

# Plain English

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## Doctors told to cut jargon

**Doctors have been told to use plain English when communicating with their patients.**

Please Write to Me is a new Academy of Medical Royal Colleges initiative aimed mainly at doctors to encourage better habits in medical communication.

The initiative advises doctors to write easily understood, friendly letters to their patients after countless complaints.

For decades we've made regular pleas for clearer information across all types of medical communication, from appointment letters to the way doctor's speak to patients about their health.

While these welcome proposals are long overdue, clarity in health communication is where plain English is absolutely essential. Being confused about a banking product is serious enough, but for too long people have been baffled about the state of their health. If being duped out of a few quid with jargon is considered bad news, failing to understand a diagnosis is clearly far more serious.

It's another long-standing myth that a certain brand of 'important sounding' language is necessary in medical communication. Many years ago we successfully fought for clearer information on medicine bottles and leaflets. These new moves surely mark the inevitable end of complex medical explanations.



Now that doctors have been told by their bosses - not the humble patients whose health relies on clear medical information - to clean up their act, we expect to see immediate results.

Nobody wants to have to think twice about what they think is bad news, nor do they want to get that news in a headmasterly tone.

For example, why bother flaunting your medical thesaurus by citing 'Dysnopea' as part of an assessment, rather than 'being out of breath'? Stop showing off, doc.

### Inside:

**Page 2: Train jargon cancelled/Internet T&Cs**  
**Page 3: MoD acronym furore/Shakespeare**  
**Page 4-5: This year's award winners**  
**Page 6-7: Golden Bulls**  
**Page 8: Course dates/A bit of fun**

# Exit-fee sneakiness hits homeowners



Christine Williams had no option but to sell her house after separating from her husband.

Two years earlier Christine took out a £25000 equity release loan against the property to pay for some home improvements.

So when the time came to sell her home, she knew that first she would have to repay the loan. Which is where her unforeseen problems began.

## Internet app T&Cs 'need simplifying'

Kids are signing up to internet apps despite terms and conditions 'meant for university students', according to reports.

We've all faced endless streams of gibberish we're often expected to read before 'agreeing' to whatever it all means. We tend to click 'Yes' first and then worry about the consequences later.

But our kids can't be held responsible for signing up for things they can't possibly understand. Internet apps meant for a young audience are a completely different matter than those meant for the rest of us.

We might struggle to understand an app's terms, but we're ultimately responsible for signing up. Kids can't be expected to understand reams of nonsense or take responsibility.

Christine was initially told that she owed £32133. But a few days later her solicitor told her the figure had risen to £34000. Her early-repayment fee, which had been £6000, was now £7800.

Baffled, Christine contacted her loan provider, whose reply included three pages of jargon that referred to things like 'gilt movements'.

Christine still has no idea why she was suddenly hit with such a fee hike. She can't read the explanation.

Lenders charge variable exit fees that are calculated by using very complex means. Whoever is reaping the benefit of these seemingly arbitrary charges and leaving customers confused and angry needs to provide an understandable explanation, or stop sneaking in late fees.



Apps meant for kids should be written for them, and should contain no surprises that their parents will have to deal with.

Ultimately, those paying the hefty bills for a sneaky charge hidden behind walls of impenetrable gibberish - mum and dad - are the ones being conned.

App makers: stop taking advantage of kids and pretending it's accidental.

# 'Absurd' MoD acronyms baffle everyone



The Ministry of Defence is just as well known by the acronym MoD. So it should come as no surprise to anyone that they heavily rely on TLAs — or three-letter abbreviations.

Shorthand codes have become so widely used by the British armed forces and NATO that the MoD now need to use a 370-page handbook to list all the abbreviations.

The extraordinary length of the list has led to widespread bafflement as well as

serious criticism from MPs.

Gavin Robinson, a Democratic Unionist Party MP who sits on the defence select committee, said: "The extraordinary obsessional quest to develop an acronym for everything has led to an unintelligible swamp of letters that even the most skilled military strategist would struggle to navigate."

