

SS6.

simpl speling July 1998 newsletter of the simplified spelling society Editor: Allan Campbell

Society founded 1908

Working for planned change in English spelling for the benefit of learners and users everywhere

New appointment

Chairman Chris Jolly has announced the appointment of Marie (Masha) Bell, a new committee member, as paid administrative support for the Society.

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1. QES head offers campaign tips

Guest speaker at the SSS AGM was Dr Bernard Lamb, chairman of the London branch of the Queen's English Society. The society's aim is the defense of the English language and the promotion of good standards. To that end members have run a number of campaigns, the strategy and tactics for which might also help the SSS

Speaking on *How to run English-related campaigns*, Dr Lamb told members that during the 1990s, enthusiastic individuals from QES ran five major campaigns, including a conference. A survey of students' usage of English became a book for the conference, and another book arose from the conference.

Dr Lamb revealed some methods of publicizing his society's work. One was to circulate newspaper education correspondents about the survey.

The society then met those who showed interest and who offered a fee. QES offered them an 'exclusive' six months before publication of the survey. It chose *The Mail on Sunday*, which gave good front-page coverage.

At the date of publication of the survey book (by which time the exclusive had been forgotten), QES sent a press release to the Press Association wire service, which circulates widely. Dr Lamb pointed out the need to allocate time for response to articles.

The society has more than 700 members, and active branches in London and Sussex. Its journal is *Quest*. It has inaugurated an annual modest (£100) but prestigious prize for excellent English. For the first contest last year, 23 entries were received. A press release will announce the 1998 award in August/September.

The next project for the society is a national language authority for English.

Dr Lamb showed examples of spelling errors, poor grammar, handwriting, punctuation, word confusions from the student survey, opinions of employers from an industrial survey, and opinions of teachers in secondary schools about the English standards of their pupils. For the opinions of the teachers he bought a set of school mailing lists, with 4500 address labels. He used a random selection of these.

Dr Lamb has co-authored *How to Write for Biology* (his subject is genetics), which includes spelling rules.

This 'n that from here 'n' there

2. Fonics edict after dire illiteracy findings

Surveys and research continue to show literacy in a parlous state in the two major English-speaking nations.

According to a *USA Today* report in April a National Institute of Literacy study suggests about 40-44 million Americans struggle with literacy, with the District of Columbia and southern states having the greatest needs. Illiteracy is not defined as a total inability to read: adults can sign their name and total a bank deposit entry, but may have trouble locating an intersection on a street map.

In Britain it is a similar story. The *Daily Mail* reports up to eight million Britons are so poor at reading and writing they cannot cope with the demands of modern life, as revealed by research. A survey by the government funded Basic Skills Agency looked at the state of the three Rs in every district council in the country.

In the area with the best results, Hart, in Hampshire, 9% had low literacy levels, while in the London boro of Tower Hamlets 25% had difficulties with reading and writing.

Adults with problems with English and maths spent five times as long as others on the dole, were unemployed more often, and more likely to be living in poverty.

In an editorial *Must try harder*, the *Mail* said Education Secretary David Blunkett was being confronted with the scale of the task awaiting him.

In response to these kinds of results, and perhaps realizing the scale of the task, the new Labour Government has decreed 'the most fundamental change in primary education since the introduction of the national curriculum', according to the *Daily Telegraph*. It says the Government has sent a directive on the teaching of reading to 18,500 schools. It requires them to return to 'traditional, structured teaching' of fonics, a move which, says the *Telegraph*, 'represents an unprecedented intervention in classroom teaching methods by politicians.'

Spreading the word on the inside

Among letters received by Jean Hutchins, membership secretary, is this from Tony, at Wayland Prison, England:

"I would appreciate free SSS membership for a further year. All the literature the SSS send me is passed on to the head of education here; then to the lady who takes the remedials for English. So when U write to me U are contacting over 650 men. I also correspond with Inside Time, the Prison Phoenix Trust, and several other national bodies. I send relevant newspaper cuttings to Chris Upward quite often. So I do hope U will consider me an asset to the Society."

[George Anderson: see [Journal 26](#). Item 3, [Newsletters](#)]

3. VIPs also can be poor spellers

George Anderson, Scotland

So you think you're a poor speller? Well, you're not the only one. Michael Heseltine [ex-Deputy PM] is too. So is Susan Hampshire [actress] and Jackie Stewart [racing-car driver], and a host of other VIPs.

