



Empowering professionals to write with skill and confidence

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The State of Writing

The other day, as I was editing, I was reminded of George Orwell's infamous essay, "Politics and the English Language,"

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>, written in 1946.

Over 50 years after Orwell's article, we're still battling the demons that Orwell railed against, demons that are, in some ways, getting worse rather than better. I find that many, many writers use what Orwell termed "**pretentious diction**" and which I call **pompous language**.

A great example of this is the word "**utilize**" for "**use**." Why do so many writers insist on using "utilize" when it's no better and does not convey a better meaning than good old "use"? When I discuss "utilize," and other such pompous language in the workshops that I teach, participants often tell me that they use such words because they "sound more professional" or "make me appear smarter." The reality is, however, that "utilize" has become a cliché, which as we know, are overused words and phrases that can be extremely vague. And in terms of such language making the writer sound "smarter," such language can oftentimes obscure meaning, making the writing more difficult to understand; when this happens, the writer does not appear smart.

Unfortunately, so many writers in the workplace, lacking confidence in their own writing skills, fall into the terrible habit of using words or phrases that they've seen or heard others use, without **questioning if these words or phrases actually convey the appropriate idea**. More important perhaps is that they don't question if the words will make reading and understanding the document easier for readers, which is the ultimate goal. We'll be **addressing Orwell's points in the next few newsletters**, but the tip for today is: **Avoid pompous language; keep it simple!**

Contest

Submit your idea of "pretentious diction" to us at pam@hurleywrite.com. We'll post them and allow you to vote; the person with the most votes will win the opportunity to take one of our stand-alone writing modules: "Proposal Writing," "Writing Effective Emails," or "Effective Editing and Proofreading Strategies" (a \$99 value!).

Puzzler

Congratulations to the winner of our first quarter grammar contest! **Courtney Kieper** of PPD in Wilmington, NC, submitted the correct answers and explanation. Our next contest will be in our April 2010 newsletter. To see Courtney's answers, [click here](#).

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