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The practical purpose of this paper

Unplain language and stuffy public language are of great concern for publishing editors: but they are even more concerned about writers' unwillingness to change the stiff, official style, or even to accept obvious editing suggestions that would make their work more elegant and easier to understand.

We can complain about these problems, but it would be more useful if we carried out practical measures that would actually influence writers to decide themselves to write in a better style.

This paper gives step-by-step suggestions about some practical things you can start doing tomorrow.

Although fighting officialese is a very long-term job, and its chances of victory low, it's worth the effort. It's a sort of publishing editors' Dunkirk — salvaging something useful from a defeat that has already been inflicted.

Peddling plain language is hard work

You would think that peddling something as basic as easily understood language would be easy — like selling bread, or beer — but there is a resistance to it, which may stem from a feeling that, having spent so much money, time and effort to learn a sub-dialect of English, such as *commercialese*, *educationese*, or *management- or consultant-speak*, a person feels cheated when asked to drop all that, and speak so that they can be understood at the first listening or reading.

A good description of plain language (with our italics) is taken from a website supported by the Oxford University Press (<http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/plainenglish/>):

Plain language refers to the writing and setting out of essential information in a way that gives a cooperative, motivated person a good chance of understanding the document *at first reading*, and in the same sense that the writer meant it to be understood.

This means pitching the language at a level of sophistication that suits the readers and using appropriate structure and layout to help them navigate through the document. It does not mean always using simple words at the expense of the most accurate words or writing whole documents in kindergarten language.

An attempt to define plain language was made by Dr Robert Eagleson:

Plain language is clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary. It is language that avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary and convoluted sentence construction. It is not baby talk, nor is it a simplified version of the English language. Writers of plain language let their audience concentrate on the message instead of being distracted by complicated language.

And, just to round it off, here is what the Australian Language and Literary Policy (Dawkins 1991) said:

... Plain language is important for social justice and economic reasons. Public documents which are not written in plain language and presented clearly are difficult for people to understand

... means clear, intelligible English. It does not mean simplistic English. Plain language should be used in public documentation issued by governments and the private sector. It does not attempt to strip English literature of its richness....

To that last quote, I would like to add: "Far from stripping English of its richness, plain language encourages writers to *use* the rich store of language already provided". In other words, far from "dumbing-down" the language, plain language "elegants it up".

Efforts by the government to improve things

There have been several attempts by well-meaning governments and other organisations to try to slow the frantic flight to obscure language, but nothing seems to change. However much money is put into

councils, commissions, investigations and the like, the language just stays the same. One example of the sterling efforts once made by the federal government is summarized in the recommendations shown in Appendix 3: Recommendations by the Australian Language and Literary Council. These recommendations were made to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, in the book *Putting it Plainly: Current developments in plain language and accessible reading materials*, in June 1996. How many of the recommendations were followed, and how many petered out?

This paper may be just one more example of wasted effort, but if all editors just try the practical steps included here, we may gain a few yards in the trench warfare we are bogged in.

Some writers object to plain language

Even with a commonsense understanding of what plain language is, and how valuable it must be, some people, while claiming that they support its principles, still refuse to use it. Objections to plain language (that people admit to) include:

- it dumbs-down the language
- it reduces the size of our rich vocabulary
- it is not the language that business/education/management people use
- plain language reduces the impact of a job application, an academic paper and so on

Objections to plain language (that few people admit to) include:

- I do not have the courage to be the first academic to break the circle of incomprehensible language common to my profession
- if I write plainly, my peers will not respect me, and they may suspect my background
- speaking plain language will damage the distance I maintain between myself and lower-order staff and other people
- by using management-speak, I demonstrate that I belong to the inner circle.

Despite a belief that unplain language started some time around the 1950s, in the USA, it has been with us as long as we have been speaking language at all, as these three quotations demonstrate:

Thy remissness in writing seems to be due to the thing which makes thee obscure, that is to say, to elaboration. In future, write unaffectedly, clearly, with plain words, which saves trouble to both writer and reader. (Babur, the first Mughal emperor, in the mid-1500s, advising his son.)

