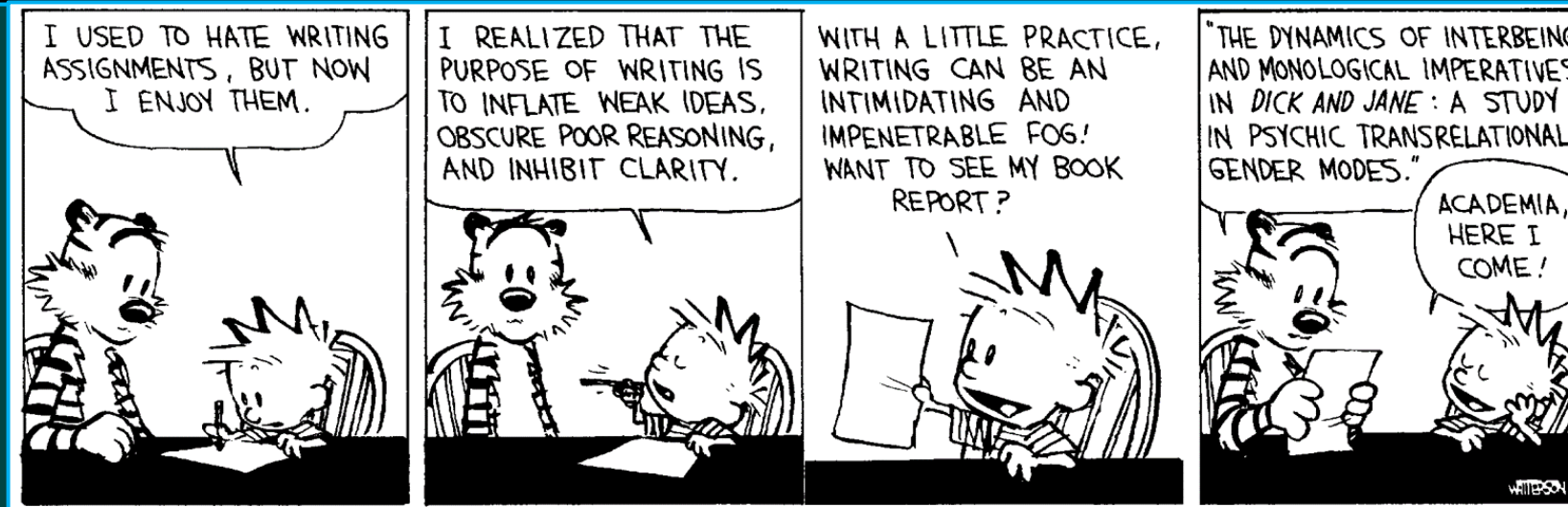


WRITING EFFECTIVELY

Logic no more explains how we think than
grammar explains how we speak

Marvin Minsky

(qtd Ali Almossawi, *An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments*, San Francisco, 2013
<https://bookofbadarguments.com>)



Calvin & Hobbes

A Good Statement...		A Bad Statement...
Uses language your constituents use.	↔	Uses jargon, doesn't understand your audience.
Is emotionally stirring.	↔	Is logical and cold.
Communicates the "why."	↔	Communicates only the "what" or "how."
Is concise.	↔	Is really long.
Is a single, powerful sentence.	↔	Is a rambling paragraph.
Sounds good spoken out loud.	↔	Is full of clauses and hard to say.
Is memorable.	↔	Is forgettable.
Surprises.	↔	Is dull.
Is actionable.	↔	Can't be quantified.
Is specific.	↔	Is vague.

GOOD & BAD WRITING:

For

- Essays

but also

- Report
- Application
- Proposal
- Review
- Journalism
- Short story
- Critique of any kind ...