Mark Francois, a Conservative MP on the committee, was also less than impressed. "For those outside the department these TLAs can sometimes be confusing and do not always help the cause of defence. In fact some at the Treasury have even been known to use "FFS" [for f\*\*\*'s sake] in reaction to the abbreviations."

Our response can be summed up with: 'WTF?!' To a specialist audience acronyms can be useful, but 370 pages is ludicrous.

# Shakespeare with emojis 'helps children'

To emoji or not to emoji - that, to some, is the question.

Avonborough College in Bournemouth this year decided that Shakespeare might go down better with emojis.

So they put sad, happy, angry or scared face icons alongside the Bard's immortal lines, so the kids weren't confused.

Shakespeare is hard, rewarding work, brought to life by a live performance. It's not for everyone. Kids often need help to unlock the language. Live performances, classic TV and film productions, and getting them to read the lines can all be a big help.

Emojis are useful for people in a hurry texting and emailing each other. They're not much use elsewhere.



And while they might be fun, they could set a lazy and shallow precedent in the classroom. Shakespeare cannot be made easier by looking at a tiny yellow face.

Emojis are not going to help kids, but good teachers always will. There are no simple or plain English versions of the world's greatest plays.

# The Plain English Campaign

## Foot in Mouth Winner



**Elon Musk**

**"Sorry pedo guy, you really did ask for it."**

Musk made his excruciating comment as part of a shameful Twitter-rant against Vern Unsworth, who would go on to lead the heroic rescue of several stranded Thai children. And to think earlier in the year Elon was firing cars into space.

## Runners-up

**Dominic Raab (as Brexit Minister)**

**"I hadn't quite understood the full extent of this, but if you look at the UK and look at how we trade in goods, we are particularly reliant on the Dover-Calais crossing."**

## Kick in the Pants

**National Rail**

We had more tweets about National Rail jargon than any other subject. After announcing a new price hike of 3.1% for January, the least they can do is better explain why their trains are broken or late. Again.

## Football Guff

**Sam Allardyce**



**Earned £9m for 26 Everton games, £1m for 67 days with England. Then said the following.**

**"Money has just brought more instability than ever before, and it's managers who suffer the most."**

**Guff Legend: Michael Owen**



**"That's an unstoppable shot, but the keeper has to do better there."**

**"He's given the referee no choice but to consider his options."**

**"When they don't score they hardly ever win."**

**"If there's a bit of rain about, it makes the surface wet."**

**"It's hit the facial part of his head."**

# winners and losers for 2018

## Chrissie Maher Award

**Academy of Medical Royal Colleges**  
(Please, write to me)

## Plain English Award winners

**George Eliot Hospital Maternity Services**  
(Leaflets and website information)



## Independent Age

(Caring for someone/Planning for the end of life/Settling into a care home)

## Nuffield Health

(Discharge information following Cataract Surgery)

## By Miles

(Your Policy Handbook)

## Dementia UK



## Plain English Communicator

**Charlie Corbett (The Art of Plain Speaking)**

## Pat on the Back

**Carole Cadwalladr (The Observer)**

## Media Award

**James O'Brien**  
(LBC)

The voice of a disgruntled and spin-weary nation once again.



## International Award

### Shawn Burton

(The Case for Plain-Language Contracts)

There's still no excuse for jargon in business contracts, as Shawn eloquently argues.

## Osborne Memorial Award

**Mind - for better mental health**



## Website Award



# The Golden Bull Awards

**The following is just a sample from a 303-page document Keith Teall sent us, a Lake District National Park Authority 'Local Plan Review'...who wants to read the whole thing?**

We have produced an Options and Suggested Approach Document, which provides the options we have considered and which ones we have chosen as our preferred option, our suggested draft planning policies and our suggested draft site allocations. This is a summary version of the above document and only provides the suggested draft policies and a brief overview of the intention and main issues which have informed the policy development.

In order to deliver our collective vision our strategic objectives all relate to delivery of this Vision. The strategic objectives for the Local Plan are presented as "specifically this means" and the "cross cutting objectives".

