

The background image shows the deck of an offshore supply vessel. A large, white, lattice-structured crane or derrick is the central focus, extending from the deck towards the sky. A vertical mast with a platform is suspended from the crane. Several workers in high-visibility orange and red safety gear are positioned around the deck. On the right, there is a wooden workbench with various tools and equipment. The sea is visible in the distance under a cloudy sky. The magazine title 'Geo-Strata' is overlaid on the top left, with 'Geo' inside a yellow circle. The date 'May/June 2013' is in the top right. The main title 'Offshore Geotechnics' is in large green letters in the center. In the bottom right, there is a red 'ALSO' followed by the article title 'Lessons Learned from Geo-Legends: Robert D. Holtz'. A white rectangular box is in the bottom left corner.

# Geo-Strata

May/June 2013

## Offshore Geotechnics

**ALSO**

Lessons Learned from Geo-Legends:  
Robert D. Holtz



## Say It Isn't Sew

Professionals are society's best. We expect them to be intelligent, well educated, and technically capable. We also expect them to communicate well. (How would you respond to an oncologist who tells you, "I think you got some of that there cancer.")

Although geoprofessionals – the world's most important professionals – write more than any others, they are not the best writers. Or speakers. A principal failing: Their penchant for language inflation; e.g., they "utilize" instead of "use"; "provide with" instead of "give"; offer "further" information, not "more"; use "with respect to" and "regarding" instead of "about"; and prefer "at this point in time" to "now." And let's not forget the however-heads who believe something's wrong with "but."

As off-putting as word inflation may be, the biggest professional image-crusher is using words and phrases that are just plain wrong. I try to ignore the violations because I'm a pedant who employs judicious silence to keep friends. Now, to help you improve your image, I break my vow of silence.

We do not "hone in" on things. We "home in," explaining why honing pigeons are mythical.

People who offer foolish insights have another "think" [not "thing"] coming.

It's "right of first refusal" not "first right of refusal."

Eliminate the "s" of "towards," unless you live in the UK. And in both nations, it's "anyway," not "anyways."

While the don't-end-a-sentence-with-a-preposition rule is no longer valid (Churchill called it "nonsense up with which I will not put"), "Where are you at?" is an unprofessional question; substitute "Where are you?" Likewise, it's "these," not "these ones."

"Iterate" means to repeat. To "reiterate" is to say something at least three times.

"Irregardless" is wrong; "regardless" is right.

"I could care less" is a confusing corruption of "I couldn't care less." Assuming you care.

Do not say or write "is comprised of." The phrase was devised by those who don't know what the word means. Why say "the USA is comprised of 50 states" when "the USA comprises

50 states" says it more intelligently and with fewer words?

When you give people a status update, you "apprise" [not "appraise"] them of the situation. And when generalizing what happened, you could say "For all intents and purposes," not "For all intensive purposes."

"Unique" – which means "one of a kind" – cannot be used as a comparative; it's an absolute, which is why "very unique" or "most unique" is incorrect. "Perfect" and "ideal" are absolutes, too; nothing can be "more perfect" or "more ideal" than anything else. Geometrically, "square" and "circular" also are absolutes, meaning that you can never get rid of a car that's parked in your circular driveway.

"Full" is also an absolute; nothing can be "fuller" than "full" because, when something's full, there's no more room for anything else. This explains why "fullest extent of the law" is so silly; and why any firm claiming to offer "full-service" is guilty of false advertising.

Stop using "different" when it's useless. Consider "Ten different strategies are available to deal with employee turnover." Of course the ten strategies are different from one another. If



# Most Unique?

they weren't, there'd be fewer than ten. "Actually" is usually useless, too, as in "We actually got here at 5PM." "Received" is useless when you write something like "We are responding to the received RFP." If you didn't receive it, how could you respond?

Don't know if an adjective or adverb is useless? Chances are, if its opposite is absurd, the modifier is unneeded; e.g., skip the "thorough" from "We performed a thorough review," given that "We performed a slipshod review" sounds absurd. So, too, do "Our lines were busy yesterday. An operator will be with you soon." and "liberal compliance." ("Strict compliance" is another silly legalism; either you comply or you don't.)

Stop using "a number of." It's a confusion-creator, because it means who-knows-what to you and something different to whoever else reads it.

When writing, note that you:

- "toe [not "tow"] the line";
- have your curiosity "piqued" [not "peaked"];
- cite [not "site"] "a case in point" [vs. "a case and point"];
- have an assistant "at your beck and call" [not "at your beckon call"];
- "whet" [not "wet"] your appetite;
- declare a point is "moot" [not "mute"]; and
- report to a firm's "principal" (who may have "principles" but isn't one).

My final thought: "Having said that" is not a transitional phrase; it's a verbal road apple.

#### AUTHOR

**John P. Bachner** is the executive vice president of ASFE/The Geoprofessional Business Association (GBA), a not-for-profit association of geoprofessional firms; i.e., firms that provide geotechnical, geologic, environmental, construction-materials engineering and testing (CoMET), and related professional services ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoprosessions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoprosessions)). GBA develops programs, services, and materials to help its members and their clients confront risk and optimize performance. Contact [john@asfe.org](mailto:john@asfe.org)

## HOUSE