



# 150 Business Jargon Fixes

## For B2B and B2C Writers

### Introduction

When business writers resort to business jargon, it's because they lack the time, creative energy or subject mastery to find a more exact word or phrase. Unfortunately, B2B and B2C writers face these obstacles day in and day out. It's difficult to come up with a suitable alternative to "solutions" when assignments are coming in by the hour. And in the agency world especially, writers are often forced to write about businesses and industries with which they have very limited experience or knowledge.

This guide is meant to serve as a quick fix for business writers looking for powerful alternatives to the tired phrases that drain all the life out of their content. The information herein was originally published as a series on the Jeff Bullas blog.



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## 150 BUSINESS JARGON PHRASES, WITH BETTER OPTIONS

#-A

**1. 800-pound gorilla.**

Convey the idea with more style by saying a force to be reckoned with.

**2. Actionable.**

An actionable item is one you can take action on. Whether the action is desirable is another story. For that reason, an item may be more clearly described as practical, useful, realistic or workable.

**3. Action item.**

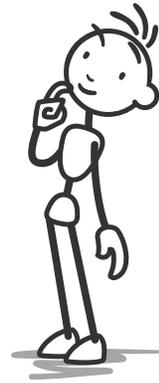
What's the difference between an action and an action item? Other than word count — none.

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**4. Aha moment.**

A trendy way of saying you just discovered something important. Suitable substitutes include revelation and insight.

(Aside: Would an aha moment in a sushi bar be an ahi moment?)



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**5. Around.**

Don't have a discussion around an issue; have a discussion about an issue.

**6. ASAP.**

This means you're in panic mode; you need it so fast you don't even know when you need it!! Spare us the theatrics and just provide a due date.

**7. At the end of the day.**

Any time you write this phrase, your next step is to delete it.

**8. Awesome.**

If you're describing the Grand Canyon or the dimensions of the universe, awesome is fine. Otherwise, find a less sensational (i.e., more realistic) adjective, such as outstanding or exceptional.



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**B**

- 9. Baked in.**  
Instead of saying that a given possibility or fact is baked into something, say it is accounted for.
- 10. Balls in the air.**  
Sound less like a carnival act and more like a business professional by saying that you are busy or have several projects underway.
- 11. Bandwidth.**  
This is a euphemism to make we don't have time sound like it's part of the plan. If you simply say you don't have the time or resources, people will respect your frankness.
- 12. Bells and whistles.**  
These are fancy features added to a product or service to entice prospects. Since bells and whistles suggests unnecessary features, avoid the phrase when talking about your own products.
- 13. Best of breed.**  
"Of breed" adds nothing to "best." Just say you're the best.
- 14. Best regards.**  
How lucky am I to receive your best regards rather than only your regular regards! Don't be pretentious; stick with regards.
- 15. Big bang for the buck.** A sleazy fast-talker's way of saying this or that product or service has exceptionally high value.
- 16. Bleeding edge.** With so many companies on the bleeding edge, it's no wonder the economy is hemorrhaging. Overstatements such as this inspire skepticism. Instead, talk about your groundbreaking business model or new approach.
- 17. Boil the ocean.** To boil the ocean is to waste time. Since not everybody knows this, don't force readers to boil the ocean trying to figure it out.
- 18. Brain dump.** Brain dump is an overly casual way of saying we'll teach you. (At the pretentious extreme, we engage in knowledge transfer.)
- 19. Brain surgery.** This isn't brain surgery has been so overused it carries comical overtones the author may not intend. Better to operate with a straightforward word like complicated.
- 20. Brick and mortar.** Physical locations are best described as such.
- 21. Bring to the table.** This is an overused way of saying a person contributes this or that specific thing to a project or work group.
- 22. Business case.**  
Redundant. If you're talking business, you should simply say case.
- 23. Buy-in.**  
Try support or agreement instead.

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C**24. Champion (as a verb).**

Replace with support, defend or perhaps spearhead.

**25. Change agent.**

A change agent is either a person who works at a toll both or a consultant with a mighty high opinion of himself. Personally, I'd prefer to develop and implement new ideas with the former rather than the latter.

**26. Check the box.**

Replace with complete the task.

**27. Circle back**

A roundabout way of saying discuss later that belongs in the circular file.

**28. Circular file.**

Wastebasket.

**29. Compelling.**

Overused! A 90 percent discount is compelling, but a 5 percent discount is merely interesting. Don't describe something as compelling unless it is.

**30. Competitive advantage.**

This phrase is a puffed up, boardroom-y way of saying your company excels at something.

