

Four Little Words to Watch Out for and Use Sparingly

Shôn Ellerton, December 14, 2019

I try not to get caught out on using these four words too often.



Someone once said to me, if you wish to write casual articles or opinion columns, just let it flow as though you are talking to someone naturally. Don't bother about dreaming up elaborate sentences or statements. Don't get too caught out on the structure of what you are writing. Don't go back and endlessly proofread what you've done but try to, at least, get rid of the typos. However, after writing and publishing nearly a hundred articles, there are four words I watch out for and now avoid using unless necessary.

These four words are:

Always, never, everybody, nobody

Everyone and ***no one*** are interchangeable with the last two words above, so I won't include them as additional items.

As I am approaching my one-hundredth article, I keep these four words in mind when I write to ensure that I don't abuse them. Should I look back over some of my previous articles, I'm certain that I'd find a few misuses; however, I'm not going to make a big fuss and re-edit them.

Moderate and sensible use of these four words not only applies to writing but, equally, applies to our daily conversations and chats with others.

Always and Never

Let's start with ***always*** and ***never***.

I have a 4-year-old son who frequently uses these two words.

‘I **always** behave at Kindy. Can I use the iPad now?’.

‘Why do you **always** drink tea after dinner?’.

‘I **never** get to eat chocolate. It’s not fair!’.

‘Thomas **never** lets me play with his Lego.’

Sometimes my wife might even remind me,

‘Why do you **always** leave the pantry door open?’

‘Why do you **never** put your shoes on when going out in the garden?’

These statements are, of course, not true, and they are harmless enough. We know, intuitively what they mean. However, they can become a little irritating at times, particularly in the throes of an argument or a heated discussion.

Of course, expecting a four-year-old to moderate his use of the words **always** and **never** is a stretch too far of course. However, **always** and its partner-in-crime, **never**, are often used indiscriminately when cool rationality and sensible reasoning is thrown out of the window in favour of over-generalising and knee-jerk reactions.

Using **always** and **never** is simply too easy. It’s very convenient. Fishing for alternatives trying to make them work sometimes turns out to be clumsy and repetitive. I’ve often been guilty of this if I reflect on my own writings.

A lot of alternatives are available but it’s just a matter of choosing the right one.

‘The **majority** of ...’ (*clumsy*)

‘**Most** of the time, I...’ (*can be a trifle too close to always*)

‘I **often** go...’ (*usually acceptable*)

‘**Seldom** do I venture out into the woods...’ (*an elegant alternative*)

Always and **never** certainly have their place, of course, for reasons too obvious to state here.

Everybody and Nobody

Let’s look at the other two words, **everybody** and **nobody**.

As with the previous two, these words are regularly abused in daily conversation. Yes, sure. If it is known that **everybody** raised their hand in the

boardroom in the meeting today or outlandishly stating that **nobody** has ever set foot on Pluto, then it's safe to say that the word is being used correctly.

Where the situation gets sticky and grimy is when something like a political discussion takes place or if someone is referring to a topic that centres on a collective body of people.

For example, when a politician states something on the lines of

‘Oh yes, we have **everyone** on board and in agreement with the planned construction of the new shopping mall along the south side of the river.’

Really? Often, this is simply not true. And who, exactly, is **everyone**?

Another one that came out recently in the press was when someone was interviewed in the news supporting the proposed [First Nations Voice](#) to enshrine a voice for the indigenous community in Australia's constitution, a sensitive subject at best.

She said, ‘**Everybody** within the indigenous communities supports the motion of having a voice.’

Again, it is simply not true, at least, not what it infers. Firstly, many of those within the communities would have never heard of the Voice. Secondly, there were, later, broadcasts in the media of those in the community who actively oppose it. These reasonings apply to *any* large collective group of people. Clearly, **many** are for it, but certainly not **everybody**.

It is possibly true if one reads the phrase *in isolation*. Absolutely. I'm confident that **everybody** wants to have a voice but it's not what was meant.

Knowing what to say, what not to say, but more importantly, *how* to say it is a skilled art.

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So there you have it!

Four words I now use sparingly.

Now I'm sure **everybody** is going to love this article and **nobody** is going to make any horrible comments about it!

G'day all!