1. Structure & organisation (full piece)
2. Structure & organisation (paragraphs as steps in an argument)
3. Pay attention to the reader
4. Use detail, be specific
5. Critical attention to proof
6. Inoculate yourself against bad writing & bad arguments

1. STRUCTURE & ORGANISATION (FULL PIECE)

1. How many words do you have?

Allocate numbers to introduction/ body/ conclusion

2. Determine the shape required by a particular task

compare and contrast/ assess/ critique a position/ examine new claims : each requires a different structure

3. Refer to the module learning outcomes

This is the matrix by which you will be judged*

** If you are writing a business plan/ mission statement/ report/ funding application then you need similarly to consider the criteria by which each is assessed*

2. STRUCTURE & ORGANISATION (PARAGRAPHS AS STEPS IN AN ARGUMENT)

As with so many writing problems, addressing the proposition is easier if you consider the reader's perspective. *(Example here of grant application)*

There are three aspects to this.

1. You can think of the reader as having questions in their head as they read your grant application. In the case of the importance proposition, the main question is “How important is this?”
2. The reader's definition of terms like “important” is not necessarily the same as your definition
3. The reader will want to formulate their own answer to their questions, rather than to accept your answers. They will not be impressed by an assertion that your proposed research is important, rather they will be looking for evidence.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE READER

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEAR DIRECTIONS:



You are giving
someone a lift
– explain how
to find your
white car ...

Everyday we encounter people from various social categories based on race, gender, etc. Perceiving more than one social category in a person is necessary. However, this useful social tool can lead to inaccurate perceptions. On meeting a person from a negatively stereotyped group, we may attempt to overcome this by 'inhibiting' or reducing one social category in favour of another. For example, when encountering a 'black doctor' we may seek to inhibit perceptions based on the 'black' stereotype, but elevate the 'doctor' stereotype.

One key factor that may be part of this process is 'executive resources' which deal with (in this case) incorporating new with old information. We use this process to keep up with our ever-changing social world, helping us come to terms with new stereotypes. Indeed, during the changing social climate of the nineteen-sixties, new combined stereotypes came in to being, for example 'male nurse'.

By impairing this process in perceivers, using dual task methodologies (Baddeley, 1986), this project aims to determine if executive resources really are essential when perceiving surprising social category combinations. Furthermore, this project deals with the consequences of surprising combinations and whether thinking about such combinations can offer a potential means of reducing

This is the first thing the reader wants to know.

<http://www.parkerderrington.com/blog>

ORDERING :
information
the reader
most wants to
know – what
the research
project
will do – Is
buried in the

second half
of a sentence
in the last
paragraph.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE READER

TELL THEM; THEN CONVINCE THEM

Posted Aug 21, 2015 by Andrew

[example: writing a grant application] you need to be direct. Begin each paragraph with its main message. Then use the rest of the paragraph to convince them that the message is true. In the book we refer to this style as “assert-justify”. An easy way to describe assert-justify style is “Tell them; then convince them”.

As I was writing this I thought of nine reasons you should adopt “Assert-justify” style *[in research grant applications]*. The first four are concerned with meeting the needs of the reader – one of the guiding principles for writing with style. The remaining five are concerned with making the task of writing easier.



Brian Bilston

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ref



Follow

you took
the last bus home

don't know how
you got it through the door

you're always doing amazing stuff

like that time
you caught a train

Plus side:
Creative
play with
confusion

BAD EXAMPLES TEACH YOU WHAT TO AVOID...

Reading about things that one should not do is a useful learning experience. In his book, *On Writing*, Stephen King writes: “One learns most clearly what not to do by reading bad prose.” He describes his experience of reading a particularly terrible novel as, “the literary equivalent of a smallpox vaccination” [King].

One can cure oneself of the not un- formation by memorizing this sentence: A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field.

George Orwell, ‘Politics & the English Language’ *Horizon*, April 1946

USE DETAIL, BE SPECIFIC

"A previous study in this area recruited 150 subjects and found highly significant results ($p=0.014$), and therefore a similar sample size should be sufficient here."

"Our lab usually uses 10 mice per group."