**31. Content is king.**

A massively overused metaphor that broadcasts your ignorance. King metaphors work for a clear, measurable hierarchy; e.g., The blueberry is the king of antioxidants. Content is one element of a complex marketing system in which all components have unique and essential value.

**32. Contrarian.**

A contrarian is someone who thinks and acts contrary to public opinion. Be careful how you use this, because contrarianism can be seen as a big negative. It's also worth noting that self-described contrarians sometimes turn out merely to be raving lunatics.

**33. Core competencies.**

A fancy way of saying we're good at this. There's nothing wrong with saying we specialize in this, or we excel at this.

**34. Corporate culture.**

Small businesses overreach when they claim to have a culture. It's more realistic, honest and believable to say you have a particular kind of environment or atmosphere.

**35. Cross-training.**

A sales trainee spending an hour watching an accounts receivable clerk file invoices is not cross-training. Use this phrase only if you have a serious, comprehensive and documented training program.

**36. Cutting edge.**

See bleeding edge.

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D

**37. Deck.**

Some people know that a deck is a slide presentation. Everybody else will think you're not playing with a full one.

**38. Deep dive.**

Overuse has sunk this way of describing a thorough analysis. Try explore, analyze, or the soon-to-be-overused unpack.

**39. Deliverable.**

Agency-speak for work product or output. Because deliverable is necessarily vague, avoid it as much as possible, and instead describe the things your client will receive from you.

**40. Dialog (as a verb).**

Don't dialog with someone; talk to him or her.

**41. Disambiguate.**

The word you're looking for is clarify.

**42. Disconnect (as a noun).**

This word is not only overused, it's also vague. Does disconnect imply a difference of opinion or just a misunderstanding? Clear up the confusion by using the former or latter.

**43. Disruptive.**

If a product or business model is truly disruptive, you don't need to describe it as such; it will speak for itself.

**44. Drill down.**

Replace with look more closely at.

**45. Drink the Kool-Aid.**

This phrase was gruesomely powerful in the '80s, when the Jonestown Massacre was fresh in people's minds. With overuse, the phrase has become vague: Does it mean a person is a fanatic, believes in something evil, or just toes the company line? Think about what you really mean and use a more precise description.

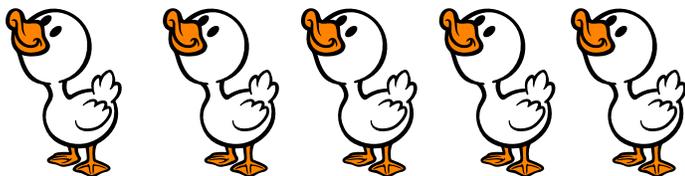
**46. Drop dead date.**

This phrase is sometimes used as a bluff to get staffers or clients moving. Use it too often and people will stop taking you seriously.

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**47. Ducks in a row.**

A silly way of saying we're ready or organized.



**E****48. Ecosystem.**

Ecosystem can describe Microsoft Windows or Apple, where users have deep and broad interaction with products and services in a closed system. For the most part, however, ecosystem is an overreach. In most business situations, ecosystems are merely systems or networks or product groups.

**49. Empower.**

Better options are assign responsibility or delegate responsibility. Besides being overused, empower has a bad business vibe, as it suggests class warfare.

**50. Epic (as an adjective).**

Epic describes something of heroic, sweeping proportions. Applying the word to business content or situations is an epic overstatement that serious-minded people won't take seriously. A simple adjective like useful or memorable carries more weight.

**51. Evangelist.**

A generous, one-sentence Yelp review does not an evangelist make. Evangelism takes fiery passion and sustained, unsolicited effort. Too often businesses describe as evangelists those who are loyal customers or casual fans of the brand.

**52. Evolve.**

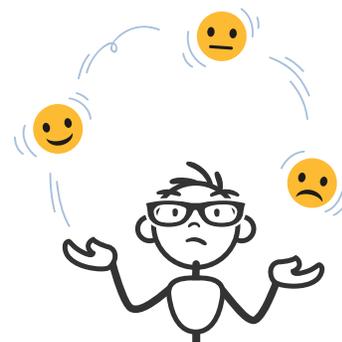
More precisely stated, a business plan or relationship develops, strengthens or grows in complexity or size.

**53. Execute.** Fancy words won't get you fancy fees. Instead of saying we'll execute the task, just say we'll do it.**F****54. Fish or cut bait.**

Scale back this reel bad jargon and say make a decision.

**55. Frictionless.**

Overstatement. Friction has to do with change, and what type of business change has ever occurred without friction? If you say something can take place with minimal friction, you'll be much more accurate and believable.

