

What good writing looks like ...

This document is designed to give you samples of interesting persuasive, informative and descriptive writing to help you know how to gain a top grade in English. It will be updated periodically. Remember – the best preparation for writing well is to read a lot.

Jay Rayner, restaurant review of Inamo, Observer, 16/5/10

Inamo's shtick is an interactive menu, beamed down on to your table from a projector above. A waitress explained the idea, but gave us only the skimpiest details, presumably because they think that if it requires too much waiter-diner interaction the whole premise is futile. They are right. Even allowing for one accidental order, it is self-explanatory. You run your finger around a laptop-like mouse pad, which brings up a cursor and a bunch of icons. Click on them and pictures of menu items are projected on to the table in front of you. You order your food. It arrives. What larks. There are other things: a few games, local information, a map of the restaurant (strangely useful; finding the loos is a task about which Homer could have written fine legends). There is even a webcam beaming you shots from the kitchen; it showed us stacks of empty crockery.

With all these bells and whistles, most of the food is about as good as it needs to be. It succeeds best with the smaller dishes and when it sticks to the Japanese end of the Asian repertoire, the one exception being long-braised honey-roasted spare ribs in XO sauce, which yielded up their meat quicker than a male stripper at an Essex hen night. We liked slices of seared wild boar rolled around asparagus and enoki mushrooms. Nigiri sushi of unagi (Japanese eel) were in no way a disgrace, the fish still a little warm, as it should be. Salad of sea bass sashimi was fine and the ponzu and wasabi dressing on single oysters had an eye-widening freshness.

It all fell apart in the larger dishes. Cinnamon chicken brought lumps of bird in a crust the colour of an old scab, and one that was so heavy with cinnamon it tasted like a candle shop smells. Alongside were halves of lime that had apparently been prepped sometime in the last decade. They were so hard and dried out I didn't know whether to squeeze them or exfoliate with them.

Ian Jack: Gordon Brown: The picture that says it all
Guardian 15/5/10

Where are we? In what's known as the "war room" on the ground floor of No 12 Downing Street and therefore no older, as a room, than circa 1960, when architect Raymond Erith rebuilt the house from scratch; later Erith's pupil, Quinlan Terry,



remodelled the interiors of No 10 for Margaret Thatcher. The style is neo-Palladian: a broken pediment above the door, wood panels from floor to ceiling, and all looking rather new. The candelabra may be from John Lewis, as may the pencil-pleated silk curtains (butterscotch?) hanging from their brass rails. Rooms in expensive Indian hotels sometimes have this look, with its unpersuasive nod to the 18th century, but we can be sure that Gordon Brown has never patronised the room's appearance with snobbish remarks, or even noticed it. As any visitor to his North Queensferry home will attest, he can never be accused of an interest in comfort or fashion; the one picture on the wall when I went there was a black and white photograph of Jim Baxter, who played left-half for Raith Rovers, Rangers and Scotland, while the living room floor was a sea of plastic toys.

Now Brown is leaving his war room for the last time. In another, more private room, Argles has photographed him on the phone to Nick Clegg – "Nick, Nick, I can't hold on any longer" – and now in the bigger room he's just finishing a brief speech of farewell to his staff and colleagues. His children run over and are hoisted to the desk. Brown ends his speech, the audience applauds. Argles takes his picture, and in a fraction of a second manages two extraordinary achievements. First, a record of how Labour's 13 years in power ended that also includes (you might argue) three great architects of its early success – Mandelson, Campbell and the TV screen. Second, a picture of Brown that for once shows spontaneous happiness: the man who people who know him say they know him to be. A painter could have struggled for years to get it all in, only to have his painting disbelieved.

Time for the slideshow and the pointer: who and what can be seen. Note the nice blue box on the desk in the foreground. It's probably where an assistant kept Brown's cufflinks – there's been no time for a leaving present. Then, between the two computer screens, a bottle of hand-soap. The swine flu scare? Next, the people, who from left are: Sarah Brown with six-year-old John; Justin Forsyth, director of strategic communications (against the curtains); Gordon Brown with three-year-old Fraser, who has cystic fibrosis (though that's a poor definition of an obviously buoyant personality); Ed Miliband (half seen) and Ed Balls, potential successors; Joe Irvin,

political secretary; the Lords Adonis and Mandelson; Campbell; Gavin Kelly, deputy chief of staff (there was no actual chief of staff); Stewart Wood, European adviser; Kirsty McNeill, speechwriter; Leanne Johnson, diary secretary.

The only person who looks uneasy is Sarah Brown. She and John are those most aware of the camera. Both have struck poses, as you do. She looks sadder than her husband, who in cuddling Fraser has found something to do. The bracelet she wears is plastic and made by one of the children, probably John. Other parts of the house have their paintings stuck to the walls. Sarah is 46 and Gordon 59. They met properly on a plane taking them to a Scottish Labour party conference in 1994 and had their relationship disclosed via a photograph taken in a restaurant for the News of the World. Charlie Whelan, then Brown's spokesman, set it up and had the shots retaken when he decided that his boss needed to look more romantic. All this seems long ago.

As for the others, at how many of them has Brown aimed a mobile? Perhaps none, or perhaps the victims have forgiven him. Almost certainly not at Mandelson – it would be like trying to hit a cat at 200 yards with a brick – though his grievance against him over siding with Blair runs very deep. Now, like the rest of this small audience, Mandelson looks genuinely sorry and admiring. Anyone familiar with workplace farewells will recognise the emotions, the lumpy throat and the prickly eyes, which comes with the realisation that not only is a significant part of the leaver's life ending but a good part of yours is as well. "You've been wonderful friends as well as colleagues ... I wish you all the best" and so on. Mandelson's face is composed to reflect similar thoughts back to Brown, and it would be unfair to doubt his sincerity. So many "ups and downs" in the past are turned in the present from mountains to molehills – say what you like about Gordon, but ... To quote the managerial euphemisms of Campbell in his blog: "As my diaries reveal, I have had a lot of ups and downs with GB and his team. But I really do believe he behaved with incredible courage and dignity in the last days of his premiership, and that whilst he may not have had all the roundedness of the TB political skillset, in particular his comms skills, he certainly had resilience and a deep belief in the power of politics to do good."

All leave-takings tend to promote the same atmosphere. With a prime minister, to quote Walter Bagehot on the weddings of princes, they may be no more than a brilliant edition of a universal fact. On the other hand, Brown on this day has behaved particularly well. According to people there, he has cracked favourite jokes to keep spirits up and sat with people with his arm around them and remembered how much this or that piece of work had helped him. And, as one of them said, it was a family house, with the Brown children favourites of doorkeepers, advisers and civil servants. Family eviction, then, on top of brave political failure, Henry V's pre-Agincourt tour of the tents, and final resignation: no wonder there were tears. Brown's career is often described as "a tragedy" – I've done so myself – with the fatal flaw stemming from a doubled-edged character divided between the New Testament and Machiavelli, between public rectitude and private scheming. It may be so, but a much more visible flaw (at least in a modern politician) was the burden of his self-consciousness and the feeling, reinforced by dozens of media consultants and millions more critics on their sofas, that he never looked or sounded right. His

nemesis in that regard hangs on the wall above the clocks and the fireplace, already shimmering with news of his going.