Speketh not in the heigh style, but so pleyn at this time, I yow preye, that we may understonde what ye seye.” (Chaucer’s host from *The Canterbury Tales* calling on the Clerke of Oxenforde to tell his tale.)

As if plain words, useful and intelligible instructions, were not as good for an esquire, or one that is in commission from the King, as for him that holds the plough. (John Eachard, 1670)

This means that people’s tendency to speak another “dialect”, to move away from language that we can all understand *when we first hear it*, and to adopt a “heigh style” suitable for “an esquire, or one that is in commission from the King” must come from something that has been deep within us for centuries. That something, I suggest, is nothing more than the need to be respected, to be looked up to, to climb the ladder, to keep ahead of the Jones’s, to show, in short, that we are not from the lower classes.

If you can accept that this is the reason why so many people in competitive jobs speak and write so much codswallop, you can also see that editors, readers, the general public, Don Watson and Dr Robert Eagleson, are all having such a hard time having their logical requests granted.

Dr Robert Eagleson wrote a brilliant piece called “Does Plain language Work?” and he showed that the reason plain language does not work is that, although everybody demands that they be addressed in plain language, they can always find a reason why they cannot address other people in plain language.

There was a “Yes Minister” episode that sums this up quite well, but in a different context. Minister Hacker had forced or tricked Sir Humphrey into agreeing that it would be a good idea to have more women in senior positions in industry and government, and so a summit meeting was organised, calling together people such as the head of the BBC, the head of the armed forces, leading university faculty people and so on. Before the meeting, they had all had to read the pitch about the desirability of having more women in senior positions, and each delegate had to state his organisation’s views and plans. To a man, they all said something similar to this (I wrote this from memory; nobody said these exact words):

I agree *wholeheartedly* with the spirit and direction of this meeting, and my organisation is one-hundred percent behind this movement. We are, I repeat, entirely in agreement that immediate and drastic, practical moves must be made *now* to ensure that far more women must be assisted into far more senior positions than they are now. We can foresee a time when all senior positions are filled on merit alone, and the sex or marital status of the incumbent will have no bearing on the case.

In the case of [our particular organisation], however, there are unique and immutable reasons, which would not apply to more than just a handful of other organisations, why the employment of women in senior positions cannot, for purely practical and/or security reasons, be accomplished. For example, ...

You can see my point. So this brings us to the hardest part of our jobs as publishing editors: to get the writer to *want* to change their style to one that is understandable at the first read. So that this piece from a 2004 senior school syllabus:

Language is constructed and meaning is made in a sociocultural environment. The language in this subject has been constructed as disciplines within and by society.

may then have been written like this:

The language used in this subject takes diverse cultures into account.

What are we going to do to change things?

I mean, what are *you* going to do about the problem of influencing writers tomorrow morning at 9 o’clock? John Howard likes to use the phrase “Practical Reconciliation” to mean using our hands and bodies to carry out concrete reconciliation projects ... not using our mouths to talk about doing something like that, and not just waving another banner. But what is practical in this case?

Don Watson suggests that we “never stop mocking them” but Neil James, reviewing Don Watson’s book in the TLS of 13 February 2004 says that this is a futile response. He says:

We need less ranting and raving and more retraining, more editing and standard-setting. This will give us a more effective weapon than ranting against the language of power: the ability to write back.

In the rest of this paper, I shall do my best to encourage you to design and make little posies of encouragement which you can distribute to writers in your “retraining, more editing and standard-setting”. You will, of course, give posies to all writers, even the good ones, so that you won’t make the bad ones feel bad. After all, if all writers get a little posy, none of them will know whether you think they are plain writers or unplain writers.

None of this is easy, and a lot of it is futile. I’d say, even at this early point, that the “efficiency” of the suggestions I am about to make will not rate at more than ten percent — and that’s the thermal efficiency of a steam locomotive, which partly explains why they are now used only for decoration.

