

**POLITICS
AND THE
ENGLISH
LANGUAGE**
**GEORGE
ORWELL**



Politics and the English Language

George Orwell

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Politics and the English Language

George Orwell

Politics and the English Language George Orwell

'Politics and the English Language' is widely considered Orwell's most important essay on style. Style, for Orwell, was never simply a question of aesthetics; it was always inextricably linked to politics and to truth.'All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer.'Language is a political issue, and slovenly use of language and cliches make it easier for those in power to deliberately use misleading language to hide unpleasant political facts. Bad English, he believed, was a vehicle for oppressive ideology, and it is no accident that 'Politics and the English Language' was written after the close of World War II.

Politics and the English Language Details

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Lisa says

You know when you stumble onto a passage in writing that articulates your thoughts for you better than you are able? In fact, helps those thoughts to grow to adult height? This essay was one of those for me, in its entirety.

It discusses our chronic lack of clarity in writing and the muddled and vague thinking unclarity props up. Now working in development, the essay feels like some combination of vaccination, antidote and prescription sunglasses.

An excerpt:

"Now that I have made this catalogue of swindles and perversions, let me give another example of the kind of writing that they lead to. This time it must of its nature be an imaginary one. I am going to translate a passage of good English into modern English of the worst sort. Here is a well-known verse from Ecclesiastes:

'I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.'

Here it is in modern English:

Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account."

Garima says

This was an insightful and relevant lesson about the usage and analysis of English language in the Political context. Orwell with his sharp wit and influential prose has given us enough food for thought to mull over. It's possible that next time while reading a newspaper or watching news channels, you'll find yourself forming a critique about the manipulation of facts and trivializing of important matters in today's times.

Here are some quotes which I found particularly wonderful:

- In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions and not a 'party line'. In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of the political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism,

*question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called **pacification**. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called **transfer of population or rectification of frontiers**. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called **elimination of unreliable elements**. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, 'I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so'. Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:*

'While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.'

- The inflated style itself is a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. Politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer.

Joey says

Sentence 1 : I had this burning sensation of shame while absorbing myself in this essay.

Sentence 2 : I was ashamed of myself while reading this essay.

Which sentence do you find easier to understand?

This essay is like a simple term paper with objective analyses and conclusions. Or I'd rather say that George Orwell was like a psycho-linguist studying the words we usually use as specimens. First, he presented five passages he picked from articles. Second, he discussed the theories of phraseology. Third, to understand the theories he discussed , he applied them to real situations in modern English. Finally, he drew his own conclusion.

Orwell argued that it is important we write clearly .He believed that the main purpose of writing is to express and share our ideas and thoughts with readers . Also, he pointed out that writing English is worth reading without using metaphors, similes, idioms, or obsolete words which vague the meanings of our sentences. Rather, we can simplify them in the sense that we understand what we really think of a certain thing. He believes, thus, that in doing so can prevent "the slovenliness of our language "as he put it bluntly.

Orwell may have some points. However, affected I am, I want to raise some questions, intentionally to rebut his ideas:

(1) If Orwell believed with the conjunction of other educated grammarians and writers as well that we should not use the words he mentioned in the essay , what are the words coined for? Are we going to throw them into a dust bin? How about the jargons or the technical terms?

(2) The real standard of an award-winning piece is based on the norms drawn by people. What is a universal literature? What is a real classic? How could laymen recognize that a piece is a masterpiece? Everybody has different tastes for literature. For ordinary readers, a simple book is enough. May be for entertainment value. But for readers whose intentions are the same: to develop their intelligence, they elevate literature to a higher level of thinking. That is the art of writing.

(3) Are archaic or obsolete words beyond readers? Probably, it depends on a reader's intelligence.

(4) Why should not we use foreign words? It depends on what kinds of readers a writer targets. Besides, readers are not inside the box; they can explore the world of literature. Literature is flexible in character.

May be I would agree with his points that sometimes we have to consider the meanings of words. Are these words applicable to situations? Probably yes or no. In addition, since language is decadent, there are "times" that we have to adjust to the existing social conditions and changes. Could people still understand them? Probably yes or no.

