

Windbagery

Windbagery is the use (often the misuse) of long pretentious or pompous words or expressions in the attempt to impress the reader or listener. It is characteristic of bad political oratory. It is entirely inappropriate for planning reports, or indeed any respectable prose. Examples are:

Anticipate (for "expect")
As of (for "on", or for nothing at all, as in "as of today I start ...")
At this (particular) point in time (for "now" or "at present")
Escalate (for "grow", "rise", "increase", etc.)
Individual(s) (for "person" or "people")
In excess of (for "over" or "more than")
Initiate (for "start")
Innovative (for "new" or "novel")
Methodology (for "method")
On a [daily, weekly, regular etc.] basis (for "daily", "every day" etc., as the case may be)
Operationalise (for "start")
Personnel (for "people" or "staff")
Presently (for "now" or "currently"; this may also lead to confusion, as "presently" sometimes means "later")
Prior to (for "before")
Share with (for "tell")

Devaluation of Words

Devaluation of words is a particularly pernicious, and sadly common, form of windbagery. It means unnecessarily using a "stronger" word in place of another, examples being "escalate", as above, and "impact" for "effect" or "result". It is pernicious because it results in watering down the original "strong" sense of the word substituted. "Impact" is a good example; it has now almost completely lost the earlier sense of a sharp, dramatic effect: it has, in fact, lost its impact. So we have, for all practical purposes, lost a useful word and gained nothing.

Handle With Care, If At All

The following is a list of miscellaneous words and expressions which should be used cautiously, rarely, or not at all.

Administrate: no. The word is "administer" (or "manage").

Alternatives come only in pairs. Larger numbers are options or choices.

Basically has a perfectly legitimate meaning, roughly synonymous with "at bottom" or "in essence", but it has come to be used as an unneeded synonym for "generally". It is quite commonly, in fact, nothing more than a sort of verbal throat-clearing, or a nervous qualification, indicating that the writer (or more often, the speaker) is reluctant to make an unequivocal (not, by the way, "unequivocable") statement.

Concept means an idea, mental image, or theoretical construct. It is often used, though, so obscurely that it is hard to tell what meaning is intended. It could almost be classified as a vogue word, and as so often with vogue words, it is likely to be used with little thought to whether or not it is appropriate.

Decentralise, deconcentrate, disperse are among the commonest terms in the planner's trade lexicon, but since they have no "standard" definition their use may give rise to considerable confusion unless you explain clearly what you mean in each case.

Development means quite different things to different people and in different contexts. To planners it usually means urban growth in quantitative terms of built-up area and/or floor space, but this is really a distortion of the true meaning of the word. Properly used, "development" has qualitative connotations that are not necessarily appropriate when it is applied to a new subdivision or office tower. In fact we desperately need a new term to substitute for this sense of "development". Meanwhile, use the word cautiously, and make clear what you mean by it.

Endorsation: no. The word is "endorsement".

Exercise (noun) carries the connotation of training or practice. Only students should carry out "planning exercises".

Goals and objectives: very commonly used, but quite often with no clear explanation of the difference between a goal and an objective. If you use them, be sure that you make a clear and useful distinction.

Impact means, properly, a sharp or violent blow. If you simply mean "effect(s)", "result(s)" or "consequences", use one of those words. And "impact" is never a verb except in dentistry, and then only in the passive voice; don't write "impacted upon" when you just mean "affected" or "influenced". (See Devaluation of Words, above. However, this is probably another lost cause.)

Implement (verb) is regarded with distaste by some authorities, but it is so firmly entrenched in the planner's vocabulary that it would hardly be feasible to dislodge it altogether, especially where it is used in the form of a noun: "plan preparation and implementation". But use it sparingly; "carry out", "put into effect" and other expressions will usually substitute quite adequately.

In terms of ..., like "basically", has a proper use, as illustrated by "In terms of resource consumption and atmospheric pollution, the private car is a very serious environmental problem". Like "basically", though, "in terms of" has come to be grossly over-used and frequently misused. It is currently employed to represent almost any kind of linkage, association or comparison between different words or ideas, even when very simple words like "like" or "about" would be correct. It has become, in fact, the worst kind of buzzword, incessantly and jarringly repeated for little reason or none whatever. Use "in terms of" only if you are actually making a statement about something in terms of something else. Think about it.

Latin, French, etc. words and phrases, and their abbreviations: be sure you are using them properly; they are often misused. For example, "i.e." (id est) means "that is to say", or "more particularly", not "for example" (which is "e.g."). Check with your dictionary. And where appropriate, get the accents right.

