

Plain English

The voice of Plain English Campaign

Issue 84 Winter 2015

Ammarah - our youngest ever award winner

We were delighted to read and hear about Swain House Primary School's English project back in October. In particular, pupil Ammarah Mahmood's findings.



Teacher Sarah Rothera instructed nine-year-old Ammarah (pictured above) and her classmates to visit the local market. They were told to find as many spelling mistakes and grammatical errors as they could. Most returned with a few – Ammarah did quite a bit better.

'No Drink's Allowed in Shop', 'Customers for Taxi's please wait here', 'Open Sunday's', 'Banana's', and 'We pay cash for DVD's' were among the clangers Ammarah spotted.

Firstly, it's great to see kids carrying out projects about grammatical rights and

wrongs. It's an effective, fun way of helping them steer clear of spelling and grammar howlers now and in the future.

Secondly, we really wanted to recognise Ammarah's efforts for two main reasons. One, we were impressed with such an outstanding achievement from someone so young. And two, we wanted to help promote good spelling and grammar from an early age. The best way to prevent the kind of mistakes we all see far too often is to iron them out as early as possible.

So, Ammarah is the youngest ever recipient of a Plain English Award – and we hope it sends out a positive message. We at Plain English Campaign want to encourage our children to set an example, by writing well and pointing out mistakes. Not only to other children, but to adults.

Sarah, lead teacher of the deaf at Swain House, said, "I would like to thank Plain English Campaign for their recognition of Ammarah's efforts and dedication to the use of good English grammar and punctuation. Both the school and myself are exceptionally proud of her."

Ammarah, a Year 5 pupil at the school, said, "Thank you very much for the award, I am very surprised that so many other people are shocked by the incorrect use of apostrophes, it's bananas! (Not banana's.)"

We think Ammarah's example could set a useful and fun precedent. Why not make more of the project and run it nationwide?

Contact Plain English Campaign on 01663 744409 or at plainenglish.co.uk

Jobbledygook

How often have you read a job advertisement and wondered 'What do they want, exactly?'

Jobs-market jargon may even have turned you away from a potential appointment. The Daily Telegraph's Sophie Jamieson has provided a guide, and a quiz, to help you understand some of the terminology.

As part of the article, Sophie asked us for our thoughts on some of the confusing management speak recruiters seem to love. Our response was predictable.

We think that a lot of job advertisements promote the use of jargon. We worry that a lot of candidates will feel expected to use the jargon in the job description if they get the position.

And we're also not sure everyone applying for the job will even know what they're applying for.

On top of all that, how much of the job description is accurate? Is a very simple position being dressed up? Is the language of the advertisement being honest about the realities of the job? It's often hard to tell.

For example, what does 'A chance to upskill your communication abilities' mean? Sophie suggests: "You'll learn to talk to other human beings." That seems a reasonable interpretation. Plenty of job advertisements use this kind of euphemistic approach, which turns nothing statements into what may look like substance.

Or they may soften a harsh reality. 'Flexible approach to working hours' could well mean "The boss is a slave driver." And what, exactly, does 'customer focused' mean?

Yet more ploddledygook

The police continue to make very little sense. They've come under fire, once more, for talking absolute nonsense in their 'Candidate Information Pack' extended job advert.

The police, according to the information pack, are looking for a 'pioneer in blue-light collaboration' who can 'reframe dilemmas'.

It's hard to find much in the document that makes sense. Here's a representative paragraph.

"Policing needs leaders who are not restricted by the unreformed system in which they have had to operate.

"We are more interested in where you can take our force than where you have been.

"In a challenging, fast-changing world innovation and creativity are the differentiators of success. Our Chief Constable must be able to see beyond the horizons of convention to make the

paradigm shift, to dream of things that have never been done before."

So the police, despite a lot of justifiable criticism (some from their own officers) about their terrible communication skills, continue to write gibberish. Why? Presumably they will continue to take no notice and waffle on about 'enabling behaviours critical to success' and 'transactional single-agency budgets'. If that's the case, we, and many others, will continue to mock them for it.