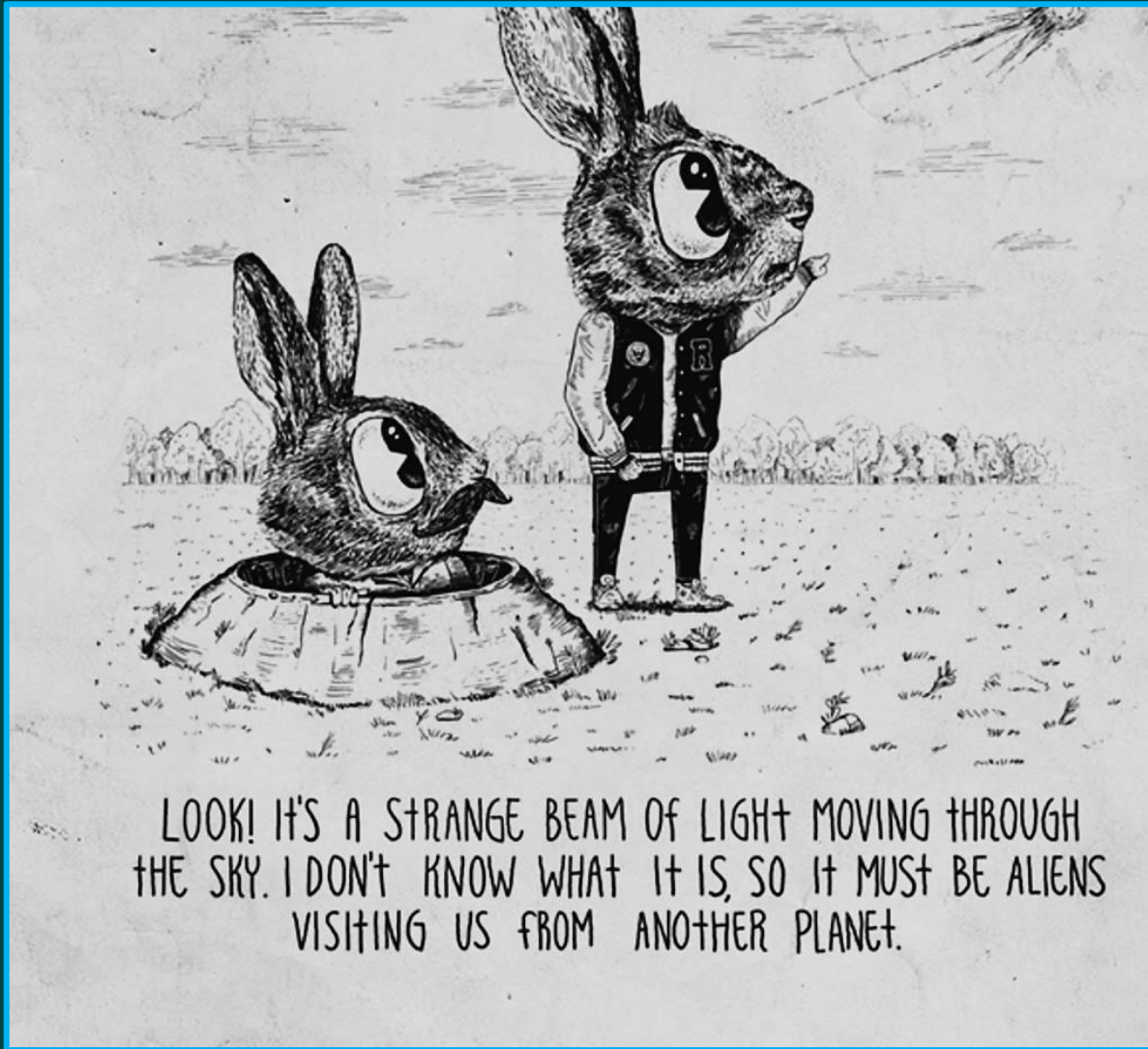
"Sample sizes are not provided because there is no prior information on which to base them."

