

# pkestaff



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## Deceptive language takes its toll

Three examples of dubious wording that can easily deceive the public



### (1) Food from fake farms

Several leading supermarkets are using fake farm names to make their food look locally produced. Faced with packaging that shows trees, farm animals and tractors – and branded with names like Nightingale Farms, Woodside Farms, and Boswell Farms – many shoppers are led to think the food has come fresh from a farm in the British countryside. In fact, it may have come from just about anywhere else, and usually has.

A Mail on Sunday investigation (10 July 2016) found that the farms don't even exist as farms – they're merely brand names. Tesco's Rosedene Farms brand sells blueberries from Argentina, Chile, Poland and Spain, while the sweet potatoes under its Redmere Farms label comes from Egypt, Honduras, Senegal, Spain and the US. The true country of origin is found only in tiny print on the label.

Minette Batters, deputy president of the National Farmers Union, said: 'These labels allow them to buy in imported stuff...and sell it as if it were British.' A YouGov poll of 1,796 people found that 6 out of 10 believed food sold under the fake farm brands was 'definitely' or 'probably' British. But Tesco claimed its labelling was 'clear'.

Aldi also has a range of fake farms. It has promised to ensure all of them will source their produce only from the UK in 2017. But they still won't be real farms, so they'll still be hoodwinking customers.



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## (2) Made-up words on make-up packaging

TV adverts for the catchily named 'L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Laser Renew The Double Care' – imagine asking for that at your local shop – say the cream will leave your skin feeling 'redensified'. This remarkable bit of jargon also exists on the [Boots website](#) where the cream retails for £20. Apparently, in blind-testing, 71% of users preferred it to the £200 market leader.

In case you've never read what's in a beauty cream, here's the slew of ingredients offered by Revitalift. There are so many and they sound so mysterious, they must be good:

AQUA / WATER • GLYCERIN • CYCLOHEXASILOXANE • DICAPRYLYL ETHER • HYDROXYPROPYL TETRAHYDROPYRANTRIOL • OCTYLDODECANOL • ALCOHOL DENAT. • PROPYLENE GLYCOL • DIMETHICONE • ISOPROPYL ISOSTEARATE • ASCORBYL GLUCOSIDE • C13-14 ISOPARAFFIN • PEG-100 STEARATE • PEG-9 POLYDIMETHYLSILOXYETHYL DIMETHICONE • BIS-PEG-18 METHYL ETHER DIMETHYL SILANE • HDI/TRIMETHYLOL HEXYLLACTONE CROSSPOLYMER • STEARYL ALCOHOL • PARAFFINUM LIQUIDUM / MINERAL OIL • CARBOMER • BEHENYL ALCOHOL • TRIETHANOLAMINE • DIMETHICONE/VINYL DIMETHICONE CROSSPOLYMER • DIMETHICONOL • CETEARYL ALCOHOL • CETEARYL GLUCOSIDE • METHYL METHACRYLATE CROSSPOLYMER • SODIUM CITRATE • SODIUM HYALURONATE • SODIUM HYDROXIDE • SILICA • SILICA Silylate • SILICA [NANO] / SILICA • MYRISTYL ALCOHOL • ALUMINUM HYDROXIDE • ADENOSINE • AMMONIUM POLYACRYLOYLDIMETHYL TAURATE • BORON NITRIDE • DISODIUM EDTA • DISODIUM STEAROYL GLUTAMATE • CAPRYLOYL SALICYLIC ACID • CAPRYLYL GLYCOL • LAURETH-7 • PENTAERYTHRITYL TETRAETHYLHEXANOATE • XANTHAN GUM • T-BUTYL ALCOHOL • POLYACRYLAMIDE • POLYMETHYLSILSESQUIOXANE • POLYSILICONE-11 • VINYL DIMETHICONE/METHICONE SILSESQUIOXANE CROSSPOLYMER • CETYL ALCOHOL • BHT • TOCOPHEROL • TOCOPHERYL ACETATE • PHENOXYETHANOL • CHLORPHENESIN • CI 77163 / BISMUTH OXYCHLORIDE • CI 77491, CI 77492, CI 77499 / IRON OXIDES • CI 77891 / TITANIUM DIOXIDE • MICA • LINALOOL • LIMONENE • CITRONELLOL • BENZYL ALCOHOL • PARFUM / FRAGRANCE. (F.I.L. B188623/1).

