BBC Training & Development

THE BBC NEWS STYLEGUIDE

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THE BBC NEWS STYLEGUIDE

by John Allen

Every time anyone writes a script for BBC News they are potentially touching the lives of millions of people – through radio, tv and the internet. That is the privilege of working for one of the biggest news organisations in the world.

It brings with it responsibilities. BBC News is expected to set the highest standards in accuracy, fairness, impartiality – and in the use of language. Clear story-telling and language is at the heart of good journalism. This styleguide will help make your journalism stronger and connect better with our audiences. As my first news editor on a small weekly paper used to say: "Keep it plain and keep it simple." It still holds true.

Richard Sambrook Director, BBC News

The BBC is a remarkable place. Much of the accumulated knowledge and expertise locked in people's heads stays that way: occasionally we share, and the result is a bit of a revelation.

This styleguide represents some of John Allen's extraordinary wisdom surrounding the use of English in written and spoken communications. This is in many ways at the heart of what the BBC does and what it is respected for. This is not a "do and don't" list but a guide that invites you to explore some of the complexities of modern English usage and to make your own decisions about what does and does not work. It should improve your scripts and general writing, not to mention making you feel better informed, challenged and amused.

This guide is being made available as a publication and online in order to make maximum impact. If you have any comments about it I would be delighted to hear from you.

Nigel Paine Head of People Development

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Why does the BBC need a styleguide?

Feather-footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole. 'Yes,' said the managing editor, 'that must be good style.'

Scoop, **Evelyn Waugh**

Good writing is important to journalists, but it is especially important to BBC writers. Along with our commitment to accuracy, impartiality and fairness, it is part of our contract with the licence fee payer. A listener, Dr D.S. King, wrote from Essex:
The BBC is listened to throughout the world and should be a beacon of correct English.

Listeners and viewers look to the BBC to maintain high standards. It is a responsibility that should be welcomed by a public service broadcaster, and it is a rôle the BBC has acknowledged since its creation. There is a good reason for this. Well written English is easier to understand than poorly written English.

It is our job to communicate clearly and effectively, to be understood without difficulty, and to offer viewers and listeners an intelligent use of language which they can enjoy. Good writing is not a luxury; it is an obligation.

Our use, or perceived misuse, of English produces a greater response from our audiences than anything else. It is in nobody's interest to confuse, annoy, dismay, alienate or exasperate them.

Why does the BBC need a styleguide?

'BBC English' is often spoken of in jest, as if it were some figment of the 50s. But the official parlance of the Corporation still does have its influence. The use of a word or phrase in, say, a news bulletin can signify its acceptance into standard English.

John Mullan,
The Guardian

The author and former BBC Radio assistant editor Tom Fort put it like this:
Most listeners will not be offended by, or even notice, bad English. But many will notice and will be offended. The first category will not be offended by good English, even if they don't appreciate it. The second category will be appeased and will be less likely to switch off or write letters of complaint which some poor unfortunate person will have to take time and trouble to answer.

The fact is that good English will offend no one and so serves our audiences better. The best journalists appreciate that writing well is not a tiresome duty but a necessity. This guide is intended as a small contribution to achieving that end. It is, though, just what is says it is – a guide. It is not a collection of rules and regulations. It is not a dictionary and it is not a list of what is acceptable and what is not. The aim is to stimulate thought and to highlight areas of potential difficulty.

Getting it right

English, like any living language, does not stand still. This creates difficulties. Some of our listeners and viewers have very strong opinions about what is right and wrong. They complain when we deviate from their preferences, and accuse us of lowering standards or of having none at all. Our task is to tread a fine line between conservatism and radicalism, to write in such a way that we do not alienate any section of our audience.
An added complication is that a great deal of news

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output is written in haste, with one eye on the script and the other on the clock. Writing under pressure is what our kind of journalism is all about, but it is no reason for ungrammatical, inelegant or sloppy use of English.

The introduction of 24-hour news networks on radio and television means BBC journalists do many more live two-ways than they once did. The informal conversational style used in this context is not appropriate in a prepared script. Bulletin writing demands a more formal, structured approach, and more organisation.

Bi-medial working has brought further complications. Story-telling with pictures is not the same as story-telling with words alone; organising your material on Ceefax or online presents particular problems. BBC writers need to be aware of the opportunities and limitations of the medium they are working for, and to adjust their style accordingly. It is not always easy.

We should also be aware of the dreadful impoverishment threatened by broadcasters who seem determined to reduce English usage to playground levels and below. The reasons for this are not clear. Laziness? Poor teaching in schools? An over-anxious desire not to seem stuck-up? All probably come into it but, whatever the cause, the effects are dispiritingly clear. No matter how many tens of thousands of people we now put through media studies courses, we still get newsreaders, reporters and channel

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announcers who use English as though they are picking it up from one another as they go along … Television is a medium of mass communication. When its practitioners can no longer use the English language properly they cease to communicate effectively and the whole thing becomes pointless.

Christopher Dunkley, Financial Times

The bits that matter – parts of speech

People think I can teach them style. What stuff it is. Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret to style.

Matthew Arnold

A large section of the English education system went through a phase when even a rudimentary knowledge of grammar was considered unnecessary. The message was: "It's what you think that's important, not whether you can write, spell or use words properly."

As a journalist who writes for a living, you should appreciate that basic literacy is a core element of the job. If you never knew, or just need a reminder, words are classified according to the job they do in a sentence. These are the most important:

NOUN – common nouns are naming words (editor, television, albatross). They can be singular or plural. A proper noun is a name and usually starts with a capital letter (Denmark, Mars, Angela). Nouns which refer to collections of people and things are called collective nouns (the team, the Cabinet).

VERB – verbs express action or a state of being (write, hit, be).

PRONOUN – pronouns take the place of nouns (he, her, we, them).

ADJECTIVE – an adjective is a describing word (Welsh, big, blue).

ADVERB – an adverb describes a verb or adjective (clearly, gracefully, finally, suddenly).

PREPOSITION – prepositions are the little words which hold a sentence together, often by showing direction or location (in, to, from, by, with, beyond).

Don't worry. This is not a grammar book (far from it), but some or all of these words may appear occasionally in the following pages.

The basics

The first rule of writing is to know what you want to say. This may seem a statement of the obvious, but items are often broadcast which are not exactly what the writer intended:

• *For the second time in six months, a prisoner at Durham jail has died after hanging himself in his cell.*

The ability of some people to die more than once is also illustrated in this headline:

• *A suicide bomber has struck again in Jerusalem.*

The afterlife seems to exist according to this writer:

• *Sixty women have come forward to claim they have been assaulted by a dead gynaecologist.*

It's a good idea to remember the subject of the sentence:

• *A walker crossing Tower Bridge spotted the body – it's understood he was about five-and-a-half and Afro-Caribbean.*

And this remains true even if the police are involved:

• *The police in Hounslow, west London, were so concerned about a surge in street crime that they carried out a survey to discover why.*

Who is getting on better with whom?

• *The Liberal Democrats get on better with Labour than the Tories.*

Lack of thought produces sentences such as this:

• *It's a sad and tragic fact that if you're a farmer you are three times more likely to die than the average factory worker.*

The basics

An item on Bank Holiday traffic problems offered this unlikely spectacle:
• *There's an overturned tractor trailer heading north on the M11.*

The key to good writing is **simple thoughts simply expressed.** Use short sentences and short words. Anything which is confused, complicated, poorly written or capable of being misunderstood risks losing the listener or viewer, and once you have done that, you might just as well not have come to work.

In broadcasting, the basic sentence structure **Subject-Verb-Object** works every time. The audience grasps what you are saying straight away. Anything more flamboyant, such as a subordinate clause, is a potential barrier to understanding.
• *With what his political opponents called a leap in the dark, the Prime Minister today committed Britain to a European daylight saving regime.*
Whose political opponents? Who are the political opponents? What leap in the dark? Decide what you want to say and get on with saying it. Aim to be simple (not simplistic), fluent and easy on the ear. Your first duty is to your audience, not to your own idea of arresting prose.

Broadcasting is all about the spoken word, and good spoken English is at the heart of what we do. There is a kind of journalese which flies in the face of this simple truth. It has its origins in the press and in

The basics

American radio, and some broadcasters think it adds impact to their output. In real life, people do not say *Liverpool and England striker Michael Owen,* or *former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher,* or *Microsoft boss Bill Gates*. In conversation they would always use the definite article, and so should we. If in doubt, ask yourself how you would tell the story to the man on the Manchester tram, and use that as your guide.

You have a relationship with the audience, so try to make it a pleasant and productive one. Here are some tips to consider:

• Do not describe news as *good, bad, shocking* or *horrendous*. Tell the story and let the listener decide.

• Do not frighten off your audience. One presenter began his programme by declaring that many people thought parliamentary reform was boring, but he was still going to talk about it.

• Do try to get a strong active verb in the first sentence. You want to make an impact and keep people listening.

• Do not start a news report with a question. The audience wants to be informed, not take part in a quiz.

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• Do not begin a story with *As expected*. If your item was predictable and you have nothing new to say, why should the listener or viewer pay attention?

• Be positive. Make assertions wherever possible, and try to avoid negatives. It is more direct to say *The plan failed* than *The plan was not successful.*

Despite the above, we are mainly dealing with advice, not rules. The most interesting writing often involves creating something unexpected, and rules tend to get in the way. But daily journalism has its discipline and that is the subject of this guide.