Retraining

For Neil James’s *retraining* I shall say *encouraging*, because I find it hard to imagine that writers could be “retrained” in something they were never trained in to start with. Bearing in mind that, according to Don Watson’s article in *The Age* of 13 February 2004, some Victorian primary school children last year were compelled to write their own personal mission statement, with core values, key

goals, and preferred outcomes, there may not be a lot of hope for rearing children whose first language is plain language.

Replacing the word *retraining*, then, but keeping the spirit of it alive, we can look at encouragement methods under the next three subheadings.

Give examples of recasting

It's not always useful to say to a writer: "I have read this passage several times, but I'm not quite sure that I've grasped its meaning. Would you consider recasting?" ... because the response is often: "There's no need to — the readers will know what I mean".

It may be better, then to say something like this: "I have read this passage several times, but I'm not quite sure that I've grasped its meaning. Do you think I'm right when I think it may have meant something like: [now rewrite the passage and put it here]. If your passage is elegant enough, some writers, freed from the burden of having to think again about a passage they probably had ten goes at, may simply say "yes"

Promise power

This may be slightly sly but, when you read a stuffy piece that could be expressed clearer and shorter, you may be able to appeal to the writer's sense of importance by making an editorial note such as: "This point you've made in this para is very important — probably the key to the whole chapter — but it might have more punch if you expressed it in a more earthy fashion, as, for example ...".

Suggest parallel passages in previous works

Into a passage written in sticky, over-dignified English, you could possibly insert this sort of comment: "I remember we talked about this sort of passage in your previous work. We agreed that it would have more power if we used more verbs and less nominalisation. Shall we repeat that idea here? I'm quite happy to do the donkey work".

More editing

More editing is something that every editor in the room would like to see made compulsory. There is a commonly held notion that writing standards are dropping. If you want evidence, subscribe to *The Times Literary Supplement*, and count how many times you read comments such as

"Were all the editors at Macmillan on holiday when this book was accepted and produced?"

"The chapters overlap a lot, and more than once Chomsky repeats himself verbatim. One misses an editor's skilled hand".

"Who is responsible for the dismaying number of misprints ...?"

How can we influence publishers of all kinds, particularly government departments, to employ editors for important publications? Why do publishers spend thousands of dollars on projects, and then neglect the final report because they could not see the value in paying \$700 to an editor to avoid the embarrassing and risible phrasing in so many of them? How can they allow sentences like this one from a 2004 educational tract from Queensland: "Globalised data can come from continuous teacher-based judgments and episodic statewide tests at milestone junctures".

We can influence the publishers only if we can convince the person at the top that fanciful phrasing, hermetic paragraphs, and showing off in organisational reports brings little more than derision from readers, even readers who, like the writers, write in that same muddy style.

This is the hardest thing I have to do, and I have no list of conquests to show you. But that does not stop me trying.

One way to do it is to drip-feed examples of embarrassing language to the boss, through a cuttings service or a webpage. Do not bombard the boss with examples from your organisation, as that might indicate that you have the knives out for some of your colleagues. It is better to use samples from similar organisations and then, later, under “Setting standards” we might be able to find a way to link the samples to the material being produced by our organisation.

A cuttings service

You will need some reliable sources of supply. If you take these regularly, you’ll know what to look out for. Some that spring to mind are:

- the *Times Literary Supplement*, for occasional references to bad editing, hermetic language, and pompousness
- a website, such as <http://jobs.govnet.qld.gov.au/>, that gives details of jobs available — some of the selection criteria or job descriptions are hilarious, such as: “Manage the operation of the change control function as it impacts on the migration of applications and enhancements between testing and production environments, and the implementation of change in the applications, database, systems, communications and desktop services areas”
- the jobs section of your capital city newspaper (for silly job requirements)
- any academic journal (for hermetically sealed paragraphs)
- school syllabus chapters with titles such as “Language education” or “Equity”
- any organisation’s annual report, strategic plan or mission statement.

