They say fences make for better neighbors. However, the opposite is true with communications: You want as few barriers between you and your audience as possible.

One of the most common roadblocks in science communication is jargon (see last month’s CSA News article about “being average” here: https://bit.ly/2Pz00oD). A 2017 paper highlights this trend and says scientists are even using more jargon when communicating among themselves! The authors studied 123 scientific journals, from 1881 to 2015, and concluded that research papers are getting harder to read. That’s right, students: It’s harder to read research today than it was in even the 1970s and 1980s (read the paper at https://elifesciences.org/articles/27725).

“Our analyses show that this trend is indicative of a growing use of general scientific jargon,” write the authors. “These results are concerning for scientists and for the wider public, as they impact both the reproducibility and accessibility of research findings.”

My analogy for jargon is this: Each time you use a word that is more difficult for your listeners/readers, you lay down a brick. With each new jargon word, a new brick. And, that’s how communication walls (or fences) get built, one brick at a time, shutting down the transfer of information. Some bricks are bigger than others…and some are even boulders.

The best way to get around this when communicating to the public is to not use jargon. It’s not easy to give up old habits, but we’re here to help! Many of our bloggers have told me that not only have they enjoyed blogging and getting correct information out to the public, but they’ve learned a lot about editing in the process.

Let’s look at a few of the biggest jargon offenders and different options.

1. Input/s: Most people associate this word with feedback or contributions. Use seed, fertilizer, water, soil, or the actual “input” you work with.

2. Amendment: Most people associate this word with legal documents. Use addition or fertilizer.

3. Mitigate: Use reduce, avoid, relieve, curb, soften, ease, lessen, or prevent. They might not be an exact fit for your topic, but they’re close.

4. Remediate: Use repair, fix, or improve.

5. Ameliorate: Use improve, cushion, or resolve.

6. Modality: Use technique or method.

7. Nexus: Use intersection, link, or connection.

8. Fertigate: Use fertilization and irrigation (although this is a cool idea, and a cool term, you’d need to explain this word fully in order to keep going).