**MOST ANNOYING BUSINESS JARGON: The next time you feel the need to reach out, shift a paradigm, leverage a best practice or join a tiger team, by all means do it. Just don’t say you’re doing it, because all that meaningless business jargon makes you sound like a complete moron. Here are 45 words and expressions to avoid. Also vote in our Jargon Madness bracket--think the NCAA basketball tourney for gobbledygook.** ~From [www.Forbes.com](http://www.Forbes.com) courtesy of Blake Gore

**CORE COMPETENCY**: This awful expression refers to a firm’s or a person’s fundamental strength---even though that’s not what the word “competent” means. “This bothers me because it is just a silly phrase when you think about it,” says Bruce Barry, professor of management at Vanderbilt’s Owen Graduate School of Business. “Do people talk about peripheral competency? Being competent is not the standard we’re seeking. It’s like core mediocrity.”

**BUY-IN:** Agreement on a course of action, if the most disingenuous kind. Notes David Logan, professor of management and organization at the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business: “Asking for someone’s ‘buy-in’ says, ‘I have an idea. I didn’t involve you because I didn’t value you enough to discuss it with you. I want you to embrace it as if you were in on it from the beginning, because that would make me feel really good.’”

**S.W.A.T. TEAM**: In law enforcement, this term refers to teams of fit men and women who put themselves in danger to keep people safe. “In business, it means a group of ‘experts’ (often fat guys in suits) assembled to solve a problem or tackle an opportunity” says USC’s Logan. An apt comparison, if you’re a fat guy in a suit.

**SWIM LANE**: A specific responsibility within a business organization, which is what no one aside from Michael Phelps should call it.

**EMPOWER:** What someone above your pay grade does when, apparently, they would like you to do a job of some importance. Also called “the most condescending transitive verb ever,” it suggests that ‘You can do a little bit of this, but I’m still in charge here. I am empowering you’”, says Dr. Jennifer Chatman, professor of management at the University of California-Berkeley’s Haas School of Business.

**☼DRINKING THE KOOL-AID:** A tasteless reference to the Jonestown Massacre of 1978, this expression means to blindly accept something, such as a company’s “mission statement.” Robotic allegiance is bad enough; coming up with tactless expressions for it is horrendous.

**MOVE THE NEEDLE:** This beauty, which has nothing to do with heroin, is a favorite of venture capitalists. If something doesn't move the needle, meaning that it doesn’t generate a reaction (like, positive cash flow), they don't like it much. So when pitching VCs, make clear that you intend to move the needle. Or you could just say, specifically, how your plan and product are superior to your competitors’.

**OPEN THE KIMONO:** “Some people use this instead of ‘revealing information.’ It’s kind of creepy,” says Bruce Barry, professor of management at Vanderbilt’s Owen Graduate School of Business. Just keep your kimono snugly fastened.

**BLEEDING EDGE:** Someone decided that his product or service was so cutting-edge that a new term needed to be created. It did not. Unless you are inventing a revolutionary bladed weapon, leave this one alone.

**TIGER TEAMS**: Remember S.W.A.T. Team? This is worse. A ‘tiger team’ is also a group of experts---specifically a bunch of tech geeks entrusted with curing your computer ills. Go Tigers!

**BURNING PLATFORM:** Jargon for an impending crisis. Better: “We’re in big trouble.”

**LOTS OF MOVING PARTS:** Pinball machines have lots of moving parts. Many of them buzz and clank and induce migraine headaches. Do you want your business to run, or even appear to run, like a pinball machine? Then do not say it involves lots of moving parts.

**CORPORATE VALUES**: This expression is so suffused with phoniness it churns the stomach. Corporations don’t have values, the people who run them do.

**MAKE HAY**: Jargon for being productive or successful in a short period of time. The phrase ‘to make hay’ is short for ‘make hay while the sun shines’, which can be traced to John Heyward’s The Proverbs, Epigrams and Miscellanies of John Heywood (circa 1562). A handy nugget for cocktail conversation, but that’s it.

