



## Writing to the Queen

How to address titled individuals in writing



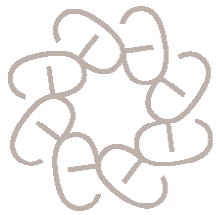
## Ban the bull

Public-sector dignity policies go under the spotlight



## Quick tips

Using email efficiently and effectively



**emphasis**  
business writing trainers

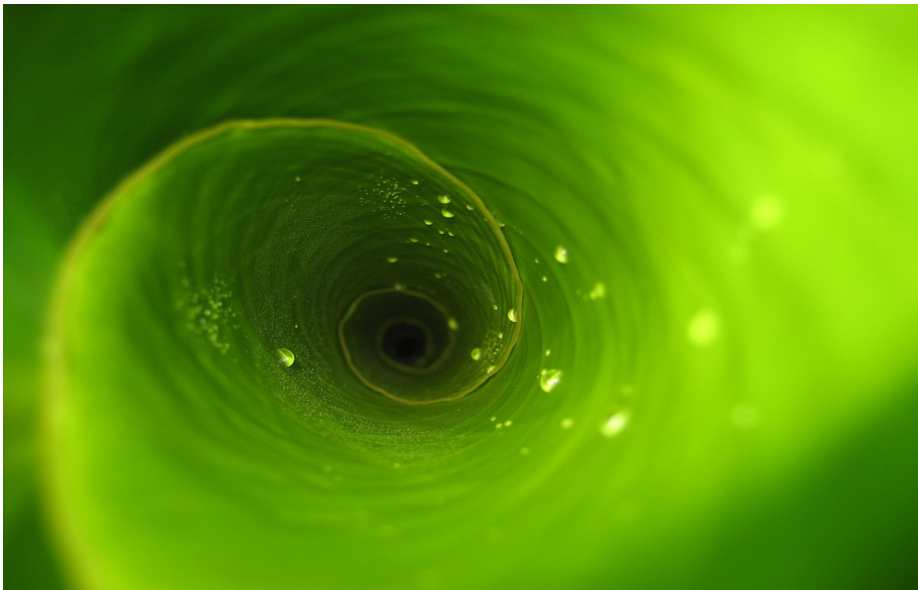
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# Write Away e-bulletin

July 2010

# Media language accelerates recovery



New growth: writing for recovery

The increasing use of the word 'recovery' in the press during the recent financial crisis may have contributed to the UK's eventual climb out of recession, new research from Emphasis has found.

This unique project – the second from the Emphasis Research Centre – began as a positive alternative to *The Economist's* 'R-word index', which predicts economic downturns by tracking the use of the word

'recession'. The research charts the use of the term 'recovery' (along with 'green shoots') in the British broadsheets during the recent recession and the months leading up to it. It reveals what appears to be a significant link between the number of press articles mentioning the word and climbs in both the FTSE 100 and Nationwide Consumer Confidence Index.

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## Ban the bull

Dignity is an inherent human right, according to the United Nations. (And who are we to argue with them?)

But what began as a subject for the UN has apparently become an issue for Health and Safety. Unions are strongly encouraging private and public-sector organisations to have a dignity policy in place – increasingly, it is a mandatory requirement for public-sector contracts. And Health and Safety may now even take into account the presence of bullying and harassment in the workplace during risk assessments.

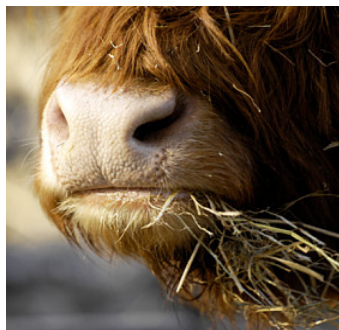
Whether or not you support the idea of such a policy is, for our purposes, neither here nor there. What is, however, is the communication of the thing. While you can hardly overestimate the value of dignity itself, it seems policies on the topic can quite easily be overwritten.

One university in London manages to state its stance succinctly in just under one screen's worth of text, but it takes other organisations anything up to 17 pages. (The UN was able to sum up the rights owed to every human being on the planet in just six.)

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## Ban the bull

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The question then becomes: do you actually want people to read this document? Presumably it will contain valuable information for your workforce, or possibly for future business associates. So make it accessible. That means, as much as possible, keeping it to a length that won't overwhelm your reader before they even begin.

