

BIDDING IN A
**BRAVE NEW
WORLD**

Lifting the Curse
of Knowledge

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The curse of knowledge

The main cause of incomprehensible prose is the difficulty of imagining what it's like for someone else not to know something that you know.”

Steven Pinker



Incomprehensible prose causes...

CHAOS



Why, oh why

Malevolence?

Stupidity?



Casting the curse

Make a potion of sticky garlic frogs

Ingredients:

Chunks (of garlic)

Glue (gum Arabic)

Four frogs



Chunking

The human brain can hold
three - seven things at a time
and learns through association

Example

M D D R R S V P C E O B H S
M D D R R S V P C E O B H S

The MD and the DR RSVP'd to the CEO of BHS

Example

Give > swap > trade > market > economy >
monetary policy > quantitative easing



Functional fixity

Thinking in terms of function
rather than form

Example

A dinner plate



Hippety-hop

Mindblindness

Egocentricity

Hindsight

False consensus



Stir and cast

THE CURSE



Diagnosis

You are cursed if you have one or more of the following symptoms...

Incoherence

Jargon

Clutter

Gobbledygook

Abstraction

Abbreviations
and acronyms

Complexity

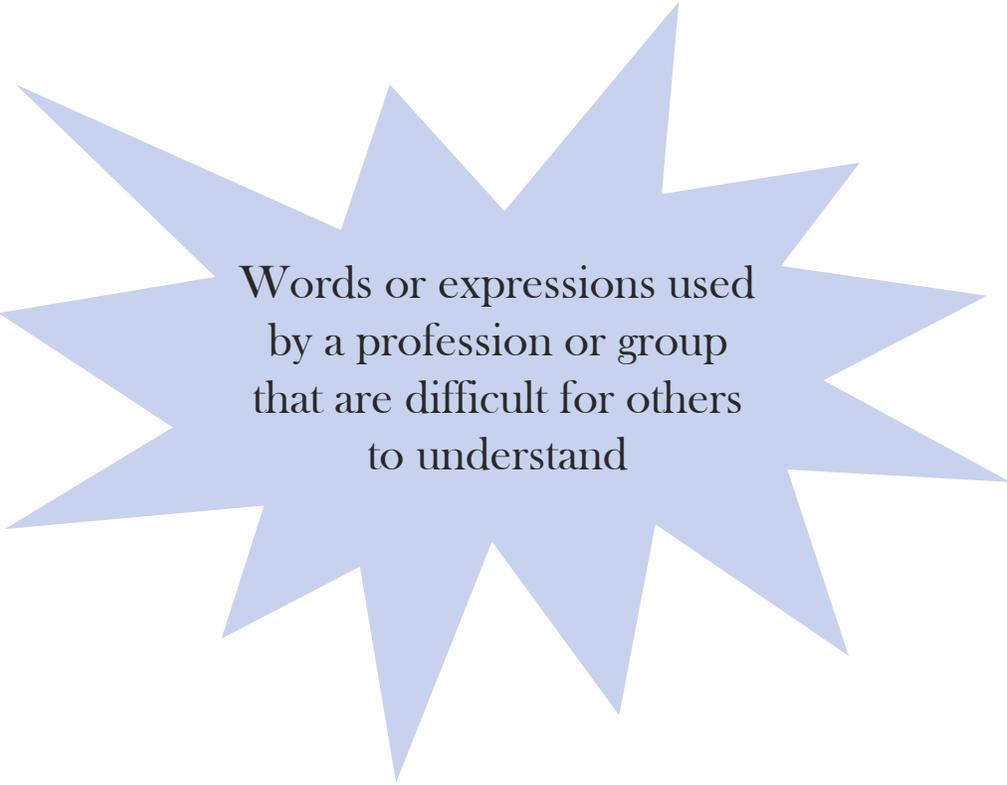


Lifting the curse

- Admission is the first step to cure
- Make a working assumption
- Follow traditional advice
- Support your afflicted colleagues
- Tackle the individual issues



Jargon



Words or expressions used
by a profession or group
that are difficult for others
to understand

Examples:

- Murine model = using mice and other rodents
- Interoperability = the ability to connect and work together
- An on-premise system = a system in the customer's office
- Quantitative easing = stimulating the economy with extra money
- Governance protocol = steps to ensure things are done properly

Cures:

- “Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.” *Orwell*
- Identify your jargon
- Use the specialist phrase and...
 - An explanation
 - An example, or two
 - “The ABC gateway allows secure interoperability. This means you can connect different systems and securely transfer data between them. For example, you can move financial data into the personnel system.”

