

Department of Conference Services

A GUIDE TO WRITING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS



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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND PRINTING

Nearly two decades after its first publication, W. H. Hindle's wise and witty booklet *A Guide to Writing for the United Nations* has lost none of its value and appeal. Those twenty years have coincided with a period of intense international activity and this has been reflected in the work of the Secretariat, which has grown rapidly in both volume and complexity. Every day, in response to requests by intergovernmental bodies, the Secretariat is engaged in drawing up numerous reports, studies and compilations of statistics exploring the vast array of international problems with which the United Nations is concerned and then translating them into six languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) for the information of Member States in taking decisions. Not surprisingly, the documents and records in which all this information is embodied have swelled to alarming proportions. What one of my predecessors in office referred to, in his preface to the first edition, as the "vast flow of documentation" has now become a tidal wave. And the need to limit and control it has become a matter of compelling, if not obsessive, concern both to Secretariat officials and to the members of delegations that have to read these documents, master their contents and take a position on them on behalf of their Governments. In this endeavour of control and limitation, W. H. Hindle's helpful and unpretentious *Guide* has something important to say.

Writing for the United Nations, Hindle rightly contends, has special difficulties, requirements and constraints. What the United Nations says must be couched in an idiom intelligible to the nationals of 158 different Member States varying greatly in language, tradition, structure and political philosophy. Moreover, most documents written for the use of United Nations deliberative bodies must be readily translatable into languages as culturally disparate as, say, Spanish and Chinese. But writing for bureaucratic organizations need not be dull, plodding, repetitious or mechanical; on the contrary, official writing can be excellent of its kind and the conscientious application of the principles laid down in this little volume will go far towards achieving that result. Annex II takes aim at bad official writing and is replete with horrifying examples, which are always illuminating and sometimes hilarious. Unfortunately, some of the battles the author waged against locutions which drew his ire have long ago been lost: what bureaucracy could now operate without such words as "implement", "as appropriate", "clarification" and "breakdown"? Who knows what other banalities and newly

minted words and phrases we may, reluctantly, learn to live with? However that may be, Mr. Hindle's genial *Guide* will continue to provide a model of elegance and good taste for all aspiring or veteran writers for international organizations who care to heed his admonitions.

As the United Nations prepares to enter the fifth decade of its existence, the present reissue of this serious but delightful treatise on writing by W. H. Hindle, who died in 1967, is affectionately dedicated to his memory.

Johan Theron
Chief Editor
Department of Conference Services
19 January 1984

PREFACE

Writing cannot be taught by handbooks. It demands a practised ear, courage, modesty, vigilance and perseverance. There is, therefore, no assurance that this Guide will produce good writers. But there is every assurance that its readers will be refreshed, amused and encouraged, and that they will turn to their unfinished work with a keener awareness of the pitfalls that surround their efforts.

The United Nations produces a vast quantity of documentation on a great variety of subjects. The General Assembly and its Committees, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions, the regional economic commissions, the many conferences and special seminars, all require the preparation of reports, background papers, surveys and special studies. The subjects treated in these documents and publications range from the scientific aspects of the uses of atomic energy and the role of technology in economic development, to questions of human rights, the prevention of crime and juvenile delinquency, the nationality of married women and the rehabilitation of the disabled. Nothing that could possibly be a matter of concern to the world community is ignored in the publications of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Much of this output is of considerable interest to United Nations delegates, government officials who deal with these subjects, and to specialists and students. Much of it is prepared by outstanding experts.

How to limit and control this vast flow of documentation is a matter of special concern to officials of the Secretariat, prodded regularly by the ever-watchful Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. But a matter of equal, if not greater, concern is how to make these publications more readable, more manageable, and thus more widely and more easily accessible. The two concerns are complementary.

The hope of contributing to the attainment of both objectives inspired the preparation of this Guide. It is the work of W. H. Hindle, a member of the United Nations Secretariat from 1947 until his retirement in 1964. During that time, Mr. Hindle served as précis-writer, as editor and finally as Chief of the Editorial Control Section in the Office of Conference Services, where he supervised the work of an international team of editors. Before joining the Secretariat, Mr. Hindle wrote on foreign affairs for a number of British newspapers and journals. He was literary

editor of the Evening Standard and editor of the Review of Reviews and the English Review. During the war he served with the British diplomatic service. He is the author of Portrait of a Newspaper (1937) and Foreign Correspondent (1939).

Mr. Hindle's knowledge of United Nations documentation and his personal experience with it are his credentials for offering to his colleagues—and to any others who may happen to listen in—the advice on drafting contained in this Guide. This he does with urbanity, charm, wisdom and wit, and with profit to his readers.

Leo Malania
Chief Editor
Executive Office of
the Secretary-General

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I. THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

The purpose of writing is to communicate facts or thoughts, usually in order to inform, to instruct, to entertain or to persuade. It sounds a purpose easy to achieve. We do it every day. We write to Aunt Priscilla that the cat has just had kittens; our children at summer camp that they must not spend any more money on riding lessons; a friend in Rome that a funny thing happened on the way to the Capitol; our Deputy (Congressman, Member of Parliament) that, if he does (or does not) vote in favour of medical care for the aged, he will not have our vote next time.

Because of this apparent ease of everyday communication, it is commonly assumed that "anyone can write". Most people would take it for granted that a physician had followed a long course of training, that an aeroplane mechanic had served a period of apprenticeship, that a translator's ability to translate had been tested. But "anyone" can write. The opposite, of course, is true. Not "anyone" can write — to be read. Except for a favoured few, writing is a difficult art and has to be learned. The first part of the learning consists in realizing that writing involves two persons — the writer and the reader. The reader is the more important: "he does not write whose poems no man reads".

Unless, therefore, we are merely stringing words together like the penny-a-liner, our writing must be governed not only by the nature of the subject, but also by the nature of the addressee. To take the elementary examples given above, in writing to Aunt Priscilla we would use a tone and a vocabulary different from the tone and vocabulary we would use in writing to our Deputy. We would not tell Aunt Priscilla that the marmalade cat next door was the protagonist in the case of the kittens. Nor would we tell the Deputy that his last vote was arcane (unless, of course, we wished to insult him without risk of a libel action).

If, then, forethought is required in this elementary writing, how much more forethought is required in writing about the new and more complex subjects which occupy the mind of man today! Technicians in these new subjects have by-passed the problem by developing specialized vocabularies which enable them to communicate among

themselves. But their jargons—the editorial technician's technical term for technical terms—have grown like weeds until the flowers of information are hidden not only from laymen but even from specialists in other branches. How many physicists, for example, would understand what a demographer means when he speaks of "cohorts"?

Yet United Nations organs, which collectively contain a small minority of specialists and a big majority of laymen, and their servant the Secretariat, which contains a larger proportion of specialists but still a big majority of laymen, must deal with the problems raised by the new branches of knowledge, as well as with the traditional political, social and economic problems of mankind.

II. WRITING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Writing for the United Nations could not be easier than writing for the public at large. It is in fact more difficult for reasons peculiar to the nature of the Organization.

The task of those writing in the Secretariat is limited in some respects. We do not, as the author writing for a commercial publisher must usually do, have so to write that our writings will bring the publisher a profit (although that discipline is not to be despised: there is some stimulus to a writer in the knowledge that his reader will expect value for money received). We do not have to entertain and we must not attempt to instruct. The Secretariat is a principal organ of the United Nations, but we, its individual members, are also servants of the other organs. Our duty is not to instruct them; it is to serve them in whatever manner they themselves may instruct. Nor can we plead causes other than those common to all mankind, and even then only when so instructed.

Our duty is to inform. It sounds a simple duty. It is not. For those we have to inform are the representatives of more than one hundred nations varying in language, culture, tradition and mode of thought. We have to inform them in a language acceptable to them all, often in a language which is foreign to many of them, sometimes in a language which is foreign to ourselves.

Even when he is writing in his own tongue, an international official may have to convey ideas that are foreign

to it. Cadaster, for example, might not be immediately intelligible to all the English-speaking peoples. Even between countries which have a language in common, there are differences in the meaning of words. A French-speaking colleague, travelling recently in a French-speaking part of North America, stopped at a village store for a beer. There was no beer, but, said the proprietor compassionately, "*nous avons des liqueurs*". Curious to explore this generally urban taste in rural surroundings, our colleague asked what kind of liqueurs were to be had.

... "*Alors, Monsieur, nous avons du Coca-Cola* ..."

Nor are these the only special difficulties encountered in writing for the United Nations. Some United Nations resolutions, such as that embodying the Standard Form for information on non-self-governing territories, go into such detail that they leave no possibility of writing other than a stereotyped report. Others are often so deliberately vague as to require research into the debates on them in order to find out exactly what the authors intended.

Over the years some United Nations reports required by the Charter or rules of procedure have become set in a mould from which it is difficult to break out. The mould may not always appear the best possible, but to stay in it may be a convenient way of averting a resumption of debate.

Other reports may be produced by a team of men of varied specializations, some of whom are writing in a language not their own. The variance of specialization can result in the piling of jargon upon jargon. The writer writing in a language not his own is apt to believe that the sonorous polysyllables of previous United Nations reports must be used, particularly when these polysyllables have acquired an aura of sanctity through enshrinement in resolutions. Thus, many laymen for whom a report was intended may find it intelligible only after long and vexatious study.

Ideally, all such reports should be rewritten by one hand. Sometimes they are. But all authors are sensitive men. Technicians are especially so because they doubt whether the rewriting layman can so accurately interpret what they mean as not to leave it open to misinterpretation. They also tend to fear that their fellow members will

not accept them as authorities unless they write in the jargon of the club. Their fears must be put to rest. We cannot be as brutal as J. M. Barrie, who said half a century ago that "the man of science appears to be the only man who has something to say just now—and the only man who does not know how to say it". Most of us must also admit that we are not as learned as the technicians are and defer to their judgement in case of disagreement. We still can and should point out that their great knowledge will be of greater value to the world if it can be communicated to others.

Some United Nations organs set time-limits for advance circulation of their reports which make it almost impossible to bring a report up to date, especially when it must be translated into one or more languages before the organ meets. Others will require a report overnight.

The fact that many United Nations reports are published in several languages also imposes on us an obligation to avoid the loose phrase and the murky word. We must not overburden our colleagues in the translation services. Incidentally, if we are familiar with two of the working languages—as, ideally, we should be—we can test our clarity by trying to translate what we have written from one language into the other. We can even make the test within our own language, by considering whether what we have written could be expressed in other words. If the wording could not be changed without damage to the meaning, however slight, then we are as near perfection as is humanly possible.

Clarity is as difficult to achieve in an international bureaucracy as in national bureaucracies. Bureaucrats are under constant pressure to "play it safe", to hide a fact rather than state it, so as to leave a back door open for escape from the critics in front. Bureaucratic caution is, understandably, especially evident in political reports. Unfortunately, it carries over into non-political matters where the substance of a report is mandatory, but the form could be at the Secretariat's discretion. There is a Secretariat report on traffic in women which reproduced a Member State's opinion that the reason for the prevalence of prostitution might be "a natural tendency to promiscuity". The opinion was a truism recorded on the clay tablets of Ur of the Chaldees more than five thousand years before. (It was also an evasion, since the United

Nations is primarily interested not in the psychological causes of prostitution, but in its economic and social consequences.)

Finally, even when writing in our native tongue, we are to some extent the slaves of ungainly and tautological precedent. When a resolution calls upon an organ to "implement" something, we may have to write about "implementation", even though the word has been characterized by an authority on the English language as "the barbarous jargon of the Scottish Bar". If the title of an ILO convention is "Equal Remuneration for Equal Work", we cannot substitute a plain word like "pay" for "remuneration" when quoting it. The Trusteeship Council and similar bodies have held "oral hearings" for so long that it would serve no purpose to point out now that a hearing could hardly be ocular.

After this catalogue, you may feel like echoing Omar Khayyam's cry of despair:

*Oh Thou who didst with Pitfall and with Gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestination round
Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin?*

There are, however, what the weather forecasters in London would call "bright intervals" in this otherwise gloomy sky. Writing in a language other than our own is a hard task, but not impossible. Joseph Conrad, a Pole; Ford Madox Hueffer, a German by origin; and George Santayana, a Spaniard, wrote much better English than many English-speaking people. Julian Green, an American; Ernest Psichari, a Greek; and Oscar Wilde, an Irishman, wrote excellent French. Some journalists, writing under greater pressure than we, still write accurate, clear and logical stories.

As for what we may consider the roadblocks strewn in our path by United Nations practices, they are the facts of life we have to live with. Properly regarded, they may even prove an incentive to the accurate, clear, concise, consistent writing which is the kind most desirable in an international organization.

III. BEFORE WRITING

Accuracy, clarity, conciseness, consistency are fine words, finer and rarer things. How are they to be achieved in United Nations documents?

The first step to this end consists in giving thought, before writing, to why we are going to write, what we are going to write, and how and for whom.

Guide-lines for this forethought may have been laid down in a resolution adopted by a United Nations organ. But United Nations resolutions run from three lines to a thousand or more and from the most precise wording possible to the utterly foggy.

The first step is therefore to decide exactly what our instructions are: unless we ourselves know exactly what we are called upon to write, we cannot write clearly and therefore cannot expect the reader to understand what we have written. To find out exactly what we are to write may not be easy. A word used in a resolution on sovereignty over natural resources may not have exactly the same meaning as the same word when used in a resolution on economic aid to developing countries. We may therefore have to turn back to the records of the debate which preceded adoption of a resolution and, in some cases, consult with the Secretary, the Rapporteur or the Chairman of the body concerned.

After that, we must consider what kind of report the body that has given us our instructions requires. It may want merely an account of action already taken or a summing up of the stages passed in consideration of a question. Or it may want the kind of report which will provide the groundwork for future action. Operational organs like UNICEF or the Technical Assistance Committee, for example, may want only statistics; an organ such as the Security Council, a narrative; the Committee on Industrial Development, an analytical study. Some bodies, such as the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, may be best served by a detailed technical paper; others, such as the International Law Commission, by a statement of general principles.

