

# George Orwell isn't just the guy who wrote *Animal Farm*

A recent Geneseo graduate who is currently attending Columbia School of Journalism just sent me the following link to George Orwell's essay "[Politics and the English Language](#)." Here's a quote from the essay (one of many smart points that Orwell makes about the connection between how we write and how we think): "If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase — some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno*, or other lump of verbal refuse — into the dustbin where it belongs." We often have this sense that our thinking can be separated from our writing, a sentiment that is perhaps best captured by that hackneyed criticism often written on student papers: "You have such great ideas, but you're having trouble expressing those ideas." It is as if we have a "thought," which isn't in language, and then we try to express that thought. Orwell's essay, though, prompts us to see the connection between thought and writing, to recognize that what we say actually *produces* how we think. Or, to put it a different way: lazy writing produces lazy thinking; stupid writing makes us stupid. Anyway, just something to think about (and one heck of an essay on how to write) as you work on your own essays for 170. Oh, and it's a great essay to read as you're listening to political ads heading up to the November election.