A plain language webpage on your intranet

If you are lucky enough to work in an organisation that has an intranet, you can set up a webpage for a plain-language group. To have any influence, this group has to be blessed by management. If you propose that your organisation should have a plain-language team to help people in the organisation understand each other better, and if you promise to run it in your own time, no boss could refuse to sanction it without appearing to be churlish.

Set up your webpage, and release a new chapter each month. Your sources can be the same as the ones shown for the clippings service but, if you do form a plain-language group, the other members can also send you material.

The plain-language team’s webpage in my own organisation is about six months old, but has recently started to show signs of effect, and I have been told that writers who would not normally have thought much about their phrasing are starting to be influenced by the simple logic of using plain language. I have also noticed that, occasionally, previously timid members of the lower ranks are speaking up at meetings and asking for phrases to be repeated in a clearer way, or appealing for forthcoming publications of drafts to be edited for plain language. Those people now feel that they have something behind them when they open their mouths, simply because the plain-language team and its webpage are officially sanctioned.

Setting standards

Standard styles

Many writers in an organisation are keen to follow a style guide so that their drafts are not covered in red ink just to get the conventions right. They want to know whether you capitalise the “D” of ‘the Director’, or whether you say “eg” or “e.g.”, or how you prefer to do your reference list.

You should go ahead to produce a small style guide, which can be based on a famous style guide. You can start with your existing style sheet, and build it up. Your first task will be to state which dictionary will be used for spelling, hyphenation, plurals and so on.

I recommend that the style guide be electronic only, linked to your intranet, so that you can change it any time you want. There are times when you will help a word's metamorphosis along, and each stage can be done on the intranet. You might, for example, have followed a word's progress like this through the years "crafts-man > crafts-person > craftsperson" or your organisation may have decided that it's now time to consider "data is" instead of "data are". By having these things in your organisation's style guide, you avoid argument.

Plain language encouragement

Having established your style guide, you have a natural bed in which you can plant plain language seeds, watered by material from the plain-language webpage. Gently but surely, you can introduce new chapters or sections and, as your style guide is, we hope, electronic, nobody will notice just how far your plain-language encouragement blooms are spreading.

Appendix 1: Style guide section headings

(parts dealing with plain-writing style are boxed)

Using this non-book book

Contents page

Look for things

electronically

Why no page numbers?

Contents

1. Why have this book?

Reference books

2. Policies

Nondiscriminatory language

Plain language

Logo

Aesthetic standards

Editorial

Technical

Political

Aesthetic

3. Copyright

4. Legal deposit, ISBN, ISSN, CIP

5. Outside printers

6. Preparing correspondence

Etiquette in academic and

religious titles 6.9 (also see 6.10)

Titles and forms of address 6.10

Current chair(person)

Other titles

Common titles

Army, Navy, Air Force

7. There is no s. 7 (as in Monty Python's "Bruce" sketch)

8. Publishing documents

Memoranda and information statements

Memoranda to schools —

Emailing memos — Posting hard copies

Information statements

Printing memos and

information statements

Disclaimers

Writers' names on

documents

Publishing paper-based things

Templates and style palette

Special symbols (diacritics and special characters)

Full editorial and design treatment

Proofreading only

Printing and distribution

Publishing on the website

Writing for the web

Write half the amount

Write for someone who is not absorbed

Put the conclusion first

Plain language

Talk to the reader

Break big information into small chunks

9. Stylistics, sequence of pages, reports

Sequence of pages

Preliminary pages

Text

Endmatter

Front cover

Inside front cover/reverse title page/copyright page

Feedback

Foreword

Preface, Introduction,

Acknowledgments

Contents page

Page layout

Appendixes

10. References

What's referencing for?

Your responsibility

Three lists

Full details available in ...

Et al.

Abbreviations

Books & plays

Magazine article

Radio & TV

Videos & films

Referencing odds 'n ends

Websites

Examples

Footnotes and endnotes

11. Resource lists

Books

Manuals and directories

Video

Sources of other videos

Magazines and periodicals

Australian Standards

World Wide Web addresses

Miscellaneous resources

12. Abbreviations and acronyms

13. School names

14. Capitals and small letters (upper & lower case)

When to use capitals?

