

Winston Churchill Gives Communication Advice

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In a legendary anecdote, described by Richard Lanham in *Revising Prose*, an American general asks Winston Churchill to read a draft of a speech the general has prepared. The following quote is Churchill's critique of the general's speech:

Too many Latinate polysyllabics like "systematize, prioritize, finalize." And then the passives. What if I [Churchill] had said—instead of "We shall fight on the beaches"—"Hostilities will be engaged on the coastal perimeter"?

You can improve communication by changing lofty words into everyday words, except where a lofty word carries a precise and necessary meaning. Here are some examples of words you can easily change:

Lofty/Polysyllabic Word	Concrete Alternative
Ascertain	Figure Out
Cognizant	Aware
Expeditious	Fast
Germane	Relevant
Multitudinous	Many
Obviate	Prevent
Ramification	Result
Pursuant to	About

Your business culture may encourage the use of unnecessarily lofty words—Churchill's polysyllabic words. One communication expert refers to such language as pseudo-speak. Whatever you call it, do your best to get rid of it. Your colleagues will be grateful. They might even follow your example.

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