They suffer from dyslexia, 'a surprising, serious difficulty with literacy skills'. It affects between 2% and 20% of the population. Its severe form can be chronic. It can also be hereditary. But environmental factors can also play a part. That they, and we, have to cope with the numerous irregularities found in English spelling doesn't help matters. Of all modern languages, English has been described as 'chaotic'.

Our alphabet has 26 letters and 40-odd sounds but hundreds of possible spellings. We insert letters for no good reason like *s* in *island*. We vary the stem of words as in *speak/speech*. We are inconsistent with word endings as in *burglar/ actor/ acre/ teacher*. We interfere with words borrowed from other languages. *Correspondance* in French becomes *correspondence* in English. We have unpredictable patterns in double lettering as in *worshipped/ gossiped*. We drop letters in some words but not in others as in *raging/ ageing*. A word ending that looks as tho it might rime with another that is similar does not, as in *undermine/ determine*. And, of course, there are the numerous howlers like *The tough coughs as he ploughs the dough!* No other language tolerates such alphabetic chaos!

Over recent times some have attempted reform. Others have given time and money to simpler spelling systems (Andrew Carnegie, James Pitman, Theodore Roosevelt) but have made only limited inroads. In 19th-century America some changes appeared, *l/11 (modeling), or/our (favor), sk/sc (skeptical)* despite much resistance. This contrasts with languages elsewhere in the world where attempts have been made to modernize, as in Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, to mention a few.

And what of our children? Strange as it may seem to adults, children are rarely embarrassed by their bad spelling. They tend to put on paper 'the sound in the head' and often, if we adults will only admit it, their spellings demonstrate logical consistency. The school dictionary isn't much help either. Try looking up *once* under *W* (and why not?).

If we British don't like the idea of Reform can we please have some Modernization and Streamlining, some Regularizing and some Development of the present 'almighty mess'?

This is a slightly abridged version of an article George, an SSS member and retired teacher, wrote in the spring 1998 issue of Link, newsletter for the General Teaching Council for Scotland. He ended with a quote from Gerard Noist Trenite's poem The Chaos.

[Valerie Yule: see [Bulletins](#), [Anthology](#), [Quarterly](#), [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#), [Personal Views](#) 10 & 16, [Media](#), [Books](#).]

4. What one member has been doing, and trying to do

Three beliefs drive involvement in spelling reform

Valerie Yule

Three beliefs led to my concern with spelling reform:

Belief 1. The future is grim unless people can use their imagination to consider what may be possible, and to use their intelligence to work out how to make it possible. This belief inspires the project of the Australian Centre for Social Innovation, to encourage imaginative and practical thinking to solve social problems and improve quality of life, with its ACSION website:

www.valerieyule.com.au; clinical and educational work to prevent the handicaps of depression, ignorance and misfortune; long-term work on a manuscript on the *Development of imagination*; study of children's imagination in their stories and pictures; and political activism.

Belief 2. Literacy is essential to develop and inform the imagination and intelligence of the people. This belief underlies teaching literacy; research and writing on reforming English spelling; and innovative methods and materials for literacy, which could be vastly improved with a more consistent spelling system. This includes a half-hour *Help yourself to read* cartoon video giving an overview of how to learn to read, and an understanding of how the spelling system could be improved — a Keep-It-Simpl-Stupid project currently rejected by educationists on ideological grounds.

Belief 3. Literate people must also have what is worth reading. Amid the flood of print that is unhelpful and unpleasant, people must be able to find what is helpful and/or pleasant, to strengthen, inspire and inform them.

Improving English spelling

When I found in my clinical and teaching work 25 years ago that often failing 'dyslexics' could read *Spelling without Traps*, I thought that the task, not the defeated learners, deserved blame and reform. My priority is a pragmatic reform for use now, that can lead into later reforms — much as I enjoy experimenting with ideal spelling and grammar reforms and new alphabets. (Everyone should design a reformed spelling for fun.)

