

CRAIN'S

From the Editor

Let's spell it out: It's always best to get it right

How important is spelling in the social media age, where one's musings flow in bursts of 140 characters (or fewer)? Abbreviations and shorthand — ICYMI, SMH, RT, etc. — are the norm to get your thoughts out ASAP, and fast-texting thumbs often challenge correctness.

Recently, *New York Times* columnist Farhad Manjoo mused about whether spelling matters. His column was written after a torrent of criticism was unleashed on President Donald Trump for misspelling "heal" in a tweet.



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Manjoo's opinion? It's time for the Grammar Police to lighten up. He wrote:

"In a digital age of autocorrect and electronic publications that can be edited from afar, not to mention social media platforms that prize authenticity and immediacy over polish, misspelling has become a mostly forgivable mistake. You simply do not need

to be able to spell as well as people once had to, because we now have tools that can catch and correct our errors — so it's just not a big deal if, on your first draft, you write 'heel' instead of 'heal.'"

As someone who has spent her career immersed in the English language, I beg to differ. The written and spoken word says a lot about who we are, personally and professionally. It also reflects on the companies and organizations we represent.

Effective communication helps convey our thoughts so that others can understand them. A misspelled word is like a giant stop sign that distracts from your intended message. Reading and rereading your writing shows respect for your audience and pride in your work.

That lack of attention to detail is a red flag for any hiring manager, and it's something I've long stressed to young professionals. For me, a misspelling in a job candidate's cover letter or résumé guarantees a one-way trip to the trash can.

Here at *Crain's*, the written word is central to what we do, so we have standards that ensure we stop as many errors as possible. We don't post a story on our website or publish in print unless two editors have read the piece, checking for clarity, grammar, sentence structure, syntax and, of course, spelling. Do mistakes still end up in print and online? Yes, of course, because we are human. And we flog ourselves when those mistakes happen. It's our goal, though, to eliminate as many as we can.

Spell check, autocorrect and the like can become crutches. The English language is complex, confounding and, yes, downright illogical at times. There is only so much spell check can find. Ultimately, nothing beats carefully reading, then rereading your work before hitting send. Better yet, have someone else read it after you've done so. Everyone — and I do mean everyone — needs an editor.

Last week, the Literacy Cooperative of Greater Cleveland held its annual corporate spelling bee in celebration of International Literacy Day. More than two dozen corporate teams participated. Besides highlighting the importance of literacy to our community, the event allowed local professionals to show off their spelling skills.

In a world where some believe that "heal" instead of "heel" is no big deal, the Spelling Bee gives me hope.

I'd love to hear what you think. Does spelling matter in the Twitter age? Share your comments on CrainsCleveland.com, or send me an email at emcintyre@crain.com. And if you are not in the practice of rereading your emails to check for spelling errors, this would be a great place to start.

Spell check doesn't catch everything, and it's the write way to right. (If that last sentence caused you to massage your temples, you definitely understand my message.)