**SCALABLE:** A scalable business or activity refers to one that requires little additional effort or cost for each unit of output it generates. Example: Making software is a scalable business (building it requires lots of effort up front; distributing a million copies over the Web is relatively painless). Venture capitalists crave scalable businesses. They crave them so much that the term now has become more annoying than the media’s obsession with Lindsay Lohan.

**BEST PRACTICE:** Refers to a method or technique that delivers superior results compared with other methods and techniques. It is also perhaps the single most pompous confection the consulting industry has ever dreamed up.

**THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX**: To approach a business problem in an unconventional fashion. Kudos to a Forbes.com reader who suggested: "Forget the box, just think."

**DUCKS IN A ROW:** The saying apparently comes from the earlier days of bowling before machines set pins automatically. One needed to get his “ducks in a row” before hurling a weighty ball down the alley. Better: At work, “make a plan”; then later, if you’d like, “go bowling.”

**ECOSYSTEM:** The vast, interlinked collection of designers, vendors, manufacturers, customers that defines a particular industry. Unless your business is aquaculture, stop using this pretentious expression.

**SOLUTION:** This word has come to mean everything from the traditional way to solve a mathematical proof to a suite of efficiency-enhancing software--and it is the epitome of lingual laziness. Says Glen Turpin, a communications consultant: "It usually refers to a collection of technologies too abstract or complex to describe in a way that anyone would care about if they were explained in plain English."

**LEVERAGE:** The granddaddy of nouns converted to verbs. ‘Leverage’ is mercilessly used to describe how a situation or environment can be manipulated or controlled. Leverage should remain a noun, as in “to apply leverage,” not as a pseudo-verb, as in “we are leveraging our assets.”

**VERTICAL:** A specific area of expertise. If you make project-management software for the manufacturing industry (as opposed to the retail industry), you might say, “We serve the manufacturing vertical.” In so saying, you would make everyone around you flee the conversation.

**OVER THE WALL:** If you're not wielding a grappling hook, avoid this meaningless expression. Katie Clark, an account executive at Allison & Partners, a San Francisco public relations firm, got a request from her boss to send a document "over the wall." Did he want her to print out the document, make it into a paper airplane and send it whooshing across the office? Finally she asked for clarification. "It apparently means to send something to the client," she says. "Absurd!" Agreed.

**FULL SERVICE:** If you don't work at a gas station, please please don’t use this expression. "If I hear one more professional describe their business as 'full service,' I'm going to scream," says Deborah Shames, co-author of Own The Room: Business Presentations that Engage, Persuade and Get Results. “Does this mean your investment firm drops off dry cleaning and provides babysitters?"

**DRILL DOWN:** A phrase often wielded by superiors wanting a subject examined more closely. "Drill down to what?" asks Shut Up and Say Something author Karen Friedman. "The oil?"

**IT IS WHAT IT IS:** Thanks. Idiot.

**ROBUST**: Often used to suggest a product or service with a virtually endless capacity to please. A cup of good coffee should carry this adjective. And that’s about it.

**TAKE OFFLINE:** An equally absurd variation of ‘let’s put this on the backburner.’ This means to postpone addressing an issue---one that may have nothing to do with the Internet. Unless you’re talking about removing your company’s Facebook page, you’re probably not taking anything offline.

**SYNERGIZE**: This word has infiltrated nearly every cube and conference room in the country. Blame Stephen Covey, author of 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. (No. 6 is Synergize.) Of this habit, Covey writes, "To put it simply, synergy means two heads are better than one." The same advice was preached several decades earlier on the hit show Sesame Street. Big Bird called it "cooperation."

**LEARNINGS**: Like most educated people, Michael Travis, an executive search consultant, knows how to conjugate a verb. That's why he cringes when his colleagues use the word "learning" as a noun. As in: "I had a critical learning from that project," or "We documented the team's learnings." Whatever happened to simply saying: "I learned a lesson from that project?" Says Travis: "Aspiring managers would do well to remember that if you can't express your idea without buzzwords, there may not be an idea there at all."

