can benefit from the careful attention of a skilled second reader. Here are a few examples of things that should never have been sent out by the business concerned — but they were!

One of the nation’s largest banks sent a letter to “Dear Bill Jones (not his real name).” There’s nothing wrong with “Dear Mr. Jones.” At least, they didn’t open with “Dear Mr. Jones.” Aside from the bad grammar, it’s just plain awkward. Mr. Jones did not avail himself of the opportunity offered.

The same bank referred to above sent Mr. Jones another missive apologizing for a letter they sent telling him that if something is “needless to say” and in another “it goes without saying,” then don’t say it!

Another unit at the college sent a letter asking for money. It was a nice letter, but it took 320 words to get its message across. Just a little bit of tightening out it to 250 words. Most people resent it when others waste their time by being “windy”; then they turn right around and do the same thing to someone else.

---

"Thou shalt learn to use and respect the comma, which, like dynamite, is small and powerful."

Remedies
If you recognize your business and its communications in any of the above, there are things you can do to remedy your problems. In the short run, you can get professional help. Believe it or not, there still are people who have a firm grasp of the English language and are able to help others remember whatever they might have learned a long time ago about good writing.

For the long haul, the obvious answer is to do whatever you and your business can to improve the system that produces your future employees — our schools. Perhaps the education system needs to be reminded that even with all the technology now available to us, a command of the language is still as much of a necessity for success in the business world as it was 50 years ago. And grammar has to be taught; it can’t be learned through osmosis.

It might also help you if you see to it that your staffers follow “The 12 Commandments” of good writing.

1. Thou shalt remember, above all else, that accuracy counts.
2. Thou shalt employ thy brain first, then use spell check and grammar check.
3. Thou shalt learn to use and respect the comma, which, like dynamite, is small and powerful.
4. Thou shalt watch keenly for the cliché, which thou shalt smite hip and thigh.
5. Thou shalt always remember that, in the English language, the best order of presentation of information is: Subject-Predicate-Object.
6. Thou shalt pay due respect to brevity, remembering that conciseness is an aid to communication.
7. Thou shalt treasure short words, leaving their longer brethren to less skillful writers.
8. Thou shalt strive for active voice in thy writing, reserving the passive for those special situations where it works best.
9. Thou shalt seek out strong verbs, for they possess power.
10. Thou shalt give deep thought to the nature of thine audience before putting fingers to keyboard because it affects thy style.
11. Thou shalt remember that “close” counts in horseshoes, not grammar.
12. Thou shalt engrave permanently on thy brain — because their proper use is the only way to guarantee entry at the Pearly Gates — that “its” is the possessive pronoun and “it’s” is the contraction.

Finally, always keep in mind that your messages, wherever or in whatever format they appear, create the image the public has of you and your business. It’s up to you to ensure that it is the one you want it to be."