Tip of the Month: Beware of buzzwords and other tips for cutting clichés

Roy Peter Clark has taught writing at Poynter to Pointers of all ages since 1979. He has served the Institute as its first full-time president, and senior scholar. Recently, Poynter.org published some of Clark’s tips for cutting clichés from the book “Help! For Writers.”

1. Don’t worry about the occasional cliché. I know writers who say they want to ban clichés from their own work and the work of others. Not only is the effort futile. It’s counterproductive. Not all clichés are created equal (is “created equal” a cliché?). Some, though recognizable, are picturesque and retain the ability to delight—at least in certain contexts. Two of my favorites are “rise to the occasion” and “whistling past the graveyard.”

2. When tempted by a cliché, give yourself one minute to think of an alternative.
   - That idea is too old.
   - That new idea is not new.
   - That idea is in cold storage.
   - Did you find that in an antique clothing store?

3. Make sure you understand the origin of the cliché. It’s “too the line” not “toe the line,” from old boxing rules requiring a struggling fighter to step to a line drawn in the dirt, demonstrating his ability to continue battle. It is “soft-pedal” or “soft-pedal?” Look it up.

4. Conduct a Google search on your cliché. Perhaps it is not as overused as you think—or more overused.

All writers suffer, at one time or another, from what critic Harold Bloom described as “the anxiety of influence.” When I use a familiar phrase, I often find the need to track it down. If there are only a few users, I won’t be plagiarizing; but I may be far short of the original language I seek.

For more of Clark’s tips, click here.

ICYMI: ACCRS Once Again Up for Public Review

The beginning of Alabama’s Legislative Session often brings about a renewed interest in education policy and education standards. With that in mind, and in an effort to be completely transparent and amenable to the concerns of parents, educators, education policy makers, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALDOE) invites legislators and the public to examine the STANDARDS FOR YOURSELF.

Annually, the ALDOE posts on line for public consumption, review, and feedback the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (ACCRS) for English/Language Arts and Mathematics—the goals for what students should know by the end of the school year.

Anyone can visit the Standards Review Homepage on the ALDOE website and review the standards released directly from Kindergarten through the 12th grade. Those visiting the Standard Review page can review each standard one by one, choose whether they agree or disagree with the standard, and, if they disagree, leave feedback as to why they disagree on a comments page. The standards are currently posted and will remain up and open for feedback through Monday, March 14, 2016.

At the conclusion of the public review, the feedback generated will go to the state English/Language Arts and Mathematics Course of Study (COS) teams. The comments that will be considered for action by the teams are those of academic substance that are tied specifically to a standard. The COS teams may then provide recommendations to the Alabama State Board of Education.

Resource: How to Handle Stakeholder Complaints Via Social Media

There is a right way and a million wrong ways to handle customer complaints via social media. The wrong ways could damage your reputation and lose you customers and credibility. Take a look at the Social Media Ethics Manual: For Public Relations has compiled all the material on how to handle critics on social media with grace and speed. Suggestions include not deleting negative comments, not taking criticism personally, and moving the conversation offline.

Toolkit Helps Parents Track Child’s Progress from Pre-K-12

Although most parents do not have a degree in education, they will do all they can to help their children succeed in school. A new resource, the Parent Toolkit, from NBC News’s Education Nation seeks to help parents support their children’s growth in all areas, academic and otherwise. Resources such as videos, guides, and growth charts are focused on health and wellness; academic pursuits; and social and emotional development. Share this toolkit with parents in your district to empower partners with educators to help their children succeed.

ICSMCA Conference Set for March 4

The time has come for another exciting Alabama School Public Relations Association (ICSMCA) conference, and this year’s event is March 4 in Vestavia Hills.

Elevate your knowledge of communication for schools in Alabama and Join us for an informative day of communication strategies and tips for all levels of staff at local schools and associated education organizations.

Among the breakout sessions are: “Back to Basics: Going Social; Communication Plan Checklist; How to Communicate Assessment Data, and Advocacy Boundaries for School PR. Register now!

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