



## WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

# 'Boilerplate' Language Is All Business

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

Today we talk about a type of writing -- boilerplate. Boilerplate language is the writing in documents such as contracts. The language is **standardized**. This means the words are well established and used by many people. The language is widely recognized as acceptable. It is not creative, nor does it change very much.

So, when it comes to things like business documents, legal contracts, and **training manuals**, boilerplate is a good thing. You don't need or want creative language in those sorts of documents.

However, in writing other kinds of stories, boilerplate has a different meaning.

If a piece of writing is not special or creative, we can call it boilerplate. The words **hackneyed** and **trite** have related meanings. Hackneyed or trite writing is commonplace and repeated too often. There is nothing special about boilerplate writing.

Now, let's hear boilerplate used in some examples.

*I'm not signing any contract without my lawyer looking at it first. I don't care how boilerplate it is.*

*The writing in the novel was boilerplate. It showed no creativity.*

*The writing job was not difficult for the college student. It was mostly boilerplate type stories.*

**Where did "boilerplate" come from?**

The website Meriam-Webster.com explains how the term “boilerplate” came to mean standard or non-creative writing.

Boilerplate comes from **syndicated** stories used especially by weekly newspapers. These stories were ready-to-print and required no additional writing.

Boilerplate stories were not usually hard news. They were stories that just filled space in the newspaper. So, the term boilerplate can mean ordinary, **mediocre** writing.

In the past, these stories were sent on flat, metal plates. These story plates looked like plates used to make steam boilers, devices used to make steam for heat or power. So, they were called “boiler plates.” Soon, the term “boilerplate” came to mean the actual printed material on the plates as well as to the plates themselves.

And that’s all the time we have for this *Words and Their Stories*. Hopefully, you don’t find our materials at VOA Learning English to be boilerplate.

Until next time ... I’m Anna Matteo.

*Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**standardized** –adj. to be regular, normal, and predictable because of similar language, spelling and usage rules

**training manual** – *n.* a book of instructions for a specific job or task

**hackneyed** – *adj.* lacking in freshness or originality because it is repeated often

**trite** – *adj.* hackneyed or boring from much use, not fresh or original

**syndicate** – *v.* to sell material for publication at the same time in many newspapers, periodical publications, or to broadcast on television or the radio

**mediocre** – *adj.* of medium or low quality, ordinary

*We want to hear from you. Do you have a similar expression in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.*