Capitals in reference lists and headings

Your guide to capitals/small letters [in this organisation]

15. Italics, bold type, and emphasis

16. Lists, bullets, numbering

17. Punctuation

Dashes (en and em rules)

Ellipsis (Alt 0133)

Slash (solidus)

Ampersand (&)

Quotation (quote) marks

18. Shortened forms

Abbreviations

Contractions

19. Numbers

Expressing numbers in figures and words

Other rules about numbers

Dates & time

Phone & fax numbers

Measurement

20. Tables and diagrams

21. Spelling, word usage and danger signals

Spelling & capitals list

Our A-Z index of dangers and solutions

Avoiding stiff and starchy words

Plurals in words which were originally Latin or French

Nominalisation

From our own writing (draft curriculum documents)

From Sir Ernest Gowers

From *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* 1995

Doubling consonants

One-syllable adjectives and verbs

Verbs with more than one syllable

Odds and ends

Exceptions

22. Sending documents to the Publishing Unit

Save precious time before you even start work

When preparing your document 22.2

Proofreaders marks

When the document is returned to you for approval

23. Bibliography

24. Appendix 1: Copyright notice

Appendix 2: Plain-language webpage text samples

Small part of a presentation by Peter Butt, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney

Prefer the simple to the complex, the concrete to the abstract

We should write as simply as the subject matter will allow. This principle can be broken down into a number of overlapping subsidiary points:

- prefer short words to long ones
- prefer simple words and phrases to complex ones (or, in the words of the Plain language Campaign, “Prefer words learned early in life”)
- prefer English words to foreign words (perhaps an over-generalisation)
- prefer concrete terms to abstract ones

No-one will think any less of our writing if we adopt these techniques. Far from “dumbing down” the language, we are using it to communicate as effectively as possible. The best writing is writing that communicates effectively with its audience, and that is best done by writing in a style that is simple, direct and clear.

I’ve yet to hear anyone complain that writing is too easy to read.

New-age wisdom that you are expected to take seriously

In mid-2003, philosopher Giovanna Borradori wrote a book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, and in it, she asked post-modern philosopher Jacques Derrida to answer the question: “9/11 is still calling. Who will answer?”. This is how Jacques replied:

... When you say “September 11” you are already citing, are you not? Something *fait date*, I would say in a French idiom, something marks a date, a date in history. “To mark a date in history” presupposes, in any case, an ineffaceable event in the shared archive of a universal calendar, for these are — and I only want to insist on this at the outset — only suppositions and presuppositions. For the index pointing towards this date, the bare act, the minimal deltic, the minimalist aim of this dating, also marks something else. The telegram of this metonymy — a name, a number — points out the unqualifiable by recognizing that we do not recognize, or even cognize, that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not know what we are talking about.

Now, if you are just itching to get your hands on this book — and I only want to insist at the outset that we recognize that we do not recognize, or even cognize that we do not yet know how to qualify — email the plain-language team and we’ll give you the publishing details.

“Demographics” — our prophecy

On Radio National’s morning program on 12 November 2003, there was an article about the growing number of people forced by circumstances to represent themselves in court, and how this reduces their chance of an acquittal. One of the contributors to the article said: “... the demographics of many people in jail force them to ...” whereas he meant to say: “... the circumstances of many people in jail force them to ...”

We can foresee “demographics” changing to mean not only what it means now (vital statistics about society) but also “individual circumstances” or “personal information”. This will happen firstly because it will appeal to pecksniffers; and secondly, as “demographics” means vital statistics about society, it will be taken as also meaning vital information about the smallest section of society, i.e. a person. It’s a bit like how “anticipate” has swallowed “expect”.

