

**WRITING**  
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**ON OUR SIDE**  
**Progressive Literacy Group**

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# WRITING ON OUR SIDE

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*Writing on Our Side* is not an academic treatise or an intellectual analysis about the problem of illiteracy in our current society. It is an eminently readable discussion about how to write in language that makes what you have to say accessible to as broad an audience as possible. Put together by a group of people active in the field of progressive literacy, this booklet is basic reading for community groups, teachers, political organizations, women's groups, trade unions and anyone else who cares about communicating.

*An important piece of work. Interesting and analytical. A clear step-by-step approach to writing popular English that will be useful for instructors, tutors and anyone else working with basic literacy.*

Linda Forsythe, Learning Centre Co-ordinator  
Carnegie Community Centre .

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# THE PROGRESSIVE LITERACY GROUP

Do you write? Do you write for a trade union or community group or progressive political organization? Do you want to reach a broad audience? If so, this booklet is for you.

This booklet was written by the Progressive Literacy Group (PLG). We see it as a modest but necessary piece of political work.

We are a group of independent socialist adult educators working together on some of the problems of literacy. We have worked with progressive unions and community groups to help make their written material more readable and persuasive, that is, to help them write popular English.

The questions we raise in this booklet and the measures we suggest aren't just technical. They touch our politics deeply. They all have to do with the kind of "democracy" we have, and the kind we are working for. Not just anybody, anywhere, cares about whether writing is accessible to those who might pick it up to read. We care because we believe that everyone has the right to participate in making decisions that affect us all.

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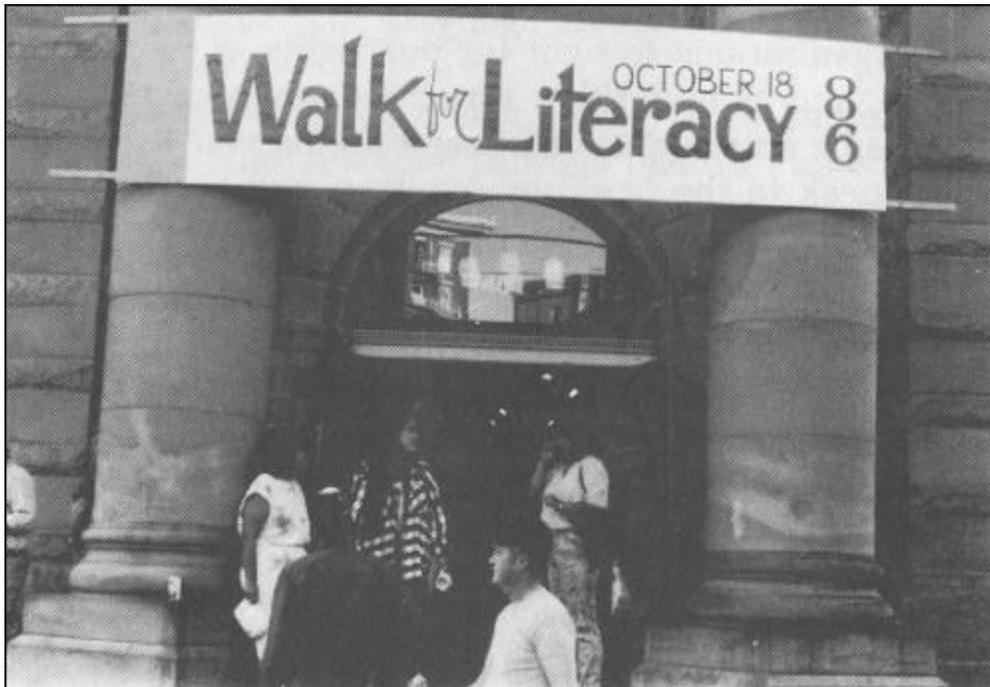
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We thank all the people who have helped to develop these ideas by participating in workshops, and by commenting on drafts of this booklet, with special thanks to Penny Goldsmith for her help in co-ordinating production.