Megalopolis: the concept, as originated by Gottman, Doxiadis et al., may be open to argument, but at least it is fairly well defined and is distinct from "metropolis", "conurbation", etc. Its meaning, however, often becomes completely lost in the promiscuous bandying about of what has become something of a vogue word for non-planners (such as journalists) perhaps even more than for planners. Don't fall into the trap of using "megalopolis" simply as a fancier-sounding, trendy substitute for more conventional terms.

n't (suffix): in this paper I use "couldn't" rather than "could not" (etc.) because its tone is intended to be informal. But don't (do not) use this form in formal reports unless you are quite sure it is the accepted practice. Even then, I don't really recommend it.

One of the only . . . : no. It's either "the only", or "one of the few" (or perhaps "one of the only two", three, etc.).

Ongoing is one of those coined words that have crept into the language to replace perfectly adequate words already in existence. It is in fact inferior to them because it is vaguer (which is probably why it came into use): for example, is an "ongoing dialogue" a dialogue which is taking place as you write (or speak), or a continuing dialogue which may or may not be in progress at the moment? Often, this is not at all clear. Try to avoid what has become almost a vogue word; use more precise words such as "current", "continuing", "continuous", etc., according to sense.

Organic is a seductive but dangerous word in a planning context, suggesting a pleasant but usually false biological analogy. It may so used as to imply a premise on which an argument is then based, although the premise has never actually been stated in such a way that it can be examined and challenged. In short, the use of "organic" is apt to be facile and misleading.

Per cent (not "percent") and *percentage*: use only when you are referring to a specific figure, not just in a general way to a part or proportion. Thus, "about half the residents seem to be in favour of the plan", not "approximately 50 per cent . . .".

Predominately: no. The word is "predominantly", despite the verb "to predominate".

Priorise (or *priorize*) must be conceded, reluctantly, to be useful shorthand for "arrange in order of priority". But it is unattractive (see Verbising, below), and it should definitely not be used for "give priority to".

Problematic has become a vogue word, employed to mean creating or involving a problem or difficulty. This is actually a recent change in meaning, probably out of ignorance, from "uncertain". Since it is still also used in the older sense, it is best to avoid it.

Rationalise has at least two distinct meanings. As "rearrange or reorganise in a more efficient or economical way" it is disliked by some authorities, and it is apt to be used rather vaguely. If you think that something should be rationalised, in that sense, elaborate a little.

Significant has come to be seriously over-used, almost ranking as a vogue word. Properly, it means "big enough to matter, or to need to be taken into account"; use it accordingly, and not just as a substitute for "large" or "important".

Situation is also badly over-used. Sometimes its use is appropriate, but often it could be discarded altogether as redundant (as in "my vacation has left me in a debt situation", for "my vacation has left me in debt"), or replaced to good effect with such terms as "circumstances" or "state of affairs".

Task force is a term gleefully adopted from the military, presumably because of its (often highly inappropriate) suggestion of vigour and grim determination. Applied to a cluster of civil servants, welfare council members or whatever, it is slightly ludicrous. "Working group", or "working party", or even just plain old "committee", is usually a good deal more suitable.

Time frame is usually an unnecessary substitute for "time" or "period".

Upcoming seems to be another product of the misguided propensity to make simple words longer and more elaborate. What is the difference between the "upcoming" council meeting and the "coming" council meeting?

Utilise (or utilize): no, unless there is a very good reason. In most cases "utilize" is merely yet another manifestation of the urge to replace a short, simple word with a longer, more impressive-sounding one. If you don't want to over-use "use", try "employ" or "make use of" sometimes.

Vision is another case of a useful word becoming trendy, hence over-used, hence devalued. Don't refer to your "vision" when you just mean the goal or end result you are trying to achieve.

-wise (suffix) sometimes enables one to avoid a long, clumsy construction, but it is unattractive and in most cases unnecessary. Instead of "moneywise, it will be costly", what's wrong with "it will be expensive"?

Verbising

Verbising is the illegitimate conversion of a noun or adjective into a verb, sometimes by adding the suffix "-ise" (or "-ize"). "Finalise" is a common example. Others are "to impact upon", "to dialogue" and "to target". It is usually unnecessary and often horrible, as in the word "verbise", which I have coined specially for the occasion. Generally speaking, don't do it.