Abbreviations & acronyms

One should not aim at being possible to understand but at being impossible to misunderstand.

Quintilian

Just because you know what NACRO means, and the people you've discussed the story with know what it means, it doesn't follow that the majority of your audience know. Assume nothing. Some short forms such as NATO, CIA, BBC, ITV, AA and RAC are well known and need no explanation, but think twice before using others. If you introduce the likes of BECTU, HSBC, RNIB, RTZ, ACAS and the BMA into your scripts without saying what they mean, you are virtually inviting some listeners or viewers to turn off. It's usually better to give the full name of an organisation at first reference and then use its short form later.

Active & passive

Dear Joseph,…you will put it into the proper Whitehall prose, scabrous, flat-footed, with much use of the passive, will you not? I may have allowed something approaching enthusiasm to creep in.

Patrick O'Brian,
The Yellow Admiral

At its heart, news is about people doing things. Activity is interesting. Where you can, write sentences with subjects that are doing things, and not subjects that are simply receiving actions upon them. Compare these two sentences:

• *A meeting will be held by the company's directors next week.*

• *The company's directors will meet next week.*

The first is an example of what grammarians call the passive voice; the second is the active voice. Don't be put off, it's really very simple.

Active voice: **A does B.**

Passive voice: **B is done** (usually by A).

The active voice will help give your scripts some vitality and life. It can also make a weak sentence more emphatic and give it greater impact. Compare these examples. The first is in the passive, the second active:

• *There were riots in several towns in Northern England last night, in which police clashed with stone-throwing youths.*

• *Youths throwing stones clashed with police during riots in several towns in Northern England last night.*

The *there is, there are* construction is overused. Why waste time stating that something exists when you could get on and describe the action? The imagery in the second version is so much more vivid and powerful and helps the audience to imagine what went on.

Active & passive

Sometimes, though, the passive is better.
Active: *A rhinoceros trampled on Prince Edward at a safari park today.*
Passive: *Prince Edward was trampled on by a rhinoceros at a safari park today.*

In this example, the focus of the story is Prince Edward, not the rhinoceros, and it is the royal name you probably want at the beginning of the sentence because that is where it will have most impact.

Governments, politicians, and officials of all kinds love the passive because individual actions are buried beneath a cloak of collective responsibility. They say *mistakes were made* instead of *we made mistakes*, and use phrases such as *in the circumstances it was considered* and *it will be recognised that* and *it was felt necessary that.* Used in this way, the passive takes the life out of the action and distances it from any identifiable source. When things go well, the minister or company chairman or football manager says: "I decided on this course of action." When the response is less positive, this becomes: "It was thought to be the right thing to do at the time."

Americanisms

We have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language.

Oscar Wilde,
The Canterville Ghost

One of the things which most exercises our listeners and viewers is our use of words and constructions which we are accused of slavishly copying from the United States. American English is virtually everywhere. It is the language of international agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank; American films, music and television programmes bring it into our homes; magazines and wire services are dominated by it, as is the internet. Is it any surprise, then, that journalists adopt new usages, vocabulary and pronunciation?

It is not, but we are not broadcasting for ourselves. Very many people dislike what they see as the Americanisation of Britain, and they look to the BBC to defend 'Britishness' in its broadest sense. In particular, they demand standard English from us, and we should acknowledge their concerns. At the very least, we should be conscious of what we are doing when we write our scripts.

We should thank North America for adding greatly to our vocabulary. Some Americanisms are so embedded in our language that their origin has long been forgotten, for example *editorial, peanut, commuter, nervous, teenager, gatecrasher* and *babysitter.* But new words are constantly queuing at language immigration control, hoping to be allowed in.

• *Lambs can be euthanised, he says, but who would care for damaged human children?*
This sentence was written by a news correspondent in Washington, and illustrates the American

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enthusiasm for turning nouns into verbs. English is not averse to the practice, but we should not risk alienating our audience by rushing to adopt new words before their general acceptance at large. *Euthanise* is not a verb you will find in any dictionary and it has no place in our output. (But who can say what will happen in the future?)

Think about the words you use. Are you happy with *authored* as in *Tony Benn has authored a book*? Or *guested* as in *Sir Michael Caine guested on the Michael Parkinson Show*? Would you welcome *diarise* (enter into a diary), *civilianise* (replace military or police staff), or *casualise* (replace permanent staff)? Standard English has accepted verbs such as *finalise*, *editorialise*, *publicise* and *miniaturise*, but will it be so receptive to others? Our listeners and viewers must not be offended or have their attention diverted by the words we use.

American speech patterns on the BBC drive some people to distraction. Adding unnecessary prepositions to verbs is guaranteed to cause apoplexy in some households. Problems which were once *faced* are now *faced up to*. In North America, people *meet with* other people. Everywhere else they *meet* them. British people *keep* a promise rather than *deliver on* it. Expressions such as *deliver on*, *head up*, *check out*, *free up*, *consult with*, *win out*, *check up on*, *divide up* and *outside of* are not yet standard English, and they all take more time to say. Even so, these extended forms seem to have great vitality and are rapidly becoming the norm. We have to make a

Americanisms

judgement about their acceptability to our listeners and viewers.

There are thousands of differences between British English and American English, in spelling, grammar and vocabulary. British people use *car parks* not *parking lots*, having bought *petrol* rather than *gasoline*, and worry about *transport* issues rather than *transportation*. We throw *stones*, not *rocks*, because in standard English a *rock* is too large to pick up. Our *lawyers* appear in *court*; their *attorneys* appear in *courtrooms*. We take bodies to a *mortuary*; American dead are taken to a *morgue*. Our workers get pay *rises* not *hikes*.

Many American words and expressions have impact and vigour, but use them with discrimination or your audience may become a tad irritated.

Attribution first

Broadcasters should always identify the source of an assertion before making it – always say *who* before you say *what* they said or did.

The British economy is on the verge of collapse and unless the Chancellor hits the taxpayer hard in his next budget we will experience the worst depression since the 1930s. That's the view of a Luxembourg-based bank which has carried out a review of economic trends in Europe.

This construction puts impact before information. The listener or viewer is in no position to make a judgement on the validity of the assertion until they know who is making it, or they will be so shocked by the assertion that they will not take in the attribution.

There are other good reasons for writing broadcast news this way. It is more natural and conversational and it avoids confusion. You would not say to a friend: *I am a dissolute, disreputable failure, a moral vacuum with no discernible redeeming features. That's what my wife said last night.* You would naturally put the attribution first: *My wife says I'm a dissolute, disreputable failure* etc.

That's the way we speak and it's the way we should write news stories.

This rule does not apply to Ceefax. Their style, for the eye not the ear, is the other way round – statement first, attribution second.

Clichés & journalese

By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself.

George Orwell

It's a cliché to advise writers to avoid clichés. Every time you have a story about a child being left unattended you can reach for the phrase *home alone*; every time two motorists exchange angry words it's obviously a case of *road rage*; escapes from prison are always *daring* and inquiries always *in depth*. The regular use of these predictable words and phrases is numbing and indicates a lack of thought and effort.

In themselves, clichés are a form of shorthand and we would be hard pressed to do without them altogether. There are probably some lurking within the pages of this guide. However, in the final analysis, Clichéville is a town which bears all the hallmarks of the angry clashes which occur with monotonous regularity.

Journalese comes from newspapers, which have developed a particular style to meet their own needs. Some of them have moved a very long way from standard English. Some journalists assume that newspaper English is the language of all journalism. It is not. Broadcast journalism, written for the ear, requires a different approach. Our writing has to be simpler, clearer and more natural. *Hello Tim. Have you heard that Matt's job has been axed and he's pledged to fight on in a bid to block the move.*

You do not often hear people in conversation use words like bid, probe, pledge, axe, plea and all the other short words in the headline writer's sack. Good radio and television writers avoid them.

Clichés & journalese

One man's meat is another man's poison, and one man's list of clichés might be another man's list of useful sayings and phrases. However, if you find yourself including any of the following in your script or summary, take yourself to one side and ask yourself if it really is the best you can do.

a question mark hangs over

conspicuous by its absence

the situation remains confused

leaves much to be desired

combing the area for clues

leave no stone unturned

grind to a halt	**point blank range**
quiet but tense	**moving the goalposts**
full-scale search	**level playing field**
the bottom line	**armed to the teeth**
blessing in disguise	**spread like wildfire**
calm before the storm	**horns of a dilemma**
wealth of experience	**in the final analysis**
in the pipeline	**hail of bullets**
shrouded in mystery	**reign of terror**
ripe old age	**last-ditch effort**
rushed to the scene	**vanished into thin air**
beginning of the end	**limped into port**
burn the midnight oil	**emotions ran high**
moment of truth	**riot of colour**

Clichés & journalese

This is a sample – there are lots more where these came from.

Uninspired journalists are also very fond of nouns and adjectives which go together so inevitably that they have lost any force or colour they might once have had. I have a sneaking suspicion that you may want to add your own favourites to this list.

glaring omission	**bated breath**
weighty matter	**blissful ignorance**
bitter end	**hot pursuit**
serried ranks	**breakneck speed**
sweeping changes	**true colours**
chequered career	**daylight robbery**
whirlwind tour	**brutal reminder**
marked improvement	**absolute rubbish**
foregone conclusion	**strife torn**
wreak havoc	**open secret**
luxury yacht	**cherished belief**
gory details	**deafening crash**
psychologically important	**blazing inferno**

The words and phrases in these lists are not banned. There will be occasions when you choose to use some of them, but at least be aware that when you do you are straying into the superficially attractive word store which produces second-hand, second-rate writing. A large part of your personal style comes from the vocabulary you use, so choose wisely.