Abbreviations and acronyms



Short forms, contractions
and initials

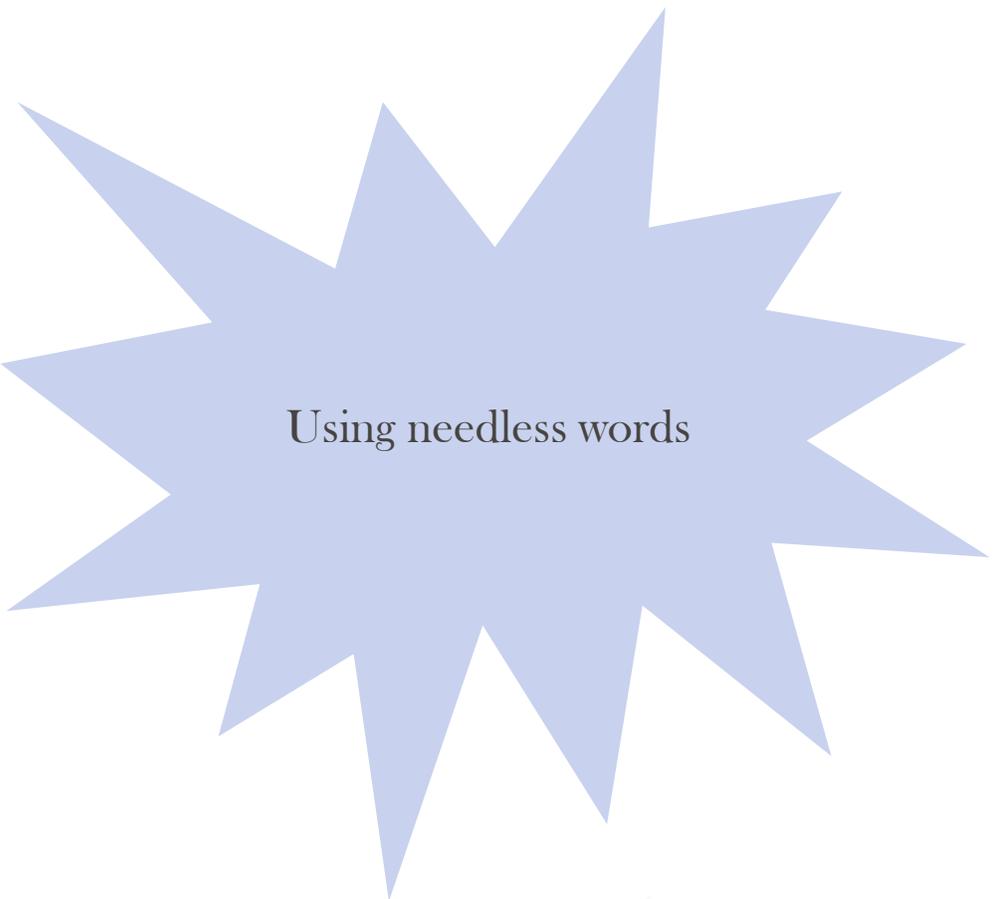
Examples:

- E.g. = For example
- Dept = Department
- SME = Small Medium Enterprise or Subject Matter Expert
- RAMS = risk assessment and method statements

Cures:

- Identify your abbreviations and acronyms
- Avoid lazy or unexplained abbreviations
- Compile a glossary

