

# The Red Letter



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*I Give You My Words*

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by Martin “Red” Fredricks

## Wishing You an Orwellian New Year

Writing is simple.

Sure it is. Tell that to anyone who sweats blood in front of a blank page on a computer screen, bounces a racquet ball against the office wall for hours in an effort to jump-start inspiration, or takes shelter in a more engaging endeavor... like filing.

Maybe writing isn't easy, but George Orwell can help. In his essay, “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell published six simple rules for writers of English. Keep them in mind when you sit down in front of your computer, and you'll have a fighting chance.

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive [voice] where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Following these rules won't make you a good writer, or even make for good writing, but they're a step in the right direction.

If you follow them and your message still doesn't sell, persuade or effectively inform, turn to a professional.

## Free Red!

I'm not quite sure it happened, but on January 26 I'll be tossed in the slammer “for good.” It's the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Lock-Up, and I need your help to make a break for it.

Your tax-deductible donation will help fund research into cures for more than 43 neuromuscular diseases, MDA clinics, support groups and summer camps. Less importantly, you'll help me to get back to work.

I've donated \$50. Match me, give more or give less. Any amount will be appreciated. If you can help, please send me an e-mail. Alternatively, show up at Ruby Tuesdays in West Fargo at 10 a.m. on January 26, make a contribution and throw banana peels through the bars at the jailbird.

*Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right. – Oprah Winfrey*

*The Good Word*

### A Word Scrooge Resolution

Assumption: we all want to sound as intelligent as possible when we speak. If you're using any of the following doozies, overheard in 2004, it's going to be a tough year:

“Supposably, the windshield

factor will dip to 30 below. You can check out the trend in a graft at the Weather Service website. That's cold, but with a windproof coat it'll be a mute point.”

Supposedly, windchill factor isn't measured on our windshields. Grafts can be helpful for burn victims and creating new apple varieties, but for illuminating information you can't beat a

graph. True, your point doesn't say much, but since a point is not capable of speech in the first place, it's moot.

Repeat after Ebenezer Word Dink: In 2005, I only will use words that actually exist, and words that fit the context.

Bah, humbug.