"The throughput of the clinic is around 50 patients a year, of whom 10% may refuse to take part in the study. Therefore over the 2 years of the study, the sample size will be 90 patients. "

"It is estimated that for a sample size consisting of 6 animals in each trial and with a tumor volume variance from 0.1 to 1.0 cm³ – that when the difference in the population reaches 0.25, the power will reach 100%."

Avoid
Vague - or
confusing
information

PRACTICES TO AVOID



APPEAL TO IGNORANCE:
Such an argument
assumes a proposition to
be true simply because
there is no evidence
proving that it is not.

CRITICAL ATTENTION TO PROOF

Three years to save mankind', says David Icke

JON AUSTIN Wed, Mar 16, 2016

Twenty five years ago David Icke shocked Britain by coming out as the "son of the Godhead" during a press conference and subsequent appearance on prime time chat show Wogan.

"My opinion after looking at it for several years is that this world is ultimately controlled by a self-aware equivalent of a computer virus

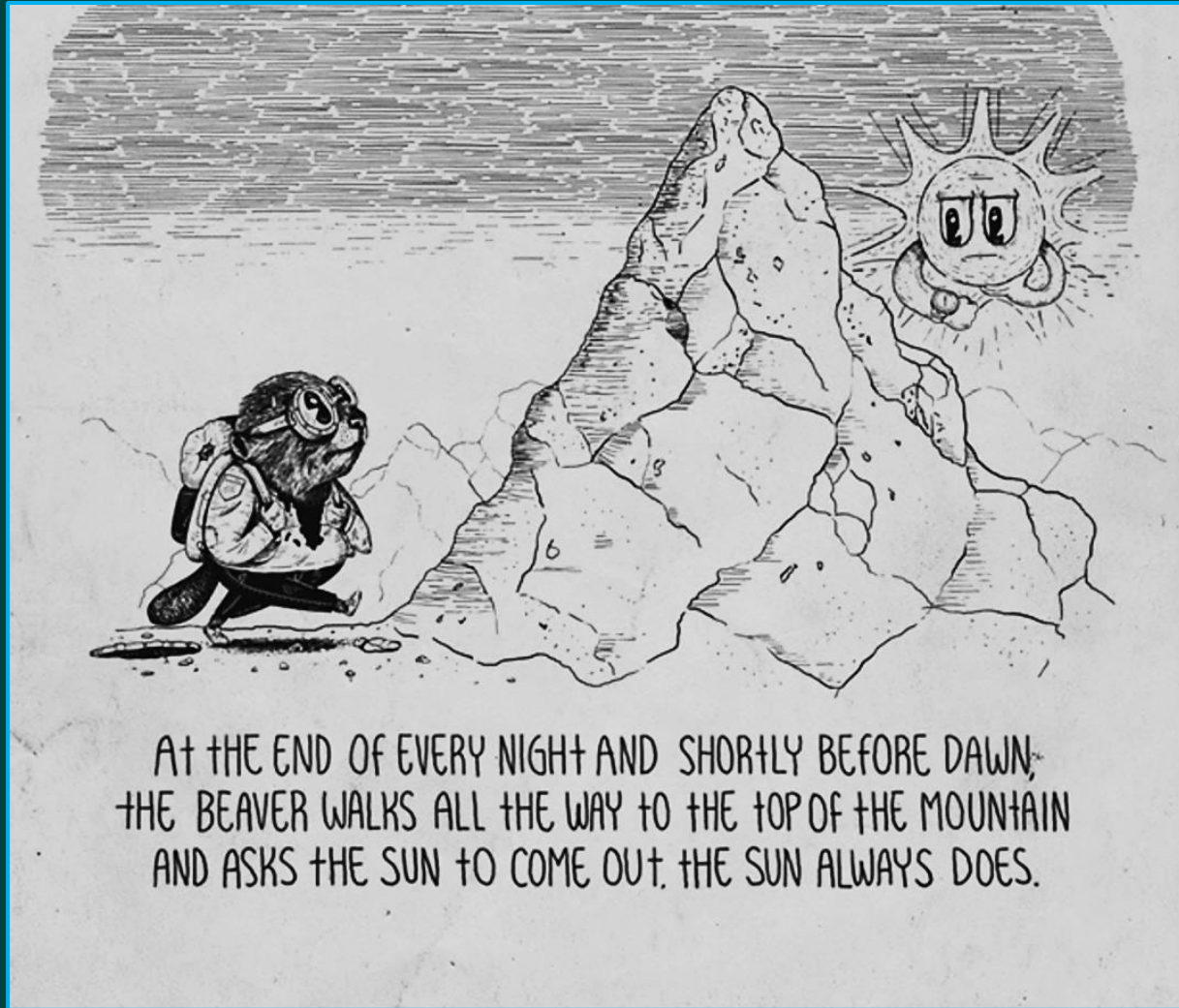
"We are living in a world driven by fear, when you look at the extremes of the virus we have name for it - psychopathic behaviour with no empathy and no fail-safe mechanism to stop any scale of extreme behaviour.