Once we have decided why, how, for whom and what we are going to write, there arises the question of the material available. Some specialists among us sometimes

think, and sometimes rightly, that they have all the material they need at their finger-tips. Nevertheless, it can do no harm to consult our colleagues in the Library. They are specialists too, in the geography of knowledge, and as such may sometimes point out new facts that have come to light or old facts that have been forgotten. Discovery of a new fact or rediscovery of a forgotten fact may enhance the value of a report.

Once the material available has been assembled, there comes the question of what to use and what to discard. It is a crucial question because it lies at the heart of long-winded, and thereby poor, reports.

Conscientious authors, and particularly specialists, tend to tell the reader all they know rather than what he wants to know. A United Nations report should not say everything that can be said on a given subject, but should select and state those facts, and only those facts, that are necessary to understanding of the subject for a given purpose. Because of the abundance of information available today, the question is more often what to leave out than what to put in. It is a question deserving of careful consideration, since reduction of quantity often leads automatically to improvement in quality. On most subjects a well-written paper is shorter than one that is ill-written.

Once this and the preceding questions have been answered, the next action, ideally, would be inaction: to sit back and let facts and ideas sort themselves out in the subconscious mind. This is perhaps the best way to discover what Coleridge called the "surview which enables a man to foresee the whole of what he is to convey and arrange the different parts according to their relative importance as an organized whole". The "surview" will also enable us to see the end as well as the beginning, the last sentence as well as the first, and so give direction to our thoughts.

If inaction is not possible, then the next step is planning.

IV. PLANNING

None of us would start to build a garage without first making a plan. Planning is just as necessary a preliminary

to the production of a report. Yet many authors in the United Nations take a running jump at their subject and so risk falling flat on their faces.

In one case this haste may be due to pressure of time, in another to the panic which seizes many of us at the sight of a blank page that has to be filled. The pressure must be accepted as an occupational hazard; the panic must be overcome. For in either case it will generally be found that time presses less if the first part of it is given to sorting out facts or ideas.

A plan is needed; history has given us many models. One of the simplest was that of Euclid's propositions. Another was until recently, and may still be, in use in the French civil service. It laid down that a report to a government department should be in four parts: first, a statement of the reason for the report; secondly, an outline of what the report would say; thirdly, development of points in the outline; and, lastly, a conclusion making recommendations.

The first part of the French model coincides with United Nations practice; most United Nations reports begin with a statement of the authority for them, usually in the form of a quotation from a resolution. The other parts offer useful pointers.

An outline of the sequence of ideas or facts, for example, is essential. There are various kinds of sequence—logical, chronological, psychological. In the United Nations the logical and chronological kinds are most often needed. Forethought is needed for both.

Provided we have the dates right to begin with, it might appear that chronological sequence is as easy as falling off a log. It is not necessarily so. For consideration of a question in a United Nations body may go beyond the beginning of action on the question and may have to be correlated with that action.

Logical sequence is a by-product not only of forethought, but also of trial and error. We may have to try several different approaches to a question and leave them dormant in our subconscious for a while until we hit upon the right one.

Once that goal is reached, it may be found useful to prepare a brief introduction, summarizing what is to follow.

An introduction serves several purposes. First, it makes clear on what points we need more information. Secondly, it frees our minds so that we can concentrate on developing each of the parts of a report. Thirdly, it leaves the reader in no doubt as to what the report and its parts are about. Suspense is essential in a detective story. It is not desirable in the direct communication of facts or ideas which is our sole purpose. Finally, an interesting introduction may whet the reader's appetite. If he likes the introduction, he will be more inclined to go on to the body of the report.

It might be thought that a table of contents would serve the same purpose as an introduction. It does not. A table of contents is static, an introduction dynamic, and we want to be on the move towards our conclusion from the start. For the busy international reader the conclusion may be the most important part. It enables him to get at once to the heart of the matter, leaving the rest of the body for later study. For us, the writers, it will serve later as a check-list.

V. STYLE: POSITIVE

A carefully thought-out plan and a concise introduction will set us on the road to that clarity and simplicity which are our goal. They will not keep us on the road unless we ourselves exercise constant vigilance. There are too many enemies waiting by the wayside.

While at work in an international organization (wherever it may be), most of us are under the influence of alien words and alien grammatical constructions. At leisure, whether at home or abroad, we are under constant bombardment from the cryptic headlines, distortion and over-emphasis of Press, radio and advertising.

In warding off these enemies of simplicity and clarity, some positive and some negative rules may be of help.

A first positive rule would be to state a fact or an idea directly whenever possible. Often this is best done by following the natural order of thought: subject, verb, object. Here the language of childhood may offer us better models than the language of bureaucrats. "Mary had a little lamb" is a perfect example of concise, simple

statement of fact. It is thereby much more effective than the bureaucrat's roundabout "with respect to the question of pets, Mary exercised rights of ownership over a certain juvenile member of the sheep family". Sentences beginning "with respect to" (or such variants as "in regard to", "concerning", "in reference to") leave the reader dangling. When there is a long chain of them, as sometimes happens in United Nations reports, the reader may become too tired to go on and find out what is "the question with respect to which" the writer wishes to write.

A second positive rule would be to use verbs rather than nouns whenever possible. Verbs are dynamic; nouns, especially abstract nouns, tend to be static. An announcement from the United Nations that "world trade continued its expansion" does not convey the same sense of movement as "world trade continued to expand". Through the use of "its", it also endows world trade with a separate personality which world trade does not in fact possess.

A third positive rule would be to use verbs in the active rather than the passive voice whenever possible. United Nations writers, like other official writers, seem to prefer the passive voice to the active, no doubt because of the everlasting bureaucratic fear that a direct statement may lead to trouble. This bureaucratic caution carries over into areas where it is not needed. The United Nations *Journal* has provided many thousands of instances. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, it says that "a statement was made by the representative of Blank" when it could have said that "the representative of Blank made a statement". Occasionally, it confounds the issue by combining active and passive in the same sentence, as in "The Chairman made a statement regarding the statement made at the previous meeting by Mr. X". Such "statements" do not mean much in either passive or active form, but at least the latter is shorter, easier to read, and suggests that somebody did something rather than that something was done to something by somebody. To return to a previous point, the dynamic is generally preferable to the static.

A fourth positive rule would be to use concrete rather than abstract words whenever possible. In order to distinguish between the concrete and the abstract, it might help to adapt the tag once used in Latin grammars to

distinguish masculine from feminine nouns. This ran:

"Masculine will only be
Things that you can touch and see."

For us it should go:

"Concrete will only be
Things that you can touch and see."

We can touch a table or see a mountain. We cannot touch or see those most favoured of bureaucratic words, an "aspect" or a "concept". (In the four mimeographed pages of a recent United Kingdom memorandum to the United Nations, there were fourteen "concepts", most of them inappropriate.)

A fifth positive rule, especially applicable in the United Nations, would be that short words, short sentences and short paragraphs are to be preferred to long words, long sentences and long paragraphs whenever possible.

Short words are better because they are more likely to be understood by a multilingual readership. Short words familiar to the reader are better still. There is no need to call a cocktail a "rooster's caudal appendage", accurate as that description may be, because cocktails are familiar in the United Nations.

Short sentences are better because they allow the reader to pause and absorb the idea or fact a sentence is intended to convey. The practice of short sentences also combats the tendency to hedge direct statement around with subordinate clauses.

Short paragraphs are better for three reasons. Visually, they are less forbidding than long paragraphs. Psychologically, the practice of short paragraphs acts as a brake on the writer who tries to string too many ideas or facts together and thereby confuses both himself and his readers; one idea to one paragraph is a good rule of thumb. In debate, short paragraphs make for ease of reference.

This brief list of positive general rules could be complemented by a list of negative general rules ten times as long as the Ten Commandments. A few are listed here. Others may be found in the annexes and in the works listed in the bibliography.

VI. STYLE: NEGATIVE

United Nations reports, being directed to a hundred and fourteen nations of varying cultures and political systems should state facts objectively. Often they do not. Picking a United Nations report at random, we are almost certain to find that some thought or fact is inflated. It is "specially emphasized", "specially stressed" or even "re-emphasized". We are almost equally certain to find that something is "maximal" or "minimal", "fundamental" or even "most fundamental". (What could be more fundamental than fundamental?) The reason no doubt is again bureaucratic fear, on this occasion fear that some delegation may complain that its point of view has not received enough attention. This fear is unnecessary. If we have in good conscience stated the facts as objectively as we can, then there is nothing to fear but fear itself.

Emphasis can be a useful tool. Overuse blunts it. When we emphasize everything, nothing is emphasized and we leave ourselves in the same predicament as the aircraft manufacturers, who will soon have no place to go. They began with Skymasters, went on to Globemasters and doubtless soon will be producing Outer Space Masters. And after that?

Sparing use of emphasis is a good negative rule.

Inasmuch as United Nations reports are addressed to a majority of people unfamiliar with the language in which they are written, they should generally be straightforward. Whenever possible, we should call a spade a spade and not an agricultural implement. We cannot always do so. To many of our readers the straightforward term may, for historical reasons, have an unhappy connotation. May the day soon dawn when the reasons are regarded as historical only, when we in the Secretariat may follow the example of an African President of the General Assembly and speak in simple, descriptive terms such as Black Africa. Meanwhile we will do better to use some such circumlocution as Africa south of the Sahara.

Avoidance of anything which might offend the sensibilities of our readers is a second negative rule.

A third negative rule is not to adorn our facts or ideas with adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives and adverbs have a way of leading into expressions of personal opinion, even injunction. For example, if a member of the secretariat of a regional commission finds the economic prospects "sombre", it is quite natural for him to add that "these sombre prospects should reinforce the determination of the countries of the region ..." It is also quite wrong. In his private capacity the international civil servant may have, but in his official capacity he cannot express, personal opinions, much less tell the Member States what they should do. It may be in subconscious revolt against this impersonality that United Nations writers stuff their work with such meaningless phrases as "over-all national organization" and "substantially strengthened system". It may also be owing to a desire to evade the inevitable impersonality that United Nations writers frequently try to slip their opinions into reports by such openings as, "It is obvious that ..."

The words "whenever possible" have been used several times in the preceding paragraphs. This is not an accident. Nor is it due to a desire to hedge. General rules are general only; as Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "All generalizations are false, including this one".

There may be times when long words and long sentences are more appropriate than short words and short sentences, circumlocution preferable to direct statement, vague "concepts" more suited to the occasion than specific proposals. This is true of some United Nations resolutions, when the only way to secure a consensus is to sacrifice clarity.

Resolutions are a special case. Even apart from that special case, the writer cannot be for ever bound in a strait-jacket of staccato one-line sentences. That way boredom lies. But unless he is a skilled writer—and members of the Secretariat are not always chosen for their ability to write—he will find that the short sentence, though initially harder to write, is easier to read.

Nor should the writer be restricted to words long native to his country. That is fetishism. The vocabulary of Corneille, of Shakespeare and of Calderón would be inadequate for modern needs. It is risky to bet on Shakespeare, but it would be a reasonably safe bet that

he never used the word "cadre". The English language of today can avoid it only by beating about the bush.

This does not, however, mean that we should invent barbarous words like "complementarity" and "finalize" in order to save ourselves the trouble of looking for the right word that already exists.

To sum up, the first consideration in deciding on the length of sentence or paragraph is what the subject requires, but always with a leaning towards the short. The first consideration in the choice or rejection of words is not whether they are short or long or are descended from Greek or Latin or Arabic or Chinese, but whether they are as simple as the subject will allow. Some subjects, such as the effects of atomic radiation, demand technical words. All the more reason why the general phraseology in which these necessary technicalities are embodied should be as simple as possible.

VII. ACCURACY AND CONSISTENCY

General observance of general rules will help us towards clarity and conciseness. It will not ensure accuracy and consistency in fact and in word.

All of us are aware of the need to check facts. We would not write that the population of a city is about 50,000 when we have at hand a reference book which tells us that the population is in fact 60,510. Not all of us are as much aware of the need to check words. Indeed, most of us assume that we know exactly what a word means because we have heard or read it a hundred times. It is not always so, even for those of us who read or write in our mother tongue. It is, obviously, much less so for those of us writing in a tongue other than our own.

Yet accuracy in words is more important in writing than in speaking. The speaker is face to face with his audience. His expression can be seen and the tone of his voice can be heard. The writer can offer his reader only the printed word and the word may be subject to misinterpretation if it is not exact. It may be especially subject to misinterpretation when it implicitly conveys an opinion. If a United Nations writer says that "... birth rates have risen from a record low in the depression

judgement
of the 1930's", he is stating a fact. If he says that "... birth rates have recovered from a record low ..." he is implying, by use of the word "recovered", that a low birth rate is a sickness. Maybe it is. But not all States Members of the United Nations would agree. A dictionary should be always at hand and consulted whenever doubt arises, so that we may say in one word all that one word can say and no more than it should say.

Consistency is that agreement between the facts or ideas in the separate parts of a whole, in grammar and in terminology which is necessary to ensure harmonious development of any theme. When, for example, a United Nations publication tells us that "the students had a chance to practise many take-offs, including night landings", it is inconsistent in fact because even at night an aeroplane's landings can hardly be mistaken for take-offs. When a United Nations resolution calls for information on "town and rural planning", it is grammatically inconsistent because "town" is a noun and "rural" an adjective.

Consistency is hard for the individual to achieve; when writing on a drab subject, we are all tempted to add colour by using different words or roundabout expressions to express the same fact or idea. It is even harder to achieve when, as happens in the United Nations, a report is written by a team of men of various nationalities, languages and cultures. This is a difficulty familiar to such members of the Secretariat as *précis*-writers. It can also plague specialists. Recently, after the International Law Commission had discussed access to the sea at length, one member remarked that the word "access" had obviously been construed less broadly by other members than he himself had construed it.

Definition of key words in advance will help us to achieve consistency, particularly team consistency. So will repetition of a word when that word, and only that word, is the one needed. But the best road to consistency is probably constant forethought, thought and afterthought. It is a hard road.

VIII. THE EXAMPLE OF THE MASTERS

Short plain words, short sentences, short paragraphs! No colour, no adornment! Following these rules may

make our reports shorter. Will it not also make them as dull as the sermons of Dr. Dryasdust?