I researched, read, taught, and corresponded internationally with reformers, cognitive psychologists, communications experts and linguists, exploring every type of proposal and testing arguments and assumptions of reformers and opponents. I learnt from Sir James Pitman's 'diaphonic' principle and other insights about a user-friendly spelling; Lindgren's 'start with something small'; Downing's practical expertise in children's learning, especially with the initial teaching alphabet (ita); experiences of George O'Halloran and others in designing new writing systems; writing system reforms in other countries; Helen Bisgard's Dictionary Kee, Rondthaler's computerized dictionary; J H Martin's initial leming spelng, David Moseley's Aurally Coded Dictionary; John Beech's design for testing adaptation to spelling reform and Chris Upward's logical development of Cut Spelng. Other friends included Newell Tune, Axel Wijk, Vic Paulsen, Kingsley Read, Madhukar Gogate, Harvie Bernard. So much of what pioneers have already done should not be forgotten nor wheels invented again.

I have constantly been heartened, and as constantly disappointed. In 1982 the New Scientist published a spread on starting reform by dropping surplus letters, but it was rewritten, retitled and re-illustrated by a hostile copy-editor. In 1986 the Harvard Educational Review published my key contribution, The design of spelling to meet needs and abilities, showing the way to empirical research rather than argument — but it is unread. I have experimented in schools (risky!), in psychology and education labs, at conferences and on friends and relations.

As a PhD scholarship was the only way to finance research on the unacceptable topic of spelling reform, and to have access to university facilities, my thesis on *Orthograpy and reading: spelng and society* was made to stretch the doctoral limits in its interdisciplinary range and variety of experiments, with emphasis on the cognitive psychology of reading and testing responses to reading text with surplus letters cut. (Copies are held by SSS and Manchester University.) The rewritten manuscript, however, is still unpublished.

It seems to me that a clean-up of English spelling is practicable now by three steps: cutting out surplus letters, using only consistent consonant spellings, and rationalizing vowel spellings to a smaller number of consistent patterns. People can take these steps as they can. Transition can be by fast international fashion changes, with alternative spellings coexisting with present spelling until they overtake it and are officially established. Then is the time when a proven ideal system can replace the immediately pragmatic.

I would like to pass on the motto: 'It's better to have tried and lost, than never to have tried at all.'

A select bibliography is available from the author, from published articles in *Spelling Progress Bulletin*, *Journal of the Simplified Spelling Society*, etc. and chapters in books. See also www.vicnet.net.au/-ozideas/spelsys.html and www.vicnet.net.au/-ozideas/spelref.html

Valerie is a vice-president of the Society.

5. Letters

Can we seriously call this education?

Frank Jones, England

In 1997 the British School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) introduced an optional 50min test of grammar, spelling, and punctuation to be used alongside the statutory Key Stage 3 English tests. Section A was a 10min spelling test containing 14 spelling errors, in italics and underlined so they were clearly identified. The children were required to write the correct spelling for each.

Their first task was to identify the misspelled word from its spelling alone. Supervising teachers were told not to read the word aloud. Clearly the effectiveness of the test depended entirely on the ability of the children to correctly identify the misspelled word. If they succeeded in this, one has to ask in what sense is the word misspelled?

We have here the situation in which the nation's educational examiners wrote *acomodate* because it unambiguously spelled the word they wanted and then declared to the nation's children that it doesn't spell the word they wanted.

Can we seriously call this education?

If the spelling has identified the word to the reader then its job is done and it has been successful. It is nonsense to say it needs to be corrected. That would make success a prerequisite of failure! A spelling must be all right, must be successful, before it can be corrected. So what is the point of correcting it?

It is time we demanded something better for our children. We should stop calling things wrong that are not wrong. If you can identify test words like *discoverys*, *diffrent*, *acomodation*, *receive* and *necesity* then these spellings clearly do spell the intended words and it is dishonest and the antithesis of education to claim that they don't.

Favors use of best dictionary forms

Tom Lang, England. *Linguo, internaciona* IDO

I have been a supporter of spelling reform for many years, and I recently joined the Society. Your proposal to use the best forms from any dictionary appeals to me. I enclose a list of some simple words from Swan's Anglo-American Dictionary (1950). I would also favor *thru*, *thruout*, *thoro*, *enuf*, *tuf*, *cof*, etc, and omission of final e (*giv*, *hav*, etc).

A list of simple spellings was enclosed. — Ed.

Simpler spelling in progress

Joe Cober, Canada

After coming from Flanders to Canada I realized no law tells me how to spell English words. Remembering Flemish simplification, I started writing some simpler spellings, on stationery headed 'Partially simplified spelling: I use it'.

I thought I was the only one, but when told of what had already been done I wondered why no progress had been made.

My conclusion: All in favor of simplified spelling did not, could not, agree to accept one single word; they also wanted to present a complete new spelling to the public — the worst thing because it turns everyone off.