UKIP were deservedly demolished by Suzy Howlett's red pen back in April and this wasn't their only terrible error-riddled election leaflet.



Stop using jargon, regulator tells banks

The FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) has gone after banks once again.

In yet another unsurprising blast, the FCA suggests that banks and other finance companies use too much unreadable jargon in their small print.

"All too often customer communications are so technical that even the most astute consumer would struggle to understand the information," said Christopher Woolard, the FCA's Strategy and Competition Director.

"Communications play a fundamental role in helping consumers make decisions about the

products and services they buy which is why it's so important that we work with firms to get this right."

The firms in question already know that their customers probably don't understand the information. That's certainly their hope, and why it's tucked away in the small print.

The FCA recommends using videos and infographic aids to make things clearer in future. They also mention some Australian firms that use comic strips to explain financial information as part of an easy-to-follow story. How about this innovation: a clear, plain English explanation?

A burning issue

A Royal Pharmaceutical Society survey suggests that many people don't know what protection ratings on suncream bottles mean.

According to the survey, one in five are unaware that the SPF rating, or factor number, does not mean protection against all sun damage. Only 8% of those surveyed understood that the SPF rating on the bottle means protection from UVB rays only. The SPF rating shows protection against sunburn, but not from UVA rays, which cause long-lasting skin damage. Protection against UVA rays is shown by a star rating. Both UVA and UVB rays can cause skin cancer.

Professor Jayne Lawrence, Chief Scientist for the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said: "Clearly many consumers do not realise the SPF rating applies only to the amount of protection offered against UVB rays, not

UVA rays – both of which can damage the skin and cause skin cancer.

"People should not have to pick their way through complicated dual ratings information to understand how sunscreen works and the amount of protection it potentially provides."

Professor Lawrence goes on to suggest a new, single standard with a clear ratings system. We absolutely agree with that suggestion. As it stands, there is too much confusion surrounding a jumble of star-rating systems, number-value protection levels and the differences between UVA and UVB rays.

Once again confusion on product labels could potentially cause serious health issues. A single system, which tells consumers clearly, without any potential for misunderstanding, what the product protects them from is essential.

More golden rules

Back in 2013, we applauded Michael Gove for demanding clearer written communication. He set out a list of 'golden rules' for everyone working at the Department of Education.

Gove, now Justice Secretary, has laid out similar rules for his current staff.

Gove's updated guidelines, titled 'Ministerial Correspondence Preferences', suggest using 'make sure' instead of 'ensure', avoiding

capital letters whenever possible and using the active voice. Gove also advises on rewriting 'anything too pompous' and only using 'impact' as a noun.

We can only hope that Gove's insistence on good grammar and plain English is influential throughout the Cabinet and beyond.

There is still, as there has always been, an awful lot of jargon and bad writing around government. This is clearly a step in the right direction.

The year in plain English

As we bid farewell to 2015, let's pause to remember the plain English heroes and villains from the past 12 months.

The Fox News Network and Donald Trump scoop the two awards nobody wants, while The Financial Times'

Lucy Kellaway, Quentin Letts, Rightsinfo and nine-year old Ammarah Mahmood are among those earning positive recognition.

Aqua Shard, Finlay Graham, Profinda and Rugby Football Union are among this year's Golden Bull culprits.

Read on for those and other equally bad examples of unreadable nonsense.

We eagerly await the opportunity to salute and mock the upholders and abusers of plain English over the next 12 months.

Here are our 36th annual winners and losers.

Plain English Awards

'i-go' (East Sussex County Council)
'Making your Service Accessible to disabled people and their families: A Good Practice Guide for leisure providers'

Suzy Howlett
For her brutal red-pen demolition of Sharon Snook and Derek Tanswell's awful UKIP election leaflet.

Prostate Cancer UK



For their excellent and easy-to-follow leaflet 'Find out about your prostate'.

Health and Safety Executive

For their 'Health and Safety Law – What you need to know' poster.

Quentin Letts

For his long-standing enthusiasm for dismantling the worst of political gobbledygook.

