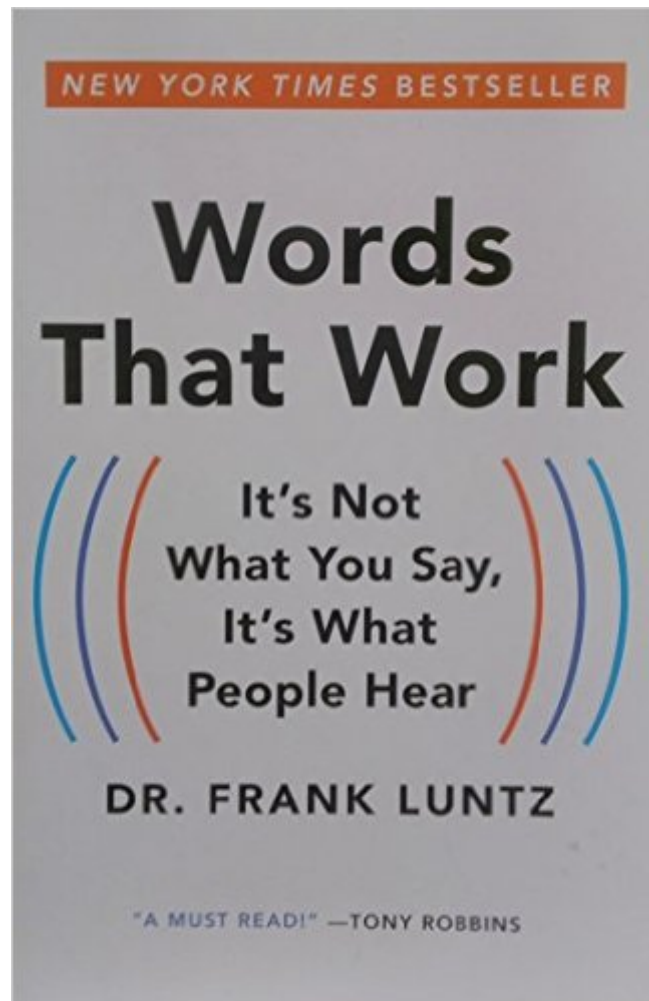


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# Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear



## Synopsis

The nation's premier communications expert shares his wisdom on how the words we choose can change the course of business, of politics, and of life in this country. In *Words That Work*, Luntz offers a behind-the-scenes look at how the tactical use of words and phrases affects what we buy, who we vote for, and even what we believe in. With chapters like "The Ten Rules of Successful Communication" and "The 21 Words and Phrases for the 21st Century," he examines how choosing the right words is essential. Nobody is in a better position to explain than Frank Luntz: He has used his knowledge of words to help more than two dozen Fortune 500 companies grow. He'll tell us why Rupert Murdoch's six-billion-dollar decision to buy DirectTV was smart because satellite was more cutting edge than "digital cable," and why pharmaceutical companies transitioned their message from "treatment" to "prevention" and "wellness." If you ever wanted to learn how to talk your way out of a traffic ticket or talk your way into a raise, this book's for you.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is masterful in its exploration of the use of language in American life, especially in business and politics. It was written by Dr. Frank Luntz, who calls himself a "linguistic geek." It's ideal for anyone, like me, who loves words and reading. The subhead to the book is "It's not what you say, it's what people hear." The trick is to speak in a way to make people hear what you want them to hear. To be persuasive. As Luntz writes, "It's not enough to be correct or reasonable or even brilliant." People must first listen, and then understand. This book gives many comparisons of word choices, and explains why one choice is the most effective. For example, instead of saying

"comprehensive," say "easy to understand." "Pre-owned vehicle" sounds much better than "used car." "Housewives" have turned into "stay-at-home moms." I'm reminded of another book I recently reviewed, *Eat This Not That!* which shows photos of foods to eat on the left, and comparable foods to avoid on the right. *Words That Work* could have been called *Say This Not That!* Luntz gives a list of ten rules of successful communication that anyone can use:

1. Simplicity: Use Small Words
2. Brevity: Use Short Sentences
3. Credibility is As Important As Philosophy
4. Consistency Matters
5. Novelty: Offer Something New
6. Sound and Texture Matter
7. Speak Aspirationally
8. Visualize
9. Ask a Question
10. Provide Context and Explain Relevance

Words have such power. They force you to organize your thoughts if you want to connect with other people.

The world's best message is ineffective if the person on the receiving end does not understand or relate to it. It is a harsh standard. It is a message communicators ignore at their own peril. You can be brilliant, creative, even right, but your message will fall flat unless it touches the hearer's prism of experience, beliefs, preconceptions and prejudices. In *Words that Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*, Frank Luntz offers insights into finding and using the right words to achieve your goals. The key to communication is to place yourself in the listener's situation and understand his or her deepest thoughts and beliefs. What the listener perceives constitutes the listener's reality. Based on his experience as a political and corporate pollster he recommends 11 rules for effective communication:

1. Use small words.
2. Use short sentences.
3. Credibility is as important as philosophy.
4. Consistency matters.
5. Novelty: offer something new.
6. Sound and texture matter.
7. Speak aspirationally.
8. Visualize.
9. Ask a question.
10. Provide context and explain relevance.
11. Visual imagery matters.

Luntz does not stop there. In addition to an insightful discussion complete with illustrations from his professional experience of the 11 rules, he adds critical elaboration:

1. Never assume knowledge or awareness.
2. Get the order right.
3. Gender can obstruct understanding.
4. It's about the children.
5. How you define determines how you are received.

The author resents accusations that his language hides and distorts meaning. "I do not believe there is something dishonorable about presenting a passionately held proposition in the most favorable light, while avoiding the self-sabotage of clumsy phrasing and dubious delivery." He then outlines his ten rules for effective language (Simplicity, Brevity, Credibility, Consistency, Novelty, Sound, Aspiration, Visualization, Asking Questions and Context / Relevance) and spends the rest of the book illustrating their use. Frank Luntz's book makes a good case that these rules are effective. Several topics are worth reading closely. Luntz describes the "dial session" focus group

methods he has devised to elicit and test snippets of effective language. He lays out the linguistic techniques he used to make the Republican "Contract with America" so appealing to voters. Chapter 9 debunks language-related myths the author's research has uncovered. These myths include that Americans are well educated, read a lot, and are generally happy. The truth corresponding to each myth has implications for choosing effective political and advertising language. Frank Luntz's in-your-face style comes through in his stories--particularly the ones that end with him being thrown out of yet another client meeting. For readers who may be uncomfortable with this style, I'll suggest a brief test. The political and business arenas that contribute the bulk of his examples are far from most readers' experience. But Chapter 11, "Personal Language for Personal Scenarios," is different. It recommends the best language for apologizing, requesting a raise, avoiding a traffic ticket, and other everyday situations. This ten-page chapter is a quick read.

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