"This virus, when it overwhelms someone, they become psychopaths, and if you look at the story of some certain bloodlines they have been genetically engineered to run the world for the virus."

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/weird/653080/Three-years-save-mankind-David-Icke-25-years-coming-out-son-of-God>

DOES HE HAVE ANY PROOF?

PRACTICES TO AVOID



NOT A CAUSE FOR A CAUSE:
The fallacy assumes a cause for an event where there is no evidence that one exists.

CRITICAL ATTENTION TO PROOF

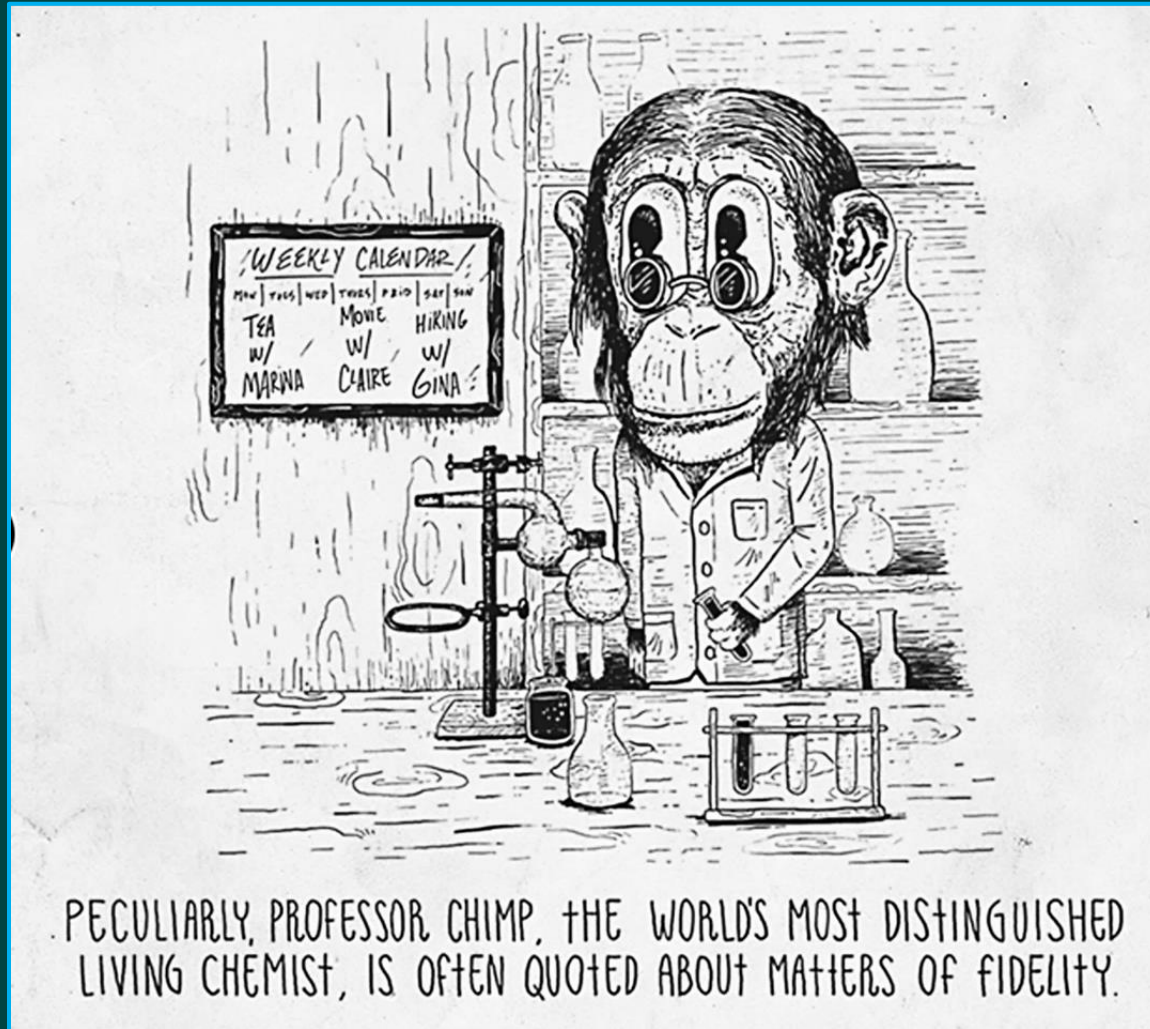
In his ancient-astronaut narrative, Icke argues that humanity has been genetically manipulated by the Babylonian Brotherhood, a hybrid race of human–extraterrestrial reptilians, also known as the Illuminati.[126] He briefly introduced the extraterrestrial hypothesis in *The Robot's Rebellion* (1994), citing Bill Cooper's *Behold a Pale Horse* (1991), and expanded it in *And the Truth Shall Set You Free* (1995), citing Barbara Marciniak's *Bringers of the Dawn* (1992).

