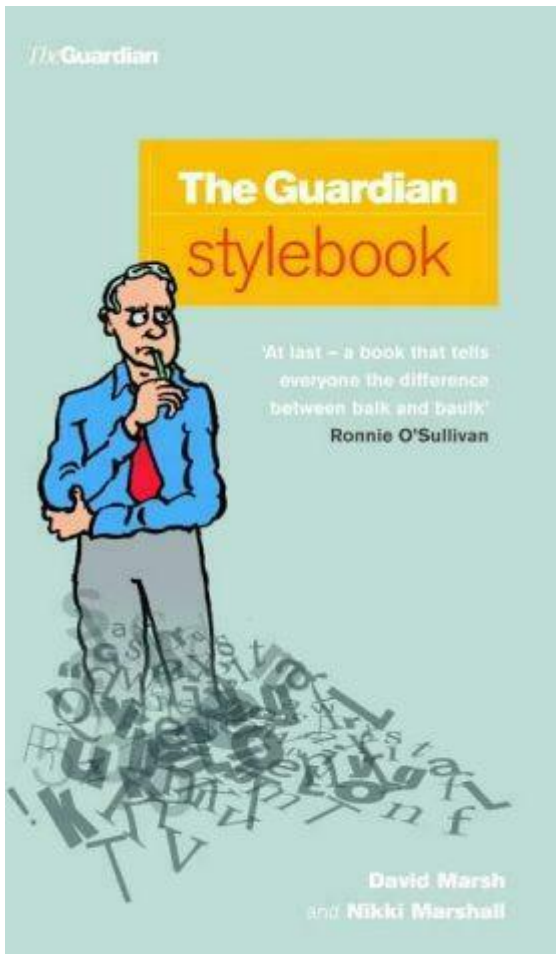


OUCH! You Gotta Have Style



by Reg Green

When I got my first break in journalism – on the Guardian in England – I was handed a copy of its “style book,” which laid out how all words with alternative spellings were to be written, how certain points of grammar were resolved, how numbers were to be written (in words from one to nine, then in numbers like 5015 if they were precise but in words – five thousand – if they were approximations.) Publications all over the world have them to avoid a mishmash and I still follow them as if they were Holy Writ.

So when I began to broadcast commentaries for the BBC it was easy to understand why correspondents from around the world were required to say the names in exactly the same way whatever the local pronunciation. And so, for example, Munich

was said like that, not München or München.

One day, long ago, I was driving through Germany and indulging in my most recurrent dream: how to find a way to move to the US. The arguments against it were strong: I had a well-paid and secure job that I enjoyed with plenty of opportunities to travel (like the trip I was then on) and not much supervision. If I came to the US I'd be back in the ranks with the risk of having a boss saying all the time, "No, not that way."

The argument for moving was less rational but more powerful: the sense I had on visits to the US of a society whose style book of life allowed a lot more freedom of choice, more fun, more risk-taking.

Twelve o'clock was just approaching (twelve not 12 because it is the first word in the sentence) and I switched on the car radio to the American Forces Network and heard the opening words of the daily midday show which in the BBC would have been called something like "The World at 12" or "Today from London." This one was "Lunchin' in Munchen."

"I'm going," I said to myself and a year later I did.