The Vision for the Lake District National Park is an expression of what sustainable development looks like in our locally distinctive context. In turn, the policies in the Local Plan will provide a spatial expression of the Vision, the focus of which is to support sustainable development, and the proposed land allocations will further that spatial expression by proactively facilitating sustainable development throughout the Lake District National Park.

**Thanks to Steve Stretch for this garbled rugby report by Jonathan Twigg...**

Such a magnificent occasion on Friday, a Quarter Final of the Heineken European Cup in the depth of West Wales at Parc Y Scarlets, French giants, metaphorically and physically La Rochelle in town; reminiscent of King William in 1066, to conquer, greeted by a capacity 16,000 natives. A warm message of welcome from European Rugby's Chairman Simon Halliday, a flying England winger from the last millennium his roots stretched with longevity to his birth place, Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire.

Like King William, having conquered the struggle for La Rochelle was to consolidate their assets, something they failed to do after securing an early 7-3 lead after six minutes, through a converted try by second row Romain Sazy.



**Deloitte Digital US forgot to make any sense when releasing this...whatever it is. Anyone?**

Reorienting linear-thinking decision-makers toward exponential possibilities can be challenging, but it is necessary if you want to get out ahead of the curve - or even just to keep pace with technological change that shows no signs of slowing down.

**AB Business Training sent us the following incomprehensible nonsense from Antonio Horta-Osorio, the Lloyds Bank Group Chief Executive...**

Our differentiated, customer-focussed business model continues to deliver with our multi brand, multi channel approach, cost leadership, low risk positioning, investment capacity and execution capabilities positioning us well for sustainable success in a digital world.

**An anonymous supporter sent us a dire email courtesy of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, from which here's a sample...**

Community Engagement

We will use the life-course approach across multiple domains (individual, family, street, community and environment) to better understand peoples' motivations and attitudes. Using this approach, we hope to demonstrate what we have learned at each stage of the life cycle and therefore enable the methodology for the pilot to be replicable in other areas.

We recognise that an active co-production of local solutions based on behaviour change theory needs constant engagement and refinement of innovations with local community members and therefore want the community alongside to have a strong and influential voice in developing and implementing Active Withernsea.

# (2018's worst gibberish)

**Here's Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson in great form. Thanks to Steve Read.**

While certain demand headwinds are transitory, and some of our cost increases are appropriate investments for the future, our recent performance does not reflect the potential of our exceptional brand and is not acceptable. We must move faster to address the more rapidly changing preferences and needs of our customers. Over the past year we have taken several actions to streamline the company, positioning us to increase our innovation agility as an organisation and enhance focus on our core value drivers which serve as the foundation to re-accelerate growth and create long-term shareholder value.

**Michael Mellor sent us the following awful nonsense, courtesy of IBM.**

Whilst Business War Rooms are structured by Channel and appear to be effective in triaging Business issues to enable both technical and operational defect remediation, they do not intergrate technical change, i.e. change could be made to the same architecture component by different War Rooms without a holistic assessment.

The short term focus should be stability, enforced by central design authority working with the business and the IT run organization to do defect triage and determine the priority of fixes.

**James Middleton read and re-read the following without success. Matthew Moore at The Times is the culprit.**

BBC staff have been told to use non-binary pronouns when addressing gender-fluid or transgender employees to ensure that the corporation does not develop a 'heteronormative culture'.

**W P Reed wondered what we made of the following from the DWP. Not a clue!**

The decision maker has proceeded to consider whether regulation 29 & 35 of the Employment and Support Allowance regulations apply to X and has decided that he suffers from a specific disease or bodily or mental disablement and by reason of that condition there would be substantial risk to the mental or physical health of any person if he were found not to have limited capacity for work.

**The following gibberish was forwarded by Jerry Dzanc from Italy, who has asked us not to say which global telecommunications giant is responsible, since he works for them...**

This project is Agile and there is no traceability matrix. The acceptance criteria can be found in the individual EPICs which are listed below for the current release development of a self-service capability which allows customers to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Overlay capability to manage their service with much greater flexibility, and using the more advanced self-service capability to direct customers to the portal as the default way to manage their service, improving the customer experience and reducing our cost to serve.