You can also order more copies. Write to us for information on cost and bulk discounts at:

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Feel free to copy any or all of this booklet for use in community groups, trade unions and the like.



## **LANGUAGE WE CAN ALL UNDERSTAND**

Many people have trouble reading ordinary forms of print such as newspapers, notices, instructions, bills, tax forms, trade union publications and political pamphlets. Such everyday reading requires about a grade nine level of education. However, according to the 1981 census, over twenty per cent of the adult population hasn't finished grade nine. We know from experience that even some people who have finished grade nine have a hard time reading.

If we in progressive organizations want to open up broad-based movements for change, we have to speak to people's needs in a language they can understand. We need organizations to fight for our rights as workers, as women, and as minorities, especially when governments are passing anti-human rights and anti-labour legislation. If we speak to the few, our numbers will be few; if we speak to the many, our words and actions may become part of a growing movement for change.

# WRITING ON THEIR SIDE; WRITING ON OUR SIDE

Our decision to take up writing popular English comes from our political work and from our experience as teachers. We ask: how can literacy enable participation? How can literacy serve the movements through which people make their own history? In working with adult students on reading and writing, we have seen that the problems they face are more than simply learning to read the words. Many ordinary people "read" well in the mechanical sense, but most of the print in our society is not written for them. The language of most news media, government pamphlets, and legal documents is alien to their experience. The language is exclusive. The texts are impenetrable.

We live in a world in which literacy is an implement of class rule. Communication through reading and writing is used by the ruling class to organize and perpetuate itself. Literacy is an essential means of organization for making records, carrying messages, and allowing many people to develop and to think the same thought. Literacy is an important means of organizing power. Things like reports, memoranda, balance sheets and policy guidelines are used to coordinate action among people in corporations and government, and thus to manage the rest of us. Newspapers generally serve to spread the corporate point of view on all kinds of issues.

Too often printed material tells people what to think and how to think. It obstructs their participation. Teaching people only the mechanical skills of reading and writing doesn't address these problems. There could be a right-wing literacy campaign (indeed there have been in the military and in some Third World countries).

There could be "political illiteracy" in the midst of high levels of literacy (indeed we have it here).

This is why we are working to develop a way of writing things down that enables participation rather than erecting barriers to it. We call this writing popular English. We distinguish it from the language of those who presently hold power, which we call corporate English.

Popular English is not writing that over-simplifies, or leaves out essential information, or bores the reader. Popular English is writing that is widely accessible, because it is as direct as possible, and because it begins with people's experience.

## BASIC READERS

We use the term "basic readers" to describe people who do not routinely read for work or pleasure, and who have a hard time with everyday reading. They are often called "functionally illiterate," and there are many myths about them.

Basic readers are not stupid, lazy or incompetent. They just don't read well. Nevertheless, they manage their lives in an overwhelmingly literate society, and, in addition, they often manage to conceal their lack of reading skill. How does a parent who doesn't understand the writing on the report card talk to the kid's teacher? How does a man get the job application filled out, and not give away his lack of reading and writing skills and still get the job? How does a woman talk to a friend about a newspaper story and not look stupid? It requires intelligence, a high level of ability to "read" aural and visual clues that literate people may miss, a skill in managing social situations and a knowledge of how things work.

If we want to reach basic readers through the printed word, we have to be aware of their approach to print, so we can make our ideas comprehensible and appealing.

Many basic readers say, "I can read, but I can't understand it." Among other things, they mean that too many "big words" make a barrier to understanding, or they mean they can

decode the words but when they read sentences such as this one, with too many clauses, they can't keep all the meaning in mind until they come to the end of the sentence. They get lost.

Often writing assumes a background knowledge that many readers don't have. Perhaps they don't read much. Or, again, they may concentrate so much on decoding difficult words and sentences that they can't bring their background knowledge to bear.

In everyday conversation, basic readers may easily understand and articulate hidden motives, emotional undertone, sarcasm or other subtle clues to meaning. But when they are faced with print, the task of reading takes up so much energy that they don't have any left over for subtleties. Basic readers don't make inferences well from written material.