Not necessarily. Some masters of the past, writing in three of what are now the five official languages of the United Nations, have shown us that the contrary may be true. Francis Bacon began one of his essays: "God Almighty first planted a garden". Victor Hugo began one of his poems: "*Il neigeait. L'on était vaincu par sa conquête. Pour la première fois l'aigle baissait sa tête.*" Tolstoy began one of his short stories: "A gentleman was serving as an officer in the Caucasus. His name was Zhilin."

Bacon could be extravagantly verbose when currying favour, Hugo on occasion as flamboyant as a scarlet hibiscus, Tolstoy as long-winded as any lawyer. Yet none of them was ever more effective than in these direct, plain, short statements, made without benefit of subordinate clause or passive voice.

These examples from the past have been chosen because it is a reasonable supposition that any English-speaking, French-speaking or Russian-speaking member of the Secretariat would have come across one of them in school.

The masters of the present can be no less direct. T. S. Eliot wrote that:

*Gus is the cat at the theatre door.
His name, as I ought to have told you before,
Is really Asparagus. That's such a fuss
To pronounce, that we usually call him just Gus.*

General de Gaulle began his war memoirs: "*Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France.*" A chapter in the Soviet "History of Diplomacy (1872-1919)" edited by V. P. Potyomkin begins: "The Frankfurt pact did not weaken Franco-German hostility. On the contrary, the pact intensified it."

We in the United Nations may be called upon to write about subjects intrinsically less interesting than gardens, cats or the Caucasus. We can still use the technique of the masters to arouse interest in our subject. A social report, for example, may be rather forbidding on the face of it. If we begin it by saying that "the situation has significantly improved in vital sectors since the period covered by the Preliminary Report as far as can be

judged by the limited evidence available," it becomes formidable. Opening sentences like this beg too many questions. What does "significantly" mean? Is it a polysyllabic variant of the monosyllabic "much" or just another of those meaningless United Nations adverbs? Which are the "vital sectors"? How "limited" was the evidence? How could we possibly judge by evidence that was not available?

If, on the other hand, we had said that "the situation has somewhat improved", that would be a statement everyone could understand. It might need to be further qualified, as Gus's name had to be qualified, but the qualifications could come later. The essential point is the improvement.

A direct opening statement is helpful to both writer and reader; to the writer because he then realizes what he has to show in what follows; to the reader because he has an inkling of what to expect.

But direct statement should not be confined to the beginning of a report. It should be carried through to the end, through the introduction, through the parts and the paragraphs in the parts, through the conclusion.

If this technique is followed, and if the original plan was logical, the first part should flow naturally from the introduction and into the parts that follow, the last part into the conclusion. When this does not happen, the only recourse is either to go back to the beginning or to add or subtract ideas or facts in order to restore the even flow. Huygens, a distinguished Dutch poet, said three hundred years ago: "Think before you write, but while writing don't stop thinking".

In this connexion there should be no "in this connexions". The subject is the connexion. If we have dealt with it in logical order, there is no need to emphasize the connexion between one paragraph and the paragraph that precedes it. If we have not been logical, then "in this connexion" is a fraudulent and, worse, an unconvincing way of trying to cover a gap in the train of thought.

It is an illuminating commentary on the comparative intellectual honesty of different nationalities that the usual French translation of "in this connexion" should be "*dans un autre ordre d'idées*", which means "speaking of other things".

IX. AFTER WRITING

The ideal course of action after completing a report would again be inaction, at least so far as that particular report is concerned. Lapse of time is conducive to a more balanced view of everything, and especially of our own work.

If time is lacking, then our report should be subjected to a number of tests.

The first test would be for accuracy and consistency in fact and in word. It is assumed that all the facts used were checked before writing began and that their source was noted. It may still be desirable to check them again. New facts may have come to light or a situation may have changed. Here our colleagues in the Library or Reference can again help. They can also save us from unconscious plagiarism. Any of us is almost certain to have in his mental attic words or thoughts expressed years, even centuries, before and unconsciously to use these words or thoughts as if they were his own.

Reference to an earlier writer's thoughts may sometimes be necessary; there is little that is new under the sun. Conscious copying of an earlier writer's thoughts or words, without reference to the source, is inexcusable. It means either that we were too lazy to adapt the earlier writer's thoughts to our own theme or that we were padding. Padding may be desirable in women's dresses or football players' shoulders. It has no place in United Nations reports.

The test for accuracy should include a watch for errors that may have crept in while writing or transcribing. Errors of this kind occur most often with numbers. They can also occur with words, particularly dictated words. In the early days a document prepared for a Conference on the Declaration of Death of Missing Persons turned up in mimeograph as a document for the Conference on the Declaration of Death of Mrs. Perkins.

A second test should be made to ensure that there is no unnecessary repetition. Repetition of facts or thoughts may be necessary in the conclusion, just as a judge's summing-up of evidence is necessary. Repetition may be desirable elsewhere for the sake of emphasis. Repetition of words is preferable to the roundabout descriptive

phrases beloved of the journalist. But unnecessary repetition is likely to make the reader think that the writer was slipshod in his writing and therefore slipshod in his thinking.

After these tests a check may be needed to ensure that the report provides all the information required by a resolution or instruction, and, equally important, that it provides nothing that is not required. Some years ago a member of the Secretariat was called upon to write a report on aid given to the developing countries by Member States. He knew his subject well and wrote a good report. But he included in it sections on aid given by States not Members of the United Nations.

The something not required may not be of such political consequence. It may be no more than an occasional excursion into byways. Byways are more tempting than highways and can make for an entertaining distraction in literature intended to be read for pleasure. In United Nations reports they are distraction only.

It may be no more than an excess of words, beautiful words perhaps, but not required to make the point and, indeed, likely to obscure it. An English writer once recommended that "in composing as a general rule" you should "run your pen through every other word you have written; you have no idea what vigour it will give your style". We cannot be as drastic as that. We can and should prune words that are not really necessary. The international reader has to read thousands of words a day. If his reading time can be cut by half an hour, that means half an hour gained.

Economy in words must not, however, be carried to the point of parsimony. The smallest number of words required to express a given fact or thought may be four or forty. If the required number is forty and we cut it down to thirty, the reader may find it hard to seize our point. Roy Campbell has expressed this difficulty well:

*You praise the firm restraint with which they write.
I'm with you there, of course.
They use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody horse?*

Parsimony in words may also lead to ambiguity in meaning, leaving it open to the reader to interpret (and so possibly misinterpret) what we have written.

Lastly, it may result in downright error. When a United Nations publication says, for example, that "the Secretary-General is elected by the General Assembly" without adding "on the recommendation of the Security Council", it is leaving out a very important qualification and thus mis-stating the facts.

When all tests have been made, it will be well to read the report through as a whole. If it reads smoothly from beginning to end, in other words, if there are no points where the reader stops short to wonder what a passage means or why it is there, then it is probably logical, well balanced and well written. Even so, a colleague should be asked to read it too. For we may have our chain of thought so clear in our own minds that we leave out links needed to bring it home to the minds of others.

In very doubtful cases, our colleague might even be asked to read a passage aloud. The ear is often more sensitive to confusion of thought than the eye.

Finally, lest exhortations to simplicity and clarity should have been followed too slavishly, we should make sure that we have not insulted our readers' intelligence. Delegations may like to know that "a great diversity is observed in the density of population", but we do not have to add, "which is expressed in the number of persons per square kilometre".

Writing for the United Nations is a tough job.

Annex I

REPRESENTATIVE CRITICISMS

Like anything submitted to the public view, United Nations reports have often been severely criticized. The following are some representative criticisms:

1. *Delegation*: The representative of one Member State described the following paragraph from a United Nations report as "excruciating":

"There is a tremendous amount of verbalization on the level of clinical, therapeutic and individualized objectives, but this lip-service has quite minimal implementation in the actual provisions for treatment."

2. *Press*: The Manchester *Guardian*, generally favourably disposed to the United Nations, described one of our reports as "a higgledy-piggledy mass of documents, a grand jamboree, apparently, of all the reports which reached the ... United Nations, some of which are invaluable, some futile ..."

3. *Individual*: "I trust this is not a cry in the wilderness. For there must be many others who have had to endure the slow, heavy, disheartening and thoroughly boring task of reading through the publications of the United Nations ... I have found much useful information in the reports I have been using recently. But why in Heaven's name don't you reduce the unwieldy length of your treatises, cross out the frequent repetitions ... and rewrite the whole ... injecting, if possible, some clarity and perhaps some life ..."

4. *Individual*: "This pompous, polysyllabic and relentlessly abstract style ..." Edmund Wilson in *Red, Black, Blond and Olive*, p. 106.

5. *Advisory Committee*: The Advisory Committee has frequently criticized United Nations reports in general terms. It has also stated (A/2403, para. 156) that documentation inferior in quality constitutes a lasting injury to the prestige of the Organization—lasting because the records of international institutions are used long after they have ceased to be working tools.

Annex II

SOME LINGUISTIC ILLS AND REMEDIES

The examples in the following pages illustrate some of the linguistic ills mentioned in the guide and suggest some remedies. Most are taken from reports issued by the United Nations in 1964. Some are from earlier United Nations reports, a few from Press, radio and other sources.

All the examples are genuine. The sources have not been given, but are available to anyone interested.

Accentuate the positive

And one of the best ways of doing this is to use the active voice rather than the passive whenever possible. "Active" means "doing"; "passive" means "being done to". Let us do rather than be done to.

1. Although as a general rule it is considered preferable by the ILO to arrange individual training programmes ...

"The ILO considers it preferable" ("better" would be better) would save two words.

2. Increased interest has been displayed by the general public in the work of the United Nations.

Why not "Public interest in the work of the United Nations has increased"?

3. Another subject studied by the ECAFE/FAO agricultural division was the problem of rural credit.

"The ECAFE/FAO agricultural division also studied rural credit" would save six words. "The problem of" is unnecessary.

4. The credentials of the representatives have been examined by the Secretary-General and have been found to have been issued in accordance with the rules of procedure.

"The Secretary-General has examined ... and has found ..."

5. As there is no information service, monthly news-letters are published by the Government.

"The Government publishes monthly news-letters".

6. Further efforts and progress were made by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination during the period under review.

"ACC has made further efforts and ..." (But even the active voice won't save this.)

7. New developments were also marked in the social and cultural fields.

Why not say: "There were new social and cultural developments"? Then the fields can lie fallow for a while.

8. It was the unanimous view of members that ...

"All the members thought that ..."

9. In part, the inflow of international capital and donations derives its importance from the fact that ...

"The inflow of international capital and donations is important because ..."

10. WHO has discovered that the domicile of the vectors is in the waters of Lake Titicaca.

The discovery was important enough to deserve direct statement: "... the vectors live in Lake Titicaca". "The waters of" is unnecessary. Had the vectors lived on the bottom of the lake or the banks that would have been worth saying.

Accuracy

Accuracy is conformity with truth or with accepted usage. It is much more difficult to attain in linguistics than in, say, mathematics. It is still important, as treaty-makers will testify.

1. The seat of the United Nations in Geneva.

The seat, that is the Headquarters, of the United Nations is in New York. The European Office is in Geneva.

2. Mr. X's disclosure gave a fantastic reverse twist to the Labour Rackets Committee's investigation.

The Committee's full title was "Committee on Improper Practices in the Labour and Management (my italics) Field".

3. This was thought to be an interference in matters which were within the essential domestic jurisdiction.

Article 2 (7) of the Charter says "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction". If we are going to quote the Charter, even without quotation marks, let us at least quote correctly.

4. As a result of the admission of new Members, the Library has had to deal with periodicals in difficult languages such as Hungarian and Finnish.

Hungarian is not a "difficult" language. If the Geneva Library had said "less generally known", it would have been more accurate.

5. Membership in the United Nations ... (Charter, Article 4)

In accepted usage we become members "of", not "in" clubs, societies, political parties. Compare Article 5 of the Charter, which says, "A Member of the United Nations ..."

6. Estimates prove that the Centre will be able to supply ...

An estimate is an approximate calculation. It cannot "prove"; it can indicate a probability.

7. At the invitation of the President, the representative took his seat at the Council table.

If the representative had had "his" seat at the Council table, he would not have needed an invitation from the President. He took "a" seat (The French are more accurate: "*Le représentant du ... prend place ...*").

Ambiguity

An ambiguous statement is one that can be interpreted in two or more ways. Ambiguity may be intentional. More often it is due to sloppy thinking, ignorance of the meaning (or several meanings) of words, faulty grammatical construction, or failure to punctuate.

1. A selected list of materials directed to the improvement of the status of women for the use of technical assistance experts.

Two commas would have saved this.

2. The figure supplied by the Department for this publication is purely notional.

The representative of the Department said that "notional" meant "a rough estimate". He was wrong. It means a guess.

3. Information has been gathered ... on special aspects such as measures to be adopted in relation to the expansion of slum areas ...

This sounds as though the intention was to expand slum areas, which was certainly not the case. If "to prevent" had been substituted for "in relation to", the meaning would have been clear.

4. United States Mission to the United Nations building.

Of course the mission was not to the building. But English is such an elliptical language that it must be used with great care. The French would have been longer—"*Bâtiment de la mission des Etats-Unis auprès des Nations Unies*"—but unambiguous.

5. Accordingly, the experts made it perfectly clear that within the reconstruction process under discussion world trade could no longer be governed by the automatic application of rigid principles. Nor could it be based on—and calculated to maintain—inequality between countries.

What does "it" in the third sentence refer to? The "reconstruction process" or "world trade"?

6. After the royal appetite was appeased, water was handed to him by female attendants in a silver basin.

W. H. Prescott, a respected historian, on Montezuma. Rearrangement: "water in a silver basin" would remove the absurdity. So would use of the active voice: "female attendants handed him ..."

7. Equal pay for equal work, however important it may be, is only one aspect of the broader question of women's wages. It has been noted that their chief characteristic is their low level as compared with those of men.

In the third sentence "their" could refer to either the women or their wages.

8. The third meeting of the Expert Panel on the use of Nuclear Energy for Desalting Water of the International Atomic Energy Agency opened in Vienna today.