No doubt. Orwell knew the psychology and mathematics of words. He understood what people think of the words used in society- let alone in politics. So what is this essay all about after all? I would believe that what he really wants to point out in this essay is that connection with readers is the most important elements of writing regardless of what concept you have got. He manifested this belief in his works. Mostly, politics is bad when the language is corrupt as it is the conspicuous undertone of his essays.

If I were George Orwell's professor, just for fun, I would give it A+, but, in my humble opinion as a reader on GR, I regret to give it 2 stars.

Ralph says

It is intriguing to note how applicable this essay still is to the current times.

Nisreen says

One of the greatest essays I have ever read about the relation between language and politics. A must-read for writers, and any one interested in deconstructing political discourse.

Orwell's precise, clear and simple language is an example of how theoretical and political discourse should be rather than the meaningless and pretentious endless formations of misused jargon we encounter nowadays in newspapers and books.

Andrew says

"Politics and the English Language" is an essay written by the novelist George Orwell and published in

1946. It criticizes the written English of his time. Orwell argues for a writing style that is plain and transparent. The most important thing in writing is to make one's meaning clear.

Orwell brings up numerous problems that plague writers' works. The most important of these issues is the use of canned phrases. Many writers do not take the time to craft new sentences with select words that specifically get the writer's meaning across. Many writers rely on phrases, these phrases are then "tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse", the result being poor writing. By the use of phrases the writer loses precision and his or her own voice. Orwell also suggests avoiding pretentious and inappropriate words. Writers often fail to visualize the words used; they often favour abstract meaningless words over concrete. He suggests that writers should avoid using everyday, well-known metaphors.

This decline in language is not permanent and can be prevented by the writer if he or she strives to write good English. Orwell suggests reasons for this deterioration of English. These poor writing habits spread by imitation. The decline of language can be explained by political and economic factors. Political writing often strives to be vague; it uses this as a technique to obscure the details. In this sense, I would argue, political writing is effective. It accomplishes what it intended to do, even if its intent is hardly virtuous. When writing I always begin with what I want to accomplish, how I wish my audience to react, or what I want them to feel or learn. However, Orwell points out that political writing is often mechanical and ineffective.

The "fix" does not entail setting up a Standard English. Orwell notes that the issue does not lie in grammar or syntax. Good writing is writing that best gets the writer's meaning across to his or her reader. The writer should use the fewest and shortest words required and have the intended meaning already mapped before the writing process begins. Bad writing occurs because the writer is rushed and lazy. If the writer is willing to take the time to truly craft original sentences with active selection of appropriate words his or her writing will improve.

The biggest impact that this essay had on me was Orwell's critique of phrases. I will often use canned phrases when writing, I acknowledge that this occurs due to economic reasons; it simply takes more effort and time to write well. Since reading the essay I have also begun to analyze the phrases that I use in daily speech, it would be very difficult to craft original sentences for everything that I say. There are a few key differences between writing and speaking. Speaking allows the receiver of the message to have instantaneous feedback, if the meaning is not clear the receiver can alert the speaker. In person communication also allows other aspects of communication such as body language and intonation, which are extremely important for accurate communication. The writer does not have these supporting components. The writer must ensure meaning through the use of words alone. The lack of feedback means that the writer must have an understanding of his or her target audience and write for that audience.

I think that being more active and dedicated in the writing process will lead to more effective writing where the thoughts in my mind are more accurately transferred to the reader. Words should be selected that give imagery and not vagueness. Sentences should be unique and meaningful.

<http://miffedinclifton.blogspot.ca/>

Mark Rice says

Don't be put off by the word 'politics' in the title. This guide deals with language - spoken or written - and how to express oneself clearly in words. Orwell's rules of writing are as relevant today as they were when he

wrote them, perhaps even more so in this age of grammatical vandalism. Using examples of vacuous political writing, Orwell critically shreds them, driving home the importance of clarity and specificity in language. To make his points, Orwell critiques shambolic political prose, but he could equally have used examples from religion, philosophy, journalism, literature or myriad other disciplines. This pamphlet (to call it a book would be a wild exaggeration) is short yet indispensable. In some ways it reminds me of a condensed version of Strunk and White's 'The Elements of Style', thought by many to be the definitive no-nonsense guide to clear, concise writing. Unlike that book, however, Orwell's guide is subjective: he is fearless in expressing his views on not just language, but also politics, war and society. 'Politics and the English Language' is all the better for it, as Orwell's personality shines through on every page: his sticklerism, his humour (the fierce criticism of woolly political rhetoric is hilarious), his fears, his hope, and his prophetic vision of the future.