Chrissie Maher Award

Ammarah Mahmood
At just nine years old, Ammarah shamed adults who really should know better by spotting numerous spelling and grammatical mistakes as part of her school project.



International Award

Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at the Australia Institute.

For his exceptional essay on obfuscation and sleight of hand in economics, *Of Clowns and Treasurers*.

"Economics doesn't tell us that we need to cut taxes for the rich or cause climate change if we really want to help the poor. And 'the markets' don't tell us that either. Those are the sentiments of some wealthy people, and some politicians who represent them. But they say it in econospeak because it sounds so ridiculous in plain English."

Web Award



Excellent round-up of what's happening in the world news, presented in an entertaining, attractive and clear way.

Vice News
Hard-hitting but accessible news source – exceptional, eye-catching presentation.

Timebank
Easy-to-use, clearly presented and extremely useful volunteering resource.

Plain English Communicator Awards

RightsInfo – (Adam Wagner, Founder)

'The European Convention on Human Rights' simplified.

Osborne Memorial Award

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

For a vital, clear and accessible service across different media.

Plain English Award winners 2015

Plain English Diplomas

Julie Copley – HM Courts and Tribunals Service

Pat on Back Award

Lucy Kellaway

The award is long overdue recognition of Lucy's lengthy and admirable campaign against management fads and jargon.

Kick in the Pants Award



Fox News continues to promote hysterical opinion that often has very little to do with actual news. It's selective, aggressively biased and often simply wrong, and it continues to be extremely influential in moulding the viewpoints of millions of viewers.



Plain English Media Awards

Celia Walden

For her article 'The perils of jargon: a plea to speak in plain English' which highlights 'how social workers, hospitals and others eschew straight-talking in favour of language they think makes them sound more intelligent'.

Steven Yoder

For his Comstock's article 'Legal English as a Second Language – Why can't lawyers communicate like other humans?'

Heather Hogan

In particular for Heather's fantastic article for Autostraddle about the alternate reality constructed daily by Fox News.

Foot in Mouth Award



Donald Trump



For offering up a prolific and unflagging stream of clueless waffle during 2015 as part of his entertainingly obnoxious run for the Republican Presidential nomination.

Foot in Mouth Runners-up

Shaun Murphy responding to defeat against Stuart Bingham in the 2015 World Snooker Final.

"There's not a player in the world who doesn't deserve it any less than Stuart."

Tony Blair's speech to the New Labour pressure group Progress certainly deserves a mention.

"We won not because we did what we thought was wrong as a matter of principle but right as a matter of politics; but when we realised that what is right as a matter of policy is right as a matter of principle.

"Labour shouldn't despair. We can win again. We can win again next time. But only if our comfort zone is the future and our values are our guide and not our distraction."

Brendan Rodgers

2014 was a classic year of gibberish from ex Liverpool FC manager Brendan (example: "We play with 11 men, other teams play with 10 men and a goalkeeper"). So was 2015. "You can go there, you don't need to dominate the ball – but you need to dominate this space."

Kim Kardashian

(mother of North West) for her response to rumours that her second child with rapper Kanye West might be called 'South':

"I don't like South West, though, because that's like, you know, North will always, you know, be better and be more ... she has a better direction. So I wouldn't do that. I don't think we'll go with another direction."

Golden Bull Winners 2015

Here's the worst written codswallop of 2015 – the following indecipherable and over-written streams of self-important gibberish beat out hundreds of entries to take their place in our hall of shame. If you can figure any of these out, you're way ahead of us, and those responsible for writing them.

According to Origen Private Client Solutions, all you have to do is...well, we're not sure. What, for example, is a 'platform'? 'Bundled funds'? See if you can figure it out – the anonymous contributor who sent this in understandably struggled...

"All you need to do at this stage is to confirm our ongoing adviser charge for the bundled funds we advise you on, by completing the enclosed **Affirmation Form**. The form can be found in this pack and we have prepopulated it where we can for ease. We have also enclosed a pre-paid envelope for you to pop it back in the post to us. Your platform will then write to you later this year to confirm your funds have been converted to their 'unbundled' equivalent."

