Mind your language

Posted on Oct 27, Posted by Lynne Powell Category Journalism

Who care's about apostrophe's? I do, and those slips *were* intentional, by the way.



I also care about all punctuation, and spelling and grammar, so no doubt this blog will peppered with errors that you'll be pleased to point out. And quite right too.

There is a school of thought that all those rules we learnt at our English master's knee are no longer relevant in this fast-moving world ruled by txt spk and foreshortened tweets. But I don't agree.

I'm all for creative manipulation of our language to nudge the boundaries, open tired eyes and fit the bill - after all, we journalists have our own set of rules. Oh, is that a full stop? Must be time for a new paragraph.

Language and grammar are oft twisted by novelists to make a point or create a stir. James Joyce's Molly Bloom's Soliloquy, which closes Ulysses, has no punctuation whatsoever, for instance. Meanwhile, his dreamlike Finnegans Wake shakes and rattles 'the rules' to breaking point, and produced a whole rainshinebow of colourful new words. There's more on Mr Joyce at www.jamesjoyce.ie if you want to revisit him.

Clever Anthony Burgess (try www.anthonyburgess.org) invented and new language for Clockwork Orange, and then there's e e cummings of course...

I approve of all that. I am all for using language to transform, and to shatter preconceptions. However, in order to do that effectively, both the author and the reader need to know the rules before they are broken, otherwise neither will get it.

So I say we should be picky about what we write and read, in order to reinforce what's right and wrong. We should care about apostrophes, spelling and grammas and make sure that everybody else does too.

Would I go as far as telling the greengrocer to mind his pea's? Possibly, if I was in there buying and he clearly didn't know his onions. I did tell the local manager of a major supermarket chain about his 1000's of bargains, but in a nice way.

I'm not self-righteous or smug, because nobody's perfect and we all make mistakes. That's why it pays to get someone else to look over your wise words before you let them go public (oh, OK, since you ask... just contact us via our website).

Your message is crucial and so is the language you use. We can have fun and make an even bigger impact when we rock the regulations, but only when we all grasp them to start with.

PS: We can also provide a tick box grammar and corporate style guide for your employees to ensure that everyone's pinging from the same hymn sheet on your intranet, your website and in all your business communications.

Tags: crucial , grammar , james joyce , punctuation , spelling , style guide