

# The Hateful 8: These Content Mistakes Tell Editors You're a Bad Writer

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If you're writing contributed content for your agency, you know that every day brings a new challenge: another looming deadline, another subject-matter expert to interview, another blank Word doc mocking you with its blinking cursor as you try to wrest another 1,000 words from your poor, tired brain.

Writing isn't easy, and editors get that. They expect to make some revisions and changes to your copy, but these eight serious blunders will make an editor question working with you – and your agency – again.

## **1 – You don't understand your audience.**

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It's not necessarily a guarantee that the people who read The Economist aren't also reading Cosmopolitan, but it's a pretty safe bet – and if you're writing a byline for a specific publication's audience, then they're your audience, too. Think about why they would care about your topic, what they'd want to learn and why they'd take the time to read it.

## **2 – You don't work within the publication's style.**

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Take 20 minutes and skim the pub's other digital content to get a feel for its style and preferred format, including headlines. Some pubs prefer a short, catchy head to an SEO-friendly one; some like bullet points, some don't; some prefer a straightforward tone to anything clever or creative. Editors are experts on their own publication's style, and expect to touch up your content, but if they have to totally rework it, you risk rejection.

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### **3 – You make a claim in your article without backing it up.**

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The old journalism school mantra says, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out." You're working from the other side of this principle. Don't make any kind of sweeping generalization ("X is the fast-growing industry in the nation") or specific claim ("X industry grew by 20 percent in 2016") without including a link to your source – which, by the way, had better be a reliable third party and not some armchair pundit.

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### **4 – You miss a deadline at the last minute.**

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Everyone runs into roadblocks, whether they're because of the client approval process or because you couldn't get your subject matter expert on the phone in time – but if you're having challenges with a deadline, don't wait until the eleventh hour to let the editor know. If you force an editor to scramble to fill the space (physical or digital) for which your article was slated, it can kill your agency's relationship with that publication.

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### **5 – You ignore the publication's guidelines.**

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Every publication has its own requirements that contributed content must meet. These requirements might be as simple as a few bullet points the editor sends in an email, or as formal as a multi-page PDF – either way, if you want your stuff published, then you'd better toe the line.

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### **6 – You use too many buzzwords or grandstanding adjectives.**

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"Unique," "innovative," "groundbreaking," or "disruptive" – these are all words your client loves to hear about their product or service, but if you use them in contributed content, the editor may question your credibility and/or sanity. (For the record, "unique" describes something that is not like anything else in the entire world. Is that *really* true about the thing you're describing?) Stick to the facts – show, don't tell, why something is "groundbreaking."

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### **7 – Your headline is unrelated to the content.**

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The headline is important – duh – and you want to make sure yours is interesting and SEO friendly, but it still needs to relate to the body of the article. Don't sacrifice truth for clickability with a headline that doesn't fit the article's theme/points.

## **8 – You can't take constructive feedback, or you argue over revisions.**

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This is not to say that the editor is always right – feel free to defend yourself if you truly believe that a revision was made incorrectly. But don't argue for the sake of arguing, and learn to take constructive criticism. The editor wants your article to be the best it can be, and so should you.

Stay away from these hateful eight, and you'll lay the groundwork for long-standing relationships between your agency and an editor – and make editors happy to receive your clients' content.