ProFinda sent Phil Wainright an email containing the following. The service itself is almost as questionable as the language used to tout for business.

"ProFinda is engaged with the largest knowledge driven companies helping them transform the way their employees collaborate, breaking down silos and creating a flatter more dynamic organisation that better leverages the thousands of staff that they have."

Anne Duffell found the following book blurb from Palgrave Macmillan completely incomprehensible. We can't argue with her assessment.

"Thinking Through Digital Media

Thinking Through Digital Media offers a means of conceptualizing digital media by looking at projects that think through digital media, migrating between documentary, experimental, narrative, animation, video game, and live performance. Hudson and Zimmermann analyze projects at the intersections of imbedded technologies, transitory micropublics, human-machine interface, and critical cartographies to forward a set of speculations about how things work together rather than what they represent."

An anonymous supporter sent us this email from Regen SW, which is apparently about 'Renewable Heat Incentive'. We'll take their word for it...

"Domestic biomass growth indicates degression in April
Forecasting expenditure for biomass is over its degression threshold at the end of November 2014 and therefore requires a 10% degression in April. The question is whether we might see the schemes first 20% degression due to the 'super trigger' being hit.

This would require forecasted expenditure for the third quarter of 2014/15 to increase by 61%, which is higher than the previous quarterly increase of 45%. The final decision depends on deployment figures in December and January. We expect December's deployment to be high, due to the increase level of sales in advance of the degression on the 1 January 2015, but this may also mean January's figures will be much lower."

Gordon Minto was understandably baffled and annoyed by the following offering from Land Registry (Wales Office). Spelling mistakes and various errors are not ours....

"I refer to your application for registration affecting the above property received on 5 August 2015.

You have applied for adverse possession of freehold land and as you only acquired the freehold of your property on the 25 April 2013, the 12 year period for adverse possession starts to run from that date .

Any interest you may have acquired in the claimed land whilst you were a tenant under the lease dated 9 August 1937determined on merge of th lease and any interest in the claim would have devolved to your vendor, Lorton Investment Limited .

No fee accompanied your application and a fee for adverse possession of unregistered land id £70.

I am therefore rejecting your application. Please renew your application once you have corrected the defect(s) referred to. The documents lodged with your application have been destroyed after being scanned in line with current policy. We enclose official copies of the documents which may be re-lodged for registration."



Here's West Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Group's baffling response to Deborah Pearson's query about NHS Continuing Healthcare.

"In deciding whether a person has a primary health need the representatives will consider whether the nursing or other services required by that person are: -

- a) where the person is, or will be, accommodated in a care home, more than incidental or ancillary to the provision of accommodation which a Local Authority is, or would be, but for a person's means, under a duty to provide; or
- b) of a nature beyond which a Local Authority whose primary responsibility is to provide social services could be expected to provide

and if it decides that the nursing or other health services required do, when considered in their totality, fall within paragraph (a) or (b), it must decide that the person has a primary health need."

David Simpson, a rugby coach of six years, was understandably unimpressed by the following email from the Rugby Football Union.

"Age Grade Competition Review

The RFU Council meeting of 17th April agreed key actions to drive implementation of the Age Grade Competition Review (AGCR) from **September 2016**.

The AGCR Implementation Action Plan, which also includes a new strategic direction for Under 16 representative rugby, has foundations based on the firm principles that the game must be player-centred, development-driven and competition-supported, in that order. This ensures that the motivations and welfare of all players, no matter their experience or ability, are the cornerstone of the game they play week in week out.

The plan includes, from the 2016-17 season, consistent age bandings and incremental player progressions for all Age Grade Rugby; a nationally consistent playing menu and calendar that increases inclusivity, clarifies player priorities and dovetails club, school, college competitions; an integrated England Rugby Player Development pathway and representative framework and training and Continuous Professional Development for coaches, referees, parents, teachers and others. It will support and work with counties, clubs, schools and colleges over the next 16 months to make the changes."

Aqua Shard's response to Philip Bowden's email wasn't what he was expecting...