If we had said "the third meeting of the Expert Panel of IAEA ...", there would have been no ambiguity. It recalls the famous "Report on the increased use of windpower by UNESCO".

9. Any meeting outside of Headquarters is more expensive than anywhere else due to the Secretariat arrangements.

If this means anything, it means that any meeting at Headquarters is more expensive than a meeting elsewhere, which was certainly not intended.

10. The Committee declared that land alienation could not be considered solely as an economic question. It was fundamental to the welfare of the territories.

The Committee is saying that land alienation is beneficial to the territories. It did not mean to do so.

11. One woman, an habitual offender, was sentenced to five years' confinement.

A long parturition. "Confinement" has more than one meaning.

Anticlimax

A sudden and often unconscious descent from the higher to the lower, or sudden ascent from the lower to the higher, with a consequent jolt to the mind.

1. Mostly the member governments of FAO are also member governments of the United Nations, the organization which has its headquarters in New York.

Some believe that "the organization which has its headquarters in New York" is the senior member of the family.

2. Two men were critically injured and five others suffered from bruises and shock. But the worst damage was to traffic.

Which comes first—the man or the motor car? This is really putting the cart before the horse.

3. The increase in production of pigmeat was concentrated largely in the United States, where slaughter rose appreciably from the reduced levels of 1961 and 1962.

Substitution of another word for "appreciably" would have made this statement of fact just that. Slaughter and appreciation make strange bedfellows.

4. Pedestrians crossing First Avenue at 42nd Street are a hazard to traffic.

See 2. above.

5. Article 18: Funeral aid shall be provided for anyone unable to maintain a minimum standard of living.

Insertion of the words "who had been" between "anyone" and "unable" would have saved this from being ludicrous.

6. Jail is really no place for a woman, unless she is a great menace. Could not a truly woman's institution be established for women offenders for crimes such as murdering the husband, infanticide, habitual theft?

Habitual theft is to be deplored, but hardly as much as infanticide—or even murdering the husband.

7. An initiation into a fraternity is a kind of blend between a religious service and a Greek drama. But it is often taken seriously despite that.

Some people take religious services and Greek drama seriously too.

8. This is not only a milestone in the history of philately, but also in the history of the refugees.

See 2. above. Which is more important—stamp-collecting or mankind?

9. Social security benefits covering sickness and death.

After all, death is the ultimate in social security.

10. Finally, there is the English huntsman's comment on a spring morning: "What a beautiful day! Let's go out and kill something."

A characteristic example of blood-sportsmen's perversion.

Bromides

Bromides are drugs inducing sleep, and by extension comments so obvious as to induce sleep, especially when written pompously. Platitude is the orthodox name. Bromides are safe. We are not likely to be criticized if we stick to the commonplace. Bromides are to be found in our reports.

1. The assessment of groundwater is dependent upon the amount of data available.

2. The basic problems with which governmental action has to cope include illiteracy, which prevents the people from making use of some of the mass communication media.

3. By half-mast is meant the lowering of the Flag to one half the distance between the top and the bottom of the mast.

4. A reliable estimate of population is vital since the quantity of sewage contributed from the area to be provided with a sewerage system depends directly upon the population figure.

5. One of the most important activities of any national tourist office is promotion of the country as a destination for tourists.

6. Improvement of roads is a requisite* for road transport.

7. Schools, hospitals, museums, art galleries are built not for their own sake, but to serve specific purposes.

8. Suppression of drug addiction is the fundamental reason for the establishment of the international control of narcotic drugs.

9. When high-powered motors are installed in the fishing boats, they move faster.

10. The Committee considered that the cure of immediate and obvious social evils might be of limited importance if steps were not also taken to remove the basic causes.

11. The cost of these products far exceeded the returns, making it commercially unfeasible to grow them.

*We were lucky. He could have said "an indispensable prerequisite". See Inflation, para. 9.

Ceremonial words

Ceremonial words are suited to such occasions as weddings, funerals and the opening of the General Assembly. On other occasions they are likely to become deadheads, which in railroad parlance means passengers who have not paid their fares and so contribute nothing to the maintenance of the line. We have many deadheads in our reports. In one report of fourteen mimeographed pages, I found thirteen "implementations", seven "purviews" and assorted "appropriates", "basics" and "clarifications".

1. *Appropriate*: Under appropriate ordinances, the Administration may guarantee repayment of a bank loan.

The Administration would surely not guarantee loans under an inappropriate ordinance.

2. *Aspects*: It is not a matter of optimism or pessimism, for there are always aspects or facets of the problem that can be viewed in either light.

This has everything: aspects, facets, problems, even a choice of lighting.

3. *Balanced and integrated*: Developing countries of the region would have to pursue their goals of raising national income through balanced and integrated development.

There was a time when this meant something. Now it has become another United Nations cliché, as meaningless as "meaningful".

4. *Basic*: The basic factors to be taken into consideration ...

"Basic factors" is nothing. In other United Nations reports we have had "basic pillars"—probably the most original architectural innovation of the twentieth century.

5. *Breakdown*: In this document ECLA has given a breakdown of oil exports by port of entry.

"Breakdown" is a term properly applied in psychiatry, as in "a nervous breakdown", or to traffic on the New Haven Railroad. Here it means that "ECLA has classified ..."

6. *Broad*: This chapter presents a broad survey of developments in teaching about the United Nations.

A survey has to be broad.

7. *Centre*: The Committee's discussion centred mainly on the rate of progress in the Territories.

The Committee mainly discussed ...

8. *Central*: The Commission strongly emphasized the world population situation as central to its deliberations.

The Commission thought that the growth of world population was very important.

9. *Clarification*: It was requested that a clarification be made concerning the total amount of time necessary for the training of civil servants.

The Committee asked how long it took to train civil servants.

10. *Concept*: Any preventive programme must be based on a clear concept of what constitutes juvenile delinquency.

Concept gets most-favoured-word treatment in the United Nations. In this case why not a "clear definition"?

11. *Concepts*: The Commission had to reformulate its concepts and basic philosophy for the economic development of the African continent.

"Concepts" means "philosophy"—if it means anything.

12. *Conceptually*: It is conceptually convenient that the sample-units ...

"Conceptually" is unnecessary.

13. *Emanate*: The Administering Authority said that the petition emanated from a prohibited organization.

Noxious gases can emanate. The petition "came".

14. *Focus*: Of these four foci of effort, the first was the easiest.

There might be degrees of ease in the effort, but not in the foci, which are central points.

15. *Implement*: These considerations suggest that if appropriate national and international measures are adopted and vigorously implemented ...

"Implemented" means "carried out" or executed.

16. *Inter alia*: Under Economic and Social Council resolution 980 A (XXXVI) the Committee was requested *inter alia* ...

"*Inter alia*" is the accepted bureaucratic hedge against the possibility that we may have left out something important. If we said "among other things" the hedge would be seen too clearly.

17. *Meaningful*: Two factors will be specially meaningful in this connexion.

"Meaningful" is either a mealy-mouthed way of saying "important"—a comparatively direct word which would commit us to an opinion—or it is meaningless.

18. *Overall*: Over-all progress in the field of industrialization.

"Overall" is properly applied in the plural to the kind of clothes we wear when tinkering with the car. Here it means "general" (which is so general as to be unnecessary).

19. *Portion*: The bad weather in the early portion of the year exerted a generally depressing effect on output in Europe, Japan and the Soviet Union ...

"Portion" can mean an overfilled plate, as in American restaurants, or a scrap, as in "this portion of the news is presented by Bubblegum". Here "part" would be shorter, and better.

20. *Reaction*: The representative said that he would like to know the Rapporteur's reaction to the proposal.

This word is at home in chemistry, physics, mechanics and the like, where it generally implies a violent response to a stimulus, as in jet aeroplanes. Here all the representative wanted to know was the Rapporteur's opinion.

21. *Relevant*: The question has been referred to the relevant authorities in the Territory.

Things can be relevant, persons not. As used here, the word endows the authorities with an unflattering neuterness.

22. *Significant*: Farms of this type constitute a highly significant phenomenon in some countries.

"Significant" is second cousin to "meaningful" and about as meaningful, especially when applied to a phenomenon, which is by definition extraordinary.

Fields

Among United Nations ceremonial words, "field" deserves special mention. Perhaps because a great part of their life is bounded by steel and concrete, United Nations writers love fields and find them in the most unlikely places. They are no worse in this respect than Press and radio, as the second and last examples show.

1. In addition, the International Development Association gave assistance in the field of sewage ...

No comment.

2. Mrs. Naylor knows more about sheep than anyone else in the field.

Including the shepherd?

3. "...has continued to take in the field of the anti-erosion struggle".

Why the "field"? Also, why the "struggle"?

4. In the field of commercial and office employees the wage differential ... was further reduced.

Why not "for" instead of "in the field of"?

5. United Nations activities in the field of prevention of crime and treatment of offenders ...

Again, why not "for"?

6. Technical assistance in the broad field of economic planning is being strengthened ... Another important feature in the broad field of economic development ...

Two "generals" would get rid of two "broad fields". For "broad" see "Ceremonial words".

7. In the field of water resources a number of important advances were made.

A "field of water resources"? Rice paddies?

8. In the field of those aspects of water resources which influence hydro-power development ...

This one has everything but "concepts".

9. He referred to the progress achieved in the Territory in the fields of nutrition, education, water supply and public health.

Why not omit "the fields of"?

10. In other fields offering also a great degree of similarity ...

These fields offer also a great degree of verbosity.

11. And that's the story in the funeral field.

This concluded a report on a governmental inquiry into "The high cost of dying". Perhaps the broadcaster was thinking of Potter's Field.

Consistency

Consistency is agreement between the separate parts of a whole; in grammatical usage; in terminology; in the facts and the order of statement of them; and, especially, in metaphors. Here are some examples of inconsistency.

1. The number of true cases of crime, mainly theft, has increased moderately from 427 in 1947 to 516 in 1957.

In many countries theft is a misdemeanour, not a crime. Some people might consider that an increase of nearly 20 per cent was not moderate.

2. Town and rural planning

"Town is a noun, "rural" an adjective. "Town and country" or "urban and rural" would have been consistent.

3. Relations between mothers and children born out of wedlock.

A question deserving of United Nations attention, but hardly concerning married women. Besides, the single word "illegitimate" would cover "born out of wedlock".

4. Under the United Nations Charter, members have promised to work separately and together ...

The Charter (Article 56) gives the opposite order.

5. To ensure that your copies of OXFORD reach you regularly, will members please record any change in the address to which the magazine should be sent.

We might have expected the editor of OXFORD to be an educated man. He is obviously not, at least in grammatical consistency. Or perhaps he let the advertising manager take over?

6. An organization subsidized by the manufacturers for lobbying against child labour and the minimum wage.

An organization lobbying against the minimum wage would be unlikely to lobby against child labour.

7. At the very time when moderates most desperately need to meet on the level and part on the square, there are fewer and fewer bridges across the widening gulf.

London Bridge is falling down.

8. These countries are studied as a group for three reasons. Firstly, ... In the second place, ... Finally, ...

Why not "The first reason is that ... second, ... third, ..." It would not be shorter, but would be more consistent.

9. A more important reason why larger manpower and less machinery are employed in this region is the imperative necessity to find employment opportunities for the people.

"More manpower and less machinery" would be more consistent. Also, "larger manpower" suggests Gulliver in Brobdingnag.

10. Apart from petty offences, there is little crime.

A petty offence in most countries is not a crime.

Cramming

When we attempt to cram too many facts or ideas, even related facts or ideas, into one sentence or one paragraph, the result is at worst to make our writing unintelligible, at best to slow down our readers. A frequent side-effect is that the typist or stenographer, understandably, skips part of what has been written or dictated.

Let us leave cramming to students in telephone booths.

1. They do not make the choice according to the availability of domestic materials and the state of the domestic market, both of which are very small, but according to their own particular background and experience, the possibility of acquiring technical know-how from abroad, the availability of labour and its potential for training to the level of skill required, the source and cost of such imported material and spare parts as cannot be made domestically, and the availability of a combined domestic and export market.

If we stop at "small", and then begin "Instead they choose according ..." nothing will be lost.

2. Even apart from the measures designed to bring about an improvement in the management of farms, the considerable increases in the supply of fertilizers envisaged for the forthcoming years seem certain to result in a substantial increase in output, and in view of the prevailing very low yields per hectare associated with extremely inadequate applications of fertilizers to grain production, the steep rise in the supply of fertilizers may enable the country to expand its agricultural production at significantly higher rates than might be achieved by a more highly developed agriculture.

Again, we could stop at "output" and begin a new sentence with "In view of ..."

3. The fourth problem in the field of food supplies, to which we urge that special attention should be given, is that of the control of the tsetse fly. While this is primarily a problem affecting Africa, it appears to us to warrant special attention for at least three reasons: (a) it affects very large areas of potentially productive land in Africa, from which cattle are at present virtually excluded; (b) the control of the tsetse fly would not only make large areas more fully available for agricultural production, but could enable human trypanosomiasis to be eliminated; and (c) the problem should, in line with other vectors (for example, the mosquito), be amenable to scientific study and solution if sufficient resources could be allocated to it. We strongly urge that high priority be given not only to such scientific studies, but

equally to the subsequent measures needed to apply the results on the necessary scale.

The writer here has attempted to separate his ideas by (a), (b) and (c). If he had also adopted the simple device of indenting (a), (b) and (c) and making each a sub-paragraph, he would have been more readable. Note the relief which the second sentence brings, although it is not unduly short.

4. With respect to development financing, it was pointed out that the present levels of external financial co-operation fell short of the needs of the developing countries, as did also the United Nations proposal that the industrialized countries should contribute 1 per cent of their GNP to the developing countries and that multilateralism, in spite of the advantages it offered, had lost ground to bilateralism in external financing.

This could be made into three sentences. We could stop at each of "the developing countries". After the first we could begin, "So did ..." instead of "as did also ..."; after the second, "It was also pointed out that ...". This would add a few words, but would save the reader from breathlessness.