A recent Which? report says the use of jargon in cosmetics advertising and on packaging is a sales trick that's typical of the beauty-products industry. It cites mumbo-jumbo that supports Garnier Miracle Cream, with terms like 'rapid diffusion', 'skin-tensor peptides', 'encapsulated micro-pigments' and 'micro-peptides' being used to justify high prices.

## (3) Inventive fee names rake in ticket loot

Fans are being required to pay extra fees with unusual names when buying tickets online for events at some of Britain's biggest venues. The added charges go under such titles as service fee, facility fee, fulfilment fee, facility charge, and booking fee. Often they are shown to buyers only at a late stage in the transaction, according to a Sunday Times report (13 Nov 2016).

Two tickets to see the comedian John Bishop at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena 'carry additional costs of £14.03', says the Sunday Times, including a £9.88 admin fee, an 80p facilities fee and a fulfilment fee of £2.55. The O2 Academy even adds a £3.25 delivery fee when customers print out the ticket at home or use an eticket.

One secondary ticket reseller charged separate delivery costs of £4.98 per ticket even though several tickets were posted in the same envelope. Another reseller

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charged four times the face value of a pair of Craig David tickets and then, when the buyer clicked to pay, slapped on an extra £87.95, including a £65 booking fee and a delivery charge for each ticket of £9.95.

Vickie Sheriff, campaigns director at Which?, told the Sunday Times: 'Unavoidable ticket fees should be rolled into the headline price and any additional purchase costs, such as delivery charges, should be clearly displayed [upfront] alongside the ticket price.'

## Loose chippings from the Tower of Babel (6)

► **'Facilitate'** Harewood House, fabled Yorkshire stately home, is proud of its good ship The Capability that floats upon the lake. A leaflet for visitors says: 'Please note the boat can facilitate a maximum of 10 people per trip.' Facilitate, indeed! Our quayside mole asks, what would be so wrong with 'take', 'carry' or even 'accommodate'? What a pleb, eh?

► **'Amount' and 'number'** Is it time for sticklers to admit defeat in their rearguard action against the use of 'amount' instead of 'number', eg: 'Mr Roberts's remarks had upset "a huge amount of employees"'? (Times, 4 Aug 2016) The rule used to be simple enough: use 'amount' for mass nouns, ie singulars and commodities like bread, cheese, vinegar, and pork; use 'number' with count nouns, ie plurals like loaves, cheese pies, bottles of non-brewed condiment, and pigs. Today, most people in the broadcast media seem to use 'amount' for everything, so it's commonplace to hear 'A large amount of children walked through the school gates', as if children today are weighed by the ton (obesity hotspots only). In a piece about the Internet Movie Database in the Times on 10 Nov 2016, Kevin Maher writes: 'The StarMeter, especially, has changed the way movies are cast. It is utterly simple and brutally effective, and collated by counting the amount of clicks a star's IMDb profile page receives.' Also from the Times (31 Oct 2016), Simon Hughes sneaks this googly past the snoozing subeditor: 'Adil Rashid's lack of confidence in Test cricket is betrayed by the amount of different deliveries he tries in an over.'

► **'The reason is because'** We have wittered at some length about the foul tautology of 'the reason...is because'. Here's a classic full house from the Times diary of 29 Aug 2016: 'Paul Mason...claimed yesterday that the reason why most of the [Labour] shadow cabinet resigned two months ago was because they feared Corbyn [Labour party leader] would lead them to victory in a rumoured snap election.' Delete 'why' and replace 'because' with 'that'.

► **Jargon for grown-ups** Plain-language devotees are not against technical jargon as such, it being a useful shorthand among the initiated. Cue this perfect example from the Times obituary of Chris Bell, self-taught bicycle engineer (2 Sept 2016):

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'The key to the oval chainring is that it eliminates the deadspot at the top of the pedal stroke on a circular ring because it has the effect of lowering the gearing at the point where a cyclist's legs produce the least power.' At least, it sounds like a perfect example. Only bike specialists would really know.

► **Chilcot inquiry update** In Pikestaff 74 we said the Chilcot report on the Iraq inquiry would run to a million words. Actually it totalled 2.6million words. All praise, therefore, to the Edinburgh Festival troupers who spoke every single word of it in performing Iraq Out & Loud. It's not known if any audience members 'stayed the course', as George W Bush was wont to say. Nor is it known whether Dubya himself has read it all yet.

