

A field guide to THE BIRDS OF PLAIN ENGLISH

Abridged edition

6 feathered friends who can help us change the quality of professional writing

A flamboyance of flamingos

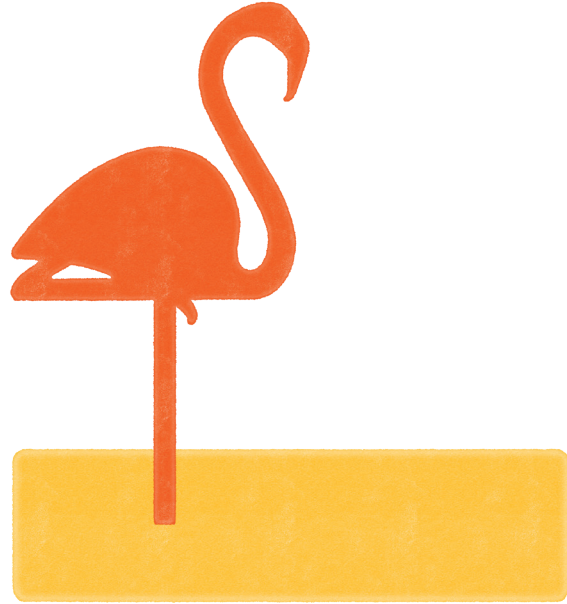
Family
Plain English wording

Key feature
Energy-saving elegance

Description
Flamingos are famed for resting on 1 leg to save energy. So we ask: why use 2 legs when 1 will do? If a writer has 1 precise word to capture their thinking, what will they achieve by writing down 2?

Habitat
At the heart of short, sprightly sentences

Threats
Tautology, legal doublets, waffle, long noun strings



A flock of pigeons

Family
Plain English structure

Key feature
Navigational nous

Description
Pigeons tend to be maligned, but homing breeds have incredible in-built navigation systems. Their ability to deliver a message miles away reminds us what plain English can do.

Habitat
Down the streets and laneways between sections

Threats
Missing summaries, unclear headings, broken links



A hoard of bowerbirds

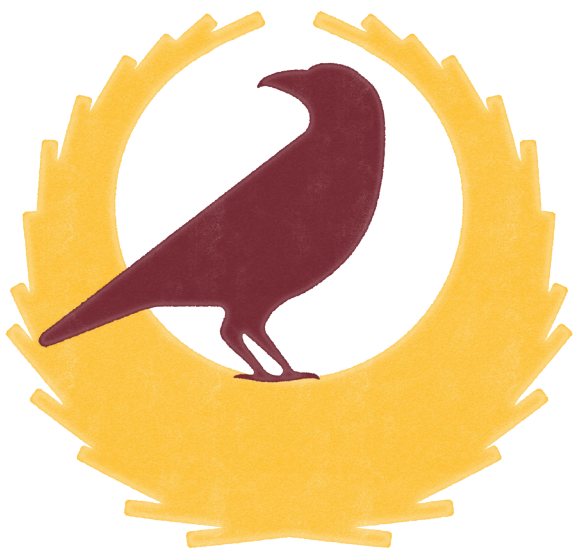
Family
Plain English design

Key feature
Curatorial cunning

Description
Bowerbirds build their bowers with great care, creating the visual illusion of forced perspective. When we're curating content for writers, we too can use little tricks to focus the reader's attention.

Habitat
In the foreground of a thoughtful layout

Threats
Lack of visual aids, walls of text, inaccessible items



An ostentation of peacocks*

Family
Plain English design

Key feature
Eye-catching innovation

Description
Peacocks are among the most extravagant creatures in the natural world. So what are they doing strutting around here?

Well, like anyone, we're drawn to the great spectacle of their trains – the way they blend form with function to ward off predators and attract mates.

It's a masterclass in colour, pattern and scale.

We can use the same elements when we're designing content with or for writers.

