

Ban the banned list? (That's a #QTWTAIN of course)

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Cliché may be the enemy of good writing, but pedantry can also be a block to open communications.

Social media in particular is more demotic, conversational and irregular. That is why people like it. It talks our language.

Insisting on perfection privileges professional communicators. In the totality of the public sphere the stylistic quality of what is said matters less than the content. To an extent, quality also matters less than the quantity or the potency of what is said.

(For eg I would rather millions of Egyptians spoke out on Facebook in cliché than just a few wrote in well-hone prose in a national newspaper).

Elitists, especially those who feel threatened by the public having a voice, emphasise form over function because it preserves their power over language. While I enjoy and participate in The Independent's John Rentoul's [#BannedList campaign](#) against cliché, I also worry that it goes too far. I have recommended it alongside Orwell and Waterhouse as an aid to good writing, but as both those journalistic style masters would say, clichés do sometimes hit the nail on the head.



When I write a book I desperately hope that it is well-written, that it avoids cliché and makes an argument without resorting to trite metaphors, over-used imagery and formulaic style. I am lucky enough to have publishers with editors who run the rule ([#bannedlist?](#)) over what I have written and improve it. More important, though, is that I have something worth saying.

But when I am bashing out 140 characters in the strange jargon we use on Twitter, or stuttering through a radio interview, I think we should be allowed the occasional stylistic faux-pas or verbal tic. Certainly, less-practiced communicators such as experts, citizens or participants in an issue or news story should not be inhibited by the relentless style watchdogs.

At least a couple of the examples given before John's interview on [BBC Radio 4's Today](#) programme were of a social scientist who clearly doesn't do much broadcasting. John himself used the redundant mannerism 'I mean' three times in the same item.

Lynn Truss probably did the world of communication a favour with the irritatingly jolly grammatical fastidiousness of *Eats Shoots And Leaves*. Likewise John Rentoul has enough of a sense of humour to see the hazards as well as the profit in his campaign. They are meant to be correctives rather than regimes.

We live in a world where words are twisted and debased. The Internet adds to the visible volume of ill-considered writing. However, there is a danger that what should be useful reminder turns into a witch hunt.

Generally, there is a kind of linguistic Gresham's Law at work here. Those who use clichés or irritating jargon will not get their message across as well. Attention and traffic will tend towards those with something to say in an intelligible way, like John Rentoul on politics.

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