► **'Latter'** John Pare writes, 'Really like Pikestaff, but in your hyphenation article (Pikestaff 74) you refer to three alternatives for nut-cracking, and opt for "the latter". Which one is that, please – the first or the second?' Yes, guilty as charged, since 'latter' is normally OK for two alternatives only. But we cling to the small comfort provided by a 'not standard' definition of 'latter' given by the online **Cambridge Dictionary**, namely: 'the last of more than two people, things or groups previously mentioned'.

► **English to be the Latin of the EU?** If the UK leaves the EU, will this raise the chance that English (or Euro English, which is not quite the same thing) will become the EU's main working language, given that this would advantage only a relatively small member state, Ireland, where English is the main native language? In recent years, English has become increasingly popular as the lingo for draft EU documents, from which translations into the other 23 official languages are derived. The widespread use of English among Eurocrats may make it attractive as a new kind of Latin, spoken as a native tongue by few but understood by most. After all, Latin is used for much of the business correspondence of the Holy See, the Catholic church's governing body, yet its native speakers are thin on the ground (mostly under the ground, in fact).

## From-virus – latest news

Long-time readers of Pikestaff will know how we joust against the fast-spreading from-virus, which causes such temporary paralysis among subeditors that they fail to strike out the dreaded 'from' when it's redundant. Signs of new outbreaks have been pouring in, eg:

- 'The Red Arrows are not allowed to perform flypasts for birthdays, weddings or funerals – but there's nothing to stop newlyweds *from* finding themselves in the right place at the right time.' (Times, 10 Aug 2016)
- 'The families lived about 500 metres from each other, but at first did not allow the pair to interact to prevent them *from* discovering their true relationship.' (Times, 1 Aug 2016)
- 'A manhunt was launched after Ms Connor's ATM card and driving licence were

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found at the crime scene, and immigration officials were alerted to stop the couple *from* leaving the island.' (Times, 22 Aug 2016)

- 'The former shadow chancellor's interpretation... appalled judges but delighted enough viewers to prevent him *from* having to compete in the knockout dance-off...' (Times, 14 Nov 2016)

Maybe authors can't cope with exercising discretion, so they just retain 'from' every time. Or perhaps they worry that if they delete 'from', super-sticklers will demand they start using a possessive word instead, eg: '...to prevent his having to compete'. Of course, sometimes 'from' is needed, as in: 'Another official claimed that the two men had been prevented from leaving the country.' Anyway, the struggle continues.

## Clichés rear their ugly heads like the plague

### 'Wash down'

How long before the people rise up against the clichéd verb 'wash down'? [Longer than you think – Ed.] Its use to describe the sluicing of food particles through the gullet with some exotic wine or spirit has become widespread among restaurant critics and travel writers. Fresh examples abound, like reindeer droppings in the winter snow:

- Foolishly I washed it all down with many additional draughts of beer. (Bill Bryson, Notes from a Small Island, Daily Mail, 16 Aug 2016)
- To gauge how far she [Elizabeth David], and we, had come, consider the typical supper she recollected sitting down to in the mid-1930s – 'three sardines on bits of toast, one very tired sponge cake, two digestive biscuits', all washed down by 'tepid tea' and interspersed with cigarettes. (Jenny Johnson, Daily Mail, 8 July 2016)
- The coolest woman I have ever had the terror of breaking bread with... ordered steak, chips, tarte tatin and Epoisses, washed down with champagne for dinner at the Ritz, each element receiving only the most cursory acknowledgment. (Hannah Betts, Times, 8 Nov 2016)
- The Randolph even forgot to serve a cup of tea to wash down the sorry affair. (Andrew Elson, Times, 18 Oct 2016)
- Glued to the television, The Donald devoured hamburgers washed down with Diet Coke... (Toby Harnden, Sunday Times, 13 Nov 2016)

### 'Rolling hills'

If that torment isn't enough, the papers have also been replete with that dire cliché 'rolling hills' and its many egregious variations, eg:

- The rolling hills and mountains are as verdant and fertile as any of the Latin poet Virgil's descriptions... (Victoria Hislop, Daily Mail, 4 Sept 2016)
- That home [owned by opera singer Daniela Dessi] was a beautiful house tucked

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among the rolling Franciacorta vineyards near Genoa. (Times obituary, 29 Aug 2016)

- The same goes for much of northern Scotland, for the rolling hills around Rhydownen in the county of Ceredigion... (Times editorial, 18 July 2016)

Anyone who has noticed hills, mountains and vineyards rolling off somewhere – on trucks, ball-bearings, bogies or just of their own accord – please let us know.

