

Press release

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Writing experts analyse election manifestos

Political parties must radically overhaul their writing styles before publishing future election manifestos – or again risk failing to connect with voters.

That's the verdict of business-writing specialists who carried out a detailed analysis of the 2015 UK General Election manifestos published by the seven main parties.

Experts at Brighton-based Emphasis – a leading business-writing training company – also said that mistakes in the text of the manifestos set a poor example.

They put 1,000 words from each manifesto under the microscope and produced graphs (attached) to compare them on style and technical accuracy. The study found that:

- UKIP struggled the most on sentence structure, with 14 sentences highlighted as too complicated
- Labour fared worst on grammar and punctuation – the experts spotted 11 errors in the sample
- the Green Party used the passive voice 18 times – more than any other party – often leaving out who would take the action described
- the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats outperformed the other parties overall.

Emphasis analysed the manifestos of each of the seven parties that took part in the televised leaders' debate on 2 April: the Conservatives, the Greens, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party and UKIP. The company uses the same kind of analysis for delegates on its courses.

Emphasis CEO Rob Ashton said: "We examined in detail not just grammar and punctuation but the complexity of the words and sentences used. We also looked at how academic or people-centred the writing was.

"There was far too much waffle and, in some cases, the parties failed to spot unfortunate punctuation and grammatical errors – or issues with sentence structure – before publication.

"This is not the way to connect with the electorate, especially at a time when so few people are engaging with politics. Politicians should lead by example if they want voters to take them seriously."

All the parties used short words, of around five letters on average, but they often used more words than they needed.

Mr Ashton added: "The result is dense documents that policy wonks may love but that may fail to connect with voters."

The study found marked differences between the styles used by the three parties who have dominated Westminster in recent years – the Tories, Labour and the Lib Dems – and the four other main parties.

Mr Ashton said: “UKIP, the Greens and Plaid Cymru have all tended to use long sentences, each containing a multitude of ideas. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have done the opposite, favouring shorter, simpler sentences, with the Tories taking the middle road.”

He said the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and SNP manifestos “use more superfluous words than the other parties”.

Labour, the Tories, the SNP and Plaid Cymru used more people-centred language. Mr Ashton added: “The biggest surprise was in the Tory document, which is the only one that addresses the reader directly – in grammar terms, the ‘second person’.

“This is the grammatical equivalent of the method used by Ed Miliband in the first debate, when he looked straight into the camera to speak to the audience viewing at home.”

For more detailed analysis of the manifestos, go to <http://www.writing-skills.com/election2015>

For more information or to arrange an interview with Emphasis CEO Rob Ashton, please contact:

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Notes to editors:

1. Emphasis based its analysis on 1,000-word samples of text, beginning at the start of the manifestos' education policies.
2. Emphasis is the UK's leading business-writing training company, offering specialist business-writing training and consultancy services to private and public sector organisations all over the world. Set up in 1998, the company has trained more than 30,000 people. For more information see <http://www.writing-skills.com/> or call 01273 732888.