



THE AGENT'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

# CRAFTING CLEAN, COMPELLING LISTING COPY

The power of **emotional words**, **language pitfalls** to avoid and how to **perfect the professionalism** of your marketing efforts

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *A survey by Redfin and Grammarly showed that many buyers would be less likely to tour a home if the online property description contained misspellings or grammatical errors.*
- *Maintaining a pattern of spotless listings evokes professionalism and can elevate an agent's image both in the eyes of consumers and other industry players.*
- *When using abbreviations, be consistent and think about what the broadest range of consumers is likely to understand.*
- *Infusing your copy with emotional and power words can make your listings stand out from the crowd.*

## First impressions of online home listings matter — and photos aren't the only element that buyers notice.

In a [2014 study from Redfin and Grammarly](#), nearly 45 percent of the 1,300 people surveyed said they would be much less inclined to tour a home if there were spelling and grammatical errors in the property description.

Photos were unanimously more important than text, but 87 percent of the survey participants said that descriptions were “extremely important or very important,” the report noted.

Between coordinating appointments, responding swiftly to online leads, answering the phone, managing client databases, creating and distributing flyers, updating social media profiles and more — wrangling with copy can understandably slide to the bottom of the priority list on a busy day.

But listing presentation (and, for that matter, all forms of writing you communicate via text, email and social media) are a piece of your professional brand.

How many times does marketing copy at an advertising firm get reviewed before it's unleashed to promote a product? Listings are really no different; they're marketing efforts — ideally with your name attached.

Although digital listing syndication vastly increases exposure, it also means that a notable mistake could end up in multiple email inboxes with the subject line “LOL.”

In online discussions, agents also expressed that taking a few minutes to proofread your text before hitting publish could significantly raise the overall reputation of the industry. Maintaining a pattern of spotless listings evokes professionalism and can elevate an agent's image in the public eye, they said — and can make a difference in the eyes of other industry professionals, too.

“I hardly have clients make serious mention of another agent's spelling/grammar mistakes,” said Kasey Jorgenson, a Keller Williams Realtor, in an online Facebook discussion. “It does, however, show me the caliber of agent I am dealing with. If their listing is littered with errors, I can tell it has a high chance of being an annoying transaction because of the lack of attention to detail.”

An unclear sentence represents an unclear thought, and the last thing you want is to confuse a buyer reading your listing description.

**Here are some of the most common listing language danger zones, along with tips and tricks that help you craft better descriptions when you put fingers to keyboard:**

### MALAPROPISMS

Malapropisms are words used incorrectly that are close in sound and appearance to other terms, but that mean something different.

Both the Redfin study and agents themselves pointed out several real-estate specific red flags, and these are mistakes you can't necessarily count on software to find:

- ~~curve appeal~~ (curb appeal)
- ~~granted counters~~ (granite counters)
- ~~rod iron fence~~ (wrought iron fence)
- ~~walking closets~~ (walk-in closets)
- ~~quite streets~~ (quiet streets)
- ~~sub pump~~ (sump pump)
- ~~dinning room~~ (dining room)
- ~~fresh pain~~ (fresh paint)
- ~~on-suite bathroom~~ (en suite bathroom)
- ~~back-slash, backslash~~ (backsplash)
- ~~suit~~ (suite)
- ~~for sell~~ (for sale)

In case you were wondering:

### molding/moulding

Both are actually correct, depending on where you are. Trim Guide tells us that “molding,” as in “crown molding,” is the proper U.S. spelling,

but the term originated in the U.K., where it's spelled “moulding.”

### crepe myrtle/crape myrtle

Referring to the pink or purplish Asian shrub with crinkly petals, the consensus is that both spellings are acceptable. A passage from Garden.com indicates that the plant's scientific name is *lagerstroemia*, or crape myrtle. “Crepe myrtle” is a traditional Southern spelling that draws from the flowers' resemblance to crepe paper.

### HOMOPHONES

Homophones are words that sound the same but mean different things, and often vary in spelling.

They're/there/their, your/you're, affect/effect, lose/loose, new/knew are classic examples.

