

A Straightforward Guide
To
Writing Good Plain English
Improve Your Written English
Nicholas Corder

Straightforward Publishing
www.straightforwardco.co.uk

Straightforward Guides

© First Edition Nicholas Corder 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means, electrical or mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data. A Catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9781847163691

Printed by Berforts Press

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained within this book is correct at the time of going to press, the author and publisher cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions contained in this book.

Writing Good Plain English-Improve Your Written English

Contents

	pp
1. Why Good Plain English?	9
2. The Steps of Writing	13
• Step 1 - pre-writing-ideas and research	14
• Step 2 - planning to write	20
• Step 3 - writing	27
• Step 4 - re-writing-editing and drafting	37
• Step 5 - proofreading your work	45
• Step 6 - presenting your work	51
3. A Potted History of English	53
4. How to Give Your Writing Zip	61
-Do's and Dont's for Writers	
5. A Brief History of Grammar Punctuation and Spelling	91
6. A Guide to Garmmar Punctuation and Spelling	100
Parts of speech and other bits of useful grammar	104
Punctuation	113
7. Grammatical Confusables and Some Hoary	134
Old Chestnuts	
Confusable words	147
Cutting out the waste	176

8. Exercises	182
9. Exercises-answers and explanations	188

Useful reading

Postscript 1-How I wrote this book

Postscript 2-Where you come in

Index

Foreword

Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light. Joseph Pulitzer.

Congratulations on picking up this book. You are a person of distinction and, if I may be so bold, you are easy on the eye. I like your hair. I like your clothes. I like the cut of your jib.

Now, before you take this book to the till, have the librarian swipe it onto your card, add it to your cyberspace shopping trolley, or even send it wirelessly to your e-book reader, let me tell you a little about the treats in store for you. That way, you know if it's worth shelling out your hard-earned cash and spending several hours of your hectic life reading it.

In a nutshell, this book aims to do exactly what it says on the cover — help you write good, plain English. The fact that you're reading this introduction means that you're the kind of person who would like to write well. You may be looking for a rule book. Beware of rule books. If there are such things as rules, they change quickly and are not always that helpful. This is a guidebook, not a straitjacket. You may even disagree with some of the things in here, and that's fine.

Nor is this is a finger-wagging book. These are available. They have titles such as *If You Can't Even Write A Sentence You Must Be A Complete Prat*, *Only Total Divs Can't Spell* or *Don't They Teach Them Anything at School Nowadays?* If you want to feel as though you've just crawled out of a sewer to be harangued by a man with a purple face, then please put this book down now and go and buy one of those. They are written by people who have never misspelled a word, cocked up a sentence or forgotten half-way through a paragraph what on earth it was they were writing about. This book is not meant to be a reprimand to some naughty child who's made a blooper. This book will not jeer at you if you get

something wrong. It's meant to help you. It is a kind book, a soft book. It's the kind of book you could take home and introduce to your parents.

This book acknowledges that we're all human.

Writing is a difficult process. After all, around 20% of the population of the UK have genuine literacy problems and struggle with everyday written language. The English language is also complex. It's almost like some giant organism in a sci-fi film that sucks in spellings and grammatical constructions from other languages. It changes constantly, adding new words. And then once those words are established, they go and change their meaning.

Of course, this book tries to help you avoid the kind of grammatical howlers that have spittle-blowing retired colonels reaching for their fountain pens to condemn the current educational system. Yes, it's great to be able to spell correctly and stick the commas in the right place. So we do have a bit of that in here. There are sections devoted to dealing with grammar, punctuation and spelling. They're not the most interesting topics in the world, so you'll notice that all that stuff is towards the back of the book. I try to work on the principle that you don't have to eat loads of cornet before you can get at the ice cream. Some sections, you'll only want to use for reference.

But the book also tries to go beyond that. Sure, let's get the basics right, but let's also look at how to make what you write interesting — something that other people might want to read. What's the point of being able to spell and punctuate correctly if you don't have anything interesting to say or do have something you feel passionate about, but can't convey your excitement to the reader?

And that's where our friend Pulitzer comes in. Good, plain English is what Pulitzer relished. Not just plain English, or good English, but a combination of the two. He was after more than just bare bones information. He wanted to be entertained, uplifted, carried along by the written word.

I don't expect you to read this book at a single sitting. Dip in and out of it as the mood takes you. Try to think about what you're reading and put it into practice when you can. Get some of those clever peel-off sticky labels and mark up the parts that are most relevant to you. Write in the margins (unless it's a library book). You can even do the exercises. Try not to cheat. Above all, don't turn reading this book into a chore, especially if it's been foisted on you by a teacher or lecturer. And if you're a teacher or a lecturer, don't foist this book on your students. Recommend it, by all means, but please don't turn it into a dry text for analysis.

As I say. You're smart, good-looking, well-turned-out. We could have a future together. Click that button, swipe that card. Let's get going.