Clutter



Using needless words

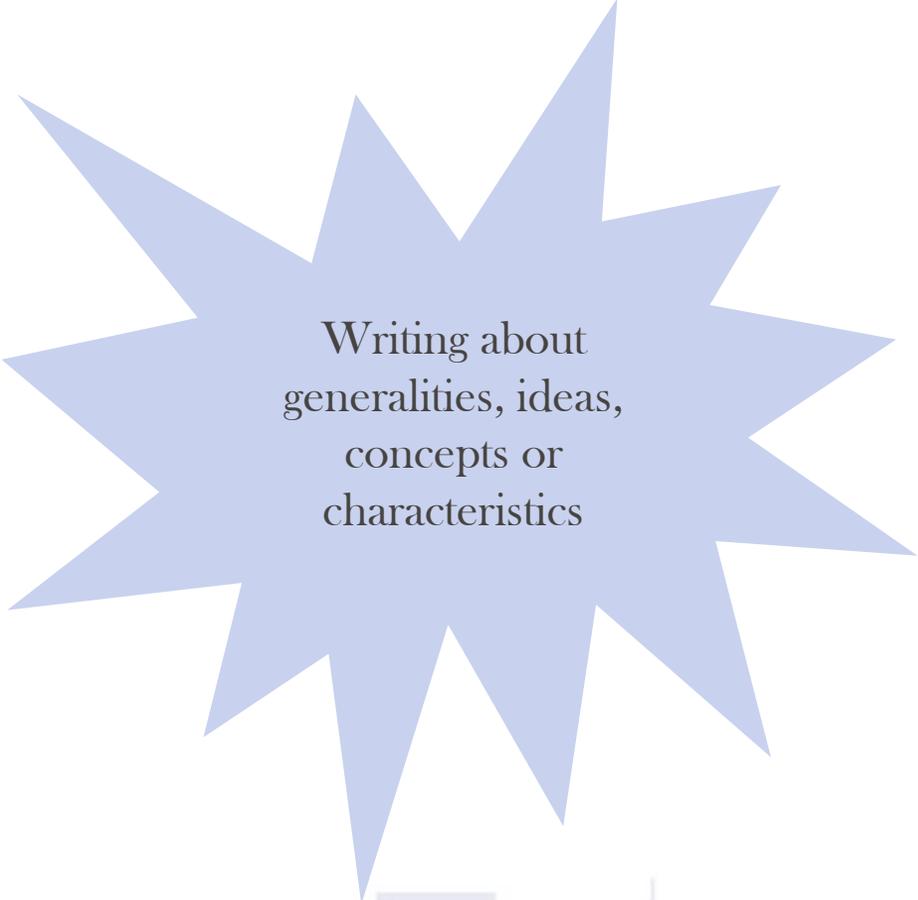
Examples:

- When one word will do:
 - At this point in time = now
 - Due to the fact that = because
- Pretentious alternatives:
 - Facilitate = ease, help
 - Utilise = use
- Business speak:
 - Pushed the envelope = thought of new ideas
 - Paradigm shift = a fundamental change
- Unnecessary adverbs and adjectives:
 - Smile happily = smile or beam
 - Tall skyscraper = skyscraper
 - Run fast = sprint

Cures:

- Omit needless words (Strunk and White rule 17)
- Set yourself limits
- Focus on the important points

Abstraction



Writing about
generalities, ideas,
concepts or
characteristics

Examples:

