



# Write me some KISSes

Anne Turner, Affinity Editorial | BeerCon3, October 2021

# So, you love\* writing reports?

*\* Disclaimer: mild to moderate sarcasm*

- ▶ Communication is the thing that gives what we do purpose
- ▶ Writing is part of the job
- ▶ It's a large part of how we share knowledge and information beyond the security bubble



# The 'are you legit?' bit

- ▶ Thirteen years working in consultant roles
- ▶ Security standards and risk management specialist
- ▶ Report QA and peer review (aka pedant)
- ▶ Language and linguistics background
- ▶ A translator between technical and non-technical
- ▶ Security specialist editor and proofreader



# Write me some KISSes

- ▶ Some examples of what not to do
  - ▶ Gobbledygook that sounds familiar but means nothing
  - ▶ Unnecessary vocabulary and passive structures
- ▶ The KISS principles of writing
  - ▶ Two assumptions (that won't make an a\*\* or u or me)
  - ▶ No specialist knowledge required
  - ▶ Simple, but accurate
- ▶ The value of writing with KISSes
- ▶ How to write with KISSes
- ▶ For more information

“

We need a more contemporary  
reimagining of our homogenised  
transitional contingencies.

”

Plain English Campaign, *Gobbledygook generator*,  
<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/gobbledygook-generator.html>

- ▶ We emulate the language we hear around us
- ▶ It's what we hear, so it's what we write

“A hand-held ground excavation tool was deployed to penetrate the mantle’s super-substrate resulting in the formation of a vertically descending shaft.”

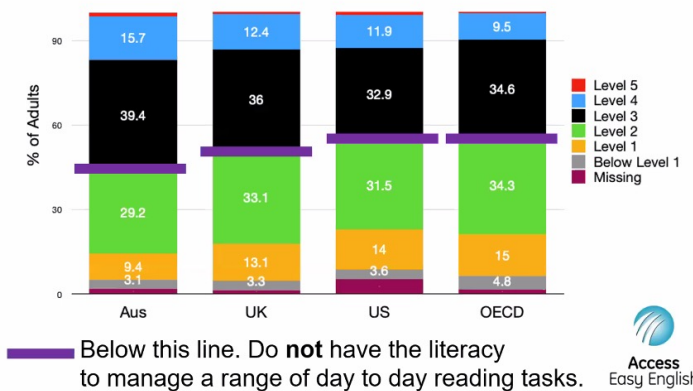
- ▶ Complex or unfamiliar language can be inaccessible
- ▶ Passive voice masks responsibility
- ▶ Passive is as passive does
- ▶ Takes time to absorb and interpret meaning

# Write me some KISSes – principles

- ▶ Two basic assumptions (that won't make an a\*\* of u or me)
  - ▶ The person reading your report has zero time to do so
  - ▶ They don't share the same vocabulary as you
- ▶ Keep It Simple, Stupid / Keep It Super Simple (KISS)
  - ▶ A design principle that meant a jet aircraft could be repaired by an average mechanic using basic tools
  - ▶ No specialist equipment or knowledge required
- ▶ “Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler”
  - ▶ Attributed to Einstein
  - ▶ Use the correct terminology but avoid specialist language if an everyday word will do

# Write me some KISSes – why it matters

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. (PIAAC) 2013,2019 Literacy Data



C. Basterfield, *Easy English: The principles of writing for people with low literacy and what editorial professionals can learn from them*, CIEP Conference, 2021

“ Research shows that higher literacy people prefer plain English because it allows them to understand the information as quickly as possible. ”

‘Writing well for specialists’, *Writing for GOV.UK*,  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/writing-for-gov-uk>



# Write me some KISSes – how to

- ▶ Be concise; keep sentences short
- ▶ Say who as well as what
- ▶ Minimise jargon and acronyms
- ▶ Explain specialist terms in everyday language
- ▶ Separate the summary from the detail
  - ▶ Most people will only skim the summary
  - ▶ Summarise the problem and why it matters, and explain who needs to do what to address it
  - ▶ Offer detail to those that need it but not more than necessary

“ Writers of plain English let their audience concentrate on the message instead of being distracted by complicated language. They make sure that their audience understands the message easily.

”

Professor Robert Eagleson, Australia,  
<https://www.plainlanguage.gov/about/definitions/short-definition/>

# For more information

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- ▶ Plain English Campaign(UK)  
<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk>
  - ▶ free guides: How to write in plain English; The A–Z of alternative words
  - ▶ tools: Drivel defence
- ▶ Plainlanguage.gov (US)  
<https://www.plainlanguage.gov>
  - ▶ plain language guidelines
  - ▶ checklists and style guides



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