I noticed some words were simplified by people who, it is said, can't spell, e.g., *plow, draft, donuts* — a natural process. When enuf* people spell it consistently a simpler spelling finds the dictionary. Let's help this process move faster, but not speed. I add an asterisk to simpler spellings, eg, tho*, thru*, enuf*, chek*, fone *, telefone *, with a footnote *simplified spelling'.

So-called American spelling is nothing but simpler spelling in progress. Some call it American because of no other defense against it.

A retired professor here insists a language cannot be simplified (he won't enter a store selling donuts). If the 'educated' want to stay behind, let 'the people' do it.

Shorthand and spelling reform

Noriyuki Nakamura, Osaka University of Foreign Studies,

I read the article *One person's search for spelling reform organizations* (SSSNewsletterJuly97) with great interest. I am also searching for some organizations. Altho machine-shorthand systems are widely used, few people today know about manual shorthand. It is considered to be out-of-date, but I believe it is still a useful tool for notetaking and, besides, it will remind us of the need for spelling reform. The inventor of the famous Pitman's Shorthand was much interested in spelling reform.

Will U please let me know of anyone or any organization interested in the use of manual shorthand systems? I hope someone may write in Simpl Speling about the relationship of spelling reform and shorthand.

It seems I am the only SSS member living in Japan. [U are. — Ed.]

[Nelson Helm: see [Newsletters](#)]

6. Selling spelling

'The excellent but unlikely is killing the modest but less unlikely'

Nelson Helm

If I knew more about fonics I would love discussing the alternatives. But I know almost nothing of fonics. I enjoy email posts by other members and wish I knew what they know. But, I fear it's going nowhere, castles in the sky.

The excellent but unlikely is killing the modest but less unlikely.

I believe that most persons think of what they learned as small children as somehow both natural, like gravity, and right, like (your) religion. Most think they see the world as it is. Furthermore, peoples commonly identify nationally by language (eg, Churchill's History of the English Speaking Peoples), and bucking nationalism would mean swimming against a very strong current.

Altho we often use the same words, I suspect that most persons do not understand God as their parents or grandparents did; like the same music their parents or grandparents did; nor food, nor clothes, nor art, nor literature, nor houses. But, we still use the same words, and understand Shakespeare reasonably well. I know of no behavior that persons cling to more tenaciously than talking and writing as they learned as children.

So, I expect agreeing on how to reform will be much easier than convincing hundreds of millions of persons to reform.

We're still here

Consider past efforts. Some first-rate minds — Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Pitman — have not made a dent. In the US, lexicographer Noah Webster changed *centre* to *center*, *colour* to *color*, *gaol* to *jail*, etc. Walt Whitman changed some *cs* to *ks*.

Nice, but ... we're still here. Have we made a dent?

The spelling changes I have observed came from the bottom up — inexpert persons uninterested in language talking and writing sloppily — *thru*, *EZ*, *kwik* — or ad agencies naming products fonetically, with no care about linguistic by-products, nor thought about a comprehensive integral system.

Ad agencies?! Persons who want to influence how others think and act, advertise. Advertisers use polls and focus groups to learn what those they hope to influence think and want; what they will accept; and what they think ridiculous. Then, the agency crafts ads appealing to their target market, and publishes in media likely to reach it.

Advertisers and agencies do not think things thru rigorously, anticipate cultural by-products, and balance competing interests to present elegant solutions in the social interest. Look at ads for razors, shoes, beer, cigarets, and leadership (election campaigns).

Small change first

I expect the public will resist the first change most. Therefore, I suggest that we find some small, popular change, and sell it in isolation (not as part of a package).

What do we change first? Before deciding, look for a change which will make or save someone money. Poll and listen to focus groups to learn who will support us, and who will oppose. Then, select the change which enlists maximum support, minimum opposition, which you expect to require the least effort.

It will take years. Do it again. It will take years. And again. By then, I expect some will not feel so threatened by planned change. A new generation will be growing up with planning change as the normal status quo.



Only after we have succeeded in making a few changes, should we start talking publicly about broad, systemic change.

I hope we can propose a first change consistent with an integral, comprehensive scheme, but expect that to change anything, we must exploit our opportunities as we find them, perhaps abandoning the goal of a consistent integral scheme.