Regular spell check likely won't help you here, but free online tools offer contextual spell checkers.

[Grammarly](#) is often cited as the No. 1 program for this task. It seamlessly installs on your browser in five seconds, and the free version flags “critical” errors and suggests corrections on any website in which you're composing content, including the MLS.

For around \$12 per month, the premium version offers vocabulary enhancement and sentence structure assistance.

Here are some particular to real estate worth noting (with Grammarly installed on my Chrome browser, it flagged four of these seven as problematic, missing “coy pond,” “double-pained” and “except”):

- ~~stares~~ (stairs)
- ~~double-pained windows~~ (double-paned)
- ~~coy pond~~ (koi pond)
- ~~miner work needed~~ (minor)
- ~~stainless-steel~~ (stainless steel)
- ~~sneak peak~~ (sneak peek)
- ~~except-an offer~~ (accept)
- ~~Excessive punctuation and caps lock~~
- ~~exclamation points~~

Instead of relying on multiple question marks, exclamation points or all caps to catch buyers' attention, let the words and photos speak for themselves. Busy markings likely won't add anything extra to beautiful property images or enticing copy, but they can be an eyesore and drown out the message.



As said in an article about online “[netiquette](#),” or being polite on the Web: “Typing in all capital letters on the Internet is considered rude because it is difficult to read and comes across as very aggressive (LIKE SHOUTING!). If you take away nothing from this ‘how-to’ other than knowing that typing in ‘caps’ is widely despised on the Internet, consider it time well spent.”

Listings that capitalize the first letter of most or every word are also hard to read.

### LENGTH

Oftentimes, the number of characters available for a property description are limited by the MLS or listing platform. In these cases, agents might feel forced into taking shortcuts and working with wonky abbreviations. Some MLSs, for example, cut you off at 500 characters, which pans out to around 80 to 100 words.

That might seem tight, but the good news is that buyers actually prefer a “medium-sized” listing — according to the same survey from Redfin/Grammarly, this indicates a sweet spot around 50 words.

In addition, further analysis by Redfin revealed that “homes with descriptions of around 50 words are, indeed, more likely to sell within 90 days. What’s more, they also tend to sell for higher than list price.”

Consistency, too, is important in all writing. That’s why newspapers and magazines follow national style guides in addition to creating their own in-house rules. Be consistent with your abbreviations in and across your listings, and shorten the most common items (such as 1/2 ba and A/C) before you would 1-CD (one-car detached garage). Think about what the broadest range of consumers is most likely to understand. (Ask some if you aren’t sure.)

LandTerms.com has compiled a list of abbreviations and acronyms used by the National Association of Realtors that [can be accessed here](#).

### DETAIL SELECTION

When you have to pack a lot of information into a small space, consider what might be the most important details to your ideal buyer and include those first.



## Anatomy of a great listing

### TIPS AT A GLANCE

Create a killer headline

Spruce up your descriptions

Avoid malaprops

Check your grammar

50 words is the optimal length

Mind your tone

Tailor details to target buyer

For example, you might want to play up the designated parking in a hip downtown unit that would attract young professionals — which might help explain why your property is going for a little more than the comps.

You can’t leave out the biggies, but [new home search tools and data analytics](#) are revolutionizing the days of bed, bath and price to make room for lifestyle, commute and affordability. Buyers are looking to narrow down their search based on things like proximity to work, shopping, coffee shops and good schools.

Use the property description to talk about features that the pictures fail to represent, such as seasonal elements or impressive details that weren’t photographed. If a property has easy access to running trails, don’t just mention it but also provide a link to the trail map if it’s available.

In addition, check your copy for repeated information appearing in different formats. If beds and baths are mentioned in the header, you don’t need them again in the description.

Steer clear of language that falls under [Fair Housing law violation territory](#), and work with your broker on any gray areas.

## HEADLINES

Let's analyze the quality of actual listing headlines (when the header is the property address, think of this as the first attention-grabbing sentence) using one of our favorite tools here at Inman: [CoSchedule's Headline Analyzer](#).

This service is primarily designed for content and blog posts, but its evaluation of copy based on the balance of common, uncommon, emotional and power words is applicable to marketing in general.