**56. Functionality.**

Instead of multi-user functionality, try supports multiple users. The latter phrasing is easier to read and contains an action verb rather than a bland, corporate compound noun.

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## G

**57. Game changer.**

Whereas paradigm shift is too formal, game changer is too casual. Instead of either of these, meet in the middle with significant change or fundamental change.

**58. Get on board.**

See buy-in.

**59. Give 110%.**

At this rate, by 2020 we'll have to give 250% to demonstrate our commitment. C'mon: 100% — i.e., everything — should be sufficient.

**60. Going forward.**

For the most part, this phrase can be eliminated: Going forward, we will hire 10 people.

**61. Good to go.**

A slangy way to say ready.

**62. Granular.**

Instead of taking a granular look, look at the details.

**63. Grow the business.**

Unless you're a farmer, build the business.

**64. Guesstimate.**

Replace with rough estimate and reduce the odds of being taken for an idiot.

**65. Guru.**

If others describe you as a guru, people will be skeptical. If you describe yourself as a guru, people will laugh in your face.

## H

**66. Herding cats.**

This phrase describes the attempt to manage a group of difficult and/or disagreeable individuals. Because herding cats is insulting to the individuals in question, the phrase should be used with care — especially if your cats are customers.

**67. Holistic.**

Comprehensive or complete is more straightforward.

**68. Human capital.**

Ironically, few pieces of business jargon are as dehumanizing as human capital. Much better to speak of employees, workers, laborers, workforce, crew or staff.



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I

**69. Ideation.**

To ideate is to form ideas or concepts. The word is frequently used in a clinical (and rather ominous) context, such as suicidal ideation. In business, stick with phrases such as develop a strategy or brainstorming session.

**70. Impact (as a verb).**

Grammatically correct options: have an impact on or have an effect on or simply affect.

**71. Incentivize.**

A mouthful of mush that means motivate.

**72. In light of the fact that.**

Replace this useless phrase with because. (Side note: Did you know that because is one of the most powerful and persuasive words in all of business writing?)

**73. Innovative.**

Describing a product or service as innovative means nothing. You have to explain in what way the product is innovative. Since most things described as innovative aren't, this can be a daunting task.

J-K

**74. Jump the shark.**

If a business or product is past its prime and grasping at straws to stay relevant, it has jumped the shark. The metaphor is past its prime; grasping at this straw makes your writing suck.



**75. Key takeaways.**

A puffed up way of describing important points.

**76. Killer app.**

More overstatement. Most “killer apps” are dead within months of their introduction.

**77. Knowledge transfer.**

We'll teach you beats We'll engage in knowledge transfer by six syllables and a country mile.



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## L

- 78. Laser focus.** I guess when regular focus isn't enough, companies must bring out the big guns and employ laser focus. C'mon: drop the pretentious laser and just focus.
- 79. Leaders.** Everybody is a leader in this or a leader in that — so what? Here's a case where frankness and modesty paradoxically arouse interest. If you claim only that you're good at this or that, people may actually take notice.
- 80. Learnings.** Ironically, this is not even a real word. Teachings or lessons, on the other hand, are.
- 81. Level playing field.** Stop going over the same metaphorical ground and replace this phrase with fair competition.
- 82. Leverage (as a verb).** Instead of, we leverage our volume to offer low prices, try, our volume enables us to offer low prices.
- 83. Lipstick on a pig.**  
When you try to make something bad look good, you're putting lipstick on a pig. A more professional phrase: put the best face on.

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**84. Low-hanging fruit.**

This phrase drives people bananas. Pear down fruit metaphors and juice up clarity with easy opportunities or easy options.



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**85. Luddite.**

A Luddite is someone who opposes technological innovation. It is not someone who rejects your new, untested, unproven and unendorsed gizmo.

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# M

**86. Magic bullet.**

High caliber business writers replace this overused phrase with cure-all or panacea.

**87. Make hay while the sun shines.**

Maybe this is what a farmer does after putting lipstick on his pig. If you're not a farmer, replace this phrase with make the most of the opportunity.

**88. Maximize.**

To sound like a real person, say that your product or service improves results rather than maximizes results.

**89. Methodology.**

Scholars, scientists and extremely complex businesses have methodologies.

To avoid sounding pretentious, say that your business has documented methods, processes or internal systems.



**90. Mission-critical.**

What's the difference between critical and mission-critical? Unless you want to sound like an astronaut, stick with critical.

**91. Most unique.**

Something is either unique or it isn't. If what you're describing is truly unique — a rarity indeed — by all means call it unique. More likely, you're looking for a word like special, rare, or extraordinary.

**92. Move the needle.**

This means to get meaningful or measurable results. Why not, then, say one or the other?