## 'Incredible', 'epicentre', 'iconic'

Do cheer, however bleakly, if you watch any travel, history, motoring, nature or cookery programme without hearing the words 'incredible/incredibly', 'epicentre' and 'iconic' in the opening 30 seconds and then at regular intervals. Maybe the presenters, often recruited from children's TV where everything must be jolly and loud, are contractually obliged to use these wow words. Consider this burst of incredibles during Inside the Factory, presented by Gregg Wallace and Cherry Healey, about a Manchester canning factory they visited for BBC2 on 9 Aug 2016:

- 'Each bean will go on an incredible mile-and-a-half journey through this factory.' – Wallace
- 'This can of beans is about to go on an incredible journey.' – Healey

Healey also gushed that this was 'the most incredible place I've ever set foot in'. So we must assume she's never visited the Sistine Chapel, York Minster, the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or the Grand Canyon... or if she has, they were nothing compared to a shed full of bubbling haricots in Trafford Park.

## Let's get quizzical

Spot the blunders in these recent clippings from the national press. Answers are towards the end of Pikestaff (literally).

1. [Jason] Kenny said of the kiss [from Laura Trott, fiancée): 'I couldn't understand what she was saying. She was just balling her eyes out'. (David Williams, Daily Mail, 17 Aug)
2. Once reported, passports are cancelled on the system immediately to mitigate against the risk of misuse... (Times, 3 Oct)
3. 'No wait...It's not a full frontal lobotomy. It's a miniscule wart on his bottomy.' (Cartoon caption, Daily Mail)
4. When she refused to stop, neighbours called the police and four officers attended to diffuse the shouting match that ensued. (Daily Mail, 23 July)
5. As more scouts return, and more foragers set out, the hive systematically hones in on the optimal source. (Matthew Syed, Times, 10 Aug)
6. Yesterday news of Bieber's move had already spread online among his hoard of fans...(Daily Mail, 17 Oct)
7. Womens' votes (Letters page headline, Times, 16 June)

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8. They have no children, a subject which I find myself loathe to raise... (Judith Woods, Daily Telegraph, 9 July)
9. The former Mrs Trump, 67, also predicted that he would forego Air Force One for his own Boeing 757. (Times, 15 Nov)
10. As she [Maria Fernandes, wife of Keith Vaz, MP] readily conceded, many people will find it incredulous that after more than two decades of marriage she did not know the truth about her husband's sexual preferences. (Mail on Sunday, 11 Sept)

## Brexit vote: clear answer to a clear question, but was it merely advisory?

By 316 votes to 53, the House of Commons voted in 2015 to put the UK's continued membership of the EU to a referendum. The government issued a leaflet to every household (cost: £9.3million) that said: 'The referendum on Thursday, 23rd June [2016] is your chance to decide if we should remain in or leave the European Union.' It went on: 'This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.'

Pikestaff, of course, remains resolutely neutral. But by a majority of about 1.2million in a bigger turnout than most general elections, the people voted 'Leave' in response to the only – and very clear – question on the ballot paper, which was: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?'

The issues were hotly and thoroughly debated and there was misinformation on both sides, as we reported in Pikestaff 74. Yet at no time did the then prime minister or any other leading light on either side say the vote would be anything but binding. The public answered the question unequivocally, despite being warned of economic Armageddon if they voted Leave. It's plain that the high level of net legal immigration, roughly 330,000 a year (half from the EU), was a decisive factor to many Leave voters. And since freedom of movement is an EU shibboleth, they knew they were voting to quit the EU single market if the only way of having access to it was to accept free movement.

The clarity of what was said and written to voters has been much considered. The philosopher AC Grayling argues (New Statesman, 3 Nov 2016) that the vote was merely 'advisory' and 'consultative', citing the House of Commons briefing paper 07212 issued to all MPs in 2015 before they debated the referendum bill. Yet his argument seems flimsy, as the paper itself enjoys only advisory status. Moreover, a word search of the paper and the explanatory note (MPs' crib sheet) that accompanies the Bill reveals no mention of the word 'advisory'. Nor is 'advisory' used in the Bill, which MPs voted into law as the European Union Referendum Act 2015. Both the Leave and Remain camps made clear in the run-up to the poll that there'd be no going back on the vote.