## HERE WERE A FEW LISTING TITLES I TOOK FROM CRAIGSLIST THAT SCORED THE HIGHEST:

### 1. Super cute and clean ranch with huge fenced backyard!

**Score: 68**

**Points for:** the right length in characters and words, a positive sentiment, and a 44-percent power word composition (clean, cute, huge, super)

**Docked for:** lack of uncommon and emotional words

### 2. Are you looking for your home sweet home? Look no further!

**Score: 68**

**Points for:** right length in characters, being posed as a question, uncommon words (look), power words (no, sweet)

**Docked for:** being too wordy

### 3. Enjoy a rustic retreat-style getaway in this genuine log cabin!

**Score: 63**

**Points for:** right length in characters, emotional words (genuine), power words (enjoy, retreat)

**Docked for:** too many words, not enough uncommon words

### 4. Vacation-getaway style living, minutes from (name of city)!

**Score: 55**

**Points for:** right length in characters and words, use of time

**Docked for:** no uncommon, emotional or power words

## TO GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF AN EVEN HIGHER SCORE, I PLAYED AROUND WITH A HEADER THAT COULD OSTENSIBLY BE USED TO DESCRIBE THE PLACE I LIVE IN NOW:

### Is this affordable, light-filled townhome perfect for you?

**Score: 71**

**Points for:** right length in characters and words, emotional words (affordable), power words (perfect), being posed as a question

**Docked for:** lack of uncommon words

Because buying a home is such a monumental decision, focus especially on the emotional and power words component of this tool. Bookmark this list of [180 power words](#) for writing emotional headlines from CoSchedule for reference. You can also check out the emotional value analyzer from the [American Marketing Institute](#).

## FINISHING TOUCHES

Several other details will polish your copy until it sparkles, including:

### Hyphen placement

In the words of Grammar Girl, "hyphens are a 'look-it-up' punctuation mark" because they're sometimes tricky and often debatable.

These little marks are frequently used to connect two or more words modifying a noun. Use them if you have room for clarity and readability, but if you're limited on the number of characters, they might not make your priority list.

A few examples:

- *two-story home*
- *ranch-style charmer*
- *three-car garage*
- *high-end real estate*
- *low-maintenance yard*
- *split-level property*
- *move-in ready*

## LIMITING AMPERSANDS

Ampersands are the Busch Light of your grammar cocktail party — super convenient, but all-around tacky and apt to leave a bad taste in your mouth. Clean up your writing by using them sparingly, but don't be afraid to turn to them every now and then if you need to save space.

## Use semi-colons and colons to your advantage

Both marks have different purposes and can

help you squeeze more information into a tight space without compromising clarity.

### Colon — used to set off a list or series

*The main level has three major bonuses: a full bath with laundry, brand new kitchen windows and luxurious office space.*

### Semi-colon — used to connect two independent clauses (each with a subject and verb) that are related

*The upstairs features a large walk-in closet; you won't have to sacrifice any shoes.*

### Watch those articles (a, an)

- *an hour versus a historical home*
- *an L-shaped room (account for the vowel sound as you would in natural speech)*

## MODEST MUSINGS

There's another quiet but mighty regulation that keeps pedantic grammarians humble and Internet trolls in check. It's called "Muphry's law." You read that correctly — think of it as the editorial spinoff of Murphy's law.

The little-known Muphry's law states: "If you write anything criticizing editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written."

That means if you make fun of someone's grammar, something within your own response will be erroneous — and the stronger the insult, the greater your mistake. (Fact: You're more likely to experience the effects of Muphry's law if you haven't had enough coffee.)

Productive conversations about grammar rarely start with judgment or a sarcastic remark, and that applies to the language and descriptions we find in real estate listings. We all have our pet peeves, but many rules we assume to be hard-and-fast turn out to be quite fluid in the real world. Certain usages deemed technically improper become commonplace in natural speech and writing and language evolves.

That's why clean, conversational and consistent can go a long way in your marketing copy. No one wants to read fancy and prestigious listing descriptions — but don't let the comfort of informality cross that fine line into sloppy.