**93. My bad.**

If you made a mistake, don't trivialize it by saying it was my bad — this only makes people think you're indifferent as well as incompetent. On the other hand, by saying I made a mistake, you'll earn respect.



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## N-O

**94. Next steps.**

This harmless-looking phrase escalates word count. Instead of, as a next step we will ... just say, next, we will.

**95. Ninja.**

See guru.

**96. Offline.**

Replace discuss offline with discuss privately.

**97. One throat to choke.**

This means you are the only place your client needs to go for answers. Don't give your client any ideas! Instead, simply say that you are fully accountable.

**98. On the same page.**

In the old days, we were singing from the same sheet of music. Now, we're on the same page. In any era, it's easier to simply say, we agree.

**99. Open the kimono.**

If you're sharing secrets or proprietary information, just share them and be done with it. There's no upside to bringing hidden body parts into the discussion.

**100. Optimize.**

This term is overused; whenever possible, replace with improve.

**101. Out of pocket.**

A tailor's inventory may be out of pocket. You're just busy.

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**102. Outside the box.**

Ironically, using this tired phrase alerts people that you have no creativity whatsoever. Instead, talk about creative or imaginative thinking.



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P

**103. Pain point.**

Replace with problem, challenge, frustration, difficulty or headache.

**104. Paradigm shift.**

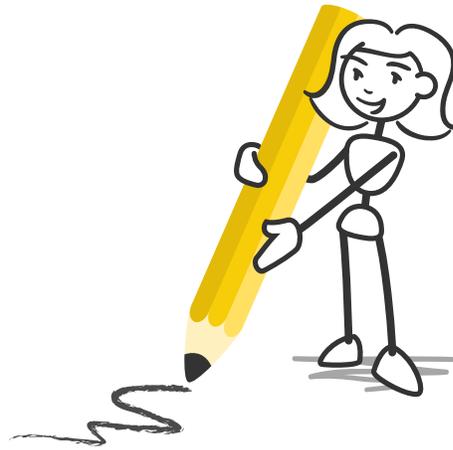
If you say significant change or fundamental change, people will actually understand what you're talking about.

**105. Pencil in.**

You penciled me in: that means we're tentatively scheduled, right?

Hmm ... maybe not.

Maybe we're definitely scheduled but you didn't have access to your calendar. Maybe you should have said tentatively scheduled or definitely scheduled.



**106. Preplan.**

When people say preplan, they usually mean early-stage planning. Preplanning is something (I'm not really sure what) that people do before they start planning.

**107. Preschedule.**

See preplan.

**108. Preso.**

I stopped using this word when I realized nobody knew I meant slide presentation. It probably saved my job.

**109. Price point.**

For general business use, price is all you need.

**110. Proactive.** When people are proactive they take the initiative. Doesn't take the initiative sound stronger and more like something a real person would say?

**111. Push the envelope.** This could mean to act aggressively, assume risk, expand the boundaries of, or advance to the boundary. Think about what you mean exactly, and then describe it.



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## Q-R

**112. Quite frankly.**

Use this phrase only when you want people to know you're being otherwise deceptive and insincere.

**113. Radio silent.**

When you don't hear from a customer or prospect for a good while, he's gone radio silent. Radio doesn't add anything to this disturbing situation. Better to say the customer has gone silent or stopped communicating.

**114. Raise the bar.**

This means to set a higher standard, which sounds a whole lot better.

**115. Rationalization.**

This is a euphemism for getting fired. Vendor rationalization means your supplier got fired; workforce rationalization means you get fired. Avoid euphemisms always. They infuriate people and are guaranteed to worsen the reaction to your bad news.

**116. Reach out.**

Customers don't want you to reach out, as that phrasing is vague and nonchalant. They prefer you visit, call, email or text them (ideally within a stated amount of time).

**117. Reinvent the wheel.**

When people reinvent the wheel, they are laboriously recreating something essential that already exists in finished form. The phrase is actually useful for describing this situation; problems arise when it is used to describe something that is not laborious, not being recreated, not essential and/or not already existing in finished form.

**118. Resonate.**

When an idea resonates, it reaches people on an emotional level or in a way they can relate to. This is why it may be better to say either that people will be moved by this idea or will relate to this idea.

**119. Roadmap.**

Vague. In business, a roadmap could be a strategic plan, a tactical plan or a set of instructions. Decide what you really mean and describe accordingly.

**120. Robust.**

Robust functionality just doesn't resonate. On the other hand, people will relate when you say your product does a lot of useful things.

**121. Rock star.**

See guru and ninja.

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**122. Rocket science.**

See brain surgery.