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This means the government has a clear mandate from the public to go ahead with Brexit. The exit terms weren't stated on the ballot, which is not the voters' fault. So the government must simply get the best terms it can. Complaining that the electorate is too backward, misguided or racist to know its own mind is not going to help. MPs ceded the decision to the public. To hold the vote was a Conservative party manifesto commitment on which it fought and won a general election. For better or worse, the public decided they wanted out.

There's still hope for Remainers on 5 December, when the Supreme Court will rule on whether the government may use the royal prerogative to trigger Article 50 of the **Lisbon treaty** and start the exit process – or whether parliament must be given the power to approve it or not, which could delay or derail everything. As large parts of the judiciary are fervently pro-EU, the Supreme Court's verdict should be an interesting test of how good judges are at setting aside their personal preferences.

They're not good at all, according to one of the twentieth century's best-known US judges, Learned Hand. In his book *The Bill of Rights* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) he said: 'Judges are seldom content merely to annul the particular solution before them; they do not, indeed, they may not, say that taking all things into consideration, the legislators' solution is too strong for the judicial stomach. On the contrary they wrap up their veto in a protective veil of adjectives such as 'arbitrary,' 'artificial,' 'normal,' 'reasonable,' 'inherent,' 'fundamental,' or 'essential,' whose office usually, though quite innocently, is to disguise what they are doing and impute it to a derivation far more impressive than their personal preferences, which are all that in fact lie behind the decision.'

Not exactly Learned Hand's clearest language. But we think he meant judges can be as biased as hell while hiding it brilliantly behind a verbal smokescreen.

## 'Reaching out' marches on

The vogue for that quaking, querulous, touchy-feely verb 'reach out' creeps creepily onwards, spreading insidiously through the interweb. Our inbox brings fresh examples almost daily, mainly in sales pitches from firms who seek to improve websites, including our very own:

- 'Hey, I hope you don't mind me reaching out. I wanted to know if you were satisfied with your current WCM platform?' [Is that some kind of bathroom pedestal? – Ed.]
- 'Hello, I wanted to reach out and ask if there is anything you would like to change about your site. I am a web developer that can do just about anything you can imagine... Please let me know if this is something you're interested in. If it is, just let me know the best number to reach you on and I'll reach out right away.'
- 'Hello, I hope all is well. At this point, I will assume you are not interested in moving



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forward to learn about Sitecore. If this is not the case, please reach out to me and we can set something up.' [You assumed right - Ed.]

- 'We're reaching out to let you know that if you haven't updated your Dropbox password since mid-2012, you'll be prompted to update it the next time you sign in.'
- 'Did you know 8 out of 10 people open their Text messages when sent one? Reach out your customers and increase your sales by using our SMS leads on CPL model or buy opt in data for your own sms campaign.' [Who says good English is dead? - Ed.]

Worryingly, even the British police have begun to 'reach out'. Detective Inspector Jon Cousins says of a witness (Times, 27 Sept 2016), 'He is a Greek resident of the island who reached out to us in May.' Perhaps the Four Tops are to blame. Their 1966 hit song Reach Out I'll Be There must have lodged deep in the psyche of direct-marketeers and police officers everywhere.

## Words old and new: manspreading, mansplaining and put to the horn

Much talk in the press about 'manspreading' - blokes sitting with knees wide apart as if to attract interest to their thigh gap - and 'mansplaining', blokes (eg, plumbers, joiners, IT staff) droning on to women (not just women; they do it to everybody - Ed.) about ceramic washers, dovetail joints and servers, as the case may be.

The real reason for manspreading is surely corpulence, as pot bellies force the legs outwards, but it is at its most annoying when the bloke is wearing an arrowed signpost, as in our picture of the foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, and other Cabinet members.



At Pikestaff Towers, we watched Alison Steadman's series Little British Isles, in which she visited Britain's 267 inhabited islands (though not all on the same day). Steadman (pictured with sailor) paused at Oronsay Priory (pictured without sailor) to admire the gravestone of a 12th-century Scottish noble. Her male interlocutor said the poor chap had been 'put to the horn'. Steadman would surely have welcomed a bit of mansplaining, as it sounded like a cruel form of execution that

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used those pointy things on Highland cattle. But she just looked sage and no more was said.