...

Icke maintains that they came for monatomic gold, a non-existent mineral (only gases can exist in a monatomic state) that, he writes, increases the capacity of the nervous system ten thousandfold. After ingesting it, the reptilians can process vast amounts of information, speed up trans-dimensional travel, and shapeshift from reptilian to human.[133][134]

‘PROOF’ IS REFERENCE TO A SERIES OF UNPROVEN STATEMENTS ...

PRACTICES TO AVOID



APPEAL TO IRRELEVANT AUTHORITY

One may reasonably appeal to pertinent authority, as scientists and academics typically do. **An argument becomes fallacious** when the appeal is to **an authority who is not an expert on the issue** at hand.

A similar appeal worth noting is the **appeal to vague authority**, where an idea is attributed to a vague collective. For example, 'Professors in Germany showed such and such to be true.'

Perhaps for us: 'Critics argue that ...' (without reference to any...)

CRITICAL ATTENTION TO PROOF

In *The Biggest Secret* (1999), Icke identified the Brotherhood as descendants of reptilians from the constellation Draco, who live in caverns inside the earth.[129] They are the deities known as the Anunnaki in the Babylonian creation myth, *Enûma Eliš*, and the fallen angels, the Watchers, who mated with human women in the Biblical apocrypha.[130] He said in an interview:

when you get back into the ancient world, you find this recurring theme of a union between a non-human race and humans—creating a hybrid race.

From 1998, I started coming across people who told me they had seen people change into a non-human form. It's an age-old phenomenon known as shape-shifting. The basic form is like a scaly humanoid, with reptilian rather than humanoid eyes.[131]

Without proof how does this achieve its effect?