How can we move things along? Recruit an ad agency. I expect some copywriters, who make their living by writing very well, care about language, words, spelling. One might volunteer to help. Wouldn't 'Reformed English spelling worldwide' look good on a resume or a tombstone?

A sticker on an envelope sent by a member: SPELLING REFORMERS DO IT REGULARLY!

Dear Mr/Ms —

I'm an avid reader of your publication. I'm also an avid fan of literacy. Your readership base, of course, is directly influenced by the literacy rate in this geographical area (see the enclosed page from *The State of literacy in America*).

To a much lesser degree, the literacy rate in this area is influenced by the editorial values and practises of people such as yourself. For better or worse, the editorial choices you make have some bearing on local literacy rates. Some literacy advocates suggest making texts simpler and plainer at the expense of accuracy. Not me. I ask that you consider a plain and simple idea that is also perfectly accurate and subtle: incorporate the authorized simpler spellings contained in the enclosed *Random House Short List of Variant Spellings*.

According to the editors at Random House, variant spellings are by definition nearly identical in frequency to their sister spellings. The American Literacy Council (of New York City) has simplified your task by underscoring the less complex of the two spellings, and publicizes the *Short List* in a variety of editorial venues.

I hope to hear back from you regarding your decision to influence literacy for the better — and simpler — in this area. Very cordially,

See also page 2. In view of similar findings in Britain, British readers might consider adapting this response to their circumstances. — Ed.

7. Thrown by the unexpected

David Barnsdale

I plan to put a motion at the Green Party of England and Wales conference. The real problem, however, is going to be getting enuf people interested so that it gets high enuf on the agenda to be discussed. That's why I attended the May meeting of the party's Educational Working Group. If I were to get these people on my side then any motion would have a real chance. If they turned out to be hostile then the motion was, in practise, dead.

They say generals always fight the last war, not the one they are actually involved in. Likewise I was fighting my last argument. In the past the antis have argued that English spelling preserves etymology. When someone tried this tack this time I was ready with my reply. Etymological spellings were only the result of a short term 16th century fad and of course there are words like *scythe* and *anchor* that are the result of mistaken etymologies. At that point my opponent threw in the towel.

What took the wind from my sails was, however, the argument that spelling was unimportant because everyone can use spell checkers. This is not the counter-argument I'm used to because defenders of TO are usually fanatics about spelling.

That put the argument back on to whether spelling reform helped children to learn to read. I quickly found myself out of my depth. Most of the people there were teachers and so they had personal experience to fall back on. I on the other hand had to rely on what I've read and that's the sort of info that is tricky to access when you've never really needed it before.

The argument I was up against came down to fonics being almost irrelevant in reading. I was sure I could remember that the research supports fonics being clearly the best method of teaching children to read but at that moment I couldn't remember it clearly. Was it specifically reading as opposed to spelling that was helped? But why didn't I bring up ita, whose success was clearly based on helping children to learn?

The only way to get on top of an argument is to do it. Next time I'll have my answers ready. But I wonder if there is a way members can get up to speed more quickly. It would be nice to set aside space at the next AGM when members can take turns to play devil's advocate.

I didn't win that argument but they were a frendly bunch and gave me useful advice on wording my motion. Even if I don't succeed in getting it thru, by moving it I will still have raised the issue of spelling reform in some people's minds. So I'll keep on truckin'.

[Jean Wilkinson: see [Newsletters](#)]

8. Jean Wilkinson, USA, writes: Presenting *H*:

Chameleon of the alphabet
Catalyst *par excellence*
Team-player of the year
Oscar supporting award winner

'Daddy, when I read *h* in my book, what shall I say?'

'Oh, wow! U won't believe this. It all depends on whether it's in *sh* or *th* or *ch* or *wh* or *ph* or *gh* or *rh*. Or someplace else!

Take *gh*. Then U might say *i* as in *night*, *f* as in *cough*, *oo* as in *through*, *o* as in *though*, *aw* as in *caught*, *ow* as in *bough*, or *g* as in *ghost*. It helps the *r* in *rhyme* and *rhythm* and *rheumatism*, and it helps to make *a* in *straight*. It says *ah* in *hurrah*, as well as making its own private sound as in *hair*. And to be honest with U, sometimes it doesn't say anything!