So, in despair – and wondering whether 'put to the horn' alluded to Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's disgusting Get the Horn sketch (it didn't, but it's on the web) – we took to Wikipedia, which said: 'Letters of horning (Scots law): a document (i.e., letters) issued by civil authorities that publicly denounce a person as a rebel. The document was issued against persons who had not paid their debts. Historically, the documents would be announced by three blasts of a horn [at the appropriate market cross], and the documents themselves came to be known as "letters of horning". A person denounced in these documents was described as being "put to the horn".'

The Students' Glossary of Scottish Legal Terms (1982) says horning has been superseded. But you can still view the Register of Hornings at the offices of the Registers of Scotland in Edinburgh. Keep those knees together, though, as you form an orderly queue.

## Plain language and the courts

Judge Peter Thornton, the chief coroner, has told his colleagues to use plain English after a jury was asked to determine 'the polarity of the dichotomy' in the case of Sean Jackson, 26, who died at Elmley prison in Kent (reports The Times, 20 July 2016). At the High Court, Judge Thornton and Lord Justice Beatson said the phrase, used by the assistant coroner for Mid Kent and Medway, was not helpful.

Meanwhile, a 17-page judgment by Mr Justice Peter Jackson has been widely commended for its plain language (**full judgment**: Lancashire County Council v M [2016] EWFC 9). It begins: 'This judgment is as short as possible so that the mother and the older children [12 and 10] can follow it.' The judgment makes much use of short paragraphs, contractions, short sentences and the active voice. The tone is humane but brusque and direct. It refers to the activities of Mr A, a white British Muslim convert who wanted to take his children to Syria under the guise of a trip to Disneyland, Paris. It explains why the children should have only limited contact with him. At the time, Mr A was facing trial for trying to buy guns and ammunition. The Times (15 Sept 2016) says it understands Mr A has since been convicted. Since parts of the judgment are as poignant as they are direct, it's worth quoting a short passage in full:

*For several weeks before Mr A was arrested in November, he was being secretly recorded by the police. I have read a lot of those recordings. They show what Mr A really thinks and how he hides it from the mother and the children.*

*In the recordings, Mr A says that he would sacrifice his life for his religion. He shows his*

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*hatred for this country because we are unbelievers who do not live under sharia law. He says that Islam is against democracy and voting. He pulled down posters encouraging people to vote that had been put up in one of the mosques. He wants Britain to be a Muslim country. He wants Muslims to be above non-Muslims. He wants men to be above women. He hates gay people. He says that Mr B is not fit to be a father because he has used drugs.*

*Mr A agrees that he said these things but says that he didn't mean them, and that he was desperate because the children had been taken away for no reason. I do not believe that. His explanations were ridiculous. And I don't accept that he only started to hold those views after the children were taken away.*

*After thinking carefully about this and listening to everyone, I do not agree with Mr A at all. People are not out to get him. His problems are his own fault. I do not know why he was trying to buy guns and whether he is dangerous to everyone. The jury will decide about that. What I am clear about is that he is dangerous to the children and their mother because of the way he behaves and because the mother is not able to stop him. There is a good side to Mr A – everyone has a good side – and this makes it hard for H and A and their mother to see what he is really like.*

*When he gave evidence, Mr A was more interested in making speeches than answering questions. He says that there is a plot by police and social workers to smash up his happy family just because he is a Muslim. He clearly doesn't feel responsible for anything that has happened. He accused everyone of being sneaky liars who have taken his whole life from him. The truthful people are locked up and the liars are free. He has nothing to lose: "If you want me to be a terrorist, then that's what I'll do."*

*Mr A is very sorry for himself but I noticed that he never showed he is sorry for the mother or the children. Instead, he wants them to feel sorry for him. They shouldn't be. For him, they are not the most important things. What is most important to Mr A is Mr A and whatever views he holds at the time.*

Seeing a judgment written so tersely raises questions about why judges would write in any other way in any other case in any other court. How much time and money would be saved if the Jackson style were taught in law schools and widely adopted by the judiciary?

## New books

**'Garner's Modern English Usage' by Bryan Garner (Oxford University Press)**

Is there any right or wrong in English? If you think the answer is obviously 'yes', then the raging battle between the 'describers' and 'prescribers' may well have passed you by – or 'past ewe buy', if you are a describer who believes that spelling doesn't really matter. To the describers, manuals that seek to guide users of English about

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what is good and bad – and, by extension, clear and unclear – tend to be anathema. This is where Bryan Garner's new book comes in, because it champions the idea that there is such a thing as good English and tries to persuade people to write it, noting that even the most ardent describers (eg, Steven Pinker and David Crystal) write their own books and learned articles in flawless, thoroughly copy-edited, standard English.