- a) Reference to selected bits of mythical narrative (*Anunnaki* = ‘*Enûma Eliš*/the fallen angels/the Watchers – all viewed as the same without regard to context)
- b) Reference to ‘the ancient world’ (= all ancient worlds are the same & all perfect)
- c) Personal anecdote of other people’s anecdotes
- d) Mythical *shapeshifting* equated with *reptilian humanoids* (many other forms of shapeshifting occur in mythical narratives – how are the others perceived?)

As of 2003 the reptilian bloodline encompassed 43 American presidents, three British and two Canadian prime ministers, several Sumerian kings and Egyptian pharaohs, and a smattering of celebrities, including Bob Hope, Chris Christopherson and Boxcar Willie. Key bloodlines are the Rockefellers, Rothschilds, various European aristocratic families, the establishment families of the Eastern United States, and the British House of Windsor.[85] Icke confirmed to Andrew Neil in May 2016 that he believes the British Royal Family are shapeshifting lizards.[11]

..

The first reptilian-human breeding programmes took place 200,000–300,000 years ago (perhaps creating Adam),[135] and the third (and latest) 7,000 years ago. The hybrids of the third programme ...today control the world: "The Brotherhood which controls the world today is the modern expression of the Babylonian Brotherhood of reptile-Aryan priests and 'royalty' which came together there after the flood." [136][137] By "Aryan" he explains that he means "white"; this includes most Jews, whom he regards as having originated in the Caucasus.[138]

WHERE IS HIS PROOF?

EXAMPLES OF BAD WRITING (2)

1. I am not, indeed, sure whether it is not true to say that the Milton who once seemed not unlike a seventeenth-century Shelley had not become, out of an experience ever more bitter in each year, more alien (sic) to the founder of that Jesuit sect which nothing could induce him to tolerate.
Professor Harold Laski (Essay in Freedom of Expression).

2. Above all, we cannot play ducks and drakes with a native battery of idioms which prescribes egregious collocations of vocables as the Basic put up with for tolerate, or put at a loss for bewilder.
Professor Lancelot Hogben (Interglossia).

3. On the one side we have the free personality: by definition it is not neurotic, for it has neither conflict nor dream. Its desires, such as they are, are transparent, for they are just what institutional approval keeps in the forefront of consciousness; another institutional pattern would alter their number and intensity; there is little in them that is natural, irreducible, or culturally dangerous. But on the other side, the social bond itself is nothing but the mutual reflection of these self-secure integrities. Recall the definition of love. Is not this the very picture of a small academic? Where is there a place in this hall of mirrors for either personality or fraternity?
Essay on psychology in Politics (New York).

George Orwell, 'Politics & the English Language'

<https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/politics-and-the-english-language/>

EXAMPLES OF BAD WRITING (3)

4. All the 'best people' from the gentlemen's clubs, and all the frantic Fascist captains, united in common hatred of Socialism and bestial horror at the rising tide of the mass revolutionary movement, have turned to acts of provocation, to foul incendiarism, to medieval legends of poisoned wells, to legalize their own destruction of proletarian organizations, and rouse the agitated petty-bourgeoise to chauvinistic fervor on behalf of the fight against the revolutionary way out of the crisis.

Communist pamphlet.

5. If a new spirit is to be infused into this old country, there is one thorny and contentious reform which must be tackled, and that is the humanization and galvanization of the B.B.C. Timidity here will bespeak canker and atrophy of the soul. The heart of Britain may be sound and of strong beat, for instance, but the British lion's roar at present is like that of Bottom in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream – as gentle as any sucking dove. A virile new Britain cannot continue indefinitely to be traduced in the eyes or rather ears, of the world by the effete languors of Langham Place, brazenly masquerading as 'standard English'. When the Voice of Britain is heard at nine o'clock, better far and infinitely less ludicrous to hear aitches honestly dropped than the present priggish, inflated, inhibited, school-ma'amish arch braying of blameless bashful mewing maidens!

Letter in Tribune.