5. As regards regional economic integration movements, it was agreed that such movements should be encouraged among the developing countries, with due regard for the special features of the countries concerned, and that mechanisms should be promoted whereby payments could be facilitated, and trade between the countries concerned could be financed; the scope of such integration movements should be fully understood by the industrial countries, and they should not take any action to hinder or counteract those movements.

We could stop at the first "concerned", leave out "and that", begin a second sentence with "Mechanisms ..." and end it with "financed", and begin a third with "The scope of ..." We could also skip "As regards ...", "between the countries concerned ..." and "hinder or ...", thereby saving ten words and making the whole passage clear on the first reading.

6. In practice, the magnitude of the manpower displacement problem which might derive from the implementation of a modernization and re-equipment programme for the spinning and weaving industries might not prove as great as indicated above, since, on the one hand, the programme would be gradual in its execution and slow to yield results in the shape of improved productivity, and, on the other, the textile market might expand still further in consequence of the increasing efforts to promote a more balanced regional and personal distribution of income.

If we were to stop at "as indicated above", leave out the unnecessary "since", begin a second sentence

with "On the one hand ..." and continue to "productivity", leave out "and" and begin a third sentence with "On the other hand ...", we should not only save the reader's breath. We should also bring out more clearly the opposition between the one hand and the other.

7. Regarding the colloquium on the economic aspects of the production and utilization of fibreboard and particle-board, held in Geneva in 1962, several delegations considered that the meeting had produced useful results and noted with satisfaction that the secretariat would report to the next session of the Committee the results of its inquiries into practical ways of further promoting international technical co-operation in this field; one delegation indicated that such co-operation was of special importance in view of the findings of the reappraisal of European timber trends and prospects.

We could stop at "useful results" and begin again with "They noted ..." We should separate "one delegation ..." by a new sentence.

8. From these studies, it appears that difficulties in finding and attracting qualified experts are really serious in certain specialities only; it is difficult, particularly, to recruit experienced planning advisers, economists in special fields, actuaries and statisticians, entomologists, engineers with teaching experience, employment objectives experts, accelerated training experts, and specialists in various branches of aviation, although language requirements add appreciably to the problem.

This should be three sentences, the first stopping at "specialities only" and the second at "aviation". "Although" is an unnecessary and indeed wrong conjunction.

Ellipsis

Our greatest sin is lack of restraint in the use of words. Too much restraint can also be a sin. When we leave out words that are needed only to complete a grammatical construction, or are implied, the sin is venial. It may still cause the reader to stop and go back in order to make sure that he has understood. Jespersen has given a classic example of ellipsis: "If the baby does not thrive on raw milk, boil it."

1. Czechoslovakia is the only centrally-planned economy which is a full member of GATT.

Czechoslovakia is not just an economy, but a country, with a language, culture, history, geography. The sentence would read better: "Czechoslovakia is the

only country with a centrally planned economy which ..."

2. Women employed in industry in the territory are generally paid two-thirds of the male rates.

If this sentence had read "... are paid two thirds of the rates paid to men", it would have been longer but clearer and less awkward. It would also have been more consistent by using the noun "men" instead of the adjective "male".

3. Following an examination of long-term projections for all fats and oils, the Group agreed that they were extremely valuable as a guide to Governments.

The way this sentence is constructed, it could mean that the "fats and oils" were valuable. Substitute "the projections" for "they" and the meaning becomes quite clear.

4. When properly researched, any member of the division can produce a study of value to the Committee.

If we had said "when he has properly researched his subject, any member of the division can produce ...", we would not have implied that he was being subjected to the third degree.

5. The output of metal products outside the centrally planned countries was about 4 per cent higher in 1963 than in 1962.

See 1. above. Countries can be, but rarely are, "centrally planned".

6. Let us not tell them they are going to get lung cancer on the basis of cigarette smoking. Such a course might save us very red faces in the near future.

What course?

7. We will have with us Tom Meany, publicity director of the Mets baseball team, who will give us an interesting talk and possibly some members of the team.

A rearrangement in two sentences would make this clear: "... team. He will ... and possibly introduce ..."

8. These replies come from a wide variety of regions, and include countries in North America and Latin America, Western Europe, Africa and Asia.

Replies cannot in fact, but here grammatically do, "include" countries.

9. There is no reason why the people should not be given an opportunity to express their views as to whether or not they desire unification of both sides of the border.

What the people would desire, or not, is unification of the land on both sides of the border.

10. Generally the status of women is the same as women in the U.K.

This is understandable, but ungainly and ungrammatical. We should have said, "the same as that of women ..."

Enemies by the wayside: 1. Press

There is much good writing in the Press, more bad. The journalist's excuse is the need for haste. It will not serve us when we imitate him. The day after I had found three different persons "spearheading" three different things in *Life* magazine, I found something (not even somebody) "spearheading" something in a United Nations report that had been long in preparation.

1. Rebel leaders have declared that use of force by the Government would bring about a popular revulsion of feeling.

"A revulsion of popular feeling" would have made this clear and correct.

2. Ethiopia and Somalia share a common frontier.

If it were not common, they could not share it.

3. Latest reports say that the rebels have been decimated to the extent of 50 per cent.

To decimate means to take ten (not 50) per cent.

4. The whole country remains taut with tension.

Taut is tense and *vice versa*.

5. Zanzibar, the island off the coast of Africa ...

"Off the coast of Africa" is useless as a description. There must be hundreds of such islands and the coast of Africa is many thousands of miles long.

6. Louis Malle has signed Tony Perkins to star in a Joseph Conrad yarn, *Liberty* ... Unless they do a lot of imaginative rewriting, isn't Tony somewhat wasted on Joseph Conrad?

This is a lallapalooza.

7. This has been said before, in fact is being currently said now by many people, but I do not know that it leaves much impact on those to whom it is addressed.

"is being", "currently" and "now" are one and the same thing. "Impact" is a sledge-hammer, not a calling card.

8. Mr. Jack Craig, a coal miner and spare-time artist, has just sold his 15,000th picture. All his pictures are painted on hardboiled eggs, most requests being for Crucifixion and Last Supper scenes, though this year portraits of the Beatles have been in demand.

See 6. above.

9. A malfunction developed in the firing mechanism.

"The firing mechanism did not work" would be too obvious a way of saying this.

10. Its directives are registered within the framework of a general policy which has an integrated character; its purpose being both initial and final, the crises demanding its attention are in depth. In order to overcome them, the tension in the atmosphere must be dispelled, there must be a wide survey of the horizon and viewpoints must be exchanged at the Heads of Government level before the Heads of State meet in a conference at the summit. (French newspaper. Quoted in *Vie et langage*)

The French say, generally with reason, that "what is not clear is not French". Obviously there are exceptions. Is "initial and final" the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning? How deep are crises "in depth"?

11. After the usual pleasantries over thick, sweet cups of Turkish coffee, the conversation drifted to politics.

The coffee, not the cups, was thick and sweet; wrong order of words.

12. Efforts were made to persuade Britain to allow Somali areas of Kenya to join Somalia before Kenyan independence and, when refused, diplomatic relations were broken off with London.

Inaccurate use of words and ellipsis. "Efforts" can fail: they cannot be refused. Even with "failed" the word "they" would be needed after "when".

Enemies by the wayside: II. Radio

Like advertising, the radio is inescapable. Along with its undeniable virtues, it has many faults, such as inaccuracy, verbosity, irrelevance, tautology, euphemism, mixing

of metaphors, sometimes sheer idiocy, as in the last example but one.

1. Since the abortive attempt to overthrow the government, the Prime Minister has been searching everywhere for a scapegoat to blunt the edge of popular dislike of the system.

He would be more likely to blunt the knife.

2. There has been an interruption in the telephone service and so we have no more news concerning the earthquake. And those are the developments in that story.

How could any developments be known when there was no news?

3. After an exhaustive study of all the relevant facts and figures, the House Committee on Committees has reached absolutely similar conclusions.

"Absolutely similar" means "the same", which is shorter. There is, incidentally, a Committee on Committees in the U.S. Congress.

4. The current temperature reading is now 40 degrees.

"Current" and "now" are unnecessary. "Is" is "current" and "now". "Reading" is verbiage.

5. Floods in Madagascar have caused extensive damage to crops and heavy loss of life. The tiny island in the middle of the Indian Ocean ...

Madagascar is not a "tiny island", but the third largest island in the world. It is also not "in the middle of the Indian Ocean".

6. Following the interception, a large explosion in the air was heard.

This is inexplicable.

7. The President was questionized by the press at the airport.

"-izing" is apparently not a United Nations monopoly.

8. The ceremony was marred by University students shouting "long live liberty!" The President explained to his distinguished visitor that this was a communist slogan.

Shades of Patrick Henry!

9. Suppose a friend told you that yesterday your favourite symphony had been played on this station and you had missed it. What mental agony you would suffer! Yet this mental agony could be avoided if you subscribed to our Programme Guide.

Unbelievable as it sounds, this was said on one of the usually more sedate radio stations.

10. XYZ time is 7 o'clock.

This can only mean that the radio station does not trust its own clocks.

Enemies by the wayside: III. Advertising

To paraphrase a familiar headline, "there's always been an ad man"—at least since the days of Herculaneum and Pompeii. It is doubtful, however, whether advertising has ever been so meretricious as today.*

1. The Bank's thrifty services.

Indeed they are—for the bank. It will charge you 11 per cent interest, calling it a discount rate of 4 per cent and hoping you will not know the difference.

2. A quaint Spanish chapel, an exotic Hindu mosque, a bit of old Holland on a tropical isle.

A Hindu mosque would indeed be exotic. So would a Moslem Jain temple.

3. Go bus and save. Buy now.

A cryptic notice once familiar on New York buses. It means: "Don't spend your money on taxis. Spend it in the shops instead."

4. The contribution of Israel to Western culture, exemplified by David's Tomb and the village of Nazareth, need no elaboration, particularly since the Bible continues to rank as the all-time best seller.

This rigmarole is from an advertisement for a Cunard Line Mediterranean cruise. It needs no comment.

5. You will be served complimentary lobster tails and filet mignon. The aeroplanes are also equipped with radar.

Stomach first, safety second.

6. Try our budget plan.

"Budget plan" is known officially in some countries as the instalment system, popularly as the "never-never plan"—because you never stop paying. The same idea is expressed in the would-be comforting, actually horrifying, phrase: "Yours today, years to pay."

*Although Dr. Johnson did write two hundred years ago: "The trade of advertising is now so near perfection, that it is not easy to propose any improvement. But as every art ought to be exercised in due subordination to the public good, I cannot but propose it as a moral question to these masters of the public ear, whether they do not sometimes play too wantonly."

7. Drink our beer. It's real beer.

The word "real" is introduced to disguise the chemical-metallic taste.

8. I repeat [they always do]: No medical evidence has proved that our [cigarette] filter causes any damage to health.

This was heard *ad nauseam* at the time of the U.S. Surgeon-General's report on the hazards of cigarette smoking. It—naturally—evades the point.

9. Tests in twenty thousand leading dental colleges have proved ...

Probably written by a broken-down hack for a very low fee. "Twenty thousand" is an exaggeration of the original.

10. It's coffee-er coffee.

No doubt we shall soon have "coffee-est" coffee.

English of the English-speaking

It is sometimes discouraging, always difficult, to try to express ourselves perfectly in a language not our own. But take heart. The statements below were made by well-educated natives of English-speaking countries—Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, United States (not in that order). I am sure we could improve on them.

1. I believe it is the Commission's practice to recommend a limited programme of work for the completion of which it considers sufficient funds can be obtained, since it realizes that it would be unwise to recommend a programme which could not be completed through lack of funds if there were not sufficient funds to complete even the limited programme if recommended.

This is from a prepared speech delivered in the Social Commission.

2. For the sake of brevity the Government gives a brief and far from exhaustive description ...

From a report on teaching about the United Nations.

3. As the details are hammered out and the outlines emerge, it can be seen that above all else it is an individual solution, tailored by the people of the islands themselves.

The tailors in the islands were probably used to making suits of armour.

4. There will be a radical change in the whole system of government as the old tribal system is transformed gradually—and it must be gradual—into a modern system of government.

From a report to the Trusteeship Council. What must be gradual—the system or the transformation?

5. The island is characterized by an economic environment which is largely of a service nature.

From a report on a Pacific Territory. Presumably means that the island's economy depends mainly on provision of services.

6. The Commissioner himself has taken personal charge of the project.

Who but "the Commissioner himself" could take "personal" charge?

7. It will be amply sufficient if the abridged account is made available.

"Sufficient" would be "ample".

8. The system is being given a trial and it is being tried in an experimental fashion.

"Trial" is "experiment" or *vice versa*.

9. The people of this country are very proud of the impact and the mark that Robert Frost has made ...

Either "impact" or "mark"; the first is strong, the second comparatively weak. This quotation from a representative's speech suggests that linguistic inflection works two ways: "impact" is one of the Secretariat's favourite ceremonial words.

10. The representative stated that Nauru presented a "special and unique difficulty" because of the resettlement problem.

"Unique" is extra-special.

11. All the members of the tribe own their own homes.

If they owned their homes, the homes must have been their own.

Euphemism

Euphemism is the use of a supposedly pleasing expression or word in place of the plainer or more accurate word. Generally, it is practised by people who wish to make it clear that they are not part of the common herd. Thus in England impoverished genteel families never take in "lodgers", but sometimes take in "paying guests".

Euphemism can be an unavoidable consequence of courtesy. When it can be avoided, it should be. It makes for pomposity and eventually results in a creeping paralysis of expression as today's euphemism develops into tomorrow's cliché.

1. While noting the smooth running of UNEF, the report discloses a less favourable financial picture.

The "less favourable financial picture" was in fact very unfavourable.

2. Ferdinand has suffered a surgical separation which will deprive him forever of the possibility of achieving fatherhood.

Sad end to the story of Ferdinand, a prize Scottish bull whose owner was hoping to sell him for a large sum when the axe fell. If Ferdinand had been a cat, he would have been "altered"—another euphemism, but shorter.

3. The precipitation probability is 30 per cent.

This may be accepted jargon, but it sounds as though the weather forecaster was offering odds against the chance of rain.

