

Sad state of written communications



By [Marion Scher](#)

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This week saw one of those 'classic' stories in the South African media. It was a sad tale of a question paper set for Grade 7 pupils by the Mpumalanga Department of Education's Nkangala District.

Take a deep breath and read on:

"Instructions to learners Read all the instructions carefully. Answer on the answer sheet provide. Write neatly. English Home Language question paper for Grade 7 pupils Mpumalanga Dept of Ed's Nkangala district.

'One day I returned at the camp to find Isaiah sitting at some distance crying. 'The bees, she got the jam.' He had been stung in many places. While he was up at the Windmill doing some laundry and swimming, a bee has discovered some open tin of fig jam in the tent. She had made a beeline for her hive, and returned several co-workers. On the principle of finders keepers, they believed that the fig was theirs, and made these quite clear to Isaiah. As I has been guilty of leaving the jam leaving the jam in the tent, I felt in duty bound to get that tin of jam out way before others returned returned.'"

So why am I rehashing this story? Simple, because as a journalist and media trainer I go into companies to train people whose work is in the field of communications - meaning they have to write anything from reports to emails, media releases and newsletters and what I find is horrific!

I fully understand that many people hated English at school and maybe found spelling and grammar not their strong points. Cool - but then why did they end up in a job where they have to use these tools on a daily basis?

Communication skills in Sterkspruit Education District

Perhaps the worst communicators work in our government departments as in the Sterkspruit Education District. Please note that I've copied the text exactly - in other words missing full stops, bad spelling and grammar, extra commas et al...

In a bid to instill stability in the Sterkspruit education district, the Eastern Cape education MEC xxxx together with the Head of Department, xxxxx will be sitting in a meeting with all education stakeholders in this district today at 09.00am

The swift move, is meant to ensure that schooling in this rural district resumes with less hustles. Additionally, the department intends to ensure that an understanding is established with all stakeholders, especially galanising the unions to refrain from disrupting schooling in the district.

According to the team (consisting of the MEC and SG) teaching and learning has been prioritised to ensure the department moves away from the bottom position nationally.

All education stakeholders will also be granted a platform to voice their concerns about the state of education in the province as a majority of them have been calling for the department to act on any disruptions since this affects their children.

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Big problems

What's particularly worrying here is that these are the heads of our departments of education and if they don't know the difference between their and thier - we have big problems.

And it's not just government departments where I find this. Corporates are often just as guilty which leads to my question of who actually interviews and decides on giving people who can't communicate jobs as communicators? Do they ever have to write tests to determine just how good their English is?

There has to be people out there who have the right skills - look harder for them...

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.mediamentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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