If you want to communicate more clearly, buy this pamphlet, read it often, soak up its messages and apply them to your own language, written and spoken.

I'd sum up 'Politics and the English Language' thus: the purpose of language is to communicate, not to obfuscate.

Everyone should read this little piece of mastery.

Joana says

Este livro chegou exactamente hoje às minhas mãos e li-o com imenso prazer. Não só porque o tema que o Orwell aqui desenvolve me é familiar, como é um tema intemporal. Através de 23 páginas Orwell relembranos o poder da escrita clara, concisa e metódica. De como a linguagem terá sempre um propósito e de como as palavras devem ser tratadas com respeito e em consideração pelo seu significado.

Encontro-me neste momento em vias de iniciar a escrita de uma tese. Curiosamente, fui apelidada de "prosaica" por uma das minhas colegas num dos meus seminários. Isto porque, parece que recorro a uma linguagem comum. Ora, a escolha de o fazer foi e será sempre consciente. Porém, parece que os académicos (especialmente os de língua portuguesa) julgam que para um trabalho ser intelectualmente sólido e relevante, este deve estar dependente da sua complexidade e ornamentação linguística. Eu, pessoalmente discordo completamente. Gosto de acreditar que escrevo para todos. Escrevo para revelar a minha verdade e gosto que esta seja clara. Todos nós já nos deparamos com textos "importantíssimos" que eram simplesmente incompreensíveis e, por saber o quanto frustrante isso é, escolho com toda a racionalidade que reside em mim escrever da forma mais simples e prosaica (se lhe quiserem chamar assim) que conseguir.

Obrigada Orwell por reforçares as minhas crenças e por me motivares a continuar a escrever!!

Laura says

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I made the proofing (P2) of this book for DP-Canada and it will be published by Faded Page.

The essays with publication dates are:

Politics and the English language (1946)

Politics vs. Literature: an examination of Gulliver's Travels (1946)

The prevention of literature (1946)

Why I write (1946)

Writers and Leviathan (1948)

Poetry and the microphone (1943)

Page 73:

From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books.

Page 81:

Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole.

5* 1984

4* Animal Farm

3* Keep the Aspidistra Flying

3* Down and Out in Paris and London

4* Politics and the English Language and Other Essays

TR Homage to Catalonia

TR Burmese Days

TR The Road to Wigan Pier

TR Charles Dickens

Carlo says

Orwell describes how language can affect thought. The essay is full of examples about how vague expressions convey much more unclear meanings than "simple" expressions, and how frequently used phrases can even do the thinking for you.

I believe what Orwell is talking about is true for more than just politics and for more than just the English language. Fictional and non-fictional writings are also suffering from the use of bad language. The two languages that I *speak* fluently (i.e. Armenian and Arabic) also suffer from needless metaphors and vague expressions.

I think this essay should have been called "Language and Thought." It will appeal to those who have interest in linguistics and "know what they are talking about".

Dannii Elle says

The essay, in its entirety, can be found here: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/Po...>

This essay measures in at just 24 pages and yet manages to convey so much in its punchy and impactful style. As the title so aptly describes, this concerns the politics surrounding the usage of the modern English language. Orwell's view is that Modern English has become a mess of abstractness, inaccuracies and slovenliness and this essay attempts to relay exactly where we all went so wrong.

Instead of using fresh and individual terms, we pepper our writing with well-known phrases, "which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves." Language has also suffered from inadequate storytelling, which has more to do with the subject of the story than the teller of the tale. Political writing, in particular, relies on an abstract style to make any commentary as diplomatic as possible. This leads to meaning buried in amongst reams of pointless imagery and unnecessarily elongated prose, where "the whole tendency... is away from concreteness."

I found this a scarily accurate portrayal of contemporary writing, despite this being penned some decades ago. Its relativity means that I can, hopefully, supply this to my own non-fictional writing and can now longer watch any news channel without continual criticism using my new-found heightened awareness.

Cecily says

Note the first word of the title: **Politics**. It's important.