Clichés & journalese

Here are a few of the unpleasantest words that ever blotteth paper.
William Shakespeare,
The Merchant
of Venice

Journalese is a specialist form of cliché writing. People who use it presumably want to sound urgent, to make an impact and to be, well, journalistic. Even though you are a journalist, whether in the field or in the office, try to avoid it. How often have you heard something like this?
The beleaguered President Humboldt's grip on power in strife-torn Benguela is weakening. The ailing leader of this oil-rich desert country is said to be literally fighting for his political life. An uneasy peace was brokered after a marathon negotiating session with leaders of the breakaway Gulf rebels, but it's almost inevitable that the once undisputed strongman of the region is heading for a bloody confrontation which will plunge Benguela into chaos.

Please resist the temptation to write like this. It is a style that goes with a trench coat and a trilby hat with a card saying Press tucked in the brim.

Here are some examples of journalese for your consideration.
Aim – rarely heard in real life except at shooting or archery clubs.

Amid – does anyone ever use this, or its close relative amidst, in normal conversation?

Axe – the jobs axe remorselessly falls in much of our output.

Bid – another one straight from the Hack's Book of Wee Words. When was the last time you said to a colleague: "Leaves on the line foiled my bid to get to work"?

Clichés & journalese

Blaze – a potentially useful synonym for fire, but not all fires are blazes.

Blow – try setback or disappointment.

Blunder – a word that seems to exist only in journalese, along with its close friend bungle.

Boost – nearly always accompanied by major, and much the worse for it.

Boss – a catch-all short word that covers everyone from the director general to the football club manager.

Centred around – makes no sense, but is much heard.

Chaos – a hardy perennial in the hack's garden of delight.

Chiefs – and their deputies remind us of Hollywood westerns.

Clash – still hugely popular among the Titans in news and sport.

Crucial – often used to suggest significance, often misused.

Death toll – why not simply say how many people have been killed?

Dramatic – see crucial.

Eleventh hour – somehow makes time stand still.

Emerged – often used when we are late on a story or to suggest spurious journalistic endeavour.

Fighting for his/her life – the subject is probably unconscious in a hospital bed and making no attempt to do anything.

Clichés & journalese

Full scale – often added to search or inquiry for no good reason.

Garner – as in *She garnered three awards*. Only ever used by hacks.

Gunned down – probably first used in the Tombstone Sentinel.

Gunshot wounds – what are they? Bullet wounds or shotgun wounds?

Hammered out – leave it for metalwork, not negotiated settlements.

Helping police with their inquiries – being questioned or interviewed is shorter and to the point.

House fire – most people would say a fire at a house.

Inferno – this is a really serious state of affairs, not just a fire.

Joyriding – can lead to death and great anguish. Try to avoid.

Key – heard too often to mean much.

Launched – barely a day goes by without some report, initiative or investigation being launched by us.

Literally – if you mean it literally, it's not really necessary to say so.

Mandarins – leave them to the greengrocer. The phrase civil service mandarins is not compulsory.

Manhunt – police search or murder hunt.

Clichés & journalese

Marathon – talks which go on for a long time do not demand this adjective.

Mercy dash – good grief.

Miraculous – as someone once said: "Who are we to determine God's work?"

Oust – top class journalese.

Plea – ditto

Pledge – properly belongs in a wedding service or a pawnbroker's.

Probe – best left to doctors or one of those tiny cameras.

Quit – another ditto.

Quiz – the noun is fine, the verb is an abomination.

Row – not all differences of opinion justify the use of row.

Rush – especially to hospital. Use it only when you really mean it.

Scheme – a great favourite, but what about plan, proposal, idea, project?

Set – as in A is set to do B. A useful but overworked expression.

Spark off – would anyone but a journalist use this?

Spree – shopping or killing?

Sustain fatal injuries – or die.

Sweeping changes – the bristles on this must be worn out by now.

Clichés & journalese

Today – broadcasters should hardly ever need to say this.

Tracker dogs – specially trained? Or just sniffer dogs. Or even simply dogs.

Trigger off – see spark off.

Vital – are you sure?

Vowed – when was the last time you vowed anything?

Walked free – from court. This phrase is not compulsory after successful appeals.

Collective nouns

Proper words in proper places make the true definition of style.

Jonathan Swift

It is the policy of BBC Radio News that collective nouns should be plural, as in *The Government have decided*. Other departments, such as BBC Online, have resolved that collective nouns should always be singular, as in *The Government has decided*. BBC Television News has no policy and uses whichever sounds best in context. The difficulty for writers comes because there is no rule – collective nouns can be either singular or plural.

The advice from Radio News is fine, but think about what you are saying. A lot depends on whether the organisation is seen as a singular entity or as a collection of individuals.

It is more natural to write *The committee park their cars in the field* rather than *The committee parks its cars* because the committee is being thought of as separate people. It would also be correct to write *The committee has decided to ban cars from the field* because it is being seen as a single body.

Similarly, *The Cabinet are discussing education* (because it takes more than one to have a discussion) but *The Cabinet is determined to push through the changes* (where its members are acting together).

There is one rule you must follow, though – be consistent. Do not write: *The jury was out for three hours, before they reached their verdict.* It is incredibly easy to change from singular to plural within a sentence if you allow your concentration to lapse. *The company has issued a profits warning which could*

Collective nouns

have a serious impact on their shares.
A team of scientists has arrived in Hong Kong. They will start their investigations into the outbreak of smallpox tomorrow.

In sport, teams are always plural. *England are expected to beat the Balearic Islands*; *Tranmere Rovers have extended their lead at the top of the Premiership.*

NB Words such as media and criteria are plural. *The medium of television is the most exciting of media.* (For *data*, see the Finally section.) It is BBC style to use *referendums* and *forums* rather than *referenda* and *fora.*

Confusables

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance/As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

Alexander Pope

English is full of traps for the unwary. Words which sound very similar can mean very different things. Viewers and listeners complain most loudly when they hear the wrong word used, and now scripts are widely available on the internet, misspellings, too, are public. Deficiencies in vocabulary detract from the authority of both the journalist and the BBC. This was broadcast on Radio Four:
A boy of twelve is in intensive care in hospital after a group of teenagers doused him in inflammatory liquid and then threw a lighted match at him.

The writer did not mean this. She meant *inflammable,* capable of being set on fire, not *inflammatory*, tending to stir up trouble.

The person who wrote *The union's decision will mitigate against a settlement* did not mean it, either. The word required was *militate*, working against. *Mitigate* means to appease, to soften, as in *mitigating circumstances*, which means circumstances that reduce the seriousness of an offence.

Here is a list of frequently confused words. If you are not confident about their meanings, look them up.

Affect/effect

Alternate/alternative

Appraise/apprise

Biannual/biennial

Continual/continuous

Dependent/dependant

Confusables

Discreet/discrete

Disinterested/uninterested

Distinctive/distinguished

Flounder/founder

Flout/flaunt

Fortuitous/fortunate

Inflammable/inflammatory

Loathe/loath/loth

Luxuriant/luxurious

Meter/metre

Militate/mitigate

Peddle/pedal

Practical/practicable

Principle/principal

Refute/rebut

Regretful/regrettable

Repel/repulse

Resistant/resilient

Stationary/stationery

Titivate/titillate

Cues

What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.

Samuel Johnson

A lot of newsroom writing in both television and radio is cue or intro writing. It is not the easiest form of journalism and there are many ways to get it wrong. Here are some thoughts to help you get it right.

• The cue and piece are part of a whole. That's how the viewer or listener perceives them. The correspondent or reporter who says: "I'll leave the cue to you" deserves to be consigned to weather stories in perpetuity. There is an odds-on chance that the first sentence of the piece will be in the cue, or should be in the cue. The answer is simple. Communication is the key. If at all possible, the cue writer and correspondent should each know what the other is doing.

• Repetition makes rotten radio (and tv). If the cue and the piece do not meet until transmission, this sort of thing happens:

CUE: *The supermarket chain, Tesco, has announced a major expansion in its operations. It says it will be creating twenty thousand new jobs worldwide – eight thousand of them in the UK. Here's Justin Thyme:*
THYME: *Tesco is creating twenty thousand new jobs worldwide – twelve thousand in Central Europe and Asia and eight thousand in this country …*

• If repetition is bad, so is raising expectations. A cue on job losses in manufacturing which says *Wales is expected to be badly affected*, followed by a piece which makes no mention of Wales is doing the audience no favours.

Cues

• Use telling phrases sparingly. When the parents of a murdered child accused a leading politician of using their son's death as a *political football*, the phrase was in the news headline, the cue and the piece, all in a matter of minutes. Any power it might have had was diluted by overuse.

• Avoid ending every radio cue with *Justin Thyme reports*, or even worse *Our reporter Justin Thyme reports*. There are lots of ways of getting into and out of a piece. Use your imagination.

• If the piece begins with actuality or wild sound, prepare the audience for it. Do not lead them to expect Justin Thyme when what comes first is a military band or the sound of battle.

• If the correspondent uses an abbreviation or short form in the piece, try to help the listener or viewer by indicating what it might represent (eg if NACRO is referred to without explanation, you might say *The news has been welcomed by a prisoners' welfare group*, or something similar).

