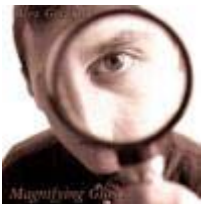


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# Purity, Pompeia and the Public Service

(or why the Public Service must embrace plain English)



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Please note

The following slides are only part of what was covered in this presentation to Network members. Please contact [lynda@write.co.nz](mailto:lynda@write.co.nz) for more information.

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What do Pompeia (Julius Caesar's second wife) and the Public Service have in common?

# A perception problem!



Oh wad some power  
the giftie gie us

To see oursel's as  
others see us!

Robert Burns

# Plain English in New Zealand

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- Law Commission
- Parliamentary Counsel Office
- Public sector examples
- Private sector examples

# Measurable success overseas

- British Telecom queries cut by 25%
- Royal Mail saved £500,000 in 9 months by redesigning one form
- US Department of Veterans Affairs saved \$40,000 by redrafting one standard letter
- UK businesses lose over £6 billion each year because of badly written letters

# What is plain English?

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Information that is presented as clearly, concisely, and appropriately as possible.

The elements of plain English include language, content, structure, grammar, and layout.

# The Plain English Campaign

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'Plain English is language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading.'

(The Plain English Campaign (UK) is an independent pressure group fighting for public information to be written in plain English.)

# The goal of plain English

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The reader understands the message on the first reading.

# Because ...

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The words don't get in the way of the message.

# The words got in the way

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## Original

Ministry of XXX subsequently undertook a preliminary assessment of the proposal to determine whether or not a temporary closure involving method restrictions was an appropriate management tool for the problem that had been identified by ABC Group.

## Rewrite one

Ministry of XXX then assessed if temporary closure, involving gaming restrictions, would manage the problem the Group had identified.

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## Rewrite two

Would the temporary closure, involving gaming restrictions, work? Our assessment said it would.

# Meaning ???

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- interactive reciprocal programming
- compatible policy alignment
- total management concepts

# Quote from a Write Group evaluation of a Ministry document

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'The report is bogged down with long-winded and awkward phrasing, repetition, jargon and extensive redundancy. We believe that the document could easily be halved (and the speed of comprehension doubled) if it was rewritten in plain English.'

# Launching a plain English campaign

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- strong management commitment
- agreement on non-negotiable plain English standards
- professional training programmes  
(customised face-to-face, hard-copy self-paced, or on-line learning programmes)

# ... launching a campaign

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- energetic internal 'PR' to reinforce the message
- use of a plain English software editor
- appointment of internal plain English coaches

# Using an external standard

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# Plain English Supporter's Network

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PLAIN ENGLISH  
SUPPORTER

---

WriteMark  Partner

We Prefer  
PLAIN ENGLISH

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WriteMark  Partner

WRITE  MARK  
PLAIN ENGLISH STANDARD

# Network benefits

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- unlimited use of the logo to communicate your plain English philosophy
- one WriteMark assessment
- plain English training for 20 people
- online punctuation course for 20 people

# Network benefits

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- invitations to plain English events
- single-user copy of StyleWriter — plain English software editor (corporates and public sector only)
- one copy of *the Write Style Guide: A Manual for Business Editing*.