Basic readers find it fairly easy to relate to stories that tell what happened in people's lives. They often have a harder time with organizational accounts (written by lawyers, journalists or social workers) of the same events. In fact basic readers often respond in a personal way to both personal and general material.

Finally, basic readers lack confidence in their ability to read. They are reluctant to admit that they can't read well. They may express their reluctance in shyness or defensiveness. They may say, "Oh, I have a touch of dyslexia," They may call themselves "stupid," "slow," or "learning disabled." They may "forget their glasses." They may simply refuse to read.

Generally, good readers concentrate on the subject matter, while poor readers must concentrate on the task of reading. In writing popular English our job is to write so that as many people as possible can read easily, and concentrate on what we are saying.

## **SCHOOLS LIMIT LITERACY**

Why is it that in our society so many people have difficulty reading? Some didn't have the chance to go to school. But even now, when students in Canada attend school full time for at least nine years, many school leavers don't read and write well.

They are the school failures. That is, schools failed to teach them and they failed to learn. They are the kids who were labelled in the primary grades as "stupid" or "lazy" and in the upper grades as "trouble makers," "class clowns," "passive," "underachievers," and "delinquents." Especially in working class areas, the schools produce many people who have not had the opportunity to develop reading, writing, researching, arguing and similar skills. This is no accident, because the process of becoming literate is closely linked to the class structure of our society. Middle class children have the kind of pre-school language experience that makes them "ready to read" as the school defines readiness and reading. In fact, schools are geared to build on the experiences of middle class kids, and not on the different experiences of working class kids. Schools also prepare people for middle class futures.

It is important for everybody to develop skills of reading and writing. Gaining literacy skills can allow people - even if they have no real power in big business or big government - to deal with the powers that be. They may perform well enough at work to get a promotion and hold a job that requires report-reading or memo-writing. They may help their kids with homework from school, take advantage of tax breaks, appeal decisions denying them unemployment insurance, and so on. They may be more skillful participants in community groups, churches or unions. They will likely have added potential for taking personal and organizational power.

However, as people become more literate, they may also find that most of what there is to read comes from the other side.

# POPULAR ENGLISH AND CORPORATE ENGLISH

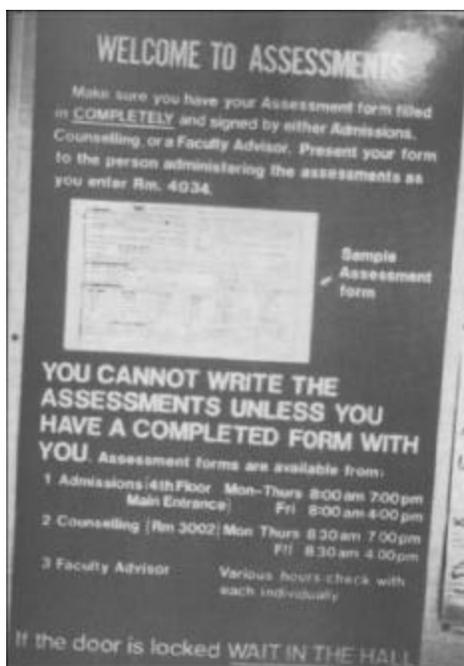
We have found it useful to identify two kinds of English: corporate and popular. Everybody uses popular English in talking about ordinary things and activities. Popular English presents people and their activities and experiences. Corporate English is the language often used in academic and administrative writing and some journalism. Corporate English presents abstract concepts that serve the purposes of ruling. People's activities are described only through organizational categories.

Here are some examples. At an adult school in an ethnic community, students often got tickets for parking by a sign that said, *Parking Prohibited Adjacent to School Grounds*. After it was translated, *Don't Park Beside the School Yard* people had no more trouble.

