

out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark *parquet*, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. I must try to think of something else. I recurred to my ghost story,—my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night!

Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. "I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow." On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*. I began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream.

At first I thought but of a few pages—of a short tale; but Shelley urged me to develop the idea at greater length. I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world. From this declaration I must except the preface. As far as I can recollect, it was entirely written by him.

And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true

echo in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone; and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more. But this is for myself; my readers have nothing to do with these associations.

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JOHN O'HAYRE

Munger, David. ed. 80 Readings for Composition. 2nd Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.

A First Look at Gobbledygook

This essay is taken from a United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, publication *Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go*. The author, John O'Hayre, is an employee of the Bureau. In his preface, O'Hayre says, "If we are to succeed in these times of new technologies, new demands, and new attitudes, we must improve our communications radically. We must abandon soggy formality and incoherence in favor of modern personal communications. No longer can gobbledygook be allowed to clog communication lines." This work was published in 1966. If we can believe what we read about the proliferation of "officialese," we can only conclude that O'Hayre's crusade has made little progress in more than thirty years.

A DISGRUNTLED STATE DIRECTOR TOSSED A COPY OF A MEMO ON OUR desk some time back. "Here's a lusty sample of what good writing ain't," he said. "Maybe you can use it to show some of our staff how not to write."

He picked up the memo and rattled it, saying: "All I did was write this solicitor a short memo. I told him I thought we could solve a nasty trespass case we'd both been working on. We suggested we give this trespasser a special-use permit and make him legal. That way we'd all get off the hook. All I asked the solicitor was, 'is this okay with you?'"

He threw the memo on the desk and scowled. "Cripes! All he had to do was say 'yes' or 'no.' But look what he sends me!"

Properly meek by this time, I asked: "Did the solicitor say 'yes' or 'no'?"

The state director whirled: "How the heck do I know! I've only read it twice!"

There was no doubt about it, that state director had a problem; he simply couldn't get readable writing out of his staff, or, more important this day, his solicitor.

Our distressed state director wasn't alone in his sweat over unreadable writing. Leaders in government, business, and industry have had the same feverish feeling for years. One chemical company executive put it this way: "If our antifreeze had the same quality as our writing, we'd rust out half the radiators in the country in six months."

A study showed executives in one company used 200 words to write 125-word memos, eight paragraphs for four-paragraph letters, and nearly 200 pages for 100-page reports. Another corporation finally got so frustrated it quit trying to hire writers and started training the ones it already had. Most big corporations are doing this now; they have to. This way they get good writing and save good money—lots of it. An average letter's cost varies from \$6 for top executives to \$2 at lower levels.

Let's read the memo that shook up the state director:

To: State Director
From: John Lawbook, Solicitor
Subject: Roland Occupancy Trespass

This responds to your memorandum dated February 21, 1964, requesting that we review and comment concerning the subject Roland trespass on certain lands under reclamation withdrawal.

We appreciate your apprising us of this matter and we certainly concur that appropriate action is in order to protect the interests of the United States.

We readily recognize the difficult problem presented by this situation, and if it can be otherwise satisfactorily resolved, we would prefer to avoid trespass action. If you determine it permissible to legalize the Roland occupancy and hay production by issuance of a special use permit, as suggested in your memorandum, we have no objection to that procedure.

Any such permit should be subject to cancellation when the lands are actively required for reclamation purposes and should provide for the right of the officers, agents, and employees of the

United States at all times to have unrestricted access and ingress to, passage over, and egress from all said lands, to make investigations of all kinds, dig test pits and drill test holes, to survey for reclamation and irrigation works, and to perform any and all necessary soil and moisture conservation work.

If we can be of any further assistance in this matter, please advise. We would appreciate being informed of the disposition of this problem.

Before we edit the solicitor's memo, let's look at two of its weak points:

1. *False Opening*: The solicitor starts his memo by telling the state director: "This is my memo to you, answering your memo to me." Who could care less? Openings like this tell nobody nothing. Yet many memos and letters start in this word-wasteful manner.

2. *Writer's Grade**: The solicitor's memo has 217 words, 44 difficult words, 3 syllables or over, and a writer's grade of 53; it should grade out at 70 or above to be reasonably readable. A high grade means that, even if you're not saying what you mean, you're saying it readably well. Your sentences are short, your constructions simple, and your words are not painfully syllabic. A high writer's grade is a guarantee of readable writing. With it you're in business as a writer; without it you're in trouble with the reader.

A basic rule for all writing is: Have something to say; say it simply; quit! The next rule is: After you've quit, go over it again with a harsh pencil and a vengeance, crossing out everything that isn't necessary.

Let's see if the solicitor's memo takes well to the pencil. On our first trip through, in order to be fair to the solicitor, we won't change any of his words or word order.

Let's start penciling out:

~~This responds to your memorandum dated February 21, 1964, requesting that we review and comment concerning the subject Roland trespass on certain lands under reclamation withdrawal.~~

~~We appreciate your apprising us of this matter and we certainly concur that appropriate action is in order to protect the interests of the United States.~~

*Refers to the Lensear Write Formula, a system for grading effective writing used by this author.

~~We readily recognize the difficult problem presented by this situation, and if it can be otherwise satisfactorily resolved, we would prefer to avoid trespass action. If you determine it permissible to legalize the Roland occupancy and hay production by issuance of a special use permit, as suggested in your memorandum, we have no objection to that procedure.~~

~~Any such permit should be subject to cancellation when the lands are actively required for reclamation purposes and should provide for the right of the officers, agents, and employees of the United States at all times to have unrestricted access and ingress to, passage over, and egress from all said lands, to make investigations of all kinds, dig test pits and drill test holes, to survey for reclamation and irrigation works, and to perform any and all necessary soil and moisture conservation work.~~

~~If we can be of any further assistance in this matter, please advise.~~ We would appreciate being informed of the disposition of this problem.

