example is 'free gratis'. Yet another: 'Once more, revisiting Anne Bolelyn yet again' (Janet Maslin in <i>The New York Times</i> .)
Clear words: Use 'because' rather than 'as', because 'as' can refer to time rather than reason.	ambiguous (<i>as/since, and/or</i>)	Avoid ambiguity. Instead of 'As I was late', use 'Because I was late'.
Current words, not old-fashioned ones that very few people use these days.	archaic (<i>we deem it advisable, we hereby acknowledge, amongst, whilst, perusal, the said document</i>)	Avoid using archaic words, that is, words that people don't use anymore, such as 'erstwhile' and 'quondam'.
Formal words, not casual, spoken expressions.	abbreviations (<i>e.g., etc., i.e., viz</i>) colloquialisms (<i>a stint with, in the throes of</i>) contractions (<i>I'd, it's, we'd, you'll, don't</i>)	When you are writing in academic and professional settings, avoid using words that are casual and conversational—words that you would use colloquially in speaking with your friends or when you are on social media. For example, 'whatever'.
Words that are already in the dictionary.	coined words (<i>crowdsourcing, criticality, biosimilar, relatable</i>)	Words are constantly coined, but use words in formal, professional writing that people use and that are already in the dictionary. For example, avoid words such as 'influencible' and 'efficator' because they are not yet widely used.
	initialisms and COIK acronyms (<i>clear only if known to the reader</i>)	Acronyms can be pronounced as words. For example, QANTAS for Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Initialisms are pronounced letter by letter. For example, the CIA. Avoid them, unless you know that your readers are familiar with them.

Original, fresh words and expressions.	buzz expressions/clichés (<i>synergy, ballpark figure, gameplan, revenue driven, going forward, at the end of the day</i>)	Buzz expressions are words and phrases that are used in the workplace, such as ‘ballpark figure’, ‘let’s kick this into the long grass’, ‘level playing field’, ‘hindsighting of credit decisions’. I recently wrote an article on buzzwords: http://theconversation.com/from-opening-the-kimono-to-incentivizing-the-war-against-corporate-buzzwords-rages-on-92657 Clichés are expressions that are tired and stale. For example, ‘through thick and thin’, ‘a viable alternative’.
Simple words. Don’t use big words to ‘sound smart’.	pompous (<i>Sedulously eschew all polysyllabic profundity.</i>) esoteric (<i>quotidian</i>)	Avoid being esoteric, that is, using words that are obscure and that you need an unabridged dictionary to locate the meanings of. For example, ‘Lusby would have been sure of an aegrotat’ (J I M Stewart).
Appropriate jargon that you know your readers will be familiar with.	unnecessary/unfamiliar jargon (<i>to the arboreal primates</i>)	
Consistent terminology. Once you start to use a noun, keep using it for consistency. Don’t vary it for variety.	‘thesaurus syndrome’ (<i>firm, company, organisation, corporation; program, project, job, assignment</i>)	Teachers often say: ‘vary your vocabulary’, but don’t use variations of words just because you think that your reader will be bored if you use the same word twice. For example, using variations such as ‘openings’, then ‘vacancies’, then ‘positions’ in a job application letter will confuse your readers. This is called the ‘thesaurus syndrome’ or ‘elegant variation’.
Authoritative, not ‘wishy-washy’.	apologetic (<i>due to time constraints</i>) equivocal (<i>tends to stem from</i>) defensive (<i>After reading this report, I hope you find it satisfactory</i>)	Be authoritative. Convince your reader that you know what you are talking about, that you are an authority.
Sincere/genuine: <i>I would appreciate a reply.</i>	presumptuous (<i>I presume you will do me the courtesy of a reply.</i>)	Don’t be presumptuous. For example, you would not write in a request to a person whom you want to write a reference for you for a job: ‘I know that I can count on your support’. or write in a job application: ‘Judging from my career so far, I believe I should get this job’.
Measured, not exaggerated: <i>Those statistics are well established.</i>	hyperbolic (<i>Those statistics have been around for decades.</i>)	Don’t exaggerate, even if you think that your reader will know that you are just doing it for effect. This is called ‘hyperbole’ (pronounced ‘highperbollee’). An advertiser might use it to make a point, such as in

		'Only two things really matter: Light chocolate and dark chocolate', but you should avoid it.
Impartial, not biased	biased (<i>Obviously, we prefer to use our own experts.</i>) polemic (<i>Everyone should be able to read statistics.</i>)	
Positive tone <i>This shop stays open till 8 pm</i> rather than <i>This shop closes at 8 pm.</i>	negative (<i>bar, fail, decline, reject, exclude</i>)	
Correct spelling	incorrect spelling, confusable words (<i>affect/effect; lead/led; principal/principle, stationary/stationery</i>)	
Familiar, not foreign	foreign (<i>modus operandi, quid pro quo, fait accompli, chutzpah</i>)	Avoid using foreign expressions such as 'bien pensant', 'soi-disant', 'au contraire', 'chutzpah', 'schadenfreude'.
Inclusive of gender (<i>Every employee enjoys their time off.</i> <i>All employees enjoy their time off.</i>)	discriminatory (<i>the generic 'he' or 'she'</i>) (<i>Every employee enjoys his time off.</i> <i>Every employee enjoys her time off.</i>) Unless you are writing about organisations that employ only female or only male staff.	
Avoid the 'weasel' words in the opposite column.	weasel ('crutch') words (<i>absolutely, actually, apparently, as it were, basically, certainly, clearly, definitely, essentially, frankly, fundamentally, generally, highly, literally, merely, naturally, obviously, quite, really, simply, to be honest, very, virtually, with all due respect</i>)	Weasel words are words that suck meaning out of accompanying words. 'Basically' is probably the one most commonly used.