Here are some examples to show how the authors of the lengthier policies we found could lighten their readers' load.

### Unnecessary repetition

*3.2 Harassment or bullying is not dependent on an intention to cause distress or hurt but is assessed by the impact the behaviour has on the recipient. As a result, it is possible that behaviour that is acceptable to some employees may cause embarrassment, distress or anxiety to others. It is recognised, therefore, that harassment or bullying relates essentially to the perceptions and feelings of the recipient.*

(Salford City Council, 17 pages)

Makes sense. But it could be less than half the length and keep all the sense by stopping after the first sentence. The last sentence basically repeats the point, and the second is not vital. If you wanted to make the second point, it could be trimmed to simply: 'Behaviour acceptable to one individual/employee may upset another.'

*3.10 The essential characteristics of harassment are that it is unwanted by the recipient and that it is for each individual to determine what behaviour is acceptable to them and what they regard as offensive. It is the unwanted nature of the conduct that distinguishes harassment from behaviour between employees*

*that is welcome, mutual and appropriate in a working environment.*

(Salford City Council, 17 pages)

This could be cut, as it adds little to the example above. Alternatively, sum it up: 'It is up to the individual to decide what conduct is acceptable to them.'

### The passive voice

*A review of the evidence gathered during the investigation will be undertaken by the Principal's nominee, who will be a person not previously involved.*

(King's College London, 15 pages)

The passive voice (putting the 'doer' of an action after the action itself) tends to add needless words, and can make it harder to quickly grasp the sense. You could make it shorter, more direct and more active like this:

*The Principal's nominee (who is someone not previously involved) will review the evidence from the investigation.*

### Too many -tions

*Further to the completion of the investigation the Investigating Officer should write to the complainant and the alleged perpetrator.*

(King's College London, 15 pages)

Like the passive voice, '-tions' and '-sions' are waffle magnets. They are long in themselves and make sentences less direct and overly formal. Where possible, replace your '-tions' and '-sions' with verbs.

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## Ban the bull

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You may even find that you can take them out completely.

*After the investigation, the Investigating Officer should write to the complainant and the alleged perpetrator.*

This next example manages to be both indirect and passive:

*These recommendations should be considered by the Director with a view to their implementation.*

(King's College London, 15 pages)

But it easily becomes:

*The Director should consider implementing these recommendations.*

### Linking

If you ever find a document like this is getting longer than you'd like, consider transferring parts to a separate web page and linking to them. This might work well for legal aspects or long descriptions of procedure. While you may want these to be available to your reader, they can make your document seem unmanageably long (one policy spent seven pages on these alone).

Always ask yourself: what does the reader need to know? And leave it at that.

### Help us to Ban the bull

Send us anything you find that belongs on the pages of Ban the bull, and we'll reward you with a rewrite and a free copy of *The Write Stuff*, our own style guide.

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## Writing to the Queen

Ever wondered about the etiquette of address in letters?

Joanne King, continuous improvement coordinator at M&S Money (and *Write Now* blog reader), asked us for a guide to using salutations and 'Yours sincerely/faithfully' for titled individuals, such as service men and women, religious leaders and people who have been honoured or decorated.

Happy to oblige, Joanne.

The necessary formality of this task is not what it once was, and the occasional slip will be more readily forgiven. But even in today's informal, fast-paced world, the courtesy of addressing people correctly still counts.

### Salutations

These days, 'Dear' is almost always the best place to start (rather than, say, 'My lord' or 'Very Reverend Sir'). That is, unless you have cause to write to the Pope, in which case, you should begin 'Your Holiness' or 'Most Holy Father'.

### Religious leaders

Apart from when dropping an email to his Holiness, the best rule of thumb is to begin 'Dear [position]', so 'Dear Bishop', 'Dear Chief Rabbi' or 'Dear Vicar'. For priests and rabbis, you might add their surname, eg 'Dear Father Jones'.

### Titled people

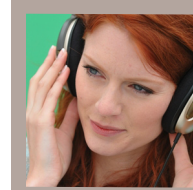
Here you will mostly find yourself writing (if not exclaiming) 'Dear Lord' (or 'Dear Lady'), plus the surname, eg Dear Lord Albright. This rule goes for a peer, baron, viscount/viscountess and a marquess/marchioness. But there are some exceptions:

- Earl/Earl's wife – Dear Lord/Lady [plus the place they are Earl of]

- Duke/Duchess – Dear Duke/Duchess
- Knight or Baronet – Dear Sir [first name], eg Dear Sir Sean ('You're still my favourite Bond...')
- Dame – Dear Dame [first name], eg Dear Dame Judi ('Please petition to bring back Sean Connery...')