• The BBC has the largest newsgathering operation in the world. If the earthquake is in Lima and Justin Thyme is in Lima, say so. Having a correspondent at the scene of the story adds to their and the BBC's credibility. There will be plenty of occasions when you have to fudge it because Justin is reporting from Sheffield about a story in Leeds.

Danglers

The virtues of good style are more negative than positive. The man who knows what to avoid is already the owner of style.

Henry W. Fowler

What do you make of these?

• *If found guilty, the Football Association could fine the Arsenal players.*

• *After eating my lunch, the waiter engaged me in conversation.*

• *When trying to log on, the system rejects my password.*

Phrases at the beginning of a sentence need a noun or a pronoun, and they will cling to the first one that comes along. This can make a nonsense of your writing. In these examples, the Football Association is not at risk of being found guilty, the waiter did not eat my lunch, and the system is not trying to log on. If your writing causes confusion, so that listeners have to pause and check the parts of your sentence to work out exactly what you mean, you have lost them. Write simply, write clearly, and if you must use this kind of construction (called a dangling modifier), make sure that the something to be modified is right next to the phrase. Then you will not write like this: *After orbiting the asteroid for more than a year, the mission scientists decided to set the probe down on its surface.*

The definite article

To write in a genuine familiar or truly English style is to write as any one would speak in common conversation.

William Hazlitt

Rick Thompson, the author of a previous BBC style guide, devoted a section to *the* because, in his words, *it is clearly in danger from scores of unfeeling hacks*. It still is and it should not be.

Broadcasters should aim to sound natural and conversational. They should write for the ear. However, many of them seem to think that dropping the definite article from titles adds pace and impact.

- *Greek minister of culture Evangelos Venizelos has made another call for the return of the Parthenon marbles.*
- *Publicist Max Clifford says the Princess's full story will never be told.*
- *Scottish distillers George & JG Smith have revealed encouraging half-year profits.*

No one, apart from journalists, speaks like this. It saves a micro-second at the expense of fluency and ease of understanding. It might look fine in print, but broadcasters have a story to tell in voice. They should tell it according to the norms of spoken English, not some imaginary argot where people are always making pronouncements.

Devolution

The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.

Thomas Carlyle

The United Kingdom is made up of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain is England, Scotland and Wales (although many people from Northern Ireland regard themselves as British). The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not part of the UK. They are Crown dependencies with their own legislative systems.

The British Isles is not a political entity. It is a geographical unit, the archipelago off the west coast of continental Europe covering Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

Confused already? Keep going.

Devolution has made a complicated system even more complicated, and there are specialist sources available to guide you through the complexities: BBC guide to devolution, *The Changing UK* or the website http://publicpolicy.gateway.bbc.co.uk/editorial/devol/devoMaster010399.doc

Areas such as education, law and health are, in the main, devolved, but what about responsibility for the arts, prisons, veterinary services, medical and scientific advice; what are the remits of the professional and representative bodies? There are no easy answers. If in doubt, there is expertise readily available within the BBC nations and regions.

Devolution

The audience's response to your script depends on where they are. Just because you live in Leicester, do not assume everybody knows where Oadby is; and your delightful home in Clacton, Cleethorpes or Crieff is not the centre of everyone's world. Try to avoid annoying your audience.

Do not use *Anglo* when you mean *British* or UK.

Do not use *British* when you mean *English*, or *English* when you mean *British*.

Beware saying *the capital*, *the nation*, *the country* without making it clear which capital, nation or country.

Beware saying *the main political parties*, *party leaders* etc without making the context clear.

Do not say the Shetlands or the Orkneys: it's the Shetland Islands or just Shetland, the Orkney Islands or just Orkney.

Strathclyde is no longer an administrative area.

It is Sheriff Court not Sheriff's Court.

The *Principality* is not liked in Wales as a synonym for Wales.

Beware organisations with *national* in the title as they do not necessarily cover the entire United Kingdom (eg the National Trust, The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the National Association of Head Teachers are applicable only to England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Devolution

Give readers and presenters all the help you can with the proper names of people, places and organisations. People in all parts of the UK get annoyed and exasperated when they hear a name they know well mispronounced by the BBC. Welsh names offer non-Welsh speakers particular challenges, but the Ll… sound at the beginning of many place names is not unpronounceable and should not be spoken as if it were a single letter L. Be aware that places such as Leominster are not pronounced as they look, any more than Worcester or Leicester are.

Help is at hand if you are not sure how to pronounce a name. Go to BBC Gateway and in the search box type *speakeasy*. You will be offered a comprehensive list of pronunciations. If that fails, you can call the Pronunciation Unit on Bush House 73062 or 73084. Even more help can be obtained from the Radio Four newsreader on TVC 49554 or the World Service reader on Bush House 71600 (but do be aware of broadcasting times). There are also pronunciation dictionaries available. The BBC has published a dictionary of British place names and Longman's Pronunciation Dictionary, edited by J.C. Wells, is also recommended.

European Union

Obscurity in writing is commonly a proof of darkness in the mind.

John Wilkins

Getting the names and responsibilities of EU institutions right is important. If in doubt, there are many reference sources available, including the EU's website at http://europa.eu.int, which is available in all EU languages.

The **European Commission** is the EU's civil service. At its head is a president and twenty European Commissioners. The Commission oversees the enforcement of EU laws and proposes new ones. It cannot enact legislation. That is the job of the **Council of Ministers**. Ministers from each member state attend when their subject is under discussion (eg the Chancellor of the Exchequer attends meetings of the council of economic and finance ministers, known as Ecofin). Do not confuse the Council of Ministers with the **European Council**, which is a meeting of EU heads of government and usually happens twice a year. (NB The **Council of Europe** is not part of the EU. It has forty members and was set up to promote European cultural values.)

The **European Parliament** sits in Brussels and Strasbourg. It has 626 members (87 from the UK) and examines proposed legislation. Any amendments are sent to the Council of Ministers. Parliament has the final say on the Commission's budget and on applications from countries seeking EU membership.

European Union

The European legal system offers great scope for confusion:

• the **European Court of Justice** is based in Luxembourg and applies and interprets EU law.

• the **European Court of Human Rights** is based in Strasbourg and applies the principles contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. It was set up by the Council of Europe and is not an institution of the EU.

• cases are first considered by the **European Commission of Human Rights**, which decides if they should be referred to the Court. (The European Convention on Human Rights is now part of British law and cases can be heard by British courts.)

• The **International Court of Justice** sits in The Hague and is part of the United Nations. It is often called the World Court and it seeks to resolve disputes between states.

Remember, Europe is not a synonym for the European Union. It is a continent which includes several countries which are not members of the EU.

FAQs

The life of the journalist is poor, nasty, brutish and short. So is his style.

Stella Gibbons,
Cold Comfort Farm

There are some topics which seem to have an inexhaustible ability to cause confusion and sow doubt in people's minds. They are also regular sources of audience anger and complaint. This section deals briefly with some of them. There are lots of books on English usage if you wish to know more.

What is the difference between fewer and less?

Fewer means not as many, *less* means not as much. A commonly quoted example used to highlight the distinction is *There are fewer cars on the road, which means there is less traffic*.

These two sentences offer another useful reminder of the difference:

- *The fewer people know about this the better.*
- *The less people know about this the better.*

The rule does not work if the number is counted as a quantity or as a unit.

- *She paid less than ten pounds for it.*
- *His last jump was less than fifteen feet.*

What is the difference between that and which?

This is not something to get too concerned about. It is absolute rot to suggest that *which* is somehow grander than *that*, and on many occasions you can miss out the pronoun altogether, as *The car she was driving*, or *This is the outfit I'll be wearing tonight.*

FAQs

When you do use it, a useful guide is ***that* defines**, ***which* informs**. This is not a cast iron rule but it can help:
This is the house that Jack built, but I think the one next door, which Jack also built, is more attractive.

This is another example which illustrates the point:
The police stopped the second car that was driven by a woman.
The police stopped the second car, which was driven by a woman.

Is it all right to split an infinitive?
There is no grammatical rule which says you cannot do so, but there are grammatical martinets everywhere who get almost apoplectic if they hear one. Sometimes, it is definitely better to split: *Can dot.com companies ever hope to fully recover their share values?* This sounds much better than moving *fully* in front of *to recover* or behind it. The key is not to write anything which is ambiguous or inelegant. Kingsley Amis offered this advice in 1997: *I personally think that to split an infinitive is perfectly legitimate, but I do my best never to split one in public and I would certainly not advise anybody else to do so, even today.*

When is it right to say may or might?
The difference between these two words is gradually being eroded and there are many occasions now when they are quite interchangeable. They offer

FAQs

varying and subtle degrees of certainty. *The governor might resign* suggests a possibility; *The governor may resign* indicates a little more probability.

May have and *might have* cause even more difficulty. *We may have beaten Australia* suggests a lack of knowledge, 'perhaps we did, perhaps we didn't, I'm not sure'. *We might have beaten Australia* suggests that if things had been different (wetter, drier, breezier), if that disputed try had been given, or if our forwards had been a little more effective, there was a chance that victory could have been ours.

Foreign phrases

[The beginner should shun] all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style – all mannerisms, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity.