Our next example is taken from a CBC news broadcast which reported on a bicycle plant in Ontario. The company was asking the workers to take a wage cut because profits weren't high enough. At the same time the company was thinking of buying another bicycle plant in Quebec. A worker interviewed asked, "If they're not making money here, why do they want to buy another bicycle plant?" A management person interviewed later responded, "The decision to make an acquisition is not necessarily related to current profitability." The first quote is popular English, the second corporate.

In a popular movie, at a farm foreclosure auction, someone from the audience shouts, "Who gets the money - the bank?" and the bank's representative says, "The proceeds from this auction will be used to liquidate the mortgagee's outstanding debts." Popular and corporate English confront each other again!

As these examples show, the most important difference between popular and corporate English is the viewpoints from which they are written. In popular English, the language refers to people and what they do and their reasons for doing it. In corporate English, the language refers to organizational processes and categories- prohibitions, acquisitions and liquidations. It obscures the presence of people and what they actually do.



## **IT LEAVES YOU OUT AND IT SUCKS YOU IN**

Corporate English is used within corporate organizations - business, government, academia and the school system. Even unions use corporate English in contracts and other legal affairs. The language can keep people out. When union staff use corporate English with workers, they mark themselves as one of "them" and not one of "us."

In a related way, corporate English can be used to reinforce control. When a staff member in a prison says, "Inmate presence in this area is not authorized," instead of, "You can't stay here," the verbal overkill works to put the inmates in their place in more than the physical sense.

Corporate English obscures reality by excluding people. Passive verbs are consistently used, and the subjects of actions are not identified (as in this sentence). Corporate organizations are personified and said to act and speak. ("Inco decided," "the government said," "the Steelworkers charged.") Nominalizations - that is, verbs that have been turned into nouns - are used to express complex actions in a single term ("restraint," "negotiation," "disturbances.") In all these ways writers can avoid saying just who is responsible for actions. This means that no one can be called to account for them. The human experience and consequences are left out. An "escalating inflation rate" or "pension de-indexing" doesn't conjure up an image of people eating dog food.

So corporate English can leave people out. But it also sucks people in. Although it comes from dominant organizations, elements of it become part of everybody's language and consciousness. Corporate English can control the content of our thought and speech. Its concepts carry the relationships through which people's lives are controlled. It uses "corporate terms."

For example, a union leader adopts a management point of view when s/he speaks of "labour inputs" instead of workers. When parents repeat a teacher's description of a child as showing "limited reading readiness," they become part of the system through which the school organizes instruction and streaming of students. When people use the category of "restraint" to describe a government that's cutting social service budgets, they mouth the government's line, perhaps in spite of themselves. The terms of an employee evaluation may allow only "productivity" to be considered, and not human concerns. A collective agreement may allow no leeway for thinking of work in a broad political way.

If you can't use corporate English, you can't participate. If you use corporate English, you can join the game, but you must play by the rules of the organization that the language comes from.

## **CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE**

When we talk about corporate and popular English, and note that you may well use corporate English at inappropriate times, we don't mean that you are an elitist snob. It's not a question of bad attitudes, but of an objective situation. If you're in a democratic union, or if you're involved in trying to mobilize people around political issues, then you're caught right in the middle of these two kinds of language.

In union work, for example, you must use corporate English: in contract negotiations, before the Labour Relations Board or perhaps when you're talking to the press. The problem arises when you continue to use corporate English, or slip into it inadvertently, in talking or writing to your union membership. You leave the labour hearing and complain to your co-worker in the union hall about the LRB's foggy language. When you report to the union meeting, someone shouts from the back of the hall, "Speak English!" You've just been caught in the middle.

# POPULAR ENGLISH IS MORE THAN PLAIN ENGLISH

Progressives will welcome the use of an alternative, popular English, to make sure they communicate what they want to say. Even more and more people in banks and government offices and public legal education organizations are interested in "plain English." This is writing that uses common words and simplified sentence construction, so that it is easy to follow. Such writing makes forms easier to fill out, contracts and warranties easier to understand, and court procedures more accessible. This is all to the good. Unions and community groups should also make their paperwork easier.