### Armed forces

These rules aren't quite as strict as they once were, but politeness is still important. As, naturally, is rank, and it's vital to note the differences between the various



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[www.writing-skills.com/resources/style-guide](http://www.writing-skills.com/resources/style-guide)

branches. For example, for a lieutenant in the Army, you write 'Dear Mr [surname]', while a naval lieutenant should be greeted 'Dear Lieutenant [surname]'.

Again, the general rule (no pun intended) is: 'Dear [rank] [surname]'.

For the lowest ranks in each force – a pilot or flying officer, a midshipman or a lieutenant (in the Army) – put 'Dear Mr [surname]'.

And for the highest ranks, do your research and find out what titles they hold. An admiral, field marshal or RAF marshal is also likely to be a knight or peer. Try to find out whether they prefer to be addressed by rank or as 'Lord' or 'Sir', and salute them accordingly.

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# Writing to the Queen

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## Royals

Unfortunately, no-one but personal acquaintances should write directly to a member of the Royal Family. So if you are holding out to turn the tables on the Queen by sending her a one hundredth birthday card, you'll actually need to send it to her private secretary. Find out if this secretary is male or female, then start your letter with 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam', and finish it with 'Yours faithfully'.

## Envelopes

Although you don't need to open your letter with the person's full name in the formal style, you should observe this on the envelope, including full title, plus any ranks, decorations or honours as applicable. For example, although your letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury began simply 'Dear Archbishop', the envelope would read: 'The Most Rev and Rt Hon the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury'. And your Christmas card to David Cameron would be addressed to: 'The Rt Hon David Cameron, MP, Prime Minister'.

## Sign-offs

The straightforward rule for writing to any of the above is that if you are writing to an unnamed 'Sir' or 'Madam', use 'Yours faithfully'. If you are addressing a specific person, whether by name or by title/position, use 'Yours sincerely'.

Once again, the Pope is the exception (as well he might be). If you are Roman Catholic, finish with, 'I have the honour to be, Your Holiness's most devoted and obedient child'. If you aren't, go with 'I have the honour to be, Your Holiness's obedient servant'. And try to resist the urge to put 'hugs and kisses'.

## More etiquette advice

Since the sheer quantity of titles out there could rival the shelves in Waterstone's, it's not possible to create an exhaustive guide here. But, if in doubt, every eventuality of etiquette for forms of address is available from the very polite people at Debrett's ([www.debretts.com](http://www.debretts.com)).



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## Using however

‘However’ is a useful word, however you look at it. (Sorry – Ed.) But Write Away readers often ask us to clarify the right ways to use it.

However we can help, say we.

### Meaning ‘but’

The most common way of using ‘however’ is to mean ‘but’. This usually comes at the beginning of a sentence, and is followed by a comma.

*The calendar claimed the month was May. However, the temperature felt more like November.*

For this use, it’s also correct to put it in the middle of the sentence, with commas either side.

*It was May. It was, however, very nippy.*

Or you can put it at the end, after a comma.

*I am normally wearing shorts by this time of year. I’m afraid of pneumonia, however.*

But it is wrong to use ‘however’ between two parts of a sentence that make sense by themselves.

*I look forward to this time of year, however today I have goosebumps* is grammatically incorrect. You can use ‘but’ here instead, because it is a conjunction (or joining word). ‘However’ is not a conjunction when it means ‘but’.

*I look forward to this time of year. However, today I have goosebumps* is grammatically correct.

### Meaning ‘no matter how’

Another, less common, meaning for ‘however’ is ‘no matter how’. You can use it in the middle of a sentence without a comma after it.

*I couldn’t bring myself to give up my thermal vest, however tired I was of being teased for it.*

You can also put it at the beginning of your sentence, without a comma afterwards.

*However you like me to dress, I’ll do the opposite.*

Be wary of not accidentally putting a comma after ‘however’ in this instance, or you could end up saying something quite different.

