

JARGON AT WORK

Activity: Read the text and decide if the statements are true (T) or false (F)

Author of the article: Gillian Sharpe, BBC Scotland News

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1. Business jargon enables smooth communication. T / F
2. Mr Simmons opts for a colloquial approach to business writing. T / F
3. People feel obligated to change their style while writing. T / F
4. The Dark Angels programme is designed to teach how to add a personal touch to business communication. T / F
5. According to the article, literary language is useless for work-related pieces of writing.
6. Kirsty Regan has always been able to write freely. T / F
7. The 'phone voice' example shows that you may be ridiculed for changing your communication style. T / F

1. 'Solutionising' business jargon

In a tented theatre at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, an enthusiastic audience shout out their favourite pieces of business jargon. "Could we park that idea," says one. "Direction of travel", suggests another. Then from the back comes "solutionise", prompting a widespread groan from the crowd. How we communicate at work and get the story of a business out to the wider world has never been more important. Yet the language of business - and more particularly when it descends into jargon - is often the stuff of humour. Think "low-hanging fruit" (an easy, achievable goal), "shoot the puppy" (do the unthinkable) or perhaps "think outside the box" (be creative).

Writers Jamie Jauncey and John Simmons have been sharing some of what they believe goes into really effective business communication.

2. Room 121

As well as training and writing for business, Mr Jauncey also writes fiction. Mr Simmons

comes from a background in branding. The two men have been publicising their book Room 121, but that is just part of their wider view that business communication needs to be more human. Mr Jauncey explained: "Business has lost its way with language". "It's lost its personality - that's the big problem - therefore it doesn't make a good connection with its audiences.

"It's **long-winded**, it's alienating, it's impersonal. It uses a lot of abstractions and it's just difficult language to work with and it isn't very effective in terms of good communication." But is a personality-filled piece of writing always appropriate in a business setting? "I think you'd be surprised at how appropriate it is on how many different occasions," argued John Simmons.

3. No-brainer

"Why would any company want to come across as boring and faceless - it's a **no-brainer** really," he said. "How do you build a bridge between your organisation and the audiences out there that you're trying to reach and trying to influence? You only do it by sharing universal principles of humanity and that's effective communication." Outside the theatre, people chatted about what they had heard. "I think we're all guilty," said one. "When it comes to writing, you take on a different **mindset** at work and think, 'I've got to write in a certain way'."

Mr Simmons and Mr Jauncey believe that being natural and authentic is key to good business communication. Along with fellow business writer Stuart Delves, they also run the Dark Angels programme - creative writing in business courses. They believe that developing a person's personal, creative writing will put personality into what they write at work. "We use a lot of poetry and literature as the basis of our exercises and things like observation," said Mr Delves. "In many ways there are similarities with a creative writing course that you might do with a poet or a playwright, but I think what's unique about what we do is making that bridge between that kind of writing, into the world of business. "That's what I've been doing for 25 years, whenever I possibly can - to **breathe life into** writing."

4. Linguistic clothes

Kirsty Regan is a businesswoman who has been on the course. Her Edinburgh-based

company, News Direct, helps organisations keep track of what politicians and others are - or are not - saying about them. She said some of her previous business writing felt like she was using language she felt obliged to use. But that has changed. "We're comfortable in our own linguistic clothes if you like," she commented. "We know what we have to say, we know where we come from, what our services are based on, what are the principles of what we do". "Certainly I feel that I've got the language to express that more usefully."

For a final word on their view of good communication, John Simmons recalled his grandmother answering the phone - a machine which for her was unfamiliar and slightly strange. He explained: "Sometimes she'd be called to the phone and you'd sit in the other room and think, 'who is that on the phone, I don't recognise that voice' - and it was my poor old nan putting on this posh voice. "And that's what happens in business with business writing - people put on that equivalent of the posh telephone voice. "They think it does them good - actually it makes them just seem rather ludicrous and pompous, so laugh at it, cut it out, move on," he added.