However, popular English goes farther than plain English. It is more than using easy words and sentences. It is a language that addresses matters of power and control- but with the people put back in. Popular English makes matters of administration more understandable, like plain English, by making people's activities central. For example, "Miners are advised to adhere to a schedule of chest x-rays at two year intervals," becomes, "Miners should get their chests x-rayed every two years." Popular English goes on to add, "And join the union Health and Safety Committee. It fights to make the mines safer."

Furthermore, popular English focuses on the choice of political perspective as much as on the choice of the words. It takes the standpoint of ordinary people, of the working class. Popular English aims broadly at describing the whole world from the ordinary person's point of view. Such a language will certainly include abstractions, but they will not be the abstractions of corporate control.

Popular English will come fully into being in a different kind of society. The popular English we write now will also bring people into the struggle for changing society.

## PRACTICE POPULAR ENGLISH

Most of us have been taught to write corporate English. In English class we received injunctions to vary sentence patterns, to use "interesting" vocabulary, and not to waste words. In social studies classes we were taught not to say "I" and had to strive to attain the "appropriate level of generality." At university we learned to use "the framework of the essay" and to marshal "argument" and "evidence." The educational system trains its successful students to participate in the corporate forms of literacy.

Although it is a different skill, writing popular English is no less a skill than writing corporate English. In this section we provide some guidelines for popular English. We also provide this warning: you really learn it only by doing it.

The most important general principle is to *gear your writing to your readers*. This is especially important since the "gearing" of writing to non-habitual readers is not as easy as writing for those used to the dominant forms of writing in our society .

All the guidelines follow from this principle: write for your readers -and include your basic readers.

## 1. Make people the subjects

In describing a situation, be explicit about who is doing what. Make the subjects of the action the subjects of the sentences.

In a more general sense, make the readers the subjects of the text; i.e. draw them into the text by putting them in the operator's seat. Organize the information or argument in the order that they would most naturally move through it.

There are two main ways to write corporate English sentences which leave out the subjects of action - (grammatically) leave out the people. One is to use the passive voice or a participle, especially with no agent named. In popular English, if the subject of action might not be clear to your readers, you should make it explicit. For example:

all proceeds raised	vs.	all the money we raised
the accident was witnessed by numerous bystanders	vs.	a lot of people saw the accident
eighty people were in attendance	vs.	eighty people came to the meeting
a settlement was reached	vs.	the company and the union agreed
BC has a high number of man-days lost due to work stoppages	vs.	many BC workers go on strike, or get locked out.

A related point is this: corporate English commonly portrays economic processes as if they just happen, independent of people. For example: "Tuition fees are going up," means, more or less, "The school is charging students more money for courses." When we say, "Interest rates may climb again," we mean, "The banks will charge you more for a loan," but also more than that. A sentence like, "Plummeting mineral prices have brought high unemployment rates to the province's north," certainly leaves out the cause of the plummeting and its relationship to unemployment.

Such economic descriptions particularly obscure who is doing what and to whom. An immense variety of particular actions are summed up in a term like "inflation."

Of course you can give a basic reading to such corporate expressions. You may read, "The inflation rate is going up," and interpret it as, "I'll pay more for my groceries." It's good to read the individual meaning of economic phenomena, but that doesn't really explain what inflation is and who makes it happen. There may be times that you want to : explain all that.

## 2. Tell a story if you can

This follows from the first guideline. If you are writing with people as subjects, then you are telling about things as people experience them. Whenever you are telling about events in people's lives, tell about them in the order in which they happened, one thing after another. A story is often useful. A story relates writing to a kind of "first. . . then. . . and then," that is, a sequential ordering of experience. A story is easy to follow and it catches people's interest.

When a story can't express the information at hand, then use a sequence which leads the reader logically forward. Don't depend on the reader to assemble scattered points into their sensible order.