E.B. White

There are many foreign words and phrases in current English, from living languages and dead ones, but unless you are deliberately setting out to persuade your audience that you are a journalist of some pretension and virtuosity, it is advisable not to use them. You may know what they mean, but some of the people you are broadcasting to will not, and if they cannot understand you, why should they listen to you? In addition, using an unfamiliar foreign word can introduce mistakes into your work.

When the MP Alan Clark famously used the phrase *economical with the actualité*, he intended a fancy version of *economical with the truth*. But *actualité* in French does not mean *truth*, it means *the present, current affairs* or *topicality*. Even though it is wrong, the Clark version sounds good to English ears and is still frequently repeated.

Some foreign words, such as *interregnum*, *angst* and *frisson* are so established as to be familiar, but if you are writing for a general audience, think twice before you include non-English phrases in your script. Here are some examples:

ad hoc	**ad infinitum**
ad nauseam	**a fortiori**
amour-propre	**bête noire**
de facto	**ex officio**
hoi polloi	**inter alia**
ipso facto	**noblesse oblige**

Foreign phrases

parti pris	**per capita**
per diem	**per se**
sine qua non	**soi-disant**
sui generis	**vade-mecum**

vox pop

Legal terms like habeas corpus, sub judice, affidavit, de jure, and pro bono publico should be paraphrased for the listener, whose Latin may not be all that it should be.

Jargon

The United States and Israel now possess the capability to conduct real-time simulations with man in the loop for full-scale theatre missile defence architectures for the Middle East.

Israel Defence Ministry

From doctors to decorators, lawyers to lorry drivers – any group of people working together or in the same field is likely to develop a specialised, shared vocabulary. As journalists, we can become honorary members of these groups if we use the language correctly. The danger is that we become so familiar with the jargon that we use it in our output, which is at odds with our aim to be understood as clearly and universally as possible. So, the obvious advice is: avoid jargon. Unfortunately, this is often not as easy as it sounds. Our output is littered with supply-day motions, three-line whips, the usual channels, corporate governance, collateral damage, affirmative action, throughput, and constructive dismissals.

Police officers say they have *attended the scene* (been there), that twelve people were *apprehended* (caught), that evidence was *detected (found)*, and that death was due to *immersion* (drowning). A colleague reports a correspondent using *de-arrested* to mean that an arrested man had been released. The hospital press officer says the driver was *fatally injured* (killed) and a passenger *received a broken leg* (his leg was broken) and is *undergoing surgery* (having an operation). And what does *comfortable* mean?

There is a lot of jargon about, but if you recognise it, you can do the audience a favour and substitute real, accessible language instead. Here are some examples from business:
The chairman said he was bullish on the company's sales (he believed they would increase).

Jargon

They can charge more because of tight supply and demand (prices are going up because demand is high and supplies are low).

The company says the new model will cause a paradigm shift (it's a big change in the generally accepted point of view).

They are currently evaluating their health care delivery system (they are looking at the medical services available to staff).

She was concerned about the granularity of the deal (she had worries about the details).

Numbers & measures

Lucidity is the soul of style.

Hilaire Belloc

Television has it comparatively easy with unemployment figures, mortgage rate trends, election results, and any stories involving statistics. A good graphic can get across the information clearly and intelligently. Newspaper readers can study tables and charts, re-read articles and take their time about it. Radio's strengths are immediacy and story-telling. It is a poor medium for dealing with numbers.

The brain struggles to take in millions and thousands. They are difficult to visualise. Even smaller numbers are a problem if there are too many of them:
Unions representing the 1,497 clerical and maintenance workers at Oxbridge University have rejected a plan to freeze wages. University officials wanted the unions to delay their agreed three-point-two-five per cent pay rise to help the college deal with an estimated deficit of two-point-seven-three million pounds. Although there have been warnings of job cuts if the wage freeze is not accepted, staff voted against the proposal by 1,049 to 109, with 339 failing to vote.

A story with too many figures numbs the listener. Simplify wherever you can, round up or down, and try to tell the story without getting bogged down in numbers:
Unions representing fifteen hundred clerical and maintenance workers at Oxbridge University have rejected a plan to freeze wages. University officials wanted the unions to delay an agreed pay rise to help the college deal with an estimated deficit of more than two and a half million pounds. Although there have been

Numbers & measures

warnings of job cuts if the wage freeze is not accepted, staff voted overwhelmingly against the proposal.

If you are dealing with a numbers story on radio, such as the latest employment figures, it is a good idea to write an opening sentence without any detail. Select a trend or a reaction to the figures as a way of signalling to the listener that big numbers are coming up. If the listener is prepared, there's a better chance of achieving comprehension rather than confusion.

There is no obvious reason for it, but among journalists the innumerate are numerous. Figures can cause problems. Percentages are frequently misused and misunderstood:
The Chancellor has shocked industry by raising corporation tax by 10 per cent, from 20 per cent to 30 per cent.

That is not an increase of 10 per cent. It is an increase of 50 per cent, or a half if you prefer. It is, though, an increase of ten percentage points, which is not the same thing at all.

• Try not to add percentages to each other. It is much better to deal in real values.

• Make sure you translate terms such as doubling, tripling and quadrupling properly. A doubling is an increase of 100 per cent. If something triples in value, it goes up by 200 per cent (not 300), and if your house quadruples in value, that's an increase of 300 per cent (not 400).

Numbers & measures

• *Three times greater than* is the same as *four times as great as*.

• Comparisons only make easy sense if they are expressed in the same format. When we wrote in 2003 that teachers were angry at being offered a pay rise of 2.9 per cent when the Lord Chancellor was getting an increase of £22,700, we were not making it easy. The comparison works only if we give the Lord Chancellor's increase as 12.6 per cent as well as the real money figure.

• Do not mix decimals, fractions and percentages in one story. Listeners and viewers by and large do not listen to your output with a handy calculator.

Names & titles

A good style should show no sign of effort. What is written should seem a happy accident.

W. Somerset Maugham

Getting names and positions right is very important. It damages our credibility and erodes our reputation for accuracy if we do not correctly identify the people or organisations we are writing about. Government, the aristocracy, the military, the judiciary and the church are particular problem areas. If in doubt, consult the appropriate reference book, website, or, if you can, confirm the details directly with the person concerned. No one was ever offended by a journalist saying: "I want to make sure I get this right. Can you confirm your full title for me, please?"

• It simplifies things considerably if we call all peers ***lord*** and all peeresses ***lady***. This means we do not have to worry if they are a viscount, a marquess, a baroness or a countess. (This does not apply to dukes and duchesses.) Thus, *Lady Thatcher* rather than *Baroness Thatcher*, even though that's what she is.

• The wife of Sir John Public is Lady Public, not Lady Jane Public.

• The wife of the life peer Lord Public is also Lady Public.

• If Lord Public is a duke, marquess or earl, his daughter is Lady Jane Public.

• On first mention, it is The Reverend Hugh Parish, with *the* and a first name. Thereafter, he is Mr Parish, never Reverend Parish or the Reverend Parish. If he were Roman Catholic, he would be Father Parish.

Names & titles

• Bishops, deans, archdeacons, canons and the rest of the clergy all have particular forms of address. Do not assume or guess – reach for Crockford's Clerical Directory or use the BBC's online research site.

• In the English legal system:
a Law Lord is Lord North
an appeal court judge is Lord Justice West
a high court judge Mr Justice South
and a circuit judge is referred to as Judge East.

• If two judges have the same family name, the junior is distinguished by the use of his first name – thus, Lord Justice West and his son Lord Justice Horatio West.

• In criminal cases, a defendant is Guy Fawkes or Mr Fawkes until any conviction, when he becomes Fawkes. This may sound odd if a court appearance follows a great hue and cry in the media, but using a surname alone can suggest guilt, and that's not our purpose.

• Do not use foreign courtesy titles such as monsieur, señor or signorina. Use Mr, Mrs or Miss (or Ms if that is a known preference).

• Some people are commonly known by their surname, eg footballers and actors. When they appear outside their normal sphere of activity, such as a court case or a charity appeal, it can sound odd to give them a courtesy title. It's a matter of judgement whether you use Mr Hussein or Mr Beckham away from the cricket pitch or football field.

Getting it right

Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be grasped at once.

Cyril Connolly

Good journalists know things. They make a note of the unusual, they memorise things which other people regularly seem to get wrong, and they learn from their mistakes.

This section is a random list of facts which should help you stay on good terms with your editor. You can add your own.

It is Trooping the Colour (not Trooping *of* the Colour)

Frankenstein is the creator of the monster, not the monster.

The church near Trafalgar Square in London is St Martin-in-the-Fields, not St Martin's.

The building in the City of London is Guildhall, not *the* Guildhall.

People do not get a CBE, OBE or MBE (Commander, Officer and Member of the Order of the British Empire). They are appointed. They can be made a peer or knight, or receive a peerage or knighthood. Medals such as the George Medal are conferred.

Middlesbrough is so spelt (not *borough*).

The epicentre is the spot on the earth's surface directly above the focus of an earthquake. It is not just a fancy word for *centre*.

A light year is a unit of distance, not time (and a knot is a unit of speed, not distance).

Outward Bound is not a generic term for organised outdoor activities. It is a registered name and the company will threaten legal action if you misuse it.

Getting it right

Other registered names to note: Hoover, Portakabin, Vodafone (so spelt), Fibreglass, Polaroid, Land Rover, Kleenex, Jacuzzi, Entryphone, Xerox, Sellotape, Walkman, Plasticine, Thermos, Formica, Primus, Tannoy and Valium.

