

The Proof Angel Summary of

Bits & Bobs: June 2014

Dumbing down?

David Crystal always gives good value. This post puts right a myth spread by headline writers about a proposed ['A' level question](#). Apparently, it is ludicrously easy.

Well the part they are quoting might be, but the full question isn't.

I would like to see what kind of answer you'd get if you rounded up all these headline writers & made them answer that whole question.

I suspect they would struggle.

Targets, statistics, and motivation

Targets are important. They can motivate, and ensure you are making enough progress.

They can also be counter productive. An easy target encourages us to slack off once it is met. A target that seems impossible makes most people wonder why they should bother.

Some targets don't have the desired impact on behaviour. When baggage handlers were set a target for the time between the plane landing & the first bag hitting the conveyor belt, the statistics were good, but the wait in the baggage hall didn't change much. When the plane landed, one chap would rush to put a bag on the belt, then return to finish the card game with his mates. The team met the target, without much change to their working practice.

Management theory urges us to set SMART objectives, which are *Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, & Time-related*. Most of us have access to many measures of our performance.

This post talks about [the impact of statistics](#) on performance.

The Proof Angel is the trading name of Sarah Perkins, freelance editor and proofreader.



Fashion and language

See how [fashion & language change](#). Like the weather.

What is Reading?

Here is a fascinating lecture by [Professor Belinda Jack](#) about the science behind reading process.

A literary timeline

Do you get confused about how the classics fit together? What was written when? Who else was writing at the same time? Here is a [literary timeline](#) to get things in perspective.

Native British languages

I'm sure we can all name several. English, obviously, & Welsh, Gaelic, Cornish, and around 13 others. Can you believe there are that many? [Find out more here](#).

How language spreads

I must confess this one hasn't struck me before, but there are some parts of the world where a lot of different languages are spoken, while in other places a large area is served by a single language. A new study has found a fascinating [connection with geography](#).

Changes in sign language

Change isn't just a phenomenon of the spoken & written language. It happens in [sign language](#) as well.

Are you going to a conference?

Conferences can be dull, or they can be really useful & interesting. A lot depends on how you prepare for the event, & your approach on the day.

Remember what Paddington Bear used to say. Life is like a marmalade sandwich. You only get out what you put in.

Here is some guidance about getting [the most out of a conference](#).

Need a reading chair?

Got a limited amount of space, but need a book case & a chair? Can't be bothered to move when you want a different book? Both problems have been solved with this [2-in-1 piece of furniture](#). I suspect it is hard to track down. I also suspect we need the sofa version.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet...

From time to time, this passage is used to demonstrate how text looks. For example, anyone who uses templates in Apple's Pages app will have seen it filling out the body of text.

If you have tried to translate it, you might have struggled. I must say I've had a couple of goes at translating, but never got very far. Perhaps if I'd got as far as a Latin dictionary I wouldn't have been surprised that the whole thing is made up. Oh well, I never claimed to be a Latin scholar.

Find out about the [background to this piece of text in this post](#).

The 20 most beautiful book shops

I think this post should probably have a health warning on it. But what the heck - let's live a little. Here are the [20 most beautiful book shops](#).

Luckily, none of them are anywhere near me, so I won't get tempted.

Some word play

If you like wordplay, you will like [this post](#).

Editing the Little House books

I don't know how many times I must have read the *Little House* books when I was a child. We felt Ma, Pa, Laura, Mary, Grace & Carrie were all close family friends.

We were hugely disappointed by the TV series *Little House on the Prairie*. Why did they use the names & location if they were going to write their own story? Surely, the names are the easy part?

I didn't realise that the books were edited by Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter. This letter is a [fascinating insight](#) into the process and the times. I'd love to know how much of the book was based on fact. Judging from this letter, not as much as we thought!

How do we read?

For the 55% of us who can read it, this is fascinating stuff. The piece of text in red below demonstrates how our brains take in the message, even if the letters aren't in the right order.

It also demonstrates how important it is to pay attention while you are having that last read through, when you know what should be on the page & are keen to move on to something new.

For those who are interested in more, here is some [more discussion](#). The readers of this blog are an above average lot. 100% of those who took part in the poll could read it.

I can read it , can You?

fi yuo cna raed tihs, yuo hvae a sgtrane mnid too. Cna yuo raed tihs? Olny 55 plepoe out of 100 can.

i cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclyt uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtaetr in waht oerdr the ltteres in a wrod are, the olny iproamtnt tihng is taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it whotuit a pboerlm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mni d deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt! if you can raed tihs forwrad it.

ONLY POST IF YOU CAN READ IT ?

The origins of common English phrases

English is full of odd phrases. Find out the origins of a [dazzling selection of them](#) here.



Happy May Day

I hope you have remembered to nip out & wash your face in the dew this morning? If not, rush out and do it now, before it all evaporates. Tradition has it that washing your face in the May Day dew makes you beautiful all year. If you could see me now, you'd realise that I'm only managing to tell you this through the magic of scheduling.

May Day is the time for spring rituals, like dancing round the maypole, well dressing (in Derbyshire) and Morris dancing. It has been celebrated since pagan times. As with many old festivals, the origin is difficult to trace, partly because several cultures had festivals around the same time. The Romans held their festival for the goddess Flora for a couple of days each side of the same date.

May is also the signal for an annual controversy about the advice ne'er cast a clout till May be out. Does it mean the month? Or the flower? Logically, if the hawthorn trees are covered with their blossom, then it must be warm enough to wear your

summer clothes. Some say the next line runs "Button through till June be to," as warm weather is often followed by a cold snap.

I can't help thinking we should work on the flower theory, & take a cardi just in case. Judging by the number of cream linen suits I've seen round London the last couple of days, a lot of people agree. These May flowers are from Hyde Park, yesterday morning.

Now off you go and wash your face.

How to cope with rejection

Do you keep getting rejections? Do you just shrug your shoulders & move on to the next ploy?

This post focuses on book marketing, but the theory has wider application. Look for the possible [reasons for those rejections](#), and think of strategies for changing the answer to yes next time.

Book sculptures

Ever wondered how those amazing book sculptures work? [Here's how.](#)