4. All the members of the Commission felt that their emoluments were far from proportionate to the important services they performed.

What they meant, of course, was that they wanted more money.

5. The aim is the production of low-cost housing within the economic possibilities of the lower-paid population.

"... housing that the lower-paid population can afford" would be shorter and more direct than "within the economic possibilities".

6. The Honourable Member is guilty of a terminological inexactitude.

The Honourable Member had told a lie, but parliamentary practice would not allow such direct statement.

7. People in the lowest economic bracket will suffer most.

This euphemistic jargon may be useful to the economist, but it makes the poor sound as though they were strung together in a chain gang.

8. The canine control officer's duties will include ...

"Dog-Catcher" would have expressed this officer's duties more briefly and more simply. It recalls the wartime "Directorate of infestation control" in the British Ministry of Food, which was mainly concerned with killing rats.

9. Senior citizens will be the first to be affected.

"Senior citizens" implies that plain old age is a disgrace.

Inflation

Many economists disapprove of monetary inflation. Some economists in the United Nations are given to verbal inflation. Of the ten examples below, all but one were taken from recent economic reports. To put it in United Nations language, verbal inflation is among the economists' "most fundamental" sins.

1. The response of Jamaica lays special stress on unemployment and under-employment.

Stress is already "special".

2. It should be particularly emphasized that scientific and technological planning ...

"Emphasized" is enough.

3. In conclusion it must be re-emphasized that equal pay for equal work, however important it may be, is only one aspect of the broader question of women's wages.

If the point has already been emphasized, "restated" would be enough.

4. All this strongly underlines the urgent need for international measures ...

Underlining is strong enough by itself, especially when the need is urgent.

5. Farm output fluctuates rather violently in response to changing weather conditions.

This is an example of a writer's being conscious of overstatement with the word "violently" and of his trying to rectify the overstatement by qualifying the "violently" with "rather". He would have done better to find the right word.

6. The crucial problem of developing the production of local materials ... was stressed ...

If the problem was "crucial", it did not have to be stressed.

7. The reform of land tenure was among the most fundamental problems of economic development.

How many degrees are there—most fundamental, more fundamental, fundamental, unfundamental?

8. Imports of coffee ... have risen extremely rapidly in most recent years.

How extreme is "extremely"?

9. With respect to the former, it was stressed in the course of the Meeting that an indispensable prerequisite for the attainment of a system which met the needs of all developing countries was the complete abolition of the discriminatory preferences ...

A "prerequisite" is by definition indispensable. "Abolition" is by definition complete.

10. It is hardly surprising that the issue of African association with the EEC has been one of the Commission's most dominant problems.

See 7. above.

11. It is highly significant that there has been a very large growth of power demand.

"Significant" is already high. How much larger than large is "very large"?

12. The Mission was glad to note that special emphasis had been put on the development of co-operatives ...

Emphasis is "special".

"It is (or may be) ..." sentences

"It is" sentences are risky for the international civil servant. They may lead him into verbiage, a venial sin, or to expression of personal opinion, a cardinal sin.

1. It is significant that it was in this period of change ... that the Commission began to take a direct interest in the subject ...

Here "it is" has bred: "it is" and "it was". Why was "it" significant? Why could we not leave out the first six words, and consequently the "that", thereby saving seven words?

2. It is important to realize, however, that the validity of such estimates depends on the achievement of a rather high degree of accuracy ...

Who decided that it was "important to realize"? We should not instruct our masters. They will judge for themselves whether or not something is important.

3. It may be recalled that a preliminary assessment of this nature was presented to the second session ...

"It may be recalled that" is verbiage.

4. Clearly it is desirable that stable trading conditions should be established for as long periods as possible.

If the desirability is clear, then we do not need to say so.

5. It is important to realize that the matching, however elaborate, of the sample and the population with respect to one or more control variates provides no guarantee that the sample is representative ...

See 4. above.

7. It is obvious that there is no unitary indicator available ...

If it is obvious, then we do not need to say so. We must not patronize our readers.

8. It is clear that the scale on which the compensatory principle might be applied may be varied very widely.

See 4. above.

Jargon: Bureaucrats'

We are so accustomed to the jargon around us that we sometimes forget how much we ourselves contribute to it and how much we use it between ourselves.

1. The contents of your memoranda of 5 and 25 July were referred fully to Mexico City in an effort to avoid or minimize any future situations of disparity between the availability, and the press release, of the publications.

This may mean that "we will try to ensure that enough copies will be sent to Mexico City before the Press is informed".

2. It is expected that staff will not fall short of the highest standards in regard to punctuality and to achieving a high level of work output.

Presumably means: "Get to the office on time and work hard".

3. The structure of pay in the Civil Service is characterized by a consistent application of the principle of equal pay for equal work.

This was a government reply, edited by the Secretariat, to a United Nations questionnaire. It means that "the principle of equal pay for equal work was consistently applied in the Civil Service".

4. Both in the impending extrusions to the Conference Building and in any new building ...

Is there a hernia specialist in the house?

5. Members of the division must sharpen their backgrounds.

I think this means that members of the division must increase their knowledge.

6. Air transport by a direct route shall normally be regarded as the basic standard.

"Normally" is "standard" and "standard" is "basic". The intention, as a member of the Office of Personnel explained, was to leave a loophole for exceptional cases. The intention was admirable. But both "basic" and "normally" could have been omitted.

7. This passageway [in a Government building] has been made non-conducive to utilization for an indefinite period.

This beats anything United Nations bureaucrats have done.

Jargon: Economists'

The sociologists' jargon is probably the worst. Economists run a close second.

1. Then, towards the end of the year, the clouds appeared to be lifting—with better food crops in sight in a number of countries, industrial capacity (if not yet output) clearly on the rise in India, some of the smaller industrial producers showing continued gains, the up-sloping edge of the "saucer" of Japan's cycle apparently reached or passed. All the long-term economic problems remained, summed up in the dangerous tendency for the income gap between the developed and the less developed countries to widen; there was reason, however, to hope that this dip in the curve lay behind.

Back to Omar Khayyam:

Awake! for Saucers in the Dip of Sight

Have flung the Curve that put the Clouds to Flight.

2. Calculations on a service-inclusive concept would probably reveal about the same rate of growth.

The calculations included the cost of services. But why the "concept" when "basis" would have served as well and would have sounded less fuzzy.

3. It should be added, in connection with the relativity inherent in the term "productivity", that exact comparison between the productivity of various units of labour is possible only when its volume is measured in homogeneous terms. In all other cases, particularly when productivity in various sectors or in various countries is being compared, only apparent productivity—incorporating differences in the evaluation of the product in various branches or countries resulting from specific characteristics and variations in price structure, and from the more or less arbitrary rates used for converting national currencies

into dollars or other units of measurement—can be taken into consideration. This does not mean that under such conditions the term productivity becomes meaningless; it is only a demonstration of its limitations for measuring and comparing the results of human activities in countries with highly different price-structures, strongly influenced by institutional factors and arbitrary decisions.

Only "arbitrary decisions" could make this clear to the layman.

4. An exercise that seeks quantitative answers relating to a period which is some distance away in the future must by its very nature be highly tentative.

He meant that what followed was largely guesswork.

5. It is obvious that there is no unitary indicator available which by itself alone encapsulates the totality of the level of living concept and which can therefore serve for comparison.

This presumably means that no single factor suffices to assess levels of living. But why the capsules and the concepts?

6. The economic nexus between the Great Powers of Western Europe and the New World ... By the beginning of the U.N. Development Decade the links had been largely broken or at least severely modified ... The establishment of new industries ... may lead to increased external economies through the inter-industry nexus ...

Of course "links" is a plain monosyllable and can therefore be severely treated. A fancy "nexus" could not.

7. A high input of manpower is required.

If we said "much labour is needed", we should be as easily understood and not suspected of equating men with the animals in the Chicago stockyards.

8. The optimum level for new productive installations ...

Why not "the best level"? It is shorter and more easily understandable.

9. Quantitatively, however, the order of magnitude was in any case small.

"Magnitude" and "small" do not sit well together. As the context shows, what was meant was that the quantity of "dispensable imports" was small.

Jargon: Scientists'

We might have expected scientists to be as exact in the use of words as they must be in the use of figures. They are not always so. The following quotations are from scientific journals and scientific committees.

1. With its short-term prospects exaggerated through ignorance born of the cloak of secrecy in which it has been wrapped, fusion work has now been forced partly out into the open by political considerations. The picture revealed is one of a field very much in its infancy.

Birth under a cloak is conceivable. The imagination boggles at a very infant field, even when it reveals a picture.

2. In astronautics much of the payoff is likely to lie in the doing of new kinds of things. Practical realization of these payoffs is dependent upon our recognizing the unique capabilities in the field and developing (inventing perhaps) the applications that make them useful. This is true in all the possible areas of interest. A space weapon will make no real contribution to defense unless it is accompanied by a clear concept of useful employment—an innovation in military science must be sought in some cases. The physical capability for worldwide live television by satellite relays is a hollow thing without a complex of planning and agreements that put suitable receiving sets in the homes on the ground and attractive program material into the transmitter. The opportunity to put scientific instruments into space is of only minor importance if it is not adequately supported by attention to basic theory and laboratory research on the ground.

This has almost everything: "fields", "concepts", "basics". To take it sentence by sentence: first sentence: "payoff" is a vulgarism for "profit"; second sentence: "practical" is tautological; third sentence: verbiage; fifth and sixth sentences: bromides (q.v.).

3. The once fair-haired space project is now floundering in a morass of uncertainty.

Let's hope that the fair hair will not become muddled in the morass.

Jargon: Sociologists'

Because the social scientists are comparative newcomers, they have, perhaps inevitably, invented more jargon than other specialists. Also, as one of our own

reports put it, they think in "the slower and more circuitous fashion proper to sociological analysis".

1. Operationalism in the administration of correctional institutions, whether for adult, adolescent or juvenile offenders, is a pragmatic and experimental planning for a treatment programme.

This seems to be an upside-down cake. I think it means that a practical ("pragmatic") plan for treating offenders of all ages ("whether for adult, adolescent or juvenile") may be derived from experience ("operationalism") in correctional institutions. "And experimental" seems to be thrown in for good measure.

2. The reports referred to embody a number of basic concepts that should be taken into account in considering the organization and administrative arrangements necessary to implement programme objectives. These, together with other relevant concepts, might be reviewed by the Working Group with a view to preparation of a statement identifying those concepts that have particular significance for the organization and administration of all types of services.

"The reports referred to" = these reports. "Basic concepts" means, if anything, principles. "Necessary to implement programme objectives" = needed. (Maury Maverik, when head of the Small Businesses Administration, said that "anyone using the word 'activation' or 'implementation' will be shot.") How do we "identify a concept"—or capture a gremlin?

3. A few of the basic concepts that should be considered in the organization and administration of welfare services as dealt with in this working paper are briefly listed below without elaboration. This is not an exhaustive listing, and while no attempt is made to include basic concepts that have significance for services in other fields, a number of the concepts suggested here are of perhaps comparable importance to all services.

"... without elaboration. This is not an exhaustive listing," and "other fields" could be omitted without loss.

4. But, because all the facets of society are so intimately inter-related, any attempt to guide social change implies that man must know more about the totality of the human pattern than the sum of the specificities of knowledge about each sector of social life.

I think this means that we must look at society as a whole rather than at the particular sections of it.

5. If we assume that in the modern pluralist state, associations and social groups seek to gain their own objectives, and legislatures serve mainly to resolve into a workable pattern the conflicts arising from this multiplicity of objectives, then public

administration is the major instrument indicated by the value system of a society.

Legislatures try to reconcile the demands of pressure groups and to do so through public administration.

6. Administratively, it is a longitudinal problem running all the way from the police, through the courts, through the institutions, and out on after-care (parole) and premature (conditional) release. No one of the way-stations along the line should be out of gear with any other way-station.

Not only the problem, but also the metaphor, is running away.

Metaphors, plain and mixed

Metaphor is the application of a name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable. Mixed metaphors are a combination of inconsistent metaphors.

Metaphors can be charming ornaments. They can also be traps into the pit of the ludicrous. Sometimes the best test of them is to draw a picture.

1. This small Mediterranean republic has been ravaged by a bloody tug-of-war.

A tug-of-war does not usually draw blood.

2. UNICEF equipment has filtered down to tens of thousands of similar villages.

What a filter!

3. Scientists at Caltech have announced the discovery of a virgin field pregnant with possibilities.

No comment.

4. The Department has sent its ace trouble-shooter to iron out the smouldering dispute.

Cards, guns, laundries, fire engines.

5. The Raffles Library was separated administratively from the Museum and is now included in the portfolio of the Ministry of Education.

Who carries the portfolio?

6. ECAFE has spearheaded developments in the field of customs administration.

What are spears doing in the fields?

7. The Council was pleased to note ... that ample provision of funds for developing a future home for the Nauruan people was not and will not be a stumbling block towards a solution.

A stumbling block cannot lead towards a solution.
It stands in the way of it.

8. We congratulate the Chairman on his skill in piloting the Committee's ship on to the solid ground of reality.

The Chairman should lose his pilot's licence.

9. We must break the stalemate in the field of disarmament.

Unless the United Nations has changed the rules of chess, stalemate is the end of the game.

10. The strong arm of the law is marching after the offenders.

The law is obviously acrobatic.

Plain and fancy words

Statesmen use the plain words, politicians the fancy. In the United Nations many fancy words have prevailed just as, according to Gresham's Law, bad money drives out good.

Here is an incomplete list.

<i>Plain</i>	<i>Fancy</i>
ask.....	request
because.....	in view of the fact that
before.....	prior to
carry out.....	implement
cause	be conducive to
come.....	emanate
explain	clarify
give	make a donation of
if	in the event of
in.....	in the position, as regards
many.....	a large (considerable, sizable, substantial) number of
much.....	a considerable (sizable) quantity of
now.....	at the present time

often.....	frequently, in a great number of instances
on.....	with regard to, with respect to, concerning
opinion (of).....	reaction (to)
pay, allowances.....	emoluments, honoraria
read	peruse
say.....	indicate
send	communicate, transmit
steps.....	appropriate (positive) measures
while.....	during such time as
	and lastly
naughty boys.....	juvenile pre-delinquents
	which has an exceptionally greasy flavour.