**Steve Barclay, MP for North East Cambridgeshire, was in full 'snake oil salesman' mode when peddling the following meaningless spin to promote the Prime Minister's seemingly doomed Brexit deal. Nominated by Tom Jennings.**

Under the Brexit deal, we have agreed to strike an ambitious new flexible and scalable relationship that allows us to combine resources worldwide for maximum impact.

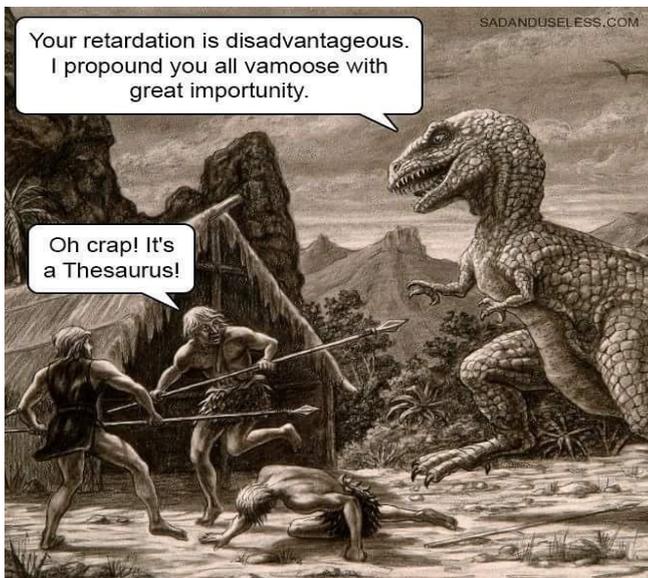
**Candice Mason couldn't understand what Transport for London were on about. Here's a mercifully brief sample of their letter.**

T-Charge was introduced to the Congestion Charging Scheme Order on the 23 October 2017 as a confirmed amendment by the Mayor of London following a public consultation. It introduced an emissions element to the scheme that requires specific vehicles to achieve certain emissions standards for Particulate Matter (PM) and Nitrates of Oxygen (NoX). PM and NoX standards apply to compression ignition engined vehicles, normally diesel fuelled vehicles. NoX only applies to spark ignition vehicles, normally petrol fuelled vehicles. The emissions surcharge applies to most vehicles that use the charging zone, from cars to heavy goods vehicle and also extends to some tricycles and quadricycles defined within the L type definitions in the scheme order.

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**Please do send us your Golden Bull examples as we may either Tweet them or include them in next year's round-up. Thanks!**

Opposite is our first winner of the 'Provocatively Plain English Award' which could certainly never be accused of mincing words, or leaving drivers in any doubt as to what's expected of them...please do send in more just like it please! Below is the most-shared post from our Facebook page...



## Course dates for 2019

### Manchester – Malmaison

Tue 26 Feb – plain English  
 Tue 16 Apr – 'Grammarcheck'  
 Wed 17 Apr – plain English  
 Wed 26 Jun – plain English  
 Wed 21 Aug – plain English  
 Tue 22 Oct – 'Grammarcheck'  
 Wed 23 Oct – plain English  
 Tue 10 Dec – plain English

### London – Thistle Holborn

Wed 23 Jan – plain English  
 Tue 19 Feb – Advanced Grammar  
 Tue 19 Mar – 'Grammarcheck'  
 Wed 20 Mar – plain English  
 Wed 24 Apr – Writing for websites  
 Tue 21 May – plain English  
 Tue 18 Jun – Report writing  
 Wed 24 Jul – plain English  
 Tue 24 Sep – 'Grammarcheck'  
 Wed 25 Sep – plain English  
 Tue 19 Nov – plain English

### Diplomas

Manchester: Tue 12 and Wed 13 Feb  
 London: Tue 10 and Wed 11 Sep

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