

# 形同虛設

*xing2 tong2 xu1 she4*

“Terms and conditions” are everywhere these days. But anyone who has ever tried to read 50 pages of text in a three-point font size and manages to get past the first line either possesses superhuman intelligence, unusual patience, has nothing better to do, or needs to have their brain checked.

But before you can get updates for essential software or use any apps or online service, you must “agree” that you have read and understood their terms and conditions, which is, of course, quite impossible.

The Norwegian Consumer Council recently put together the terms and conditions of 33 common apps used by its citizens and found that together they run longer than the New Testament and took 31 hours just to read them out.

It called the state of affairs “absurd,” which was, frankly, quite restrained. To users, these “terms and conditions” are “形同虛設” (*xing2 tong2 xu1 she4*).

## Idiom by Lon Yan

“形” (*xing2*) is “appearance,” “form,” “shape,” “同” (*tong2*) “like”, “same”, “equal”, “虛” (*xu2*) means “false,” “nominal,” “unreal,” “virtual” and “設” (*she4*) “to establish,” “to set up,” “to install.” Literally, “形同虛設” (*xing2 tong2 xu1 she4*) is “form same as unreal set up.”

It means “to exist in name only,” “empty shell.” The idiom describes something that appears to exist but, in fact, does not.

A rule that is never enforced is “形同虛設” (*xing2 tong2 xu1 she4*), so are services that no one can use because it is impractical, like the ovitrap index (誘蚊指數) for mosquito control that the government regularly publishes.

**Terms containing the character “設” (*she4*) include:**

設備 (*she4 bei4*) – equipment, an apparatus

設計 (*she4 ji4*) – to design, a design

設施 (*she4 shi1*) – facilities; installation

設宴 (*she4 yan4*) – to give a banquet