



Dear Reader,

In our last issue, we took a look at so-called weasel words. These days advertisers and politicians bombard us so frequently with deceptive, misleading and manipulative statements we decided to take another kick at this particular can.

This could arguably be the best insight you ever receive!



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In this issue...

- More Weasel Words
- Buzz Off : *Begs the question*
- Parting Words

More Weasel Words

Although sometimes used to refer to any sort of corporate jargon, strictly speaking weasel words are a kind of doublespeak that seems to moderate extravagant or controversial claims while still giving them the illusion of authenticity. Here are some more common examples.

1. **May**, as in "Users may see a decrease in wrinkles and fine lines." (Or more likely they won't – either way, the claim is true.)
2. **Suggest**, as in "Scientists suggest that global warming is due to the sun getting hotter" (One or two might suggest this but most wouldn't, and if all they can do is *suggest* it, it's hardly worth paying attention.)
3. **Reported**, as in, "75% of participants reported an improvement in clarity." (But was this finding valid according to objective criteria? Or was it mainly due to fuzzy perception?)
4. **Critics**, as in "Critics argue that the quality of television programs has never been better." (So who are these critics? What qualifications do they have that merit our taking their opinions seriously?)
5. **This**, as in "Breakfast has never tasted this good!" (It may not have tasted exactly like this before, but whether it tastes better or worse is another question, and probably depends on who's doing the eating.)
6. **Some**, as in "Some studies show a 100% increase in efficacy" (But how many studies, and how well were they conducted? And how many studies gave much more modest results?)
7. **More**, as in "Now contains 50% more!" (More than what? The previous size? A smaller size? The competition?)
8. **Most**, as in "Most experts agree that hot dogs can be a valuable source of dietary protein" (*Most* implies somewhere between 50% and 100%, but who knows exactly where? 49% might actually disagree. And 100% of those experts who weren't asked for their opinion might also disagree.)
9. **Among**, as in "among the best in its class." (A dead giveaway that it isn't really the best. So how highly does it actually rank?)
10. **Arguably**, as in "Arguably the greatest innovation in teacup design in the past 200 years." (You could make an argument for this, but you could make one against it too. It's not indisputable.)

Buzz Off : *Begs the question*

"Begs the question" is a perfectly valid expression. The problem is it just doesn't mean what many people think it does, and as a result crops up far too often. This doesn't *beg* the question of whether or not people know what they're talking about, it *raises* the question.

"Begging the question" is actually a form of logical fallacy where the conclusion of an argument is assumed in its premise, a condensed type of circular logic. An example: "God must exist because the Universe is so intricate it could only have been created by a supernatural being." Or, on a less philosophical plane: "The building is unattractive because it's so ugly."

Is there a buzzword you would like to banish? Send your suggestion to writer@ecwriting.com, then look for your buzzword and name in an upcoming issue.

Parting Words

"One of our defects as a nation is a tendency to use what have been called 'weasel words.' When a weasel sucks eggs the meat is sucked out of the egg. If you use a 'weasel word' after another, there is nothing left of the other."

– Theodore Roosevelt, U.S. president