You may want to avoid the style of newspaper "stories" which systematically deviate from narrative ordering. They scramble the order of events, for example by getting the who-what-when-where-why-how into the lead paragraph, by writing a catchy lead sentence, or by starting the story with an up-to-the-minute angle. The ordinary skillful reader has learned to cope with these broken sequences without even noticing them. Basic readers are more likely to assume that things happened in the order in which they appear on the page.

### 3. Talk to your readers

This guideline also follows from the first. You want not only to lay out a situation in terms that include the agents of the action in it, but also include the readers and writers in the text.

- Be up front about who you are and to whom you are writing and why you are writing to them. Then people will immediately be ready to decide whether what you say is relevant or irrelevant to them. Say, "In this notice we will tell you. . .," "If you are. . ., then listen to this." "Maybe you thought. . ., but. . ." (The first paragraph of this booklet is an example.!
- As you are giving information, it is useful to put introductions and summaries and road signs along the way. All these make the order of the points explicit:
- Show what the information means to readers, what they can do with it. In asking people to do things, use direct commands. Not, "Your early response would be appreciated," but, "Call the mayor today,"

Our fourth and fifth guidelines may be summed up in two words: write plainly,

### 4. Use ordinary words

For example, say "gap" or "break," or even "interruption," but avoid "hiatus." Say: "make it easier," not "facilitate;" "help make it happen," not "expedite;" "use," not "utilize." We won't provide a dictionary of "big words" and their ordinary equivalents. You can recognize them and think up their substitutes. It's good practice. We want to draw attention here to the fact that rare and difficult words demarcate a readership. That is, if you use big words, then not all adult readers will be able to read and understand what you write.

It's not easy to say exactly what is difficult and what is ordinary. It varies with your audience. Different lines of difficulty are drawn between "break" and "interruption" and between "interruption" and "hiatus." What line of difficulty you want to squeeze under is a continual question. Gauge your audience.

It can be a useful exercise to ask which technical or specialist terms would be known by all members of your audience, which by active participants, and which only by the full-time workers. For example, different sets of union members might be expected to know these sets of terms:

union	contract	expiry date
strike	negotiate	concessions
lockout	seniority	certification
	grievance	compassionate leave

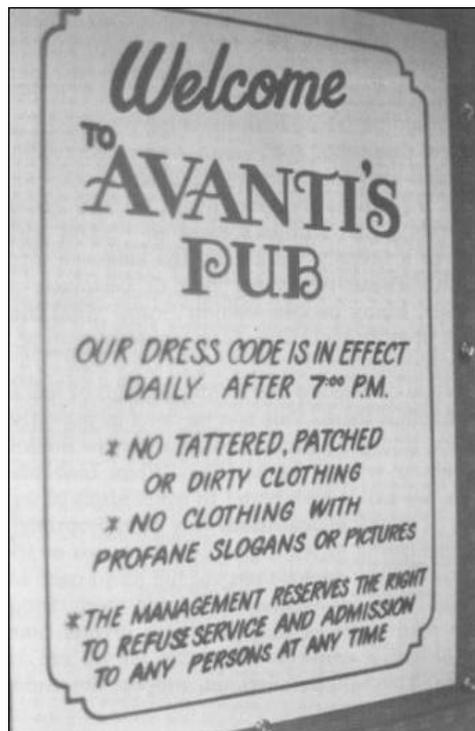
If your audience includes speakers of English as a second language, you need to be cautious about idioms and sarcasm. Though the individual words aren't hard, such phrases as "turn over a new leaf" and "ended in a stand-off" will "throw" many second-language readers. If you say, "a few words of appreciation for our progressive politicians," when you mean the opposite, then readers from a different cultural background may not understand your tone and get your meaning all wrong. There are no hard and fast rules about idioms and multi-levelled meanings like sarcasm. All you can do is be aware of them and decide each time about their use.

You should be sensitive in the same way when referring to political discussions or events. A common catchword to one reader may be incomprehensible to the next. For example, a political organizer might refer to "red-baiting," or a feminist to "women's right to control their own bodies," or a literacy worker to "the language experience approach." These terms are part of particular political discourses. Many people wouldn't know what they refer to. To be broadly accessible, they would have to be spelled out.