“If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

This essay demonstrates how political writers use language to persuade, dissemble, and deceive, and conversely, how to write factual information in a way that is honest and clear. It is also a rant that is easily misapplied to perpetuate prescriptive nonsense, regardless of context. It's a muddle.

I hate the opening (“*Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way.*” - ‘twas ever thus, going back to Chaucer and before).

But there are important and memorable examples and some good advice amid the angry fluff.

2016, 2017, and 1984

I revised this review when the UK was bombarded from all sides with vague, contradictory, and false arguments about the EU referendum. I amend it again in Trump's new age of "Alternative Facts".

Nevertheless, **1984** has a far more powerful message. See my detailed review [HERE](#) - also recently updated.

Language to Persuade, Dissemble, and Deceive

“Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind... Writing that aims at glorifying war usually takes on an archaic colour.”

“A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be an ignoramus and a rogue.”
Demosthenes

Orwell sees “staleness of imagery” and “lack of precision” as common problems, especially in political writing. He says these are exacerbated by a trend from concreteness to abstraction, and a profusion of overly complex words and stock phrases, of which he gives many examples. The effects include being able to:

- * “Dress up a simple statement and give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgements.”
- * “Dignify the sordid process of international politics.”
- * “Give an air of culture and elegance.”

And yet for all that he wants concreteness, he advises

“Let the meaning choose the word... put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures and sensations”.

Other quotes:

“When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink.”

“Fascism has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable’.... It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it... Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way.”

“Political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible... Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.”

The Infamous Six Rules

Unfortunately, many people focus on five of the six rules near the end and try to apply them regardless of **context**. That was not Orwell's intention, which is why he didn't follow them slavishly in his own writing: not in this essay, and not even this list. In fact, he explicitly states:

“I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought.”

He also says:

“It has nothing to do with correct grammar and syntax, which are of no importance so long as one makes one's meaning clear.”

For the record, those rules (which he explicitly says are NOT for literary contexts) are:

- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English

equivalent.

(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Rewriting this essay, let alone any of Orwell's novels, according to these six rules would have odd and sometimes ugly results.

To counter a rigid application of the six rules:

- * Arrant Pedantry debunking grammar myths
- * Prof Pullum's take-down

Humour?

Orwell is self-aware enough to pre-empt the most obvious criticism:

"Look back through this essay, and for certain you will find that I have again and again committed the very faults I am protesting against."

He was surely being satirical when he criticised writing in which "the passive voice is wherever possible used". The passive isn't always evil or confusing.

Orwell has particular ire for the "not un-" formation, which means "banal statements are given an appearance of profundity". He suggests curing oneself of it by memorizing this sentence:

"A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field."

Read the Essay

You can read the whole thing (12 pages), free, [HERE](#).

Read Orwell's Review of Mein Kampf

You can read it (1 page), free, [HERE](#). It includes mention of the use of photos as well as words.

"Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet."

MissSugarTown says

Language is important, it is not just a combination of sounds as I used to think. A poor language implies poor ideas which imply a weak society, and poor ideas lead to a poor language... Orwell will always make me think, this is my first essay by him and surely not the last. Read it read it read it !

Ken Moten says

Before I get to Orwell and the essay, I must do something I never thought I would do--quote the Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668 in a positive manner:

"Special uses of speech are these: first, to register what by cogitation we find to be the cause of anything, present or past; and what we find things present or past may produce, or effect; which, in sum, is acquiring of arts. Secondly, to show to others that knowledge which we have attained; which is to counsel and teach one another. Thirdly, to make known to others our wills and purposes that we may have the mutual help of one another. Fourthly, to please and delight ourselves, and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure or ornament, innocently.

To these uses, there are also four correspondent abuses. First, when men register their thoughts wrong by the inconstancy of the signification of their words; by which they register for their conceptions that which they never conceived, and so deceive themselves. Secondly, when they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for, and thereby deceive others. Thirdly, when by words they declare that to be their will which is not."

I apologize for the long quote to start with, but it does help explain, in an abridged way, what Orwell is partly getting at. This essay was written in response to a trend that is still with us, about how bad writing, in English, is caused by and causes the negative effects of our political/economic environments.

"Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks."

I do not know where to begin talking about this essay because he hits on so many relevant points at the same time that I am amazed that I had made it this far in school and never read this. He lists almost every trick or error that people use, in the English language, when they don't want to structure their words or phrases properly. This essay has hit home especially hard for me as I have just finished a series of final exam essays that may have broken every rule Orwell listed.

He lists such transgressions such as *dying metaphors, operators or false verbal limbs, pretentious diction, and meaningless words* as the cornerstone on which all bad English grammar is built on. One of my favorite examples that he gives is using a quote from the biblical Ecclesiastes as an example, from the "good" English example:

"I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

Now here is how Orwell (correctly) guesses I would have written that a few days ago for my POLI 254 final exam:

"Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account."

I can't think of the times I have had to read painful sentences like that and then write painful sentences like that.

By covering the basics of how the English language is routinely violated in sociology, science, and of course, politics we get to the main point of this essay--how political extremist on both ends of the spectrum take

advantage of people using these kinds of tricks.

"In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions and not a 'party line.' Orthodoxy, of whatever color, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style. The political dialects to be found in pamphlets, leading articles, manifestoes, White papers and the speeches of undersecretaries do, of course, vary from party to party, but they are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, homemade turn of speech."

This essay was written in-between Animal Farm & 1984 and it shows. Many of the examples of bad and deceptive writing in English would show up again in 1984. He wants to show how "Party fundamentalist" and propagandist take advantage of peoples imaginations using these tricks. *"Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers."* This sort of thing has not gone away but intensified since the turn of the millennium.

Another device that Orwell talks about is using Latin, Greek, Russian and French words to keep from having to clearly express your point. This was a favorite device of Marxists, and while he was socialist himself, he was no lover of Soviet propaganda (much less the Soviet Union itself). While I do think that using foreign words *ad hoc nauseam* (I could have easily have said haphazardly-which is also foreign) is a problem, today's globalized world may now have made more exceptions to this rule. Orwell discourages using the word *cul-de-sac* because it is a French word and there are already Anglo-Saxon words for it (e.g. blind alley or dead-end street. Tolkien went further in his criticism of "cul-de-sac" and names the Hobbits "Bag End" which is the literal translation of cul-de-sac).

"So," you ask, "does Mr. Orwell offer some advice to help us not make these errors?" Well, of course he does! Orwell offers a set of questions we should ask ourselves: *"A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: 1. Could I put it more shortly? 2. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you -- even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent -- and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear."*

The other, more famous, "rules" that he gives are at the end of the essay: *"...one can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:*

- (i) *Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.*
- (ii) *Never use a long word where a short one will do.*
- (iii) *If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.*
- (iv) *Never use the passive where you can use the active.*

(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable." Notice that the last rule is what saves this essay from being totally obsolete as Orwell recognized that the English language is forever changing by nature and some of the rules must be modified or discarded according to the times. Also, *barbarous* is a Greek word.

In the future, I will try to put Orwell's advice to practice and try to catch myself when making these mistakes. Ironically enough, in the middle of the essay he points out that he has been making some of the mistakes that he criticizes as a testament to how pervasive this problem is. I hope this gives me even a slight edge in my work for next semester. I should note that Orwell is not talking about simply banning words or phrases, but to carefully recognize what we are actually saying and to be very mindful of every single word we use.

"I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought..."

If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself.

Political language -- and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists -- is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase -- some jackboot, Achilles' heel, hotbed, melting pot, acid test, veritable inferno, or other lump of verbal refuse -- into the dustbin, where it belongs."

I will start using a thesaurus because of this essay.

Ammar says

Not a long book, yet it's packed with instructions and ideas of how Modern English is regressing and devolving and being absurd.

Orwell states that one must not use foreign words, or use verbal false limbs
And the use of meaningless words

He wants the English used to be assessable, concise.

Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Never use a long word where a short one will do

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out

Never use the passive where you can use the active

Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent

Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Sunny says

I liked this very short little essay. I'm a big fan of language and am well aware of the way it can be used to influence people both at a micro and the macro political level. Orwell wrote this in around 1945 and it still applies today probably even more so. The book is about the way media and politicians and consultants today in my case, have an inability to just talk straight forward English and will find the longest most convoluted ways to express a simple idea. As Orwell implicates, often these very people don't have a clear idea or vision of what it is they are talking about and so will use long protracted convoluted words (like protracted and convoluted?) to describe what is on their minds. Orwell also writes that we are caught in the habit of using certain phrases that have entered our language simply because they are easily understood and just roll of the tongue and also make you look cultured and erudite and in more cases than not; a bit of a bellend. There is definitely a side of me that likes to use all the long words that I read in my work (management consultant) to just show off and show how well read and cultured I am but there is another side which wants to use the word because it's the perfect word to use and to hell with anyone that thinks I'm showing off. Here are some of the best bits in this small book:

- “The attraction of this way of writing is that it is easy. It is easier – even quicker, once you have the habit – to say in my opinion it is not an unjustifiable assumption that than to say I think. If you use ready-made phrases, you not only don't have to hunt about for the words; you also don't have to bother with the rhythms of your sentences, since these phrases are generally so arranged as to be more or less euphonious.”
- “In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements.”

Vipassana says

Fresh on the heels of 1984, I read Will Self's shoddy argument against all things Orwell replete with every logical fallacy in the book. Considering what a short essay this is, it seemed like a good time to read it.

Orwell's rules for writing here are specifically with respect to politics and not the literary use of language. He states it so clearly that it's surprising how anyone could think otherwise. Orwell even confesses that he tends to do the same things that he writes against in this essay. Orwell knows the value of nuance and that's not what he opposes, it is deliberate misinformation through vagueness and familiar imagery that he is against. A passage will assume a domineering quality if littered with jargon or if one uses metaphor the way I just used

the word "littered". The impact of the passive voice, ornate language and dense vocabulary on political commentary is that it enables a person to exercise doublethink, where an idea can be right when applied to one thing and wrong to when applied to another thing. It seems that this goes against the subjective acceptance of right and wrong but that isn't the case here. The purpose of political commentary is to disseminate cause and effect, and vagueness in that context is to pander to popular moral/ethical stands.

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Orwell gives his five rules at the end of his essay. He's taken a few bad phrases and brought out the reasons that they're harmful in political commentary (or helpful depending on which side of the situation you are). He's then gone on to generate rules, to be used as a guide more than a rulebook, to ensure political text doesn't deceive. The reason that I haven't included them in this review is because it takes the rules out of context. Orwell clearly states that the rules are for when instinct fails. He doesn't state anywhere that they are hard and fast, to be followed with unerring precision as Will Self suggests. Recognising that is essential when reading this essay. To readers who want to know when language is deceiving you, highly recommended.

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Link to the essay: <http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/p...>

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June 6, 2015

Mark Joyce says

This essay should be required reading for anybody who writes so much as a daily email or social media post. Virtually every word continues to resonate more than seventy years after it was published and this passage, to take just one of many examples, could have been written yesterday:

“The English language becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

On one level this continued relevance is worrying, given that Orwell was writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War when the manipulation of language in the service of political cynicism had been taken (and in places like the Soviet Union still was being taken) to the worst imaginable extremes. But at the same time the essay's central thesis is energizing (to use an expression that will have Orwell vomiting in his grave) to anybody who still cares about the written word. Language matters and its debasement can be reversed if only we are cognizant of it and take the trouble to engage the critical faculties when we write and read.

Wiebke (1book1review) says

I'll just leave this unrated as it is so short and old.

It was an interesting read, giving me something to think about and mostly wondering what he would say to the language of today's English speaking politics.

Barry Pierce says

Orwell is a man after my own heart. This essay is basically about people using the English language incorrectly and why all political writing is bad, plus, a review of *Mein Kampf*! Orwell's stance on the English language is the same as mine, the language is fine the way it is, stop changing it! However, I do disagree with Orwell on one thing. Orwell states that one should never use complicated words. He says that if you think if writing a big, complicated word but there is a plain simple English version of the word, you should use the simple version, e.g. if I were to use the word "perambulate" (which means walking back and forwards) in a composition, I should just use "walk back and forwards" as "perambulate", is to Orwell, pretentious and unnecessary. However, I find that if we stopped using all of the big, unusual, complicated, words and used plain, simple prose instead, we would lose such a beautiful and interesting part of the language. That's my only criticism of the essay. I agree with Orwell on all other points.

The review of *Mein Kampf* at the end is just brilliant, it's really quite reminiscent of Chaplin's put-down of Hitler in *The Great Dictator*.