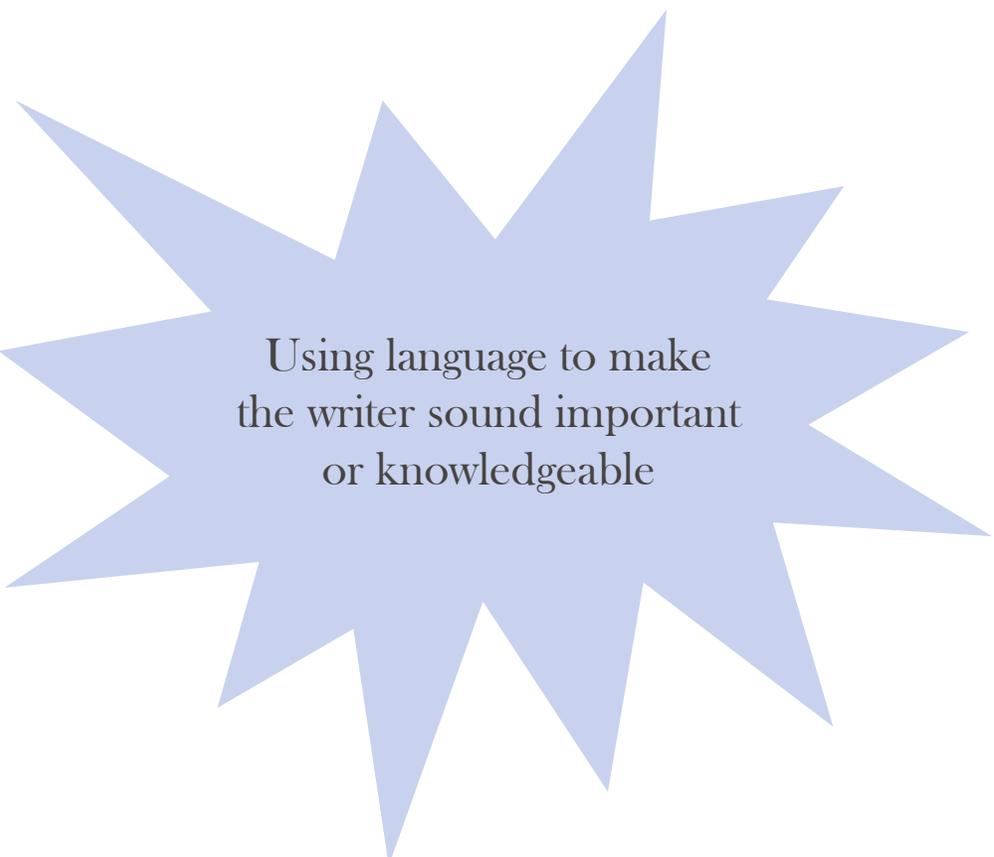
- The reader was subsequently presented with an assessment word
 - The reader then had to choose from TRUE or FALSE
- Participants were tested under conditions of good to excellent acoustic isolation
 - We tested the students in a quiet room

Pinker

Cures:

- Write about real things - objects, events or people
- Use concrete language and example
- Be clear about who is doing what, to whom, when, why and how

Complexity



Using language to make
the writer sound important
or knowledgeable

Example:

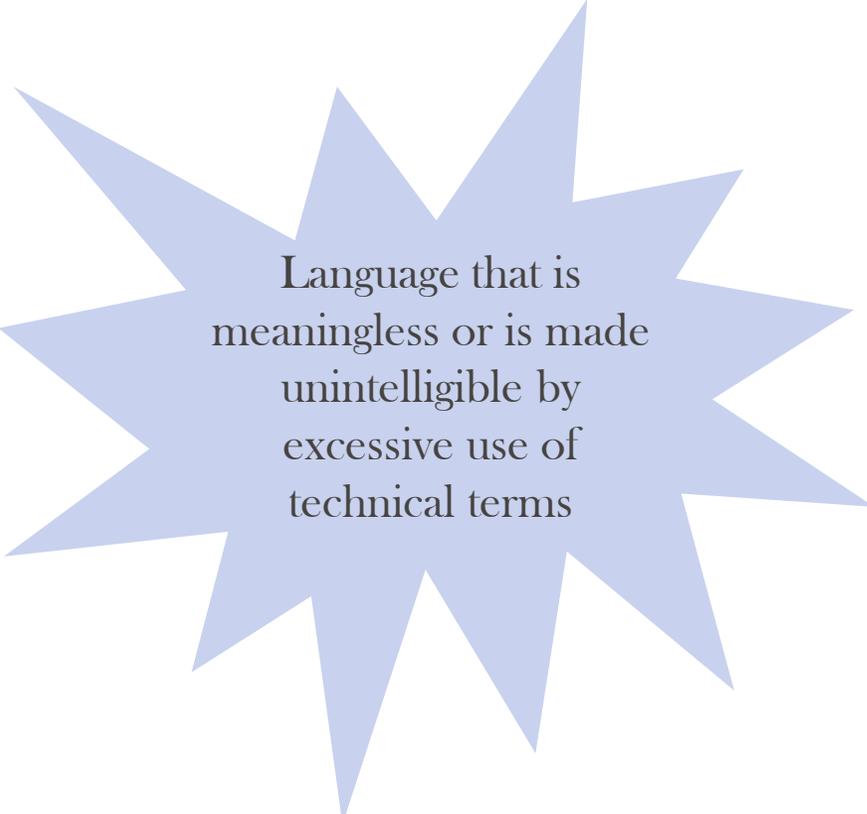
- “Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all Federal Buildings and non-Federal buildings occupied by the Federal government during an air raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination.”
- “Tell them, that in buildings where they have to keep the working going to put something across the windows.”