'Hate to tell U this, but there's more. As *ch* it can say *k* as in *stomach*, *sh* as in *chef*, as well as *ch* in *chuckle*. Sometimes *sch* says *sh* as in *schwa*, sometimes it doesn't, as in *school*. *Wh* says one thing in *whole*, and another in *whale*. *Ch* says one thing in *archangel*, and another in *archbishop*. We know that *th* changes between *there* and *three*, and we know what *ph* says, except when it doesn't in *haphazard*.

'U know, honey, somebody ought learn to invent three new letters: one for *sh*, one for *th*, and one for *ch*. Then we could almost retire this poor overworked *h* and put him out to pasture. Why should he be stuck with doing everybody else's work? And as for other combinations, seems like we're spending an awful lot of manhours writing *h*'s that really don't do anything at all. 'So what should U say when U see *h* in your book? Well, try one of these 25 possibilities. And — good luck.'

Was **George Bernard Shaw** a spelling reformer? Note these words from Kingsley Read (JSSS23, p4): '(GBS) sought a wholly new alphabet He would not consider tampering with orthodox English spelling or its traditional alphabet: these were to be left undisturbed — and unimproved.'

[Joe Little: see [Journal 29](#), [Newsletters](#), [Media](#)]

9. Call to action

Responding to findings of US report on literacy

Joe Little, USA

Someone famous once said all politics is local. The same can now officially be said of functional illiteracy: It's not just an international or national issue anymore.

That, in a nutshell, is the finding of the National Institute for Literacy's 221-page report *The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the local, state, and national levels*, or *SLA*.

The report is a useful clarification or iteration of literacy rates in the cities, states and congressional districts of the US. For instance, we are reminded that adults in the lowest literacy level (of five) are not termed illiterate: they are able to sign their names and total a bank deposit entry, but cannot locate an intersection on a street map. Tho *SLA* doesn't provide a term for this segment of the population, we may: since these folks can't function at this basic literacy level we may call them 'functionally illiterate' — tho a kinder, gentler term might be 'marginally literate'.

At any rate, in Washington DC 37% of the adult population is marginally literate, as is 30% in Mississippi, 28% in Louisiana and 24% in California, New York, and Texas. Such illiteracy levels break the heart and numb the mind.

Then what happens? Some say fight. So says Marciene Mattleman of the National Institute for Literacy Advisory Board: 'Having reliable info on our national literacy problem can be a first step toward finding solutions.' Her 'solutions' almost surely mean more spending, more programs, and more networking with more communication tossed in for good measure. That is the normal tack taken in fights for social progress.

Others allude to the benefits of flight. For example, Andy Hartman, director of the National Institute for Literacy, says, 'This report is a useful tool for business ... and these data can help companies make informed decisions about where to relocate.' In other words, where to fly to — and away from — to avoid illiteracy's fallout. Those are short-term solutions, of course. We proponents of simpler spelling can use the *SLA* report (and others like it) for longer-term — and in this case, local — literacy progress.

Here is one way for SSS members in the US to use the free report (which can be obtained by calling 1-800-228-8813 or visiting their web site at <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED416407>):

1. order it;
2. get a free copy of the one-page *Short List Of Random House Webster's Dictionary Variant Spellings* (by faxing us at 1-212-781-0099 or visiting us at <http://www.americanliteracy.com/Archives/ALC-ARCHIVE/spellings .htm>);
3. of the newspapers or magazines that U read on a regular basis, pick the one whose editor or publisher's sympathies — and editing practises — could best be influenced by the illiteracy rate of a specific city, county, or state;
4. make a copy of the *SLA* page(s) that displays this specific literacy info;
5. mail the list and a cover letter and a copy of the *SLA* page to the editor of your choice.

The body of your cover letter may be as short and sweet as the following prototype:

[Steve Bett: see [Journals](#), [Newsletters](#)]

10. Spelling on the net with Steve Bett

SSS Web site's low rating in statistics analysis

The rating software at <http://www.thewebsitegarage.com> checks spelling, load time, dead, links, and link popularity and then rates the web site on a four-point scale.

As might be anticipated, the SSS web site, which includes pages written in CS, receives a low rating when it comes to spelling. Link popularity is also rated as poor or low. Link popularity refers to the number of sites that are linked to the SSS page.

Most of the referrals to the SSS site are from the *Yahoo!* search engine. The most popular source of referrals other than from a search engine is from a site called *Linguistic fun*

One can access all of the latest statistics for the SSS web site at

In a recent report that covered the past five months, the SSS page had been visited 3100 times. This suggests that there are 620 visitors a month, but this statistic is probably inflated.

