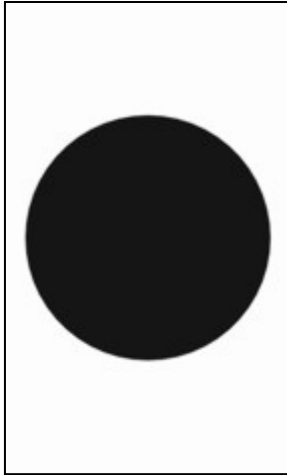


The KISS Principle

By Dónal Thompson



About 80% of my students don't know how to use a full-stop. A full-stop is the small black dot that you put at the end of a sentence. The North Americans call it a 'period'.

Writing English is easy. You make a point and you put a full-stop.

Most experts agree that good English has average sentences of 15 - 20 words. Professional journalists and writers rarely go above that limit.

'Active' sentences are better than 'passive' sentences. They sound crisper and less bureaucratic. You should have at least 80% of your sentences active.

So ... *"A new mobile phone service is being implemented by Telefónica"* (bad)

"Telefónica is implementing a new mobile phone service." (good)

"Telefónica is starting a new mobile phone service." (better. Why say 'implement' when you can say 'start'?)

Impressive English is plain English.

When someone starts using long sentences and unusual vocabulary just remember the 'KISS' principle'; 'Keep It Simple - Stupid!'. I don't mean you should be simplistic. Sometimes you need to convey very complex ideas. But even complex ideas can be broken up into short sentences.

Thank God there is no Royal Academy of the English Language. English belongs to the people who use it. That includes you! Welcome to one of the biggest clubs in the world.

If you are studying for an official exam, you should buy the appropriate books and follow their advice. If not, forget grammatical myths. Listen... You can start a sentence with 'And'. You can finish a sentence with a preposition. You can split an infinitive. You can repeat a word in a sentence if you can't think of another word.

George Orwell had some advice for writing good English:

1. Never use a metaphor or figure of speech you see a lot in print.
2. Never use a long word if you can use a short one.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive if you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules rather than say anything barbarous.

A good trick is to imagine that you are talking to the reader. We spend 90% of our time either listening or speaking so we are better at it.

Plain English is quicker to write, quicker to read and easier to understand. Full-stops, like commas and colons, are traffic signs on the communication highway. They stop accidents.