After addressing the issues, address these criteria, then address the mania for ridiculous language

From a job at a ZZZZ government agency for a ... wait for it ... “Director, Telephone System Replace”:

- Apply XXXX’s endorsed Project Management Methodology to the concurrent management of one or more complex enterprise wide information and communication technologies projects as directed.
- Develop formal project plans and supporting estimates and records addressing the range of tasks, deliverables, milestones, organisational change requirements, quality reviews etc involved in the undertaking of the projects.
- Proactively manage the projects against the project plan and report progress, and, as necessary, recommend and oversee remedial action where progress falls outside of agreed parameters.
- Review and certify all project deliverables and documents to be submitted to the project sponsor and the steering committee.
- Liaise with, and develop written submissions for, individual project sponsor, steering committees and project mentors on strategic issues affecting progress of the project/s.
- Coordinate and/or undertake the development of the range of project deliverables calling for expertise in information management, service delivery, information and communication technology (ICT) and IT purchasing and contracts.

This set of SCs drove the plain-language team to apply its methodology to the concurrent examination of these complex communication deliverables and milestones, and they proactively recommend remedial action where progress falls outside of agreed parameters, and that seems to have happened quite a lot in this always-boring, pecksniffian codswallop.

Government head slams educationese

The new head of the (UK) Learning and Skills Council, the government organisation responsible for adult education, has condemned education jargon. In his first speech in the job, Mark Haysom told college heads that “I have to say I am somewhat taken aback by the language of this world of education that I have joined. I am surprised by the assumption of knowledge, the jargon, the acronyms and the lack of clarity. What strikes me most of all is that the language of education appears to have been taken away from you and hijacked by the new speak of the bureaucrats. You must believe me when I tell you that it is particularly alienating and confusing ...”

Size does matter

The reviewer of a book about book design laments the writer’s long-winded ways. When the writer wanted to say that a folded insert in a book was bigger than the other pages, she put it this way: “The [inserted sheet] disrupts established textual boundaries, physically extending the textual space of the book outward past the established margins of the text”. Isn’t that pretty?

Stylish writing from a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh

Ms Marcella Althaus-Reid has recently written a book titled *The Queer God*, and it has been published by Routledge. Here are three passages from it:

“By which traditions of impropriety and stubborn tendencies to per/versity does “queering” as a theological vocation start in us?”

“An omnisexual kenosis is a melancholic art, well fitted for theological subjects such as Queer nomads, because it represents a continuous attempt to understand sexual identities as a process consisting of the movement of emptiness ...”

“The Queer way of holiness implies colonial mobilizations such as in the movement of ultimate negation, anticipated somehow by the theology of limbo and re-appropriated in a queer reading of hell as a space of options.”

Educationese — more complaints, this time from the mighty Times Literary Supplement of 6 February 2004

Official Gibberish, Part Umpteen

The Department for Education and Skills, which is responsible for teaching children to read and write, has issued a handbook, *Framework for Teaching English: Years 7, 8 and 9*. It’s a Tips for Teachers job. The Department appears to believe that teachers are unaware of what the verb “to teach” means. The chances are, however, that they are getting used to hearing their profession described like this: “Revision and consolidation objectives enable pupils to revisit insecure areas of learning while continuing to develop other aspects of language with which they are confident”. It is acknowledged by the Department that some pupils are cleverer than others (“More able language users”), and teachers need to have no hesitation in cultivating their gifts:

The identification of gifted and talented language users can only be possible in a school or departmental context where pupils are being provided with opportunities to exercise the sorts of interaction with texts which allow them to demonstrate their advanced skills.

A section of the teaching of “English as an Additional Language” (EAL) suggests that “the delivery of objectives through teaching which is highly interactive and discursive, and which allows for participative wholeclass and group work, will help pupils learning EAL”. A bold initiative will encourage pupils to “Make relationships” with other pupils, “and, even, take part in joint construction”.

The Royal Society of Literature, which drew this to our attention, invited three writers to mark *Framework for Teaching English* out of 100. Selina Hastings offered a generous thirty. Anthony Thwaite said he couldn’t mark it: “it needs to be scrapped”. Simon Gray responded, “I simply don’t understand it”.