What did we accomplish in this quick trip? Well, let's see. We cut the number of words from 217 to 75, cut the difficult words from 44 to 10, and raised the writer's grade from 53 (difficult) to 60 (acceptable).

Can we cut more yet? Let's go over it again and see, still without changing the solicitor's words or word order.

First sentence: Concerning the Roland trespass case, we concur that action is in order.

We can throw this whole sentence out, because: (1) the subject heading of the memo clearly states what the memo concerns; and (2) both knew "action was in order." That's why they had been writing each other.

Second and third sentences: We would prefer to avoid trespass action. If you determine it permissible to legalize Roland's occupancy by issuance of a special use permit, we have no objection.

Let's leave this for now; it contains the essence of the memo; it's the answer.

Fourth sentence: Any such permit should be subject to cancellation and should provide for the right of the United States at all times to perform all necessary work.

Let's throw this out, too. The state director and his staff issue special use permits as a matter of routine. They know what can-

cellation clauses and special-use provisions these have to carry. Why tell them what they already know?

Fifth sentence: We would appreciate being informed of the disposition of this problem.

Let's leave this sentence as it is and see what we have left after two editings.

We would prefer to avoid trespass action. If you determine it permissible to legalize Roland's occupancy by issuance of a special use permit, we have no objection.

We would appreciate being informed of the disposition of the problem.

A recount shows we're now down to 38 words, 8 difficult words, and have a writer's grade of 68.

The question now is: Does the edited memo carry the essential message and does it read easily? It does both pretty well. However, it could have a little more clarity and a little less pretension if it said simply:

We'd like to avoid trespass action, if possible. So, if you can settle this case by issuing Roland a special use permit, go ahead. Please keep us informed.

This is the way we would have written the memo had we been in the solicitor's seat. The memo now has 28 words, 2 difficult words, and a writer's grade of 70. That's good writing.

Let's go back to the original memo. What we did first was to concentrate on axing out empty words and phrases. Note how they strain to sound unnatural—and succeed. Note how they can be replaced with simple, direct words.

First and second sentences: This responds to your memorandum dated February 21, 1964, requesting that we review and comment concerning the subject Roland trespass on certain lands under reclamation withdrawal. We appreciate your apprising us of this matter, and we certainly concur that appropriate action is in order to protect the interests of the United States.

How much better had he said: "Got your memo on the Roland trespass case. You're right; action is needed."

Third sentence: We readily recognize the difficult problem pre-

sented by this situation, and if it can be otherwise satisfactorily resolved, we would prefer to avoid trespass action.

Why didn't he just say, "The problem is tough, and we'd like to avoid trespass action if we can"?

Fourth sentence: If you determine it permissible to legalize Roland's occupancy by issuance of a special use permit, as suggested in your memorandum, we have no objection to that procedure.

It's a lot clearer this way: "If you can solve this problem by issuing Roland a special use permit, go ahead."

Fifth sentence: Any such permit should be subject to cancellation when the lands are actively required for reclamation purposes and should provide for the right of officers, agents and employees of the United States at all times to have unrestricted access and ingress to, passage over, and egress from all said lands, to make investigations of all kinds, dig test pits and drill test holes, to survey for reclamation and irrigation works, and to perform any and all necessary soil and moisture conservation work.

Such a lawyerish enumeration belongs, if it belongs at all, in a legal contract, not in an inter-office memo. If the solicitor felt an obligation to give the state director a reminder, he might have said: "Please spell out the Government's cancellation rights and right-to-use provisions in the permit."

Sixth and seventh sentences (adequate but somewhat high-blown): If we can be of any further assistance in this matter, please advise. We would appreciate being informed of the disposition of this problem.

It's somewhat better, at least shorter, this way: "If we can be of further help, please call. Keep us informed."

How does the whole, empty-word-less memo read now? Would it, too, be satisfactory? Let's look:

Got your memo on the Roland trespass case. You're right; action is needed. The problem *is* tough, and we'd like to avoid trespass action if we can. So, if you can settle this case by issuing Roland a special-use permit, go ahead. Please spell out the Government's cancellation rights and right-to-use provisions in the permit. If we can be of further help, please call. Keep us informed.

In this version we have 70 words, only four difficult words, and a writer's grade of 69.

Moreover, we've said everything the solicitor said in his original memo, even the stuff that didn't need saying. The only difference is that we threw out the empty words, shortened the sentences, changed the passive to the active, and generally tried to say things simply, directly, and clearly. The gobbledygook is gone!

VIRGINIA WOOLF

If Shakespeare Had Had a Sister

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was a poet, essayist, editor, and most notably, a novelist. She was the focus of the "Bloomsbury Group," a gathering of important thinkers, including T. S. Eliot, John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster, who had wide influence in the early part of this century. In this passage from *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she builds a convincing case that a woman in Elizabethan England would never have been allowed the opportunity to create works like Shakespeare's plays.

IT IS A PERENNIAL PUZZLE WHY NO WOMAN WROTE A WORD OF THAT extraordinary [Elizabethan] literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet. What were the conditions in which women lived, I asked myself; for fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in. . . .

But what I find . . . is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. I have no model in my mind to turn