Counters are notoriously optimistic and can count a single visit multiple times. It also includes any visits made by the webmaster or author.

Only a fraction of those who get to the initial page are enticed to check out the site. Out of the 3100 who surfed to the index page, only 450 to 600 clicked thru to Brochures, Modern spelling, and Six axioms.

Cornell Kimball says this indicates that fewer than 20% of those who go to the home page go any farther: 80% do not visit any of the linked pages.

If this is true, it indicates that something needs to be done to the design of the page to hook the typical viewer. Suggestions from readers are welcomed.

A suggested topic for SSS site

Which spelling do you prefer [] *give* or [] *giv* ?

This idea comes from a 1960s study of spelling preferences summarized in the Spelling Progress Bulletin. The results are rather disturbing since they suggest, if given a vote, over half would seek to retain the worst examples of 'stupid' spelling

Subjects were asked to rate various TO spellings (which were compared to a reform spelling) on a five-point scale where 5 meant they felt that TO spelling represented an optimum spelling pattern and 1 if TO left much to be desired.

Rule level	Spelling / Alternative	Average rating	Spelling / Alternative	Average rating
graphemic	freeze / freez	4.28	give / giv	3.71
phonotactic	fetch / fech	4.18	wash / wosh	4.01
morphemic	walked / walkt	3.22	dogs / dogz	4.71
syntactic	goose / goos	3.78	add /ad	3.53
semantic	sign / syn	3.53	(reference word)	signal

As might be expected, most people said *freeze* was a near perfect way to spell /fri:z/: average 4.28. Fewer thought that *give* was a near perfect way to spell /giv/: average 3.71. All of the scores are skewed toward near total satisfaction with conventional spelling. Few thought the suggested alternative was an improvement. Both the lowest and highest rating are found under morphemic regularity. No one wanted to change the plural but a few wanted to drop the regular past tense ending. On the web page, a test like this could be self scoring. Those who liked non-phonemic spelling could be automatically sent to a page which would justify the reformed spelling.

New spelling related URLs

The find for this issue is the user friendly version of the spelling converter by Steven Bird, [no longer available]

The CGI/Pearl script is available to anyone wanting to add this clever page to their web site. To convert to Cut Spelling, Fanetic, or Truespel, simply type in or cut and paste the text into the window. Click on convert and the text is converted to the selected notation. Unlike the original BTRSPL converter, this one does not have to be downloaded nor require any computer expertise. BTRSPL is still a component of the process, but in the background.

Here are other interesting sites: [no longer available]

This is a great site for people wishing to understand hieroglyphics. It is written at the K-6 level.

The Unifon English Society includes a draft of its notation (a variation of New Spelling).

Instructions for how to build a web page.

Tale peace

Here today, ? tomorrow. Sign projected on to the outside of the building to promote the opening of the library's viewing galleries: The British Library For the nation's written heretage

11. simpl speling. July 1998 members' supplement.

With the increase in the number of pages for this issue, we have created this supplement, for in-house or other news for members. It is inserted in only those copies sent to members.

One of our aims is to make the eight page main section of general interest, not just for members, so it can be passed on confidently to others, and not be out of place in libraries, doctors' waiting rooms, etc. — Editor

April committee meeting.

Big saving likely from venue change.

- Several suggestions for alternative meeting venues were discussed. A choice was made for the next two meetings: The International Friends House.
- Officers were elected as listed overleaf. In addition Tony Burns was appointed meetings secretary for the July meeting only; a decision was postponed on appointing a public relations officer; and Paul Fletcher and Tony Burns were reappointed *PV* coordinators.
- Provisional meeting dates for next 12 months: July 25, October 31, January 23, April 17.
- Paul Fletcher circulated a list of schemes that were in the pipeline. The committee supported Paul in his requests to members to submit *PVs* in the agreed format and printed out, camera ready. Paul has pointed out to some correspondents that SSS publishes *PVs* from members only. Tony Burns reported that *PVs* from George Lahey and Edward Rondthaler were nearly ready for circulation. Paul and Tony were thanked for their work.
- Gerald Palmer suggested an advertisement in The Guardian educational section for £70. It was agreed to discuss this at the July meeting.

Wanted, by new SSS member: Regularized English, by Dr Axel Wijk; Almkvist & Wiksell, Stockholm. Offers to: Tom Lang.

At the AGM.

