

Gandon, Mike. *English for International Journalists*, Oxford: Routledge, 2013.
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By Peter H. Martyn

This slim volume fills a need. At a time when more and more reporting is done by journalists whose first language is not English, a book like *English for International Journalists* has been wanting.

English is such an irregular language. Its arcane rules about articles, for example, are difficult for even native English speakers — and I, for one, have a tough time explaining those rules to students. Then there are usages and vocabulary peculiar to news writing which, to make things more challenging, vary from continent to continent in the English-speaking world. Furthermore, cultural differences among peoples make even posing questions during an interview a fraught endeavour: in many countries, a direct question, at least one without a long, deferential preamble, would be considered the height of rudeness, yet the successful interviewer must be polite without appearing obsequious.

Mike Gandon takes on these challenges in a readable, accessible manner. For my money, the section on articles (Chap. 4, pp. 30-34) is worth the price of the book. Gandon uses examples, canvassing possible erroneous usages and explaining clearly why they're incorrect before offering his "Rewrite" — the correct answer. He does this patiently, with repeated line-by-line analyses of real news stories. An English-as-a-second-language writer can refer back to them time and again until correct idiomatic usage becomes second nature.

English for International Journalists's 10 pages on the Language of Impartial Reporting (Chap. 11) discusses the thoughtful, critical word use that separates journalism from a lot of writing that's out on the web these days — the opinionated language that tends to inflame rather than setting out factual matter which the interested public can use to bolster debate. It's an important chapter for all aspiring news writers and a worthwhile refresher for practising journalists.

The book begins with a short, useful chapter on Making Contact — the essential skill of getting the interview that many find initially difficult. How to contact someone by telephone firmly but politely with "simple, direct questions which do not cause offence," how to parry inappropriate requests for an advance look at the questions to be asked, and business-like use of email to contact or reply to someone are other topics.

The chapter on Interviewing has a useful discussion of open-ended versus closed questions, pointing out that the 5W+H adverbs pose inherently open-ended questions. How to interview distraught or traumatized persons without scaring them into silence is an essential skill, as is how to deal with the challenging, unwilling interviewee. Broadcast interviewing is covered in detail, with a concise look at the kind of questions that keep the viewer or listener in the loop while maintaining the flow of a live-to-air interview.

Some Tricky Grammar covers not only articles but tenses, such as present perfect and simple past — "Both are used when referring to past events. The difference between them is a matter of emphasis and perspective." Gandon's examples, taken from real news,

elucidate. Tenses in headlines are covered — in print, online and broadcast — are explained with examples, and the tricky subject of attributing quotes deserves its 5½ pages. Active vs. passive voice are covered, though I'd like to see some examples of the use of passive voice in crime/court reporting where it's used to avoid incriminating a suspect.

Prepositions get a short chapter to themselves, with clear examples, as do phasal verbs, those followed by an adverb or preposition, whose shifts in meaning can be puzzling for non-native speakers, e.g. “to back down” vs. “to back up.”

Most of the second half of *English for International Journalists* is devoted to chapters on “The Language of Journalism” including clear writing (what one of my mentors used to call “light, bright and tight”) with George Orwell's admonition to “Never use a long word when a short one will do,” and an undated BBC endorsement of the conversational form: “Write a story as you would tell it to a friend.” (I interviewed a U.S. science reporter a few years ago who told me how she gets PhDs to simplify complex ideas for online video interviews: She hears them out, then says, “Now imagine I'm your next-door neighbour: explain that to me as you would talking across the fence while you're flipping burgers.”)

Broadcast Language has useful tidbits such as “Sentences are short, each comprising one thought” (a good rule to follow in print, too, when you're confronted with hard-to-explain concepts), and in “broadcast writing ... information is released in the form of a drip-feed, one word at a time.”

There's a short chapter on blogs — “A blog is what you want it to be” — and timeliness. And The Language of Sustained Argument gives examples of something as simple (and oft-misused) as starting a sentence with “And.”

Sensitive Language explains the pitfalls and proper use of red-flag words on subjects such as conflict, disability, ethnicity and gender. Quoting from both real news stories and policy manuals of agencies and news outlets such as the BBC, the Guardian, Britain's National Union of Journalists and Thomson-Reuters, Gandon's examples explain how to use words from “activist” to “terrorist” and many in between, as well as pointing out potential blunders such as using now-archaic terms that have become unacceptable.

Chap. 14, The Language of the Newsroom, is essential reading: “Journalists speak to each other in jargon, just like members of other professions ...” Gandon keeps it up to date, with terminology one's likely to encounter in multimedia newsrooms as well as those dedicated to print and broadcast, and covers North American newsroom vocabulary as well as the U.K.'s.

Fun Phrases comprises an amusing list of common clichés and uncommon metaphors, some of which are sure to get the most sober reader smiling. And the final chapter, Common Mistakes, is a brief review of usages covered earlier with examples of misused articles, prepositions, etc.

There are exercises at the end of each chapter for those so inclined; answers are found at the back of the book.

A couple of elements deserve critique: The Interviewing chapter goes into tedious detail on “interrogative interviewing,” a section that could be abbreviated in future editions, and I’d appreciate a slightly fuller discussion, in the same chapter, of what constitutes an open question — although I am delighted by Gandon’s examples of how the 5Ws+H are open-ended questions.

His discussion of tenses would benefit hugely from a summary chart of what’s been covered, not just the quiz questions at the end, so readers could review all of them in one place. Likewise a chart at the end of the section on prepositions would be a worthwhile summary and review tool.

Finally, I’d like to see the “straw man” argument included in the chapter on The Language of Sustained Argument, since opinion writers need to recognize it when politicians and others use it.

All in all, *English for International Journalists* is a commendable package, useful not only to its target audience but, I suspect, to many who may feel their education has failed to give them the “way with words” they’d like to have.

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