Best steak in Caboolture

In a full-page ad in *The Caboolture News* of 3 March 2004, The XXX Tavern invites you to try The Best Steak You Can Get, and it emphasises this invitation by a noble passage headed “The customer promise” which goes:

We will satisfy the needs of the customer by the provision of a farm-direct, guaranteed eating experience through the introduction of a range of branded beef products with whole-chain integrity.

Change-management statement by a consultant

“XXXX’s approach to change management consultancy is underpinned by *Appreciative Inquiry* that is an inclusive method to engage people impacted by change (stakeholders, clients and staff) in the process of strategic planning so as to achieve socially sustainable outcomes. The ‘heart’ of the ZZZZ consultancy is to appreciate (respect and value) participants, to apply diverse and specialist knowledge, to provoke possibilities and to leverage collaborative efforts for the future. I look forward to *all* staff participating in these workshops so that together we can shape a positive future for ZZZZ.

Appendix 3: Recommendations by the Australian Language and Literacy Council

Recommendations made to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, in the book *Putting it Plainly: Current developments in plain language and accessible reading materials*, June 1996

Recommendation 1

That, incorporated within any strategy to implement the plain language objectives of *Australia's Language: Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, should be an understanding of the term “plain language” which would include the following principles:

- writing clear, intelligible English — this does not mean simplistic English;
- making information more accessible — that is, to write a document in a way that helps the reader to understand it; and
- acknowledging the relationship between design and language choices — which involves consideration of such factors as the document's purpose, the nature of the content, the intended reader–writer relationship, and the document type and use.

Recommendation 2

That, in order to provide future directions on plain language usage and effective information dissemination in the public sector, the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission and the Office of Government Information Technology jointly fund appropriate collaborative processes to enable Commonwealth Government departments and agencies to:

- identify best practice in the implementation of plain language, communication, and public information dissemination practices in the public sector;
- document a range of effective best practice models; and
- market these outcomes in both print and digital forms.

Recommendation 3

That the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet require departments and agencies, in their annual reports, to report on initiatives and results achieved in making their communication clear and accessible.

Recommendation 4

That the Commonwealth Government appoint an officer within the Prime Minister's office to be responsible for plain language, with a brief to oversee the success of departments and agencies in communicating with the Australian people.

Recommendation 5

That it become mandatory for all those appointed to the Australian Public Service to be able to demonstrate the integrated core competencies relating to clear and accurate expression in oral and written communication, as defined by the Joint Australian Public Service Training Council.

Recommendation 6

That the Australian Government Publishing Service make available its *Style Manual* and the *Communications Series* on-line for access by all government departments and agencies.

Recommendation 7

That the Department of Administrative Services establish an Australian Public Service-wide training program using the expertise of the Australian Government Publishing Service to develop and enhance electronic publishing skills. This should be done by means of targeted secondments to the Australian Government Publishing Service Electronic Solutions Research for a period of between three and six months.

Recommendation 8

That the Office of Government Information Technology investigate the impact of the use of electronic communication on information management processes, including archiving, retrieval, and information flow in Australian government departments and agencies.

Recommendation 9

That the Commonwealth, in collaboration with States and Territories, establish an Innovative Library Grants Program to maximise the under-utilised capacity of libraries to provide language and literacy resources and support for English as a second language and English-speaking background adult new readers. Such a program would establish and enhance innovative and cost-effective ways of providing appropriate resources (books, audio, visual and information technology) and associated personnel support.

The program would fund, in the first instance, up to 10 pilot projects, selected by tender, and each funded to a maximum of \$25 000.

The projects would be sited in urban, regional and remote contexts (separately or collaboratively) and ideally there would be at least one pilot project funded in each State/Territory.

Recommendation 10

That the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs allocate funds through their Australian Language and Literacy Policy Adult Literacy National Projects for the development of teaching and learning resource materials for adult new readers of the kind reviewed in *A Good Read*.

Recommendation 11

That the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs seek the support of the Minister for Communications and the Arts to establish a \$100 000 pilot program, under the auspices of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, to fund awards which would enable up to five established Australian authors to write fiction and non-fiction publications for adult new readers.