In more than 1,000 pages, Garner sets out some ways of recognizing good English. He arranges the book in alphabetical order, so it's easy to find what you want. It's perfect for dipping into and getting lost in the cross-references.

Garner's writing and seminars on plain legal language are influential in the US, where he is based, but this book will widen his influence worldwide, partly because it includes examples of English from the UK and further afield. Our review of the book picks out some of the highlights and describes it as 'a huge achievement that deserves to become a leading authority on English usage'. The review should be on our website under 'Publications > Articles > Legal English' from March 2021.

Also from the prolific Bryan Garner is 'Guidelines for Drafting and Editing Legislation', written about US law alongside the Uniform Law Commission (RosePen Books). The title is self-explanatory and the book gives copious examples of how to write, and how not to write, the law.

### **'A Plain-Language Handbook for Legal Writers' by Christine Mowat (Carswell)**

This is the second edition of Christine Mowat's book, the culmination of more than 30 years' work on teaching and campaigning for plain legal language. It occupies 700 pages and two volumes, so readers will have to put in some serious and lengthy study. It summarizes historical (and, sometimes, historic) achievements in the plain-language field, before providing excellent how-to-do-it guidance and numerous worked examples from around the world. Mowat, based in Canada, is typically generous in the space she gives to the work of other leading practitioners.

Mowat is an advocate for the social good that plain language can bring, particularly in its ability to enable people to think and act for themselves instead of having to rely on advisers to tell them what documents mean. She says unclear legal writing is akin to fraud: 'In law, as in ordinary English, fraud means gaining an advantage by deceiving someone. It is consistent with plain-language principles to argue that legal language that is unintelligible to its readers may be a species of fraud. Some poorly written legal documents are evasive or clandestine or purposely garbled. The bulk of poor legal writing, however, is merely inept, hackneyed, and poorly organized. The deception from incomprehensible text is most often due to haste, carelessness, and habit.'

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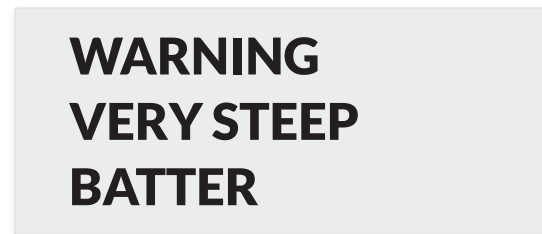


## Sign language

(1) Seen on the door of a ward at Manchester Children's Hospital, this home-made sign displays an increasingly common variation on 'utmost', perhaps through confusion with 'uppermost'.



(2) Driving through roadworks on the M1, alert Pikestaff reader Kevin Craggvale noticed several signs at the edge of the hard shoulder saying:



Was this an offer of some costly fish-and-chips? Discerning no greasy pong on the breeze, Mr Craggvale thought not, and later sought help from the dictionary: 'Batter: The slope (taper) of a wall or hedge, expressed as an angle or as a ratio of horizontal to vertical dimensions.' Perhaps it's not a good idea to distract drivers with unusual vocabulary, since one in five standard approved UK road signs is already a mystery to them, according to a [Kwik Fit survey](#).

But anyway, we think 'drop' or 'slope' would have been good alternatives, despite the supposedly derogatory meaning of 'slope' that some people claim.

(3) Martyn O'Whalley spotted this sign in Cumbria, which we translate for non-dialect speakers as, 'Take care, my good man. Lambs may be roaming upon the public highway.' However, there's something about the centred lettering and accurate full stops that bespeaks Farmer Artful erecting *amuse-bouches* for the tourists. Perhaps even the hand of James Rebanks, Oxford-educated super-shepherd of the Cumbrian fells, is at work here. They're a canny lot, these countryfolk.



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## Run-on sentences

Santander bank reminds us that the run-on sentence is still trampling conventional grammar underfoot, as its online service offers up this effort: 'At 21:42 on 02 Nov your current balance is £2,693.34, please note your current balance may differ from your available balance.' Why is a leading bank so shameless in not knowing where to put a full stop?