Roosevelt

Cures:

- Turn language back into plain English
- Use readability statistics

Gobbledygook



Language that is meaningless or is made unintelligible by excessive use of technical terms

Examples:

- “There is a significant positive correlation between measures of food intake and body mass index. Body mass index is an increasing function of food intake. Food intake predicts body mass index according to a monotonically increasing relation.”
- “The more you eat, the fatter you get.”

Pinker

Cures:

- Turn language back into plain English
- Use readability statistics

Incoherence



Rambling, disjointed
writing without logical
or meaningful
connections

Example:

Q. “How the Bidder will maximise employment and training outcomes through project delivery, including the development of apprenticeships”

A. The XYZ training plan for all personnel includes NEC Contract Awareness, Forklift, OFTEC, Gas, Temporary Work, Cherry Picker, BIM, Asbestos, Scaffold, Heating Controls, IT Training together with internal training undertaken such as H&S and First Aid.

XYZ has a long term commitment to apprenticeships and maintains an apprentice to tradesman ratio of 10%. We would expect to see that ratio maintained with the work we are looking to deliver for ABC. We look to recruit from local schools and colleges and currently have a placement reserved at Meerkat UTC for one of Site Managers who we have encouraged to complete his Degree. We believe our PDP is working, with over 70% of our employees having a minimum of 12 years service, 5 Apprenticeships in place and 2 further undergraduate training programmes active and 2 employees undergoing NVQ workplace training courses. Initial induction training is given to all new employees and then a refresher induction course is given before anyone attends site. We are committed to CITB-Construction Skills, National Federation of Builders and Investors in People and will have trade apprentices, work experience students, trainee technicians and sandwich year undergraduates working and training on Meerkat projects.

Our Personal Development Policy sets out our commitment to supporting our employees in their learning and career development. All eligible employees work towards obtaining CSCS accreditation and a number are completing site based NVQ's, IOSH and Site Safety Plus courses. 90%+ of all employees currently hold a relevant CSCS card.

XYZs Environmental Management System meets ISO14001 standards and the procedures and practices of this system is designed to provide practical application for addressing significant environmental issues we will encounter during our work

Cures:

- Think of your writing as a story
- Use content plans to structure your narrative
- Consider a situation, problem, cure, benefits, proof flow

A free spirit in a brave new world

You are cured of the curse when your writing is...

A flowing story

Jargon-free

Uncluttered

Plain English

Concrete

“Glossaried”

Straightforward



Get a check-up

- Never forget the curse can return
- Never stop learning
- Self-edit ruthlessly
- Validate using peer and “red” reviews
- Find a white witch



And to finish, a stellar piece of writing

“Again, it was a sweet Thursday in the spring. The sun took a leap towards summer and loosed the furred petals of the golden poppies. Before noon, you could smell the spice of blue lupins from the fields around Fort Ord. It was a sweet day for all manner of rattlesnakes. On the parade ground, a jack rabbit, crazy with spring, strolled in March hare madness across the rifle range, and drew joyous fire from two companies, before he skidded to safety behind a sand dune. That jack rabbit’s moment of grandeur cost the government \$890 and gladdened the hearts of one hell of a lot of soldiers. Miss Graves awakened, breathless with expectancy, she sang a scale in half tones and found that her voice was back and all was well with the world. And she was right. At eleven o’clock, the Monarch butterflies came boiling in from across the bay and landed in their millions on the pine trees where they sucked the thick, sweet juice and got cock-eyed...”

Sweet Thursday - John Steinbeck
The sequel to “Cannery Row”

THE END



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