Singular and Plural

There is a good deal of confusion about the singular and plural forms of certain nouns. The correct forms are:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
Appendix	appendices
Criterion	criteria
Datum	data
Dilemma	dilemmas
Forum	fora <u>or</u> forums*
Index	indices
Inuk	Inuit
Medium	media**
Megalopolis	megalopolises
	(if you <u>must</u> use it)
Metropolis	metropolises
Phenomenon	phenomena
Stratum	strata

* I regret to say that I once saw "foras" -- in a CIP publication.

** "Media" has come to be so generally used as a singular collective noun for the press, TV and radio, that to insist on treating it as plural when used in this sense would be merely eccentric; it remains, nevertheless, the plural form of "medium".

Problems of Gender

In time, the language will undoubtedly adapt itself to the principle of equal treatment of the sexes, and one day no-one except scholars will realize there was ever a problem. Meanwhile, we have to cope as best we can, and there are few rules; the following remarks are more reflections on the subject than an attempt to give firm direction.

-man as a suffix: in earlier editions of WAPR I pointed out that as "man" has the general meaning of "human being" as well as its gender-specific meaning, the use of "chairman" or "spokesman", for example, does not imply that the holder of the office is male, or ought to be. In principle, I still take this position, and some eminent women clearly agree; the women who headed the National Capital Commission and the Economic Council of Canada accepted the title of chairman.

Nevertheless, it is not for me, a male, to challenge the position of women who do not find this acceptable. My own practice now is to refer to "the chair", a reasonable extension of a parliamentary custom of long standing (as in "please address your remarks to the Chair"). Of course this won't work in such cases as "businessman" or "postman", where you should try to find reasonable substitutes. In some cases the existing word is really quite adequate; there is no reason other than custom why a "waiter" should be assumed to be male. However, try to avoid substituting "-person" for "-man" as your solution; it tends to have awkward and ugly results. Surely we can devise something more euphonious than "postperson" or "mailperson"?

I regret to say that I can think of no substitute for "man-made" (as distinguished from natural) that is neither inaccurate nor awkward.

Pronouns: again, the use of "he", "him" and "his" to embrace "she" and "her" is no longer generally acceptable. We deal with the difficulty with "she and he", "his/her", and occasionally "s/he". The problem is that constant repetition of these forms results in very clumsy, artificial-sounding prose. I have no solution to offer, other than doing your best to find wording that will avoid the need for such repetition. The answer may eventually lie in the use of the plural pronoun ("they", "them", "their") as a gender-free singular, as some writers have started to do, but this has not yet become a general practice.

A final word of advice, offered with some trepidation: don't let the quest for literary sexual equality trap you into the bizarre, hopelessly clumsy, or downright silly, as occasionally happens. I once wrote an article which included a hypothetical case involving a mayor, whom I referred to as "he". The female editor changed this to "he or she". I would have had no objection at all to my hypothetical mayor becoming a woman, but it seemed to me neither necessary nor useful to turn him into a person of indeterminate sex.

PART III

MISCELLANEA

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Dating

The date of your report is always important, sometimes critically so; yet it is omitted amazingly often. (My personal library includes a policy statement from a federal government department, lacking even the year of publication.) Always, always, always date your reports, at least to month and year, and to day of the month if possible (e.g., the date of the council meeting at which the report is formally presented).

(My own practice, which I recommend, is to put the date on everything I produce, even a scribbled reminder to myself.)

It is a common practice to use only numbers for dates (e.g. 6.6.92), but it is not one I recommend because there are at least three widely used arrangements (d/m/y, m/d/y, y/m/d), and confusion may easily result. If you write October 3, 1992 as 10.3.92, how can you be sure that it won't be read as March 10? How many people know that the 10th month is October without counting on their fingers, anyway? Either "Oct. 3" or "3 Oct." will be clearly and immediately understood.

When a report goes through different drafts, as reports usually do, each version should be dated. In a large office in which several people may contribute to the preparation of the report, it is helpful to number the drafts in sequence, and to identify on each those principally involved.

Headings and Sub-Headings

Well used, headings and sub-headings make a report easier to absorb by separating and identifying its components, and at the same time grouping them into related subjects. But don't overdo it. Use a new heading or sub-heading only when you want to indicate clearly that you have finished with one subject and are about to start on another. Otherwise, they not only lose their purpose, but actually make your report harder to read. Furthermore, they begin to look like padding (and probably are).

