

CONTRABAND WORDS

Yearbook copy gets a bad rap: It's often cluttered with platitudes and generalities. Here's a list of words to automatically edit out or replace with better reporting.

Always delete these words

- Very
- Fun-filled
- Awesome
- Really
- Seems
- Feels

And these punctuation marks

- All exclamation points.
- Semicolons. Yearbook paragraphs should be shorter than 41 words. A sentence with a semicolon will take up much space. Simply break the two independent clauses apart and use a period.
- Commas before "and" in a series: Red, white and blue.
- Ellipses... Short sentences... are better than... choppy ones.

Avoid redundancy

- This year or next year
- The name of your school
- The name of your mascot

Avoid weak questions

- MY FAVORITE PART — Don't ask "What's your favorite part" questions because the responses are short and always contain "my favorite part of"
- FOR MY FUTURE — The book isn't about your future. It's about your now.
- NEXT YEAR — Sports teams always like to talk about next year. Don't let them. "I agree you will be so much stronger next year. Let's come back to this year. What would you change if you could go back and make some adjustments?"

Ask good follow-up questions

- DEDICATION — "Tell me what dedication means in this case." "Can you give me an example?"

- DILIGENCE — "Describe for me a situation when you showed diligence."
- TEAMWORK — "That's great! Tell me more about how you developed the feeling of teamwork."
- BONDED TOGETHER AS A UNIT — "You know, I hear that a lot. Tell me how bonding helped you. Better yet, tell me some people with whom you bonded and how."
- A YEAR TO REMEMBER — "What sticks out in your mind?"
- HARD WORK — "I know you work so hard. For that person out there who doubts you, or who doesn't know how hard you work, describe for me a typical day in the gym/at band camp/at after school practice, etc."

Avoid these leads

- HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED — "Have you ever wondered what it felt like to cheer in front of a huge crowd?"
- IMAGINE — "Imagine trekking through ancient ruins"
- NO MATTER — "No matter their political beliefs, students could always find interesting clubs to join."
- IN THE END — "In the end, they maintained positivity."
- FROM X TO X — "From winter to fall, the school's surroundings allowed students to enjoy every season."
- WHETHER YOU'RE X OR X — "Whether you're a freshman or senior, there are opportunities to get involved."
- SO IF YOU'RE — "So if you're looking to make friends for life, join this club."

Hallmark called, and they said stop being so sappy

- ALL IN ALL
- IN THE END
- BECAME A FAMILY
- BONDED LIKE SISTERS
- TO LAST A LIFETIME
- YOU MAY NOT KNOW
- BEHIND THE SCENES

Personalize those generalities

- MANY, SOME, SEVERAL and STUDENTS should never stand alone. Instead, follow them with "such as STUDENT NAME" and you will see your copy improve immediately.
- Steer clear of "ONE." This isn't English.

These make our hearts hurt

- "WE CONGRATULATE" — You aren't in the position to congratulate. You simply report other peoples' words.
- "EVERYONE AGREED" — No, they didn't. You didn't ask every one. Until you can use scientific results, stop using the word "everyone" completely.
- "WHEN ASKED TO RESPOND" — Your job is to ask questions, and to stay invisible. Just use the answers to the questions.
- "HARD WORK AND DEDICATION" — The most overused words in all yearbooks, and trees die in vain.

It's this simple: Stop just "writing" and start "reporting"

- Copy and captions need meaningful, colorful, descriptive quotes to make them come to life. Make it a rule for every blurb to have multiple sources and for every caption to include at least one meaningful quote. People like to hear themselves talk.