Continued membership growth reported:

- Jean Hutchins, membership secretary, reported there were 125 names on the membership list, tho 33 had not yet paid their 1998 subscriptions. Sixteen new members had joined since the January committee meeting, mostly via the internet.
- Alun Bye would serve as treasurer for one more year only. Frank Garnett was reappointed auditor. Both Alun and Frank were thanked for their services. The implications of selling some investments was discussed.
- As postage rates outside Britain had risen it was suggested the subscription for members outside UK, particularly outside Europe, be increased. But it was agreed it remain at £10 for 1999. A plea was made to keep it at a rate that could be paid in notes, eg £10 rather than

£12, as some members send cash. A new member suggested credit card payment, but the treasurer is not able to administer card facilities.

- Editor-in-chief Chris Upward reported Simpl Speling tried to be positive on all efforts towards simplification; encouraged members to do what they could towards simplification; and tried to be an attractive publication. Thanks were expressed to editor Allan Campbell, and again to him and John Bryant for photocopying and posting SS.
- Chris reported publication since the 1997 AGM was two Personal Views, three Simpl Spelings, two Journals, a Cut Spelling leaflet and pamphlet No. 15 Regularity and Irregularity in English Spelling. Chris thanked Edward Marchant for typography help.
- Publicity had included: English Association Newsletter, the Langscape exercise, a letter in The Times Educational Supplement (which elicited two inquiries), mention in the Chicago Tribune, and Ron Footer had a letter in The Times which led to some inquiries. The meeting thanked Chris for his work. Altho the Society had no secretary, chairman Chris Jolly felt it was making progress. As a group it worked together well. He was confident reform would come. He observed it did not encounter ridicule as in the past.
- Jean Hutchins was appointed honorary membership secretary (in the absence of a secretary), and Alan Bye honorary treasurer. John Bryant, Tony Burns, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, Chris Jolly, Nicholas Kerr, Gwenllian Thorstad, and Chris Upward were appointed committee members. (During the subsequent committee meeting, David Barnsdale, Marie (Masha) Bell, and Gerald Palmer were co-opted.)
- Valerie Yule's publicity proposals were discussed and referred to the development group. It was suggested she should present her spelling reform ideas as a PV.
- Paul New wanted the Society to publish his views, which he estimated at about 60–70 pages. Chris Upward suggested he write a 500-word summary and try to persuade the committee it was worth publishing in full.
- David Barnsdale suggested a pamphlet for a members' guide on points to put forward in favor of simplification. This was welcomed, and David was asked to consider writing it.

Officers and committee members 1998–99.

President: Professor D G Scragg.

Vice-presidents: Dr Edward Rondthaler, Lord Simon of Glaisdale, Professor John C Wells, Dr Valerie Yule.

Chairman: Chris Jolly.

Vice-chairman: Rev Nick Kerr.

Editor-in-chief and Literature secretary: Christopher Upward.

Research director: Dr Gwenllian Thorstad.

Membership secretary Jean Hutchins.

Treasurer Alun Bye.

Committee: David Barnsdale, Marie (Masha) Bell (Now also administrative support), John Bryant, Tony Burns, Leo Chapman, Paul Fletcher, Gerald Palmer.

New member appointed as administrative support.

Marie (Masha) Bell has been appointed to the new position of administrative support in the Society. She has already taken up the part-time, paid appointment.

Masha (pronounced Marsha) is a new member and also a new committee member, having been co-opted at the April meeting.

Her roles will be defined and clarified as she settles into the job.

Masha is 53, married with two grown-up children. Originally from Lithuania, she has an English husband, is a graduate of Exeter University, and was a secondary school teacher for 18 years, teaching mainly German, but also English, Russian, and French.

She retired early from teaching three years ago because of a health problem that is now cured. With time available, she wanted to take on a new venture with enthusiasm, and being paid for it would make a huge difference. This position seemed made for her needs, she says.

Chairman Chris Jolly, in announcing the appointment, said: 'Masha's submission to the Millennium Experience shows she is enthusiastic for the subject, able to develop good promotional ideas, and able to follow them thru very competently. I have congratulated her and I think she will do very well in the job.'

¶ Note: Jean Hutchins will remain membership secretary.

Committee changes venue The next SSS committee meeting is on July 25, 10:30am, at a new venue, the Quaker International Centre, All members are welcome.

PV guidelines for presentation of members' schemes as Personal Views are available from Paul Fletcher.