

jcannonbooks

Because everybody
needs an editor . . .

and a newsletter



Travels with Johnny

I recently read *The Splendid and the Vile*, an excellent account of Winston Churchill's first year as prime minister. Just when you thought the world had enough books about Churchill, along comes Erik Larson with this fascinating look at how Winnie pulled Britain through the Blitz and its indiscriminate death.



While Churchill was guiding the war effort, rallying citizens to endure deadly air raids, taking two baths a day, drinking brandy (and whatever else seemed to be available), visiting neighborhoods that bombs had leveled, napping, smoking cigars, and trying to persuade FDR to enter the war sooner rather than later, he found time to upbraid ministerial staff about their flabby and uninspired report writing, in particular the widespread reliance on bureaucratic jargon. This surely qualifies Churchill for the editing hall of fame.

Larson quotes Churchill as criticizing the use of “woolly phrases that are mere padding” and encouraging writers to use a more conversational style.

“The results would be better for everyone,” Churchill wrote. He explained that the sort of writing he appreciated “may at first seem rough as compared with the flat surface of officialese jargon. But the saving of time will be great, while the discipline of setting out the real points concisely will prove an aid to clear

thinking.”

Churchill has his detractors (who doesn't?), but you can't fault him in this quest. Larson found the above quote in *The Churchill War Papers* (Volume 2, page 636), collected and published by Martin Gilbert, a leading Churchill biographer.



In 1978, even scruffy Yanks like me could walk right up to 10 Downing Street, where Winston Churchill lived during the Blitz, to snap a photo of the famous entrance. Afterward, my friends and I found 11 Downing Street

to be unguarded, so Jerry, below left, and Mike filled in until the Brits got it sorted. Prime ministers have lived at Number 11 since 1997, but the buildings are connected. The door at Number 10 still gets all the press.



Letter to the editor

Last month's newsletter prompted Pat F., a subscriber in far-flung Escondido, California, to pose a question about my use of the word gameplan as a verb. I was happy to answer and pleased to learn that the reach of the newsletter and blog extends so far, practically ten miles from the garret where it is produced. If you have purged all memory of last month's newsletter, you can read it here: [Big Obvious Link to Newsletter on jcannonbooks Website](#).

From: Pat F.

To: john@jcannonbooks.com

Subject: April newsletter and blog item alert from jcannonbooks

Dear Editor Johnny,

We know that plan can be a noun or a verb.

We know that gameplan is accepted as a noun.

Is it a verb?

Asking for a friend with too much time on his hands.

From: john@jcannonbooks.com

To: Pat F.

Subject: Re: April newsletter and blog item alert from jcannonbooks

I have made it so.

From: Pat F.

To: john@jcannonbooks.com

Subject: Re: April newsletter and blog item alert from jcannonbooks

Good enough for me, Editor Johnny.

There must be rules. Usually.

Do we have the energy to debate split infinitives or whether a sentence can start with but or and? Of course not. [Click here to go to my blog and read about rules you can ignore. It's worth the click.](#)

Plus, you get a [preview of next month's blog item](#), an interview with an award-

winning mystery writer.

Plus plus, the only reason I send you this handy newsletter is to entice you to go to my blog.

**Kind regards,
jcannonbooks**

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