When you do need to use technical terms or less familiar words, explain them. This can be done in parentheses, in apposition (that is in the following phrase or the following sentence), or with a format like "When blah blah b lah happens, we call it blah blah." In some kinds of writing, a glossary or marginal definitions may be appropriate.

If you're trying to teach people new terms or the ideas that the terms represent, then use the terms over and over in various ways, as well as explaining them. People will learn to read them as they see them several times, and they will get a sense of how the words are used in sentences. This will develop and support the understanding that definition begins.

Finally, when you do use words that may be unfamiliar, don't pack them together. People use context to get the idea of what is being said even if they don't understand every little bit. The flow of a sentence may carry a reader over one big word, but two or three big words intertwined dam the flow.



## 5. Prefer simple sentences

Avoid complexities of sentence structure that strain the reader's attention and memory. Sentences that are embedded - that have clauses nested inside one another, like this one--are hard for the non-habitual reader to read. They require the reader to hang on to ideas in short term memory until s/he comes to the period and sees how they all go together. The more unfamiliar the ideas are, the harder this nesting or embedding makes them to read. For example, the sentence that begins, "Based upon our union's constitutional objective of eliminating overtime, some supporters of the other union have suggested. . ." will be difficult for many to read. You could say, "Our constitution says that getting rid of overtime is a long-term goal. Some backers of the other union have twisted this. They say, ." Again another sentence begins, "The fact that the common expiry date of the two mines puts the workers in a powerful position is best illustrated by the fact that..." In popular English this becomes: "Our contracts with the two mines both end at the same time. This puts us in a powerful position. You can tell this because..."

In other words, the thing to do with these embedded bits of sentences is to pull them out of one another's middles and string them out as separate sentences.

One specific form of difficult embeddings contains "negative overrides" such as "It is doubtful that. . ." or "Never has there been, ," These tell the reader to negate or reverse the meaning of the words that follow. The basic reader will not readily follow such instructions.

Those are the guidelines. Make people the subjects. Tell a story if you can. Talk to your readers. Use ordinary words. Prefer simple sentence. As we said, all of them come from one basic principle: gear your writing to your readers.

## NOT EVERYBODY WILL LIKE POPULAR ENGLISH

If you've read this far, you're probably convinced. You agree that progressives need to be able to write a popular English that starts with people's experience, and that is interesting and powerful. You now have some idea of how to write popular English. You're ready to start. Before you set off, we have some general warnings and advice.

We have critics, and so will you. People will say that popular English is patronizing, or it's boring. Probably you have a thick skin and a quick wit and will deal well with your critics. But we also want to lay out our own answers to these criticisms.

Is popular English patronizing? No. Is it patronizing to write so that people can understand? On the contrary, it is patronizing to continue to write corporate English when we know that at least one person in four or five can't read it. If we want to avoid patronizing, we need to write so people can understand us.

There are some people for whom the reading and articulation of ideas is a common practice and those for whom it is strange, infrequent, not easily accessible. Popular English can work for both.

We know from experience how adult students receive popular English. People say, "Hey, this is good. You can tell what it's saying." They don't ask, "What does this mean? What are we supposed to do?" Popular English also eliminates the gap between people who usually read smoothly and people who usually read only with difficulty. This means that everybody can talk together about what they're reading.

Popular English makes organization and unity easier. We think that this effect works in the classroom and beyond. Popular English doesn't patronize people. It includes them.

Shown that popular English is not patronizing, critics may come back to say: popular English is boring. They may say this because they assume that respectability, interest and a kind of goodness reside in complex writing. If the prose isn't scintillating, they say, it's simple-minded.

They may also assume that popular English must amount to insult, because it will be a form of primereese or advertising style. Writers of "see-Spot-run" and "buy-gorp- you'll-love-it" do make their readers out to be empty-headed and ready for the stuffing. Can our writing be accessible without aping these models?

