

By ANNE DONNELL

Why do we have to listen to so much elaborate gobbledygook? Why can't medical experts, legal experts, scientists, scholars, and any one else who gets a microphone stuck in front of him or her just speak plainly?

-Tired of all the UNNECESSARY Verbiage

This QP of T (Question Person of Today) could be a young, sensible person, but I'm betting we're hearing from someone in the "golden years" (a term which I now believe to be a reference to the cash outlay necessary for health care when you're OLD). It's my bunch of elderly that's weary of all the new terms for old words, new terms with very lengthy descriptions. And, we're a bit hacked at the press slapping elderly on people who are in their 60s and early 70s.

Let's check in with Albert Einstein on brevity, directness in language. [Albert Einstein, 1879-1955. German-born American theoretical physicist, considered one of the most important scientists/mathematicians of all time. Einstein won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1921; his name wandered into everyday speech in America as a synonym for genius while he was still alive. (EXAMPLE. That child is some Einstein all right.) Einstein remains famous for his theory of relativity (which includes the well known, featured on T-shirts across the land, formula connecting mass and energy, $E=mc^2$) and for contributions to quantum physics. But, even he didn't find what he was searching for -- a theory of everything.]

Einstein once said he wanted to state ideas as simply as possible or accurate, but no simpler. "Most of the fundamental ideas of science are essentially simple, and may, as a rule, be expressed in language comprehensible to everyone." (The Evolution of Physics, 1938) Accuracy is not lost; a wider audience is gained.

So, why do people, who, if they were so expert on anything, ought to know plain speaking works best, why do such people write or speak so incomprehensibly, so densely? Why are scholarly books and journals filled with writing that seems to be more like thick leaves in the forest than words in the language you and I speak and write?

We've convinced ourselves that the "five-dollar" words are the mark of intelligence, scholarship, expertise. We wish to appear experts, if that's our game in life, so we start using them, believing incorrectly that simple language is reserved for simple people. Long words, complex sentence structure, dense obfuscation we decide shows us to be smart and competent.

We perpetuate this by showing respect to the poor, nervous idiot trying to convince us of his or her expertise by using almost incomprehensible jargon and elaboration. Higher education feeds on this stuff by the way.

The only cure is for a few good and true to resist using and endorsing gobbledygook. It's a

shabby, fake excuse for good expression -- confusing, boring, and annoying.

ONLINE DEPARTMENT (serious this week, but I'm not the author and can't vouch for the accuracy) "8 Things That Will Disappear in Our Lifetime" (Thanks, A.A.) • 1. The Post Office Get ready to imagine a world without the post office... Email, FedEx, and UPS have just about wiped out the minimum revenue needed to keep the post office alive. Most of your mail every day is junk mail and bills. • 2. The Check Britain is already laying the groundwork to do away with checks by 2018. It costs the financial system billions of dollars a year to process checks. Plastic cards and online transactions will lead to the eventual demise of the checks. This plays right into the death of the post office... • 3. The Book You say you will never give up the physical book that you hold in your hand and turn the literal pages. Others said the same thing about downloading music from iTunes. They wanted a hard copy CD, but quickly changed their minds when they discovered they could get the latest music albums for half the price without ever leaving home. The same thing will happen with books... Once you start flicking your fingers on the screen instead of the book, you find that you are lost in the story, can't wait to see what happens next, and you forget that you're holding a gadget instead of a book. • 4. The Land Line Telephone Unless you have a large family and make a lot of local calls, you don't need it anymore. Most people keep it simply because they've always had it... • 5. Music This is one of the saddest parts of the change story. The music industry is dying a slow death. Not just because of illegal downloading. It's the lack of innovative new music being given a chance to get to the people who would like to hear it. Greed and corruption is the problem... [I have no idea if this is true] • 6. Television Revenues to the networks are down dramatically, not just because of the economy. People are watching TV and movies streamed from their computers. And they're playing games and doing lots of other things that take up the time that used to be spent watching TV... Cable rates are skyrocketing, and commercials run about every 4 minutes and 30 seconds. Good riddance to most of it. ... • 7. The "Things" You Own Many of the very possessions that we used to own are still in our lives, but we may not actually own them in the future. They may simply reside in "the cloud." Today your computer has a hard drive and you store your pictures, music, movies, and documents. Your software is on a CD or DVD, and you can always re-install it if need be. But all of that is changing. Apple, Microsoft, and Google are all finishing up their latest "cloud services." That means that when you turn on a computer, the Internet will be built into the operating system. So, Windows, Google, and the Mac OS will be tied straight into the Internet. If you click an icon, it will open something in the Internet cloud. If you save something, it will be saved to the cloud. And you may pay a monthly subscription fee to the cloud provider. In this virtual world, you can access your music or your books, or your whatever from any laptop or handheld device. That's the good news. But, will you actually own any of this "stuff" or will it all be able to disappear at any moment in a big "Poof?" Will most of the things in our lives be disposable and whimsical? It makes you want to run to the closet and pull out that photo album, grab a book from the shelf, or open up a CD case and pull out the insert. • 8. Privacy If there ever was a concept that we can look back on nostalgically, it would be privacy. That's gone. It's been gone for a long time anyway. There are cameras on the street, in most of the buildings, and even built into your computer and cell phone. But you can be sure that 24/7, "they" know who you are and where you are, right down to the GPS coordinates,

and the Google Street View. If you buy something, your habit is put into a zillion profiles, and your ads will change to reflect those habits. "They" will try to get you to buy something else. Again and again.