The weekly newsletter of Pikestaff's MP, Andrew Bingham, is a serial offender for run-on sentences. Here is one paragraph showing the blunder twice next to 'however': 'As I said during the debate, the impact on social media on all walks of life has been huge. Many of these have been good and beneficial, *however* as with many things in life it can and has been used by some for the wrong reasons. The abuse through social media isn't just restricted to young people, *however* the impact can be much greater on teenagers than on older people.' (3 Nov 2016) No ministerial job at the Department of Education for him! If only we could persuade him to use the humble 'but', his problems would be over. Or would they, since 'it can... been used' is the kind of construction that earns proofreaders their wages.

## Plain language needs to be complete as well as clear

Praise to Procter & Gamble UK for knowing where to put hyphens in these composite adjectives on the packaging for their big-selling Oral-B dental floss: 'Brushing alone can't get to all the *hard-to-reach* places where plaque builds up' and 'It helps to clean the *tough-to-get* plaque away.' (For 'get', read 'remove'. But the instructions commit the sin of omission when they say: 'Used morning or evening when you brush, EssentialFloss helps your gums and your teeth stay healthy', because they don't specify whether to use floss before or after brushing.) Does every new user know? Is it plain common sense to floss first and brush afterwards? In fact, there's much debate about this on the [web](#), so it would be good if Procter & Gamble had said what they think, otherwise it's just not clear.

## US election: short phrases win the day

On this side of the Atlantic, we enjoyed this tongue-in-cheek headline in a Scottish newspaper, 'Aberdeenshire businessman wins presidential election'.

Few of the Clinton campaign's phrases will linger long in the memory – there was 'women's rights are human rights' from Hillary; then President Obama describing Trump as 'uniquely unqualified'. Clinton's most memorable phrase was to insult

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Trump supporters as 'a basket of deplorables'. Resonating so well with swing voters, it may have cost her the election.

Trump the showman and practised TV host churned out simple, memorable, short and imperative phrases such as Build A Wall; Lock Her Up; Drain the Swamp; and Make America Great Again. His biographer Gwenda Blair describes his vocabulary as 'extremely simple, almost to the point of being childish'. Does this make him more or less likely to scrap plain-language campaigners' hard-won Plain Writing Act (2010), which requires most kinds of federal-government information (except regulations) to be written in plain language? We shall see.

A past president, Ronald Reagan, was often derided for his simple language and desire for one-page memos on complex foreign policy. Yet he had the common touch – which Mrs Clinton lacks – and his writing and speaking style was finely honed by years of crafting **time-limited radio talks** (about a thousand of them from 1975–79).

Trump and the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, are both said to be teetotal and one of them is reportedly gay, according to the biographer Stanislav Belkovsky. This reduces the chance they'll start a nuclear war after a drunken row over a woman, which cannot but be a good thing.

## Let's get quizzical: answers

1. 'To ball' takes on a lewd meaning in Little Richard's hit song Good Golly Miss Molly (1956). In more polite discourse it means to dance or play basketball. So here 'bawling' (ie, weeping) is probably intended. The Olympic gold-winning cyclists are now married.
2. 'mitigate' means to reduce the severity of something; 'militate' is intended.
3. 'miniscule', though given as acceptable in some dictionaries, is a non-word to most; correct is 'minuscule', the old word for lower-case type, now used to mean small print.
4. 'diffuse' means to spread something around, eg light; 'defuse' is intended.
5. 'hone' means to polish or sharpen; 'home' is intended.
6. 'hoard' is a secret store of treasure etc; 'horde' is a large number of marauding soldiers, admirers etc.
7. This should be women's votes, ie votes belonging to women.
8. 'loathe' means to detest, so 'loth' or 'loath' are intended here, meaning reluctant.
9. 'Forego' means 'to go before', so this should be 'forgo', ie 'do without'. However, only a few sticklers maintain the distinction, eg Bryan Garner in Garner's Modern English Usage.
10. For 'incredulous' (the state of being disbelieving), read 'incredible' (unbelievable).

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## Farewell from Pikestaff

This is our 75th edition and, regretfully, it's our final one in this format. Plain Language Commission's website will continue to host all available back issues for the foreseeable future – they're on free download from the site under 'Publications'. We'd like to thank all who've sent in contributions, cuttings, photos and snippets over the years. Thanks also to Sarah Carr, who wrote most of the first 63 issues, and Mike Frost of Frost Design Consultants, who created the Pikestaff design and has uncomplainingly endured our last-minute alterations to every edition.

## Back issues

You can see back issues of Pikestaff on our [website](#), along with an index showing each month's content.

## Rolling the credits

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