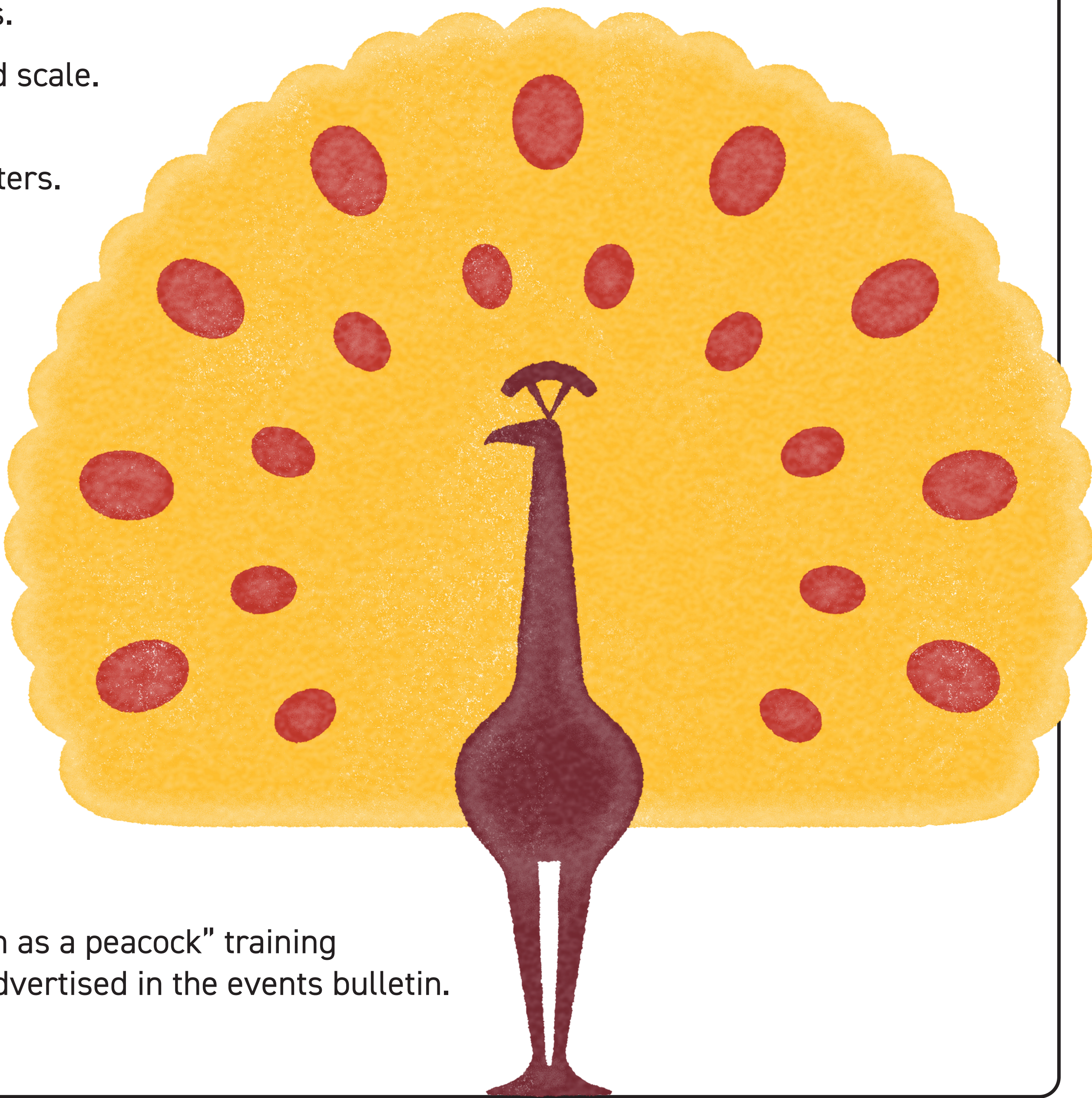
Don't let the name fool you, because plain English doesn't automatically mean dull or drab design.

Quite the opposite in fact. Done well, it is simple, sophisticated and even beautiful.

Habitat
In the flourishes that make content sing on the page

Threats
Bland or chaotic design choices, illegible typography

*
Meet all our birds properly in the "Plain as a peacock" training we run for IPEd. Future dates will be advertised in the events bulletin.



BIRD OF THE WEEK

A murmuration of starlings

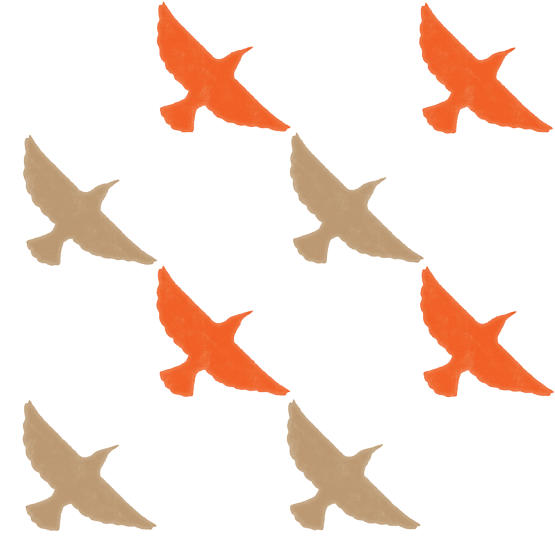
Family
Plain English structure

Key feature
Cohesive choreography

Description
Starlings fly in magnificent free-flowing clouds, somehow moving in graceful unison despite huge numbers. They find order in chaos, and we can take inspiration from them when we're structuring text.

Habitat
At the junctions between blocks of content

Threats
Illogical groupings, uneven sections, weak headings



A charm of goldfinches

Family
Plain English wording

Key feature
Melodious mimicry

Description
Goldfinches have a handy talent in that they can adopt the calls of other birds. If writers want to communicate clearly, they too must mimic the language that resonates most with their readers.

Habitat
In the ebb and flow of reader-inspired text

Threats
Stiff formality, lack of pronouns, long sentences