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S**123. Seamless.**

See frictionless. Few things, if any, in business are seamless. Replace this word with something along the lines of easy to implement.

**124. Secret sauce.**

Your secret sauce is your competitive edge; something crucial you can do that your competitors cannot. Secret sauce trivializes a supremely important concept; replace the phrase with key benefit, unique benefit, unique advantage, etc.

**125. Sense of urgency.**

When I hear this bit of corporate-speak, I think the seller is just going through the motions of sounding concerned. I'd rather hear, we're deeply concerned, which is personal and direct, or we're working an extra 10 hours a week, which is specific. Or both.

**126. Skin in the game.**

A gruesome phrase you'd expect to hear from Hannibal Lecter. Stick with the professional and universally understood ownership interest.

**127. Solutions.**

For my money, the worst word in the world. When people hear solutions, they think, "Here's a complicated product that will create more problems than it solves." Or, their minds simply go blank because they've heard the word a million times. Replace solutions with specific benefits; e.g., This product simplifies household budgeting.

**128. Soup to nuts.**

To avoid coming off like a buffoon, substitute comprehensive or complete.

**129. State of the art.**

This phrase used to be state of the art ... but now lets customers know your product has jumped the shark (see jump the shark). Better to avoid superlatives and describe it as your latest model, or having the latest technology.

**130. Strategic plan.**

Few companies have the stamina and expertise to create a genuine strategic plan. More often, the phrase is used to describe a strategic sketch, strategic guesswork or a tactical plan. Don't overinflate what you've created (and your ego) by calling these latter items a strategic plan.

**131. Strike while the iron is hot.**

See make hay while the sun shines.

**132. Synergy.**

When things synergize, they combine to have a greater impact than they can achieve on their own. Synergy is a useful business concept, but the word has been run into the ground. The key is to avoid synergy when you mean only collaboration, cooperation or consolidation.

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**T****133. Table stakes.**

Table stakes are minimum requirements to engage in a particular business. Use minimum requirements instead.

**134. Take strides.**

A way of saying we're improving that implies you started from a poor position. If that's what you mean, fine.

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**135. Take to the next level.**

A way of saying we're improving that implies you started from a strong position. If that's what you mean, fine.

**136. Task (as a verb).**

Don't task someone; give him or her an assignment.

**137. Thought leader.**

See guru, ninja and rock star.

**138. Touch base.**

See reach out.

**139. Traction.**

In general business usage, when something gains traction, it begins to take hold or gather momentum. Either of these latter phrases conveys the idea more clearly than traction.

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## U-V

### 140. Unpack.

To unpack an idea is to examine it in detail. Unpack is becoming overused; better to stick with examine in detail.

### 141. Utilize.

Don't utilize something; use it.

### 142. Value-added.

Saying your product or service has "value-added" components doesn't tell anyone anything about what the value is or how the value is relevant; in other words, the phrase is meaningless. Reaching for this phrase means the time has come to point out product and service benefits.

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### 143. Valued partner.

Beware of valued partner followed by but: You're a valued partner, but you've been selected for our vendor rationalization initiative. In general, valued is unnecessary; being a partner implies the other party values you.



### 144. Viral.

Few things in the world of marketing go viral. Most business mentions of this word mean four or five people tweeted your blog post.



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## W-Z

### 145. **White Paper.**

Bad on two counts. First, it's pretentious: THE IVORY TOWER HAS SPOKEN! Second, it's too often used to describe a scrap of drivel rather than what it is supposed to be — an authoritative report.

### 146. **Win-win.**

Theoretically, it's a game where both parties win; the opposite of a zero-sum game. In business world reality, a win-win is a phrase the party that wins more uses to console the party that wins less. Better to avoid the whole concept and describe specifically what each party gains.

### 147. **With all due respect.**

Usually a prelude to an insult. This phrase is utterly delete-worthy.

### 148. **World class.**

A bold statement that should be used only to describe proven and widely accepted products, services, systems and organizations. Even then, it doesn't convey anything concrete. As with solutions, it is far more persuasive to describe the standout quality of the subject in question: Our customer service reps answer every call within one ring.

### 149. **Wordsmith (as a verb).**

Don't wordsmith the sales copy; edit it.

### 150. **Zero-sum game.**

A game where one party wins and the other loses; the opposite of a win-win. Since not everyone knows this, a clearer (and powerful) way to describe it is winner take all.



#### **About Brad Shorr**

Brad Shorr is the B2B Marketing Director of Straight North, an Internet marketing agency with headquarters near Chicago. His articles about copywriting, sales and marketing have appeared on Forbes, Fox Small Business, Smashing Magazine, Moz and many other popular business websites.

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