

# You Have the Same Skeptics Who Watch Network News

By Dianna Booher

Consider this comment from a stranger, "I heard the funniest story yesterday—you won't believe it! You really won't." Your first thought usually is, "Oh, yeah?" And after he or she tells the story, there's always the let-down—the that-wasn't-so-funny feeling.

Overstatement begs the reader to be skeptical. Give readers the facts; then let THEM tell you how impressed they are. Have you overstated the case anywhere? Prefer understatement to overstatement.

Beware of unsupported generalizations in your writing. When you feel the need to make statements such as the following, beware of the tendency to write your "facts" rather than research them. Assume the skeptical thinking presented in the parentheses.

- As leading experts have noted . . . (*Who? Where?*)
- Few will doubt . . . (*If that's true, why point it out?*)
- Few will argue with the fact that . . . (*An attempt to keep me from arguing?*)
- Most users prefer . . . (*What survey?*)
- The vast majority of engineers today . . . (*Agree? You've got to be kidding.*)
- Several professors at major universities . . . (*Your graduate advisor and who else?*)

TV viewers have to pick up the remote or walk across the room to change channels. All skeptical readers need do is hit the delete key or reply with a "no deal."

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237 words

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