Say the word (and, if need be, say it again)

If a word says exactly what we mean and we cannot substitute a pronoun for it, we should say it again. It is much better to repeat a word than to use roundabout descriptive phrases.

1. Saudi Arabia is one of the few absolute monarchies remaining. Now that the oil-rich kingdom ...

This is journalistic cramming (q.v.). If it had said that "Saudi Arabia is rich in oil. It is one of the few ...", that would have been more straightforward and would not have taken much more space.

2. X took the ball from Y and had dribbled the sphere to within three yards of the goal when ...

Sports writers are given to this kind of writing in every country. Substitute "it" for "the sphere" and we lose nothing.

3. Most of the Commission's work is based on information supplied by Governments. These data include ...

"Information" or "data" would serve in both cases. The variation is unnecessary.

4. BTAO works in many different countries. The mutual-aid agency ...

cf. 1 above, "BTAO is a mutual aid agency. It works in many different countries ..."

5. Libya is having to face many new problems. The desert kingdom ...

"Libya is a desert country. Because of this it has to face ..." would be a more direct way of stating the facts.

6. The canal has now been blocked for four weeks, but the vital waterway ...

"The canal is a vital waterway, but it has now ..." would drive the point home more directly.

7. J.D.F., editor of the Milwaukee Journal and president of the Journal Company for nearly 18 years ... died today. The 74-year-old newspaper executive ...

We know from the first sentence that J.D.F. was a newspaper executive. It would be enough to add that "He was 74".

8. The Secretary of Labour speaks today before ... In his prepared address the head of the Labour Department says ... In the Cabinet Member's opinion ...

Substitute "he" for "the head of the Labour Department" (the readers could be assumed to know that that is what the Secretary of Labour is) and "in his" for "in the Cabinet Member's ..." More journalistic cramming.

Short and long

Short sentences are usually easier to read, as in these *Wishes of an Elderly Man (Wished at a Garden Party, June, 1914)* by Sir Walter Raleigh (1861-1922):

*I wish I loved the Human Race.
I wish I loved its silly face.
I wish I liked the way it walks.
I wish I liked the way it talks ...*

But long sentences can be readable too. Another Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), ancestor of the first, described a landscape as follows in his *Discovery of Guiana*:

"On both sides of this river we passed the most beautiful country that I ever saw; and whereas all that we had seen before was nothing but woods, prickles, bushes and thorns, here we beheld plains of twenty miles in length, the grass short and green, and in divers parts groves of trees by themselves, as if they had been by all the art and labour in the world so made of purpose; and still, as we rowed, the deer came down feeding by the water's side, as if they had been used to a keeper's call."

The later Sir Walter wrote sentences of 7-8 words; the earlier a sentence of 117 words. Both were readable, however, because both used words that were simple, direct, mostly monosyllabic and used them to say precisely what had to be said.

Tautology

A horrible word, a horrible thing. It means repeating the same idea in the same context, often in the same sentence. We are prone to it. The reason is partly because we have to listen to many tautological speeches and the language of the speakers is infectious. It is also because we do not always have time to re-read and see whether all our words are really necessary.

1. The Committee took note of the fact that most developing countries of the region depended primarily on agriculture as a primary source of income and employment.

Either "primarily" or "primary" is unnecessary.

2. The Board decided that 3,000 copies of the Spanish version could be given away free.

"Given away free" is on a par with the huckster's "free gifts".

3. The seminar reports, which succinctly summarize the discussions, have aroused wide interest ...

If a summary is not succinct, it is not a summary.

4. The basic economy of the Territory still depends primarily on subsistence agriculture and fishing.

Either "basic" or "primarily". Not both.

5. Declarations ... may be made by governments where an agreement is in their view not completely explicit ...

"Explicit" is complete.

6. It was difficult to reach any final conclusion on the articles in section II.

A conclusion is final.

7. What is needed over and above all else ...

"Above all" would be enough. "Over and" is verbiage.

8. Given the efforts that are currently being made by the countries of the area ...

"Currently" is "being".

9. In regard to the possible establishment of a joint spectrographic laboratory in Southeast Asia, the Committee realized that the Seminar's proposal in this regard ...

"In regard to" makes "in this regard" unnecessary. If the idea were stated directly—"The Committee realized that the Seminar's proposal for ..."—neither would be needed.

10. On several occasions the Executive Secretary has sought to look ahead towards these future potentialities.

Potentialities are for the future. Also the Executive Secretary could hardly look backward to the future.

11. Pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the Trusteeship Council, the Secretary-General examined the credentials of the representative of ... and found that they had been issued in accordance with the provisions of rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the Trusteeship Council.

This needs no comment.

Verbiage

The penny-a-liner died with the First World War, but probably has some dime-a-liner descendants. He was so called because newspapers paid him an English penny (then \$0.02 plus) for each line and, naturally, he stretched out what he had to say to as many lines as possible. The result was verbiage, which one dictionary defines as an "abundance of words without necessity or without much meaning", another as "a flow of incoherent words". It is also known as logorrhea. We should not be penny-a-liners.

1. As in all specializations, research specialists emerge as the top layer of a broad pyramid of people professionally qualified in that field of activity.

Research specialists are the best researchers. The top of a pyramid is a point, not a layer.

2. A high degree of conservatism still characterizes the interpretation of Islam in relation to life in a changing world.

The original report said: "The population is Moslem. It is conservative in outlook." We supplied the rest.

3. During the past decade (1951-1961), the recorded growth of electricity generation has shown an increase of about 300 per cent.

"Generation of electricity has increased about 300 per cent during the last ten years." "Electricity generation" is ungainly, ungrammatical, unnecessary

ellipsis and makes more obvious the verbiage of "recorded growth" and "has shown an increase".

4. During 1962 two experts began work on collecting general information on requirements.

Why could they not "begin to collect"?

5. "Urbanization" is used in the present context to refer to the process whereby an increasing proportion of a country's population lives in urban localities.

This is presumably: "Urbanization here means movement of people from the country to the town". "Urban localities" is polysyllabic inflation of the monosyllabic "town".

6. The Special Fund's operations are intended to be of immediate significance for the acceleration of the economic development of the less developed countries.

"Are intended to accelerate" would be more straightforward and would save nine words.

7. The projects in the vicinity of Basra are not paradigmatic under the viewpoint of duplicability.

The Basra projects were not good models.

8. There was unanimous agreement on the importance of industrial co-ordination and of proceeding rapidly towards its realization in practice.

Everyone agreed that industrial co-ordination should be achieved as soon as possible.

9. In Japan exports of private capital to these countries in the form of export credits recorded a sharp increase in 1962.

"Increased sharply" would be shorter and more sensible. Export credits can be recorded, but could hardly themselves record.

10. A substantially strengthened system of regional research institutes could in principle supplement national efforts in a very useful manner.

"Substantially" and "in a very useful manner" are too fuzzy to mean much. "In principle" raises doubt whether the author means what he says.

11. The multiplicity of cues which are utilized in the categorizing and sorting of the environment into significant classes are reconstructed from the strategies and modes of coping with the problems presented to the subjects. In many situations, no certainty can be achieved; the varying trustworthiness and merely statistical validity of the cues frequently make inferences only probable. The question therefore arises as to the generalizability of the forms of thought patterns and adaptations (as they are

derived from laboratory experiments) to scientific procedures, linguistic and cultural patterns. This claim is justified, since the scope of the cognitive problems studied, and of the mechanisms for dealing with them, represents the necessary spread and intricacy.

This was a preface by a professor to the work of three other professors. "Physician, heal thyself!"

12. It is difficult to understand why the Department does not withdraw these obsolete instructions with maximum rapidity.

What the editorial writer meant by "with maximum rapidity" was "at once", but that would have been only two monosyllables.

Without respect ...

Roundabout phrases like "with respect to", "as regards", "in reference to", deserve little respect. They hinder direct statement. They lengthen sentences. They are usually unnecessary.

The rewriting of the sentences and phrases below shows how many words could have been saved by direct statement. (The number saved is given in brackets.) The saving in cost of typing, translation and reproduction may not be important. Easier readability means a saving in reading time and that is important.

1. With respect to the question of exports of manufactures and semi-manufactures there was general agreement on the indispensable need for Latin America to expand the flow of these exports to the developed countries.

There was general agreement on the indispensable need for Latin America to expand the flow of exports of manufactures and semi-manufactures to the developed countries. (6 words. Add one more for "indispensable", which is dispensable).

2. As regards cereals and livestock products, the trade deficit of the developing countries has increased fivefold between 1953-1955 and 1959-1961.

The trade deficit of the developing countries in cereals and livestock products has increased fivefold between 1953-1955 and 1959-1961. (1 word)

3. With regard to the topic of state responsibility, he shared the view of the General Rapporteur that the topic could not be placed on the same level as the law of treaties.

He shared the General Rapporteur's view that the topic of state responsibility could not be placed on the same level as the law of treaties. (5 words. Add two more for "of the")

4. With respect to science, the contents of training courses are decided upon in close consultation with universities.

The contents of training courses in science are decided upon in close consultation with universities. (2 words)

5. As regards gas turbines, their installation cost is less than that of steam plants.

The cost of installing gas turbines is less than that of installing steam plants. (4 words)

6. With respect to development, the constitution establishes the following principles ...

The constitution establishes the following principles for development ... (2 words)

7. In relation to the creation of regional or international institutions, the main point to consider is the need of human, physical and economic resources.

The main point to consider in creating regional or international institutions is the need of human, physical and economic resources. (5 words)

8. So far as the net outflow of long-term funds to the developing countries is concerned, France and the United Kingdom were the two largest contributors after the United States.

After the United States, France and the United Kingdom were the two largest contributors to the net outflow of long-term funds to the developing countries. (4 words)

9. I cannot recall at the moment which delegations exhibited particular interest in the position as regards the cotton crop.

This passage was also English of the English-speaking.

Annex III

REWRITING CAN HELP

Destructive criticism is easy. Constructive criticism—which is in fact reconstruction—is hard, but worth while. In the following pages, passages from a social and an economic report, an administrative circular and a resolution of the Economic and Social Council have been rewritten in an attempt to show that what they said could have been said more briefly and thereby more clearly. The ECOSOC resolution was of course subject to the restrictions mentioned in the Guide.

Besides being good intellectual exercise, rewriting, followed by a comparison of the before and after, is one way of learning how to write clearly and concisely.

Social

FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SOCIAL DEFENCE PROGRAMME

...

2. This report did not, in the Secretary-General's view, offer a fully satisfactory basis for resolving the difficulties arising from the different resolutions and directives relating to the programme of work assigned to the Secretariat in the social field. However, he expressed the hope that informal discussions with Governments and with the non-governmental organizations concerned could take place early enough to enable the Secretary-General to make satisfactory proposals before the next session of the Social Commission.

3. Such informal conversations took place in Geneva in July and August first with the representatives of certain Governments and later with representatives of the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation.

4. At the informal meeting with the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation, a preliminary agreement was reached that the following should remain United Nations responsibilities as part of its leadership in the field of social defence: the organization of quinquennial congresses; the meetings of the *Ad Hoc* Committee of Experts; the publication of the *International Review of Criminal Policy*; and the system of correspondents. With respect to the decentralization of activities, agreement was reached on the creation of regional institutes. Some measure of agreement was found as regards the possible transfer of certain activities from United Nations Headquarters to the United Nations

Geneva Office. With respect to the effective co-ordination of activities, the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation agreed to discuss the matter with the non-governmental organizations dealing exclusively with social defence matters. In turn, the Secretariat would approach other non-governmental organizations having consultative status in the field of social defence.

5. Regarding the negotiations to be undertaken by the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation, it is expected that information will reach the Secretariat shortly.

6. With respect to the other non-governmental organizations, the Secretary-General has been able to discuss the question of more effective collaboration with a substantial number of them. Although some of these organizations are directly concerned with social defence matters, most of them deal with these matters within a more general framework of activities. This, and the fact that their financial and, therefore, their research resources are very limited, explain the limited character of their possible co-operation, especially as far as the farming out of United Nations activities in the field of social defence is concerned.

FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SOCIAL DEFENCE PROGRAMME

...

2. This report did not offer a satisfactory basis for resolving the difficulties arising from resolutions and directives on the Secretariat's programme of social work. However, the Secretary-General hoped that informal discussions with Governments and non-governmental organizations could take place early enough to enable the Secretary-General to make proposals before the Social Commission's next session.

3. Such discussions took place in Geneva in July and August, first with Governments and later with the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation.

4. At the discussion with the Foundation, a preliminary agreement was reached that the United Nations should remain responsible for organization of quinquennial congresses; the meetings of the *Ad Hoc* Committee of Experts; publication of the *International Review of Criminal Policy*; and the system of correspondents. Agreement was reached on the creation of regional institutes in order to decentralize activities. There was some measure of agreement about the transfer of some activities from United Nations Headquarters to the Geneva Office. The Foundation agreed to discuss co-ordination of activities with the non-governmental organizations dealing exclusively with social defence, while the Secretariat would approach other non-governmental organizations having consultative status on social defence.

CO-ORDINATION OF INLAND TRANSPORT

5. It is expected that information about the Foundation's discussions will reach the Secretariat soon.

6. The Secretary-General has discussed the question of more effective collaboration with ten* other non-governmental organizations. Although some of them are directly concerned with social defence, most of them deal with it within a more general framework. This, and the fact that their financial and, therefore, their research resources are small, explain why their co-operation may be limited, especially as far as the farming out of United Nations social defence activities is concerned.

Notes

It would be tedious to explain every deletion and change. Only the following general comments are therefore made:

1. Adverbial and adjectival stuffing ("fully", "the different", "satisfactory" in para. 2; "certain" in para. 3; "effective" in para. 4; "substantial" in para. 6) has been removed.

2. Repetitions have been eliminated. Since the discussions were described as "informal" in para. 2, it is unnecessary to repeat "informal" in paras. 3 and 4. Since the IPPF is given its full title in para. 2, "the Foundation" is enough thereafter.

