

Troublesome Adverbs Can Take You to Court

By Dianna Booher

Make sure descriptive or qualifying words or phrases come as close to the words they describe as possible. Misplaced words and phrases can obscure meaning. The most frequently misplaced words in business or technical documents are the adverbs almost, only, nearly, just, and even. Notice the difference in meaning in the following sentences when these adverbs are moved around:

The operator **ONLY** altered the table in his report about the company's inefficiency.

The operator altered **ONLY** the table in his report about the company's inefficiency.

Joseph Holland has the authority **JUST** to revise the specifications. (He has authority only to revise.)

Joseph Holland has authority to revise **JUST** the specifications. (He can revise the specifications only--he cannot revise anything else.)

ALMOST all manufacturers were able to meet our test criteria in all these areas.

All manufacturers were **ALMOST** able to meet our test criteria in all these areas.

All manufacturers were able to meet our test criteria in **ALMOST** all these areas.

Small words. Great power. Pinpoint the correct spot to place them.

#

184 words

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*Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more on business writing, see E-Writing: 21st-Century Tools for Effective Communication (Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books) by Dianna Booher.