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EDITION

WILLIAM
STRUNK JR.
A N D
E.B. **WHITE**

*"...still a little book, small enough and important enough
to carry in your pocket, as I carry mine."*

— *Charles Osgood*

The
ELEMENTS
Of
STYLE

FOURTH EDITION

FOREWORD BY ROGER ANGELL

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FOURTH EDITION

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The Elements of Style

Oliver Strunk

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*Foreword**

THE FIRST writer I watched at work was my stepfather, E. B. White. Each Tuesday morning, he would close his study door and sit down to write the "Notes and Comment" page for *The New Yorker*. The task was familiar to him — he was required to file a few hundred words of editorial or personal commentary on some topic in or out of the news that week — but the sounds of his typewriter from his room came in hesitant bursts, with long silences in between. Hours went by. Summoned at last for lunch, he was silent and preoccupied, and soon excused himself to get back to the job. When the copy went off at last, in the afternoon RFD pouch — we were in Maine, a day's mail away from New York — he rarely seemed satisfied. "It isn't good enough," he said sometimes. "I wish it were better."

Writing is hard, even for authors who do it all the time. Less frequent practitioners — the job applicant; the business executive with an annual report to get out; the high school senior with a Faulkner assignment; the graduate-school student with her thesis proposal; the writer of a letter of condolence — often get stuck in an awkward passage or find a muddle on their screens, and then blame themselves. What should be easy and flowing looks tangled or feeble or overblown — not what was meant at all. What's wrong with me, each one thinks. Why can't I get this right?

It was this recurring question, put to himself, that must have inspired White to revive and add to a textbook by an English professor of his, Will Strunk Jr., that he had first read in college, and to get it published. The result, this quiet book, has been in print for forty years, and has offered more than ten million writers a helping hand. White knew that a compendium of specific tips — about singular and plural verbs, parentheses, the "that" — "which" scuffle, and many others — could clear up a recalcitrant sentence or subclause when quickly reconsulted, and that the larger principles needed to be kept in plain sight, like a wall sampler.

How simple they look, set down here in White's last chapter: "Write in a way that comes naturally," "Revise and rewrite," "Do not explain too much," and the rest; above all, the cleansing, clarion "Be clear." How often I have turned to them, in the book or in my mind, while trying to start or unblock or revise some piece of my own writing! They help — they really do. They work. They are the way.

E. B. White's prose is celebrated for its ease and clarity — just think of *Charlotte's Web* — but maintaining this standard required endless attention. When the new issue of *The New*

Yorker turned up in Maine, I sometimes saw him reading his "Comment" piece over to