"We have previously offered a very small service for the request of vouchers for use at our restaurants, but due to a successive number of new requests being received the first week of December, which surpassed any possible projections we had held for the demand for gift vouchers, this significantly impacted on our ability to process and complete requests. Whilst, I can certainly appreciate that you would have preferred that we contact you to advise on whether there was a potential delay, the priority across the last week was actually to try to complete the requests, and I fear trying to make contact with hundreds of guests when every moment was crucial to trying to honour the original request for vouchers was counterproductive.

"The voucher request service has since been suspended, because we were unable to continue to accept requests when we were struggling to honour existing requests, and ensure we were able to complete the requests within the essence of time it was required for, and to also guarantee the quality of the vouchers when trying to honour the mass production of a small service."

Alun Owen forwarded an unreadable NHS East Coast Community Healthcare leaflet, of which this is the worst...

"To act as an expert resource to support patients, families, carers, health professionals and social care staff in the optimum management of those with Parkinson's Disease and Multiple Sclerosis and Motor Neurone Disease by providing support, training, education and information within the community and hospital setting. The aim is: 'To provide a seamless supportive service between primary and secondary care offering optimum evidence-based disease management with a well informed, empowered patient at the centre.'" The nurses will co-ordinate care through all disease stages from diagnosis, manage medication regimes, and provide specialist assessment. They can provide holistic support, and link with other health and social care services and the voluntary sector to enhance multidisciplinary team working and increase awareness. They will also work with the Parkinson's Disease Society and the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the Motor Neurone Disease Association."



Golden Bulls (continued from page 7)

Thanks to Kevan Moll for this 'Guarantor Agreement' from Finlay Graham, a purposefully dull and incomprehensibly muddy stream of words. It's an obviously rushed outpouring of gibberish which contains a sentence running to 274 words. Say no more.

"I do hereby for myself and my heirs executors administrators and assigns guarantee to you and your heirs executors administrators and assigns and the owner of the premises for the time being the punctual payment of the said rent payable by the tenant and any reduced rent or as same may be varied by law and for mesne rates that may accrue due until full clear and legal possession of the said premises shall be delivered up and I agree to indemnify you and your heirs executors administrators and assigns and the owner of the said premises for the time being from all loss damage done to the said Premises Furniture Fixtures and Effects by the tenant or through his negligence or by reason

of the non-fulfilment of any of the stipulations and conditions on the part of the tenant in the above agreement contained and for all costs of proceedings for the recovery of the rent or possession of the said premises and should Notice to Quit be served by the Landlord or Tenant or Ejectment Summons issued or Eviction Decree obtained in respect of the said premises and afterwards withdrawn or waived by either party with or without my knowledge my liability under this guarantee shall not be affected, it shall remain in full force and effect in respect of any new tenancy thereby created nor shall my liability under this guarantee be affected by giving the tenant time to pay the amount due by him or agreeing to accept same by instalments nor shall this guarantee be determined or my liability thereunder be affected by the bankruptcy of the tenant. And if the tenancy shall be continued or extended or renewed my guarantee will apply to the additional term or terms. And if this guarantee is signed by more than one person my liability hereunder shall be joint and several."

Training dates for 2016 (open courses)

If you have any questions about our range of courses, please phone us on 01663 744409 and ask for Terri Schabel, our training administrator.

About our courses

In-house courses

Our trainers will come to your organisation's offices where your staff can take the course.

Online courses

We offer some of our training, including our business-writing course, online.

Open courses

We hold these courses regularly at various hotels around the country.

Plain English Diploma

This is a course that you take over a period of a year.

London – Thistle Euston Hotel

Thursday 28 January 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – Grammarcheck
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 24 May 2016 – plain English
Wednesday 27 July 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 20 September 2016 – Grammarcheck
Wednesday 21 September 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 22 November 2016 – plain English

Manchester – The Portland Hotel

Tuesday 23 February 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 19 April 2016 – Grammarcheck
Wednesday 20 April 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 21 June 2016 – plain English
Wednesday 24 August 2016 – plain English
Tuesday 18 October 2016 – Grammarcheck
Wednesday 19 October 2016 – plain English
Wednesday 14 December 2016 – plain English