The Dutch live in the Netherlands. Holland properly applies only to two coastal provinces. The Dutch like us to remember that.

A troupe is a group of actors or other performers; a troop is a group of soldiers or Scouts.

There is no such thing as one pence. It is one penny, plural pence.

Scotch is whisky, scotch broth is soup and scotch mist is confusing. For everything else, the adjective appropriate to Scotland is *Scottish*.

Irish whiskey has one more letter than Scotch whisky.

It is the St. John Ambulance Brigade, not St. John's.

It's the ambassador *to* a country, *in* a capital. So it's the British ambassador to Algeria, and the British ambassador in Algiers.

The UK does not have embassies and ambassadors in Commonwealth countries; it has high commissions and high commissioners.

It's the Church *of* England. Other parts of the Anglican community are the Church *of* Ireland, the Episcopal Church *in* Scotland, and the Church *in* Wales.

Getting it right

The black box flight recorder carried by most commercial aircraft is, in fact, orange or red.

The six metropolitan county councils created in 1974 (Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, West and South Yorkshire) no longer exist. Neither does Strathclyde regional council. Nor do Humberside, Cleveland or Avon. If in doubt, and you probably will be, check.

Priests celebrate mass. If there is more than one, they are con-celebrating. People *go to* or *attend* mass.

The capital of Nigeria is Abuja, not Lagos. The capital of Australia is Canberra, not Sydney. The capital of South Africa is Pretoria, not Johannesburg.

There is a UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but, oddly, no such organisation as the UN High Commission for Refugees.

The SNP is the Scottish National Party. Its members may be described as nationalists.

Liaise and liaison both have two i's, no matter what your spellchecker might suggest.

The ceremony is called Beating Retreat, not Beating of the Retreat.

They were once called industrial tribunals; they are now employment tribunals.

There are nine counties in Ulster. Six of them make up Northern Ireland – Antrim, Armagh, Londonderry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone. The other three are Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. (A possibly useful mnemonic: the six counties of Northern Ireland = FAT LAD).

Reported speech

You cannot write good English for radio without some knowledge of how reported speech works.

Tom Fort,
Radio News Styleguide

Many journalists have never been taught reported speech, also known as indirect speech. This is a pity because it could help them do their job more clearly and concisely. This guide is not the place for a detailed explanation (there are lots of books on English grammar), but briefly, reported speech involves taking what was actually said and reporting it in such a way that the authorship is not in doubt.

Direct quotes can add impact and life to a story, but much of what we do is a summary of what was said: the gist without the verbosity, the repetition, the unfinished sentences, the mumbling and the mangled English. Reported speech is the great economiser, and it is not difficult to grasp.

The basic rule is simple: if the main verb is in the past tense (*he said*), then the tense of the verb in reported speech must be amended. What the wolf actually said was: "I will huff and puff and blow the house down." The reporter wants to incorporate this threat into his script.

RIGHT – The wolf said he would huff and puff and blow the house down.
WRONG – The wolf said he will huff and puff and blow the house down.

The change of tense is not needed, of course, if you are directly quoting what was said, as in *The wolf said: "I will huff and puff and blow the house down."*

Reported speech

You may ask: "Why bother? The listener or viewer can easily work out what I mean."
Listeners and viewers should not have to work out anything.

The chairman of the BBC announced that because of public demand, many news programmes on radio and television would be doubled in length. The details will be given next week.

What is the source of that second sentence? Is it the newsreader or reporter? You cannot tell. But when written properly, *The details would be given next week,* it is clear that the source is the BBC chairman, and that the journalist is continuing to report what he announced. Applying the rules of reported speech leaves the audience in no doubt.

Sensitivity

Attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious.

Dr. Samuel Johnson

The BBC Producers' Guidelines has much sound advice on what used to be called political correctness, especially in section nine, *Portrayal*, which has chapters entitled Women, Ethnic Minorities, Disabilities, Religious Groups, Sexual Orientation and Older People.

As broadcasters you are part of the debate about what is and what is not acceptable language, and there are plenty of people who will let you know when they think you have got it wrong. What started as a liberal crusade to raise awareness and stop the use of allegedly hurtful expressions has, for some, become a linguistic dictatorship. The best advice is 'use your common sense'.

There is a general acceptance that some words, such as *crippled*, *spastic*, *Mongolism*, *idiot*, *retarded* and *mentally defective* are no longer appropriate. It is also insensitive to refer to *the* deaf, *the* blind and *the* disabled, as if their physical condition was their one defining characteristic. Wheelchair users are as one in disliking the phrases *wheelchair bound* or *confined to a wheelchair*, on the grounds that wheelchairs are liberating, not confining. We must constantly be aware of terminology which might cause offence.

But there are still plenty of contentious words in our scripts. Do we say *Siamese twins* or *conjoined twins*? When we use *schizophrenic* or *schizoid* to indicate a split or division, we stand accused of making light of a serious and complex disorder. Lots of words in

Sensitivity

common use, such as *paranoid* and *brainstorm*, have specific meanings which we are urged to adopt.

Sexism in language arouses strong feelings, and so firefighters, ambulance crews and business people are now the norm, and who today would ever consider calling a radio programme *Housewives' Choice*?

The advice on race and colour has not changed. Colour or ethnic origin should be mentioned only if relevant to the story.

It is a complicated area. Read the guidelines. Use your head.

Speaking out loud

English expects all of us to do our duty.

William Safire
(after Lord Nelson)

There were scenes of delight in Port Talbot tonight, as news of the settlement spread.

This is the apocryphal example handed down through the generations as a warning against writing singsong sentences. As you write, you should appreciate that sentences have balance and rhythm. The only reliable way to avoid *scenes of delight* is to read your script out loud. There is absolutely no shame in journalists talking to themselves in a radio or television newsroom.

Staccato sentences are another danger. Try reading this out loud:
The police said they moved in after a blast bomb was hurled at their lines – their response swift and uncompromising. They pressed forward in formation, a police water cannon backing them up. Officers fought running battles with Loyalist protestors, wielding their batons to push them back.

Each sentence has the same rhythm. It is very difficult for the listener to follow the thread of the narrative when it is delivered in this disjointed way. Vary the length of your sentences. You are telling a story, not making a proclamation.

Words on paper are not the same as words in the mouth of a reporter or presenter. A Radio Four newsreader refused to read "She dismissed this as a myth…" on the grounds that it was not fit to broadcast. A colleague treasures another example: "The Navy's provision of efficient ships". Try saying

Speaking out loud

that out loud. Read what you have written with your mouth as well as your eyes. And pay attention. Speak properly. Some common words are regularly mispronounced. These examples are often heard on our output:

Seckertry (secretary)	**Nucular** (nuclear)
Vunnerable (vulnerable)	**Drawring** (drawing)
Joolry (jewellery)	**Febbery** (February)
Ecksettera (etcetera)	**Laura Norder** (law and order)

The radio news headline which said *The High Court has ruled that social workers weren't to blame for a child's death* could easily be misheard and the listener given entirely the wrong information. There is little difference to the ear between *were* and *weren't*, especially if the listener is not giving the output undivided attention. Do not risk misunderstanding by using contractions. If the negative is important, spell it out loud and use *were not*.

Another good reason for reading a script out loud is to spot sibilance, the unpleasant hissing sound which comes with too many s's. So beware of *Swiss police have stopped and searched sixteen Swedish sailors suspected of smuggling ceramics from Spain.* You get the idea.

Superlatives

Obscurity of expression generally springs from confusion of ideas.

Lord Macauly

If you are ever tempted to use a superlative, think about it. Are you absolutely confident that you are right? The audience is an enormous reservoir of information, and it does the BBC's reputation no good if viewers and listeners hear things which they know are incorrect. Do not try to add impact to your stories by using superlatives you cannot justify, so make sure of your facts before you use words such as:

unique	**unmatched**	**unprecedented**
sole	**first**	**last**
exceptional	**only**	**greatest**
largest	**fastest**	**heaviest**
longest	**smallest**	**record**
slowest	**tallest**	**matchless**
exclusive	**least**	**most**
inimitable	**irreplaceable**	

If possible, it is best to attribute claims: *A Bridlington man has made what he says is the world's biggest model of the Empire State Building using only matchsticks*. If he is challenged, he can slug it out with the competition.

Words

"When I choose a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

Through the Looking Glass,
Lewis Carroll

We are not as lucky as Humpty Dumpty. He paid words to mean what he wanted them to mean. We have to use the meanings which have evolved, and it's not always easy, because they are still evolving. Using the right word to say precisely what you intend is not something for pedants. The language, its words and the way it works, is the tool of your trade. If you write sloppily, choose the wrong words and misuse the ones you choose, why should the listener or viewer have any confidence in the facts you are presenting? Carelessness and ignorance are not the characteristics of a good writer. This section is in four parts:

- **simple words**
- **troublesome words**
- **vogue words**
- **superfluous words**

Simple words

Simplicity is the key to understanding. Short words in short sentences present listeners and viewers with the fewest obstacles to comprehension. In many cases there are longer, more decorative alternatives but think twice before you use them. They take up more time and they can give the audience more to think about. Here, in no particular order, are some examples:

manufacture	**make**
assistance	**help**
numerous	**many**
approximately	**about**
remuneration	**pay**
commence	**start**
exceedingly	**very**
attempt	**try**
discontinue	**stop**
magnitude	**size**
possesses	**has**
purchase	**buy**
requested	**asked**
apprehend	**catch**
subsequently	**later**
terminate	**end**
ascertain	**learn**
utilise	**use**
residence	**home**
ameliorate	**improve**

Troublesome words

Some words are regularly misused and provide a constant source of complaint from listeners and viewers. Using the wrong word detracts from your journalism, and prevents you from saying what you really wanted to say. Here are some words to look out for:

Anticipate and **expect** are thought by some people to be interchangeable, but that takes away a useful distinction. If I am playing chess and I anticipate my opponent's next move, I see it coming and act accordingly. There is action as well as expectation. So if you think Forfar will beat East Fife, say you expect a Forfar victory rather than anticipate one. It is simpler and more direct.