If you use sub-headings as well as major headings, it is important that the difference between them be clear. It can be extremely confusing for the reader when he or she is not sure whether what he or she is reading is on a new subject, or only another aspect of the same subject. Use identifying numbers and/or letters, "caps", underlining, overprinting, indenting and similar devices to make the relationship of the different subdivisions as clear as possible. Here is an illustration of several options:

I BUILDINGS

I.A RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

I.A.1 Apartment Buildings

I.A.1.a High-Rise Apartment Buildings

Instead of using I, I.A, etc., you can use 1, 1.1, 1.1.1 etc.; but that exposes you to the temptation of going on subdividing indefinitely, which is a mistake. More than four levels of subdivision, at most, are seldom either justified or conducive to clarity.

Paragraphs and Sentences

A paragraph is a minor subdivision of your text, dealing with an identifiable topic of its own. As a general rule, it should be possible for the reader to pick out a central statement, in a sentence or two, on which the rest of the paragraph elaborates. Also, short passages may be isolated as paragraphs for the sake of emphasis. Some reports, however, read as if written according to some artificial rule arbitrarily limiting a paragraph to half a dozen lines or so, presumably with the idea of breaking the text into bite-sized chunks to help the semi-literate reader. If anything, the effect is to make the text harder to follow because the natural breaks in the exposition are lost among the arbitrary ones. It is also "choppy" to read.

This is not the place for a discussion of basic sentence structure; anyone who needs that needs more help than this paper can give or is intended to give. But assuming that you can indeed compose a grammatical sentence, remember to keep it simple. That doesn't mean that you should write Dick and Jane prose, only that you

should make sure that your reader doesn't have to struggle through a tangle of clauses and sub-clauses to find out what you mean. Ignore arbitrary rules about the maximum allowable number of words in a sentence, but remember that it takes a skilful writer to compose a long, complex sentence that doesn't have to be re-read to convey its meaning. If you find that you have got yourself stuck in one, you would be wise to think about how you might express yourself slightly differently in order to make your argument easier for your reader to follow.

Commas

The placing of commas is not just something for pedants to worry about. It is wise to remember that it can affect not merely the clarity of a passage, but its actual meaning. Yet regrettably often, text is sprinkled with commas more or less at random, as if the writer has little idea what purpose they are meant to serve but feels that some ought to be thrown in anyway. A comma marks a natural break in a sentence, or marks off a distinct clause within it. (In the latter case, unless the clause falls at the end of the sentence there should be a comma at the end of it as well as before it; this is often omitted.) A good general guide to the use of commas is to put them in where you would pause momentarily if you were carefully reading your text aloud.

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks, inverted commas, or "quotes", are used to indicate that a passage is, in fact, quoted from somewhere else. They can also be employed to pick out a word or expression for some other reason, for example to identify it as slang or as being used in an unconventional way. They should not, however, be used for emphasis, or to draw the reader's attention, despite a regrettably common practice.

PART IV

FINISHING AND PRODUCING THE REPORT

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Preparing Final Copy

Whether your report takes the form of a page or two of typescript, or of several fat, bound, printed, lavishly illustrated volumes, it should be attractive to the eye, easy to handle, easy to follow, easy to read, and free of spelling, grammatical and typographical errors. Even if it is only a few pages on a minor zoning change, it warrants attention to things like layout, use of headings and sub-headings, and accuracy of spelling, punctuation and print. After all, you want it to be read, and furthermore, you presumably don't want the reader to be unnecessarily irritated by it. At the very least, this means checking the draft -- after you are satisfied with its content -- for things like grammar, spelling, punctuation, accuracy of references, etc.; getting the necessary changes made; proof-reading the corrected copy; correcting the mistakes; and checking the corrections.

(Preferably, in proof-reading one person should read the original aloud to a second person who checks the new copy; if possible, neither you nor the typist should be one of these two, but you, the author, must do a final read-through.)

Word processing makes the job easy for the typist, but no easier than it ever was for you, the author. Word processing, in fact, adds to the glitches you need to watch for; is there a heading left stranded at the bottom of a page while the text starts at the top of the next page, for example? It is up to you to keep checking until you are sure that everything is as it should be. Something else to keep an eye on is the breaking of words at the ends of lines. If this cannot be avoided, it should be done at an appropriate place in the word, preferably between syllables. Thus, "father-hood", not "fat-herhood". (The first edition of this publication provided an excellent example of how not to do it in "pain-staking"; the press provides us with others daily.)