3. Terminology has been made uniform. "Discussions" is the word used in para. 2. There is no need to change it to "conversations" (para. 3), "meeting" (para. 4) and "negotiations" (para. 5).

4. Sentences beginning "with respect to" (two in para. 4 and one in para. 6) and "regarding" (para. 5) have been turned around and made direct.

5. "Representatives of" (twice in para. 3) has been cut. Obviously, the discussions would be with representatives.

6. The bombastic and self-congratulatory "as part of its leadership in the field of social defence" has been cut.

7. All fields have been ploughed under.

8. Whenever possible, an apostrophe "s" has been substituted for "of the". Perhaps because of the influence of the French language, the apostrophe "s" is neglected in United Nations reports.

9. The result is a reduction of more than a quarter. Many of the words used are also shorter ("on" for "relating to" in para. 2, "soon" for "shortly" in para. 5, "some" for "a number" in para. 6).

*A foot-note showed that the "substantial number" was ten.

This item is based on Economic and Social Council resolutions 147 I (VII) and 298 H (XI). The first provides that the long-term aspect of the question of co-ordination of inland transport should be further reviewed by the Transport and Communications Commission; the second requests the Secretary-General to continue to pursue the matter. The problem of the co-ordination of inland transport was first placed before the Commission at its second session, and has since been considered at all subsequent sessions. At present activities relating to this subject are carried out under Economic and Social Council resolutions 147 I (VII) and 298 H (XI), and are governed by a statement of the Commission in which it was stated that although the problem primarily was regional in scope, the Secretary-General should continue to make reports to the Commission on developments in this field. Therefore, at its eighth session the Commission examined a report by the Secretary-General (document E/CN.2/182), summarizing developments since the previous session, and noting activities in this field by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the International Railway Congress Association and the International Railway Union (IUR). The present note contains a brief survey of more important developments in the field of co-ordination of inland transport on an international level since the last meeting of the Commission.

The Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, at its seventh session in February 1958 recommended that the *ad hoc* Working Party established to study problems of co-ordination of inland transport should concentrate in particular on the analysis of the principles and methods of co-ordination of different forms of transport, statutory or otherwise, in the countries of the region, as well as in some countries outside the region, and suggest other aspects of co-ordination requiring further study.

CO-ORDINATION OF INLAND TRANSPORT

This item is based on Economic and Social Council resolutions 147 I (VII) and 298 H (XI). The first resolution provides that long-term co-ordination of inland transport should be further reviewed by the Transport and Communications Commission; the second requests the Secretary-General to pursue the matter. The item has been on the agenda since the Commission's second session, and has been considered at all subsequent sessions. Work on it is carried out under the Council resolutions and is governed by the Commission's statement that, although the problem was primarily regional, the Secretary-General should continue to report developments. At its eighth session the

Commission examined a report by the Secretary-General summarizing developments since the previous session, and noting the activities of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East; the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America, the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Railway Congress Association and the International Railway Union. This note deals with developments in international co-ordination of inland transport since the Commission's last session.

The Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, at its seventh session in February 1958 recommended that the *ad hoc* Working Party on the subject should concentrate on the principles and methods of co-ordination of all forms of transport in the region, as well as in some countries outside, and suggest what other questions required further study.

Notes

1. "... aspect of the question of ..." (line 3) is verbiage.
2. "to pursue" is "to continue" (line 6).
3. "The problem of the co-ordination of inland transport" (lines 6-7) is the item mentioned in line 1.
4. "At present activities relating to this subject are ..." (line 9 is "Work on it (the same old item) is ..."
5. "... a statement of the Commission in which it was stated ..." (lines 11-12) is "the Commission's statement ..."
6. "in scope" (lines 12-13) is unnecessary.
7. "... make reports to the Commission on developments in this field ..." (lines 13-14) is "report developments". To what body other than the Commission would the Secretary-General report?
8. "The present ..." (line 23 is bureaucratic verbiage for "this". With a verb in the present tense the note could hardly be past or future.
9. "... contains a brief survey ..." (line 23 is more verbiage. A note is by definition brief. "... more important ..." (same line) begs a question, implies a judgement and is superfluous.
10. "... meeting ..." (line 25) in this context presumably means "session". Say the word and, if need be, say it again.
11. "... established to study problems of co-ordination of inland transport ..." (lines 28-29) is "on the subject". Readers of this report might be presumed to know that the Working Party had been established and why.
12. "... concentrate in particular ..." (lines 29-30). Concentration is particular.

13. "... different forms of transport, statutory or otherwise, in the countries of the region ..." (lines 31-32) is "... all forms of transport in the region ..."

14. All "aspects", "fields" and "levels" have been removed.

15. The result is a reduction by one quarter.

Administrative

UNITED NATIONS GARDENS

The construction programme currently in progress at United Nations Headquarters has prevented the normal opening of the gardens to the staff and the general public. It is now anticipated that with the erection of safety and security barriers it will be possible by 15 May to open a portion of the grounds. Because of the requirements of construction, certain areas formerly available for enjoyment by the staff and public must be restricted this summer, and the area so restricted will be delineated by a fence.

The only available access to the north gardens will be through the gate at 47th Street and First Avenue, and during construction the gardens to the south of the Conference building will be closed entirely. In particular, it should be noted that it will not be possible for staff members to enter the gardens through the doors in the first basement of the Conference building.

These regulations are necessary in the interest of the safety of staff members and visitors, and the co-operation of all staff members is solicited in adhering to the temporary restrictions on the use of the gardens while construction is in progress.

UNITED NATIONS GARDENS

1. Because of the construction in progress the United Nations gardens have not been opened to the staff and the public at the usual time. It is, however, expected that part of the gardens will be opened by 15 May. By then the working areas will be fenced off.

2. The only access to the north gardens will be by the gate at 47th Street and First Avenue. The gardens south of the Conference building will be closed. Staff members will not be able to enter the gardens through the first basement.

3. These regulations are necessary to ensure the safety of staff and visitors. All staff members are asked to co-operate.

The original was such a hodge-podge of bureaucrats' ("currently in progress", "normal", "safety and security barriers") jargon that the only course possible was to rewrite it completely. "Anticipated" is a fancy word for "expected". "Portion of the grounds" presumably means "part of the gardens". "Available for enjoyment" is treacle; "delineated by a fence" is verbiage. "Solicited" sounds better than the peremptory tone of some earlier administrative circulars, but goes too far the other way.

UNITED NATIONS WRITERS CAN WRITE

Lest it should be thought that all United Nations reports are written in the "pompous, polysyllabic and relentlessly abstract style" deplored by Edmund Wilson, the following passages from United Nations reports on economic, social and scientific subjects are reproduced to show that some United Nations writers can write to be read.

At least one of the passages is by a member of the Secretariat who was not writing in his native tongue.

Economic

WINDOWS AND SHUTTERS

Since 1950 competition between wooden and metal windows has continued to be intense, but it may be doubted whether either has gained much ground, as the more important developments have either been neutral or have offset each other. Standardization is an interesting example. Architects and builders have tended to resist standardization, either as limiting their freedom of design or the scope for their special skills. In most European countries, however, they are gradually being overruled by public authorities, who are responsible for large house-building programmes and anxious to keep costs down. This, it might be thought, would tell in favour of the metal windows; but, in fact, new woodworking machines have been introduced, whose high output can be fully exploited only in the manufacture of a well-defined standard product, and which have so reduced the cost of wooden windows as fully to maintain their competitive position. Similarly the modern trend in design has been towards better external lighting, through larger windows and slenderer frames, and this again would seem to favour the metal window. But the process of standardization has itself led to a more economical use of wood and has been assisted in some countries by the greater availability of tropical woods of suitable quality, which have also been highly acceptable aesthetically. Research too appears to be reducing maintenance costs impartially; improved anti-corrosion treatments have been developed for metal windows; but so have better protective coverings, for example in stainless steel itself or moulded plastics, for wooden ones. While statistical evidence is almost wholly lacking, it seems unlikely, therefore, that the consumption of wood in windows, whether in single-family or multifamily dwellings, has changed much since 1950; it has probably neither gained nor lost ground to metal, and a

more economical use has been offset by an increase in window area per dwelling.

(European Timber Trends and Prospects, 1950-1975, p. 19, UN/FAO)

Social

SELECTIVE ENTITLEMENT TO SOCIAL BENEFITS

In countries where social resources are still inadequate to meet fully any particular type of social need, difficult choices must constantly be made between individuals and localities with equally valid claims, in terms of their need for the benefit or service provided. There is, therefore, a constant demand, as the total scope of such programmes expands, for objective criteria of entitlement by which such choices can be rationalized, and for incorporation of these criteria into laws and administrative policies that will reduce the need for *ad hoc* decisions. This has usually been done in three different ways. The first is to specify the particular type of need that will be considered the basis for entitlement; as, for example, that of a child lacking any source of adult care and support. A second method, often combined with the first, limits entitlement not only by social situation but also by economic circumstances. This method, often characterized by its use of the so-called "means test", is the typical pattern of public assistance in which economic aid is extended to persons in certain designated situations. The third method is to reduce the extent of social need by making provisions for its prevention. This is the role of contributory social insurance, under which certain predictable needs are anticipated through pooled compulsory savings, protecting the covered group against a common risk, such as unemployment, loss of earnings in old age or disability. Direct public services for particular groups, services required of certain classes of employers, and tax concessions for persons in specified situations are also methods of preventing need by selective entitlement.

The common characteristic of social programmes in countries at this stage is, therefore, the factor of selective entitlement, which may be extremely restrictive or become increasingly inclusive. Selective entitlement is particularly important in reconciling social advance with economic reality, in the period when countries begin to shift the major burden of support for non-producers from the individual family to a broader social base. The older system of familial and voluntary responsibility places virtually the whole burden of relieving indigency on the poor themselves. As a higher level of national income is achieved, this compounding of misery—however inescapable in an impoverished society—is less likely to be considered tolerable. On the other hand, no other form of social service is as costly as one that involves the assumption of responsibility for maintenance.

For this reason, in developing countries, public assistance is almost inevitably limited in the beginning to a relatively small group of people and given at an economic level that is considerably below the prevailing level of living for the population as a whole. Despite these limitations, however, any public assistance programme which underpins a minimum level of living for a particular group of people must be considered a major landmark in the total span of social service development. Not only is the principle of a minimum social guarantee of basic significance, but the institutional mechanism thus established can be and typically has been expanded to cover a wider range of need more adequately as resources permit.

(1963 Report on the World Social Situation, p. 110, UN)

Scientific

ATOMIC RADIATION

1. Living beings have always been exposed to ionizing radiation from various natural sources. Nevertheless, the discovery of X-rays by Roentgen in 1895, and of radio-activity in uranium salts by Becquerel in 1896, brought, in addition to very great benefits, unforeseen hazards. Considerable damage resulted until the first measures of precaution were adopted. Indeed, within only five years, 170 cases of radiation injury were recorded.

2. The medical use of X-rays increased considerably during the First World War; this increased the incidence of over-exposure. By 1922 about 100 radiologists had died from its effects. The discovery of radio-activity was followed by a rapid development in knowledge of the characteristics and properties of radio-active substances, their separation and their applications, so that the hazard became extended to those undertaking chemical work with radio-active materials.

3. As exposure of human beings and of animals led progressively to knowledge of the gross effects of radiation, national and international conferences were held to discuss possible methods of protection against the radiations emitted by X-ray tubes and radium. The year 1921 marks the birth of national organizations for radiological protection and the publication of their first recommendations. International action was first taken during the Second International Congress of Radiology, which met at Stockholm in 1928; there, the International Commission on Radiological Protection was established, members of which were elected according to their recognized ability, independent of their nationality.

4. Progress in experimental physics since the beginning of the twentieth century has also brought about new sources of radiation such as man-made radio-activity and powerful accelerators.

Following the discovery of nuclear fission in 1939 and its applications, radiation hazards and protection problems increased very extensively and the atomic explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused many human deaths from radiation. The contamination of the environment by explosions of nuclear weapons, the discharge of radio-active wastes arising from nuclear reactors, and the increasing use of X-rays and of radio-isotopes for medical and industrial purposes extend the problem to whole populations and also raise new international questions.

(Introduction to the Report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, A/3838, p. 1)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and pamphlets on writing have been published in many languages over several hundred years. A few of them have been addressed to the official writer, most not. In both classes the United Nations writer may find help. Here are a few examples:

1. *Improve your writing*. U.S. Department of the Army pamphlet, No. 1-10.
2. *Getting your ideas across through writing*. Training Manual No. 7, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1950.

These two pamphlets, the first of twenty-eight pages and the second of forty-four pages, are obtainable from the United States Government Printing office in Washington, D.C.¹ Although addressed to a specialized readership, they are admirable, and admirably brief, statements of the principles of writing, with illustrations. They are also evidence that some officials are aware of the need for clear communication.

3. *On the art of writing*. A. T. Quiller-Couch, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1916. Reprint of 1916 edition: Folcroft, n.d. ISBN 0-8414-6918-0.

This is a longer statement of the principles of writing, based on lectures at Cambridge University. The lectures were given nearly fifty years ago, but the principles hold good. They are presented in very readable style.

4. *The complete plain words*. Sir Ernest Gowers, H. M. Stationery Office, London, 1954; reprinted Penguin, London, 1970.

This book was written at the invitation of the British Treasury—more evidence that some officials care about clear writing. To quote its author, it is “intended primarily for those who use words as tools of their trade”. By both precept and many examples, taken mainly from British official communications, Gowers shows how the tools can be used and misused.

5. *Think before you write*. William G. Leary and James Steel Smith, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1951.

This is primarily a college textbook. As the title indicates, it starts from the same premise as this guide, but illustrates it more fully and follows the illustration with detailed analyses.

6. *The Elements of Style*. William Strunk and E. B. White, Collier-Macmillan Co., London, 1979.

7. *Modern English Usage*. H. W. Fowler. Revised by Sir Ernest Gowers, Oxford University Press, 1965.

¹ These two pamphlets are no longer sold by the United States Government Printing Office. Reference copies are kept in the Federal Regional Depository Libraries.