**BOIL THE OCEAN**: This means to waste time. The thinking here, we suppose, is that boiling the ocean would take a long time. It would also take a long time to fly to Jupiter, but we don't say that. Nor should we boil oceans, even the Arctic, which is the smallest. It would be a waste of time.

**REACH OUT:** Jargon for “let’s set up a meeting” or “let’s contact this person.” Just say that---and unless you want the Human Relations department breathing down your neck, please don’t reach out unless clearly invited.

**HARD STOP:** An executive with a "hard stop" at 3 p.m. is serious about ending the meaning at 3 p.m. Very serious, and also very important---or at least that's how it comes off, observes Patricia Kilgore, president of Sterling Kilgore, a Chicago area public relations and marketing firm. "To me it sounds like ‘This meeting isn't really that important, so I need a way to get out of it,'" she says. A heart attack is a hard stop, Kilgore adds; anything else is just a conflict.

**PUNT:** In football, to punt means to willingly (if regretfully) kick the ball to the other team to control your team’s position on the field. In business it means to give up on an idea, or to make it less of a priority at the moment. In language as in life, punt too often and you’ll never score.

**IMPACT**: This wannabe verb came to prominence, says Bryan Garner, editor in chief of Black's Law Dictionary, because most people don't understand the difference between the words "affect" and "effect." Rather than risk mixing them up, they say, "We will impact our competitor's sales with this new product." A tip: "Affect" is most commonly a verb, "effect" a noun. For instance: When you affect my thinking, you may have an effect on my actions.

**GIVING 110%:** The nice thing about effort, in terms of measuring it, is that the most you can give is everything, and everything equals 100%. You can’t give more than that, unless you can make two or more of yourself on the spot, in which case you have a very interesting talent indeed. To tell someone to give more than 100% is to also tell them that you failed second-grade math.

**BODY OF WORK:** A high-nosed way of summarizing the total output of an industry or company. Stop trying so hard and just say “product line,” or some such.

**LET'S TALK THAT**: For some troubled souls this phrase takes the place of "let's discuss that," or "let's talk about that." Let's talk that? Talk this.

**PRICE POINT:** "Come on, seriously, why say 'price point'?" begs Duncan Phillips, an account executive at The Hodges Partnership, a communications firm in Richmond, Va. “Just say price!” Click here to cast your vote in the "Jargon Madness" bracket.

**TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL**: In theory this means to make something better. In practice, it means nothing, mainly because nobody knows what the next level actually looks like and thus whether or not they’ve reached it. (For ways of actually measuring what's going on at your company, check out:"Nine Enlightening Business-Performance Metrics.")

**CUT AND DRY:** Unless you’re talking about carpentry, eschew this hackneyed turn of phrase.

**OUT OF POCKET**: Many auto-reply e-mails now carry the phrase: "I'm 'out of pocket' until next week." Mark Daly, an account manager at the Davies Murphy Group, a marketing firm, astutely observes: "Expenses come out of pockets, quarterbacks come out of the pocket, but Johnny, well he'll just be plain unavailable or out of the office."

**WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY:** This breezy expression refers to the amount of time, usually brief, in which to take action; when the window shuts, dreams of freedom die. Better scramble through that sucker. Or at least “take action.”

**LOW-HANGING FRUIT**: You’d rather not have to climb the tree to get your apple, so you curb your hunger by picking the low-hanging ones. Same goes for business tasks and opportunities. Except that no one knows which tasks and opportunities you’re talking about, or whether ticking them off, easy as that sounds, is a good idea in the first place.

**PEEL THE ONION**: This means to delve into a problem, one layer at a time, to thoroughly understand what’s causing all the trouble. As metaphors go, there are worse. But like the actual vegetable, this over-used expression brings tears to the eye.