If your report is to be a modest typed document, and you have a competent typist, setting it up for production is fairly straightforward. Nevertheless, there are some rules to remember. Be sure there is a title page which clearly identifies the report, with the date. Don't be miserly with margins and line spacing; cramped text is unattractive to look at and difficult to read (1½ spaces between lines and 3 between paragraphs gives a pleasant open appearance without being unduly wasteful of

space). Pages should be numbered. There should be a clear, consistent system of headings and sub-heads. It is easy to devise a standard format that suits you; once you have done so, a good secretary will ensure that your reports are produced accordingly.

This is the minimum procedure, suitable for a short, routine, typed report. Even so, it takes time, time for which, very often, inadequate allowance is made. If your report is to be of the long, elaborate, printed variety, these things and probably many others will have to be attended to before the report ever goes to the printer. The time involved, of course, increases accordingly. The editing of a substantial report is a long, painstaking, complex business. Don't underestimate what it entails, or the time it takes.

Often, the written text is only part of a planning report, not always even the most important part. Yet it is quite common for maps, diagrams, tables, graphs etc. to be neglected until after the text is written, then to be executed hastily, possibly sloppily and even inaccurately, yet still perhaps delaying production of the report. Think about them early on, and have them prepared while the writing is being done. They should be clear and readily understandable. Don't force the reader to puzzle out -- or guess -- what you are trying to show, or to decipher tiny lettering or unclear legends. Use appropriate professional assistance if you can; remember that many draftsmen, even the most competent of technicians, have little sense of design or of how graphic material "reads", i.e., conveys its message clearly and effectively, particularly to the non-specialist. Similarly, ensure that tables of figures are clearly presented and adequately explained; and remember that such information is often best conveyed by graphs and charts. You have lived with your work for weeks, months, or even years. It is not easy for you to see it through the eyes of the reader to whom it is completely new. But it is essential that you try.

Producing the Report

It is a very common mistake, and often a costly one, to assume that the job of "getting the report out" ends when the last word is written and the last map drawn. Your job may be over, but it is quite likely that someone else's will be just starting. For that matter, you may also be the "someone else", especially if you work in a small office; but even if you aren't, you should be aware of what "someone else" is going to have to cope with -- at least, if you want your report submitted anywhere near your deadline.

Right at the start, think about the number of copies you will need. This may affect your budget, your schedule, and even the production process you decide on. Think about the sort of physical product you're aiming at. An attractively designed, printed, bound document is agreeable and may be justified, depending on its "market", but there is a price to pay, in time as well as money. If it's what you want, allow for it in your budget and in your schedule. And remember, if you start rewriting after the copy has gone to the printer, you can forget about your original schedule, not to mention your cost estimates. The way your graphics are done will be affected by the intended production process too, especially if you plan to use colour. Plan ahead.

Regardless of how simple or how elaborate your report may be, there are things you should keep in mind about its physical assembly. If it is printed on one side of the page only, maps, tables, etc. that read sideways (along the length of the page rather than across its width) should be bound along the top, not the bottom. However, if both sides of the page are used, such material should all read in the same direction; that is, the reader should not have to keep turning the book around to read maps or tables bound in top to top. If there are foldouts, make sure that it will be possible to unfold them easily after the pages are fastened or bound.

Professional Services

If your report is a massive affair dealing with, let's say, a comprehensive study for a multi-million-dollar rapid transit system, professional editing and graphic design are almost indispensable. A good editor will, in fact, make a valuable contribution even to a much more modest piece of work, not only ensuring that it is clear, readable and grammatical, but shepherding it through all the steps from rough draft to finished product.

Caution is needed in the employment of both editor and graphic designer, though. While a really competent editor, capable of improving your prose without losing or changing its meaning, is a priceless asset, there is the other kind. Until you gain complete confidence in your editor -- and even after that -- you must make sure that after she (usually the editor is a woman) has finished revising your text, it still says what you want it to say, the way you want to say it.

Keep a firm hand on your graphic designer, too. The vital characteristic of your report's physical form is ease of reading, which is not necessarily the same thing as attractive appearance; and designers have been known to sacrifice the former to the latter. And even if you can afford it, an overly lavish publication is to be avoided; don't lay yourself open to accusations of extravagance. A report can be well designed without looking like a coffee-table book. By the same token, be very cautious about unconventional shapes and sizes; they are often costly to produce, awkward to read, and inconvenient to store.

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Remember, your report is meant to be read and understood. If it isn't, you have wasted your efforts. It is worthwhile to make the reading and understanding, if not pleasurable, at least as painless as possible. And remember, it takes time.