We confess, simple English can be plodding and humourless. When we first tried to write popular English, it sounded awful. Popular English can be boring or interesting, like any other writing. It depends on what you say and how you say it.

Popular English starts out with one big advantage. Wooliness can't pass. If you say who's doing what and to whom, the vague generalizations common in corporate English will disappear from popular English. Already it's more interesting!

## **DANGERS AND STRATEGIES IN POPULAR ENGLISH**

You can build on this advantage to write popular English well. You need to have something to say. You need to find the voice to say it in. You need to relate your message to what your readers already know, and go from there. We have some specific suggestions.

What makes writing interesting is not only the information it conveys but also the strength of voice in it, the appropriateness of the style to the stuff it carries. When you start writing popular English, you may lose the "voice."

You may merely translate from corporate English in a mechanical way. You may take the sentences of some original, straighten them out so that they have subjects, replace difficult words with simpler, and so on. By doing so you will probably lose the voice of the original, if there was one, without replacing it with a new voice.

Something similar happens when, on the re-write committee, you do piece A and I do piece B and we stick them together. They come out boring not because they're written in popular English, but because they don't have a coherent voice.

To have its own voice, popular English needs to be more than a formula translation that breaks down a difficult original into littler bits. You need to really write it.

The tricks of style we use in complex English to make our writing interesting are not all available to us in popular English, but they can be adapted. For example, a rhythmic device common in complex English is a series of complex sentences, followed by a simple sentence, for emphasis. It's not the structure itself, but the *change* in structure, that highlights the point.

A series of complex sentences is too complicated for popular English. Most of our sentences are simple. We can, however, repeat a word or group of words until a pattern is established, then break the pattern to emphasize a point. For example, "Yesterday, women lost. . . Yesterday, women suffered... Yesterday, women were silent. . . Today, we are fighting back! "

# THE LIMITS OF POPULAR ENGLISH

You will encounter one difficult question that goes beyond style: are there limits to the complexity or subtlety of information that popular English can convey? We have argued this point among ourselves and never resolved it. Certainly we don't know where the limits are, if indeed they exist.

Here's one specific aspect of this problem. Often when writing popular English, you must unpack something that was bound up in passives or nominalizations in corporate English. You must lay out background information that basic readers might not have.

For example, many people, even those who have medical or automobile or other insurance, don't understand the idea of a pooling of risks in insurance schemes. It may be necessary to explain this concept rather than relying on the reader's understanding. A text written this way takes more space because it says more of what it means.

Clear explanations may eventually make a piece of reading so long that it is difficult simply because of the length. Each bit of information is plainly written. Yet because there are so many bits, by the time a whole topic has been dealt with, the point is lost. Here the questions of the style of popular English intersect with questions of the reader's level of education or information. Popular writing is not enough to reach across every gap.

Here's another question larger than the style of popular English. Fixing the mechanics of writing may only expose a more fundamental trouble. What is being said may be interesting or meaningful only to the party faithful, those who have the feminist analysis already, the insiders of whatever group. If so, the task is not only to translate bureaucratic language and political analysis. It's to construct a new writing of the world.

We need to learn how to write a popular English that is interesting and powerful because it starts with people's experience. It's not a skill that is commonly practiced, or commonly understood. We who are interested need to work at doing it, to make specific criticisms and suggestions about one another's efforts, and to share our discoveries.

## WHO'S INTERESTED?

Let us say this part in popular English.

If you start writing popular English, you'll need allies. You'll need friends and people to support you. Some will help you learn. Some will stand beside you when you argue that popular English is important. You'll find allies among people who want big changes in our society. Who will these be?

- literacy workers who think everybody should be able to use reading and writing to take part in society
- peace activists who want to stop nuclear bombs, and nuclear power plants too
- women who want equal pay for equal work
- women who want to stop violence against women
- community workers who want the people in their communities to get involved
- trade unionists who want to start new unions, or elect democratic leaders in old unions
- people who want peace with justice, who are struggling for socialism.

These will be your allies in popular English.