Assassination should be kept for the violent deaths of royalty and seriously prominent members of society, such as political or religious leaders. Everyone else is *murdered* or *killed*.

Cohort originally meant the tenth part of a Roman legion, and when statisticians use it, they mean a group with a shared characteristic. Despite recent American usage, it does not mean a group of colleagues, cronies, friends, Romans or countrymen.

Crescendo is a gradual increase culminating in a climax, so it is wrong to say that something rose to a crescendo. The word you want is *climax*.

Decimate originally meant to kill every tenth person but is now often used to indicate the destruction of a large part of something. *Devastate* or *destroy* are just as good.

Troublesome words

Disinterested means impartial; **uninterested** means not interested in.

Draconian is much overused, usually by people with no idea who Draco was. (If asked, say he was an Athenian judge who ruled that the penalty for almost everything should be death.) Try *severe* or *harsh* instead.

Effectively is often confused with in *effect*. If something is effective, it produces a satisfactory result, so *effectively* means with *a satisfactory outcome*. *The outbreak of plague in Skegness has been effectively contained* means the rest of us are safe. *In effect* means *in practice*, and often indicates an unplanned outcome, as in *The new tax has in effect made it more sensible for Geoff to remain on benefits*.

Electrocution means death by electric shock. As such, it is always fatal.

Enormity does not mean large size. It means *great wickedness* or *outrage*, although the correct usage seems to be under attack from all sides.

Evacuate. The rule used to be that only places or buildings were evacuated, not people (unless they had been given an enema). This is at odds with common usage so let the people be evacuated.

Execute means to put to death after a legal process. Terrorists or criminals do not execute people, they murder them.

Fatwa is often misused. It is a formal legal opinion handed down by a Muslim religious leader or court. It may or may not be a death sentence.

Troublesome words

Forensic does not mean scientific. It means belonging to courts of law, so a forensic expert knows a lot about the legal process. Forensic scientists produce evidence that might be useful in court cases. Avoid *forensic tests*; you probably mean *scientific tests*.

Fulsome is not a close relative of full, and does not mean generous. It means gushing, cloying, effusive or sickeningly fawning. If that's how to want to describe a speech or tribute, then this is the word for you.

Go missing is inelegant and unpopular with many people, but its use is widespread. There are no easy synonyms. *Disappear* and *vanish* do not convince and they suggest dematerialisation, which is rare.

Historic is a popular word with journalists. It is nice to think that the events we are describing will resonate down the decades, but who are we to judge? Use with great care, and never confuse with *historical*, which means belonging to history.

Hopefully generates much heat in some quarters. It certainly means *in a hopeful manner*, as in *It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive*, but it is now generally also used to mean *it is to be hoped that*, as in *Hopefully there will be an improved train service to Aberystwyth*. There is no confusion, so it can justifiably be used in both senses.

Immolate is not another word for burn. It means to sacrifice or give up something in exchange for something else.

Troublesome words

Infer does not mean the same as **imply**. If I imply (suggest indirectly) that my programme has an interview with Elvis Presley, and you believe me, you infer (come to the conclusion) that we have the greatest showbiz scoop of all time. Put simply, the inference follows the implication.

Innocent bystanders and their close friends **perfect strangers** should not be in your contacts book.

Ironically does not mean *by an odd coincidence*. Irony is using words to say the opposite of what they literally mean, and something is ironic if it is the opposite of what might have been expected. It is a subtle concept and is probably best avoided.

Major is so overused as to be almost meaningless. Think at least twice before you write major operation, major speech, major incident or major changes.

Massive is regularly misused. As the word implies, it concerns mass, weight and bulk, not quantity.

Momentarily properly means *for* a moment, not *in* a moment, but its misuse is common. If the aircraft pilot says he'll be landing momentarily, does he mean the plane will touch the ground briefly and then take off again? Probably not. Try to be one of those who uses it correctly.

Near miss is understood by everyone, even though some people argue that *near collision* is more accurate. Think of it as shorthand for *a miss that came very near to being a collision*.

Troublesome words

Refute has a particular meaning. To refute a statement means to prove it wrong. So do not write *The Chancellor refuted opposition claims that he had mishandled the economy*, because it is very unlikely that he did so. Refute is not a synonym for *deny*, *disagree* or *contradict*.

Surrogate means substitute, so it is the mother who is a surrogate, not the baby.

Transpire means to come to light or become known, as in *It transpired that the editor had been to school with his secretary's brother*. It does not mean *happen* or *occur*.

Unique has a unique meaning, and it is that there is only one of something (*uni* as in unicycle, unicorn or unisex). Nothing can be *almost unique*. You should be saying *distinctive* or *unusual*.

Viable gets knocked around by many journalists and is often misused. It does not mean *workable* or *feasible*, but capable of living and surviving, capable of normal growth and development. If a foetus is not viable it means it cannot survive outside the womb.

Other words are a problem because they are tendentious. For example:
ethnic cleansing. This apparently inoffensive term covers a multitude of sins, including massacres, murders, concentration camps, and the forced removal of people from their homes. Not to be used lightly.

Troublesome words

Pro-life is used in the United States to denote the lobby which opposes abortion. In the UK, there is an implication that if you are not pro-life then you are anti-life or pro-death. Avoid this moral minefield by using anti-abortion.

Reform can also cause problems because it carries a suggestion of improvement, of making things better. When politicians call for the reform of the health service, local government, the police force or the BBC, there is no guarantee that their proposals will be positively received by the people directly involved. One man's reform is another man's misguided, ill conceived, impractical, vindictive political interference.

Modernisation is another word to be wary of. It can be used to mask a lot of unpleasant things like job losses, changes in working practices, and getting employees to do more for less. But there's just a chance it can also mean improved working conditions, new equipment or premises, more flexible hours and a better life for everyone.

Vogue words

There is fashion in language as in most things, and some words are suddenly everywhere. Islamist, not in my edition of the Chambers dictionary, is regularly used now as a synonym for Muslim and seems set to have a long and happy life in stories about terrorism and the threat posed by terrorists. A raft used to mean a flat structure made up of planks or logs tied together so they formed a floating platform, but journalists and politicians have seized on it as a synonym for *a lot of*, and they are doing it to death. It turns up all over our output.

- *The Tories have announced a vast raft of policy statements.*
- *We are putting together a raft of measures to tackle illegal immigration.*
- *The bill has attracted a raft of amendments.*
- *The government has unveiled a sweeping raft of proposals.*

What is a sweeping raft? When was the last time you heard someone in the pub say *I must get home. I've got a raft of ironing to do*? Another word much loved by politicians, diplomats and journalists is *broker*. Again, do you hear people saying *We have brokered a good price for our house*? They would be much more likely to say *negotiated*.

Some people use vogue words because they think it shows they are on the ball. Others believe it demonstrates a lack of original thought and individuality. Good writers will try to avoid vogue words because they know everyone else is using

Vogue words

them. Here is a brief list of words and phrases. None of them is banned, and nor should they be, but you should approach them with care.

leading edge	**take on board**
scenario	**epicentre**
surgical strike	**step change**
interface	**synergy**
quantum leap	**pivotal**
parameter	**infrastructure**
lifestyle	**caring**
overarching	**ecosystem**
underpin	**traumatic**
meaningful	**kickstart**
fashionista	**asymmetrical**
warfare	**dichotomy**
exponential	**eponymous**
protagonist	

In your haste to use *blueprint*, *escalation*, *ceiling* and *target*, do not forget their plainer alternatives *plan*, *growth*, *limit* and *objective*.

Superfluous words & phrases

English is full of groups of words which go round together filling up sentences. We know them and we are comfortable with them. But when time is tight, recognise them and discard them. You will save lots of valuable seconds which you can then use to tell the story you want to tell. Here are some examples:

At this moment in time	***now***
By virtue of the fact that	***because***
In the absence of	***without***
Made good their escape	***escaped***
Leaves much to be desired	***poor***
Was of the opinion that	***thought***
Put in an appearance	***appeared***
On account of the fact that	***because***
In conjunction with	***and***
A large proportion of	***many***
Placed under arrest	***arrested***
In the event that	***if***
With the exception of	***except***

There are lots more, and none of them should earn a place in a thirty-second script. Vigorous writing is concise.

Another way to save time is to be aware of words which go together but actually mean the same thing. For example, *an added bonus* does not need the word *added* because by definition a bonus is something additional. An aircraft need not *plummet*

Superfluous words & phrases

down to earth because plummet means falling down. Nothing plummets in any direction other than down. Here are some more repeater phrases. You can add your own examples.

New innovation	***innovation***
Surrounded on all sides	***surrounded***
Red in colour	***red***
Razed to the ground	***razed***
Exactly the same	***the same***
Close proximity	***close***
Free gift	***gift***
In the field of biology	***in biology***
Collaborate together	***collaborate***
Temporary reprieve	***reprieve***
Consensus of opinion	***consensus***
Personal opinion	***opinion***
Oblong in shape	***oblong***
Future plans	***plans***
Close scrutiny	***scrutiny***
Minute detail	***detail***
Shorter in length	***shorter***
Prior experience	***experience***
Combine together	***combine***
Revert back	***revert***
Patently obvious	***obvious***
Exact replica	***replica***

Finally

The BBC is an empire made up of many, sometimes competing, parts. Your editor will have his or her own preferences and peccadilloes, which you are advised to learn within a week or two if you wish your stay to be a happy and productive one. A guide such as this cannot hope to cover the range of issues you need to become familiar with, but here is a selection of some of the most frequent.

ACAS. This is not the government's advisory and conciliation service. It is independent.

Admissions of responsibility. There is nothing responsible about terrorist attacks on civilian targets. Prefer *terrorists say they planted the bomb* or *did it.*

After. *Three people were killed after a car ran into a tree.* No. They were killed *when* a car ran into a tree. *Petrol prices are going up after a decision by OPEC oil producing countries.* No. They are going up *because* of a decision by OPEC.

AIDS. The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is a group of symptoms. Until a patient exhibits these he is HIV positive. When he does, he has AIDS. And he is not a victim.

Alibi. If Bill Sykes has an alibi it means he did not commit the crime because he can prove he was somewhere else at the time. It is not a false explanation or an excuse.

Finally

Bad news/good news. Avoid using either of these. They are subjective terms. Rain might be good news for the farmer, but bad news for the holidaymaker; interest rates going up is bad news for borrowers, possibly good news for savers. But an asteroid heading for earth could reasonably described as bad news for everyone.

Bacteria. One bacterium, lots of bacteria. They can be treated with antibiotics, unlike a virus, which cannot.

Billion. This used to mean a million million, but we have now adopted the American definition, which is a thousand million.

Boy Scouts. They are no more. They are just Scouts.

Brussels. Do not use *Brussels* as a synonym for the European Union or Commission. The UK is fully involved in most of their decision-making processes.

Canute. The soggy king knew he would get his feet wet when he sat on the beach. He was proving to his court that he was not all-powerful. Do not use the incident to suggest he was taken by surprise.

Civil Aviation Authority. This does not investigate air crashes. That's the job of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department of Transport.

Chancellor. This is a job not a title, so avoid *Chancellor Lloyd Barclay*, or whoever it might be. It's *the Chancellor, Lloyd Barclay*.

Finally

Concede. Losers of elections concede victory, not defeat.

Cyprus. North Cyprus is recognised as a state by only one country, Turkey. We should say *Turkish-occupied* or *Turkish-controlled* Northern Cyprus.

Damage. On its own, damage is worth nothing, so it's nonsense to write *Damage worth thousands of pounds*. Prefer *Damage put at* or *damage estimated at*.

Data. Common usage suggests that even though *data* was originally a plural noun, it should now take a singular verb, as in *The data reveals a growing gap between north and south*. Whoever uses the singular *datum* in normal speech? *Medium* and *media* continue to have separate lives, although when *media* refers to the press, radio and television, it acts as a singular collective noun.

Different. It is *different from*, not *different to*.

Dilemma. A dilemma is not just a problem, it is a hard choice between two alternatives, neither of which is very attractive.

The Dominican Republic. This shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti and should not be confused with Dominica, which is one of the Leeward Islands.

Due to. This means *caused by*, not *because of*.

Education. It's the Department *for* Education and Skills, not *of* Education and Science.

Fleet Street. This is no longer a useful synonym for the national press.

Finally

Forced. Do not write *Troops were forced to open fire* or *The company was forced to make hundreds of staff redundant.* We are in no position to judge motives, we just report what happened, unless we write *The government says troops were forced …*

Girl Guides. As with Boy Scouts, no more. They are Guides.

Hang. Pictures are *hung*; people are *hanged*. Professor Higgins toppled from his linguistic pedestal when he said in 'My Fair Lady': *She should be taken out and hung for the cold-blooded murder of the English language.*

Heads of state. In some countries, the head of state is also the head of government (eg the President of the USA), but in many they are different (eg the British monarch and the Prime Minister). Beware saying *Heads of state from twenty countries are attending the conference* unless you know that is definitely the case.

Hobson's choice. This is not the lesser of two evils. It means there is no choice at all.

Justify. Do not say *The mayor justified the decision to double council tax*, when what you probably mean is *the mayor tried to justify.* What the mayor is actually doing is *defending* the decision.

Lake District. The mere in Windermere means *lake*, so it's wrong to call it Lake Windermere. Ditto all the other meres, but there is one lake, Bassenthwaite.

Meningitis. There are two types: one is bacterial, the other viral. It is wrong to confuse the two.

Finally

Mercy killing. This is a highly emotive term and great care should be taken in using it.

Mortuary. As mentioned earlier, bodies in the UK are taken to a mortuary. Despite the thousands of times you have heard it on television, morgue is incorrect.

News conference. This is preferred to press conference.

None. This usually takes a singular verb (on the basis that it's a short form of *no one* or *not one*), but some authorities say it's fine to say *None of our players have taken bribes*.

Open Golf. The Open Golf Championship is so named. It is not the British Open or any other kind of open.

Opinion polls. They do not *show* or *prove* anything. The results can *suggest* or *indicate*, and trends might be deduced from them. The best advice is to treat them with caution. If you have time, it's useful to give the sample size and the date of the poll.

Over. This is often used when *because* or *about* would be more appropriate. *Staff at a call centre in Worksop are being balloted on strike action over (because of) concern that their work could be transferred to India. Police are continuing to question two men over (about) the disappearance of a BBC newsreader.*

Post mortem examination. The bodies in the mortuary are given a post mortem examination (an after-death examination), not a post mortem or an autopsy. This is still BBC style even though the forces of *post mortem* are massing at the gates.

Finally

Prison staff. They are prison officers, not jailers or warders.

Receiver. Not the same as liquidator. A receiver will try to keep a company going; a liquidator moves in if the company is beyond help, and sells off the assets.

Remembrance day. The services and parades are in memory of the dead, not in honour of them, and it's not just the casualties of two world wars who are remembered. Other conflicts such as Korea, the Falklands and Northern Ireland are included.

Responsible. People are responsible, things are not. It is nonsense to write *A fire has killed a woman in Barnsley.* A woman has died in a fire. And bad weather cannot be responsible for an increase in vegetable prices, although it may be the cause.

Sentencing. It is meaningless to write *A judge has sentenced five youths convicted of what was described as a 'catalogue of violence' to a total of forty three years in jail.* Leaving aside that catalogues are best left to mail order companies, the lumping together of five sentences is information not worth having.

Sinn Fein. We should not use the term *Sinn Fein/IRA* unless we attribute it to someone. It is a loaded political expression.

Troubled. It is becoming a cliché to describe any company experiencing financial difficulties as *troubled*, as in *the troubled life insurer, Equitable Life.* Troubled means *unhappy* or *disturbed*, unless this changes by relentless misuse.

Finally

Union Jack. That's what many people call the national flag, whether it's on a mast or a flagpole, but many others prefer *union flag*. Either is acceptable, and both are equally likely to generate complaints.

University of Wales. This is a collegiate university with branches in Cardiff, Swansea, Aberystwyth, Bangor, Lampeter and Newport. It is either University College Swansea, or the University of Wales in Swansea.

Whose. There is no problem using *whose* with things as well as people. *The Guardian, whose typographical errors are legendary, has appointed a readers' editor.* The alternative *the typographical errors of which are legendary*, is clumsy, inelegant and wordy.

Want more of this kind of stuff?

There are many books on using English, and countless websites. Here are some of the most useful and accessible. Exploring what authors consider to be good style (and bad) can be very revealing and thought provoking. In no particular order:

Essential English for Journalists, Harold Evans, Pimlico, London, 2000

The King's English, Kingsley Amis, HarperCollins, London, 1998

Writing Broadcast News, Mervin Block, Bonus Books, Chicago, 1997

The New Fowler's Modern English Usage, ed R.W. Burchfield, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996

The Times Style and Usage Guide, Tim Austin, Collins, London, 2003

Politics & The English Language, George Orwell, in Collected Essays, Penguin, 1970.

Lapsing into a Comma, Bill Walsh, Contemporary Books, Chicago, 2000. The author is a leading authority on style in the US. He also hosts an accessible and entertaining website at: www.theslot.com

The Economist Style Guide, The Economist Books, London, 2001. Much of which is available at: www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide

The Guardian's reliable alphabetical house style guide is at: www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide

Some common errors in English are detailed at: www.wsu.edu/~brains/errors/errors.html#t

Want more of this kind of stuff?

An excellent guide to grammar and style can be found at: http://newark.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/index.html

A friendly and enjoyable site devoted to words, derivations and usage is run by a former BBC producer, Michael Quinion, at: www.worldwidewords.org

Mother Tongue, Bill Bryson, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1990

The Complete Plain Words, Sir Ernest Gowers, Penguin, London, 1987

Usage and Abusage, Eric Partridge, Penguin, London, 1973

Mind The Gaffe, R.L. Trask, Penguin, London, 2001

On Writing Well, William Zinsser, HarperCollins, New York, 2001

Writing for Journalists, Wynford Hicks, Routledge, London, 1999

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