*However, you like me to dress, I’ll do the opposite.*

(Note: if you do ever want to assert that, while there are people who prefer you clothed, you will always choose to defy them, then that second comma should really be a semi-colon. Or a full stop.)

### Meaning ‘in whatever way’

In this form ‘however’ can be at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, with no punctuation around it.

*I’m kidding. I’ll dress however you’d like me to. It’s your mum’s birthday party.*

*How do I want to travel to Hawaii? However you want. You’re paying.*

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## Quick tips: effective email



These days, our fingers are more familiar with keyboards than pens. At work and at home, emailing is a big part of 1.2 billion people's lives, worldwide.

With around one in three people claiming to be regularly offended by email, there's huge scope for irritation. So make life easier for the people in your contact list.

With our quick audio tips, you can find out in just five minutes how to make your emails work best for you. Expert trainer and email connoisseur

Jan Bateman reveals how to:

- get your email opened quickly
- make sure it's understood in one reading and responded to promptly
- avoid getting yourself into sticky – and potentially costly – situations.

See <http://www.writing-skills.com/handlers/file-handler.ashx?FileId=423>

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## Using however

### Alternatives

When you're writing a long document, and you need to link from one paragraph to another, it's easy to fall into the trap of over-using 'however' (meaning 'but').

Here are some good alternatives to keep your writing varied and fresh:

- Nevertheless
- On the other hand
- But
- Yet
- Despite
- In contrast/comparison.

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However busy we might be.

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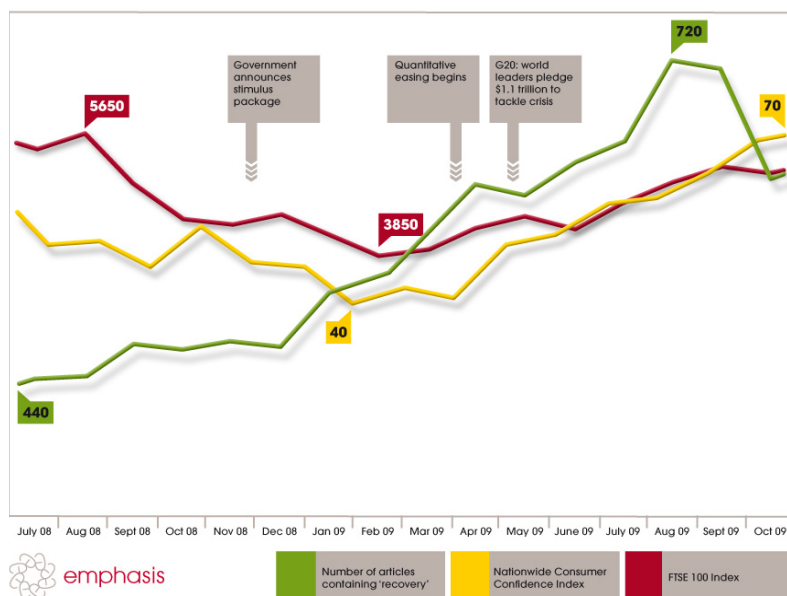
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## Media language boosts recovery

The sudden increase in the use of 'recovery' actually began long before any real sign of it existed. In fact, the UK was sliding further into recession and the markets were in freefall at the time. But the continued and ever-increasing reference to a tentative recovery may have helped precipitate a slight return to form, as both indexes began to rise slowly in February 2009.

Other factors undeniably played a part in renewed faith in the markets. The stimulus package announced in November 2008, the start of quantitative easing the following March, and the G20 summit in April 2009 are all likely to have influenced confidence. And mentions of 'recovery', though regular, were often far from positive.

Yet the apparent link between the rise in newspapers' references to 'recovery' and the fluctuations in both the FTSE 100 and Consumer Confidence Index during the most intense periods of the economic crisis seem significant.



'It could be that merely repeating the word "recovery", like a mantra, somehow seeped into the subconscious of both the public and the market,' says Rob Ashton, Chief Executive of Emphasis. 'This may be an example of journalists creating the news as well as reporting it.'

**The full Recovery Watch research report can be found at the Emphasis Research Centre. See [www.writing-skills.com/resources/research-centre](http://www.writing-skills.com/resources/research-centre)**

Creating the news: the Nationwide Consumer Confidence Index broadly followed the FTSE 100 Index until February 2009, just one month after the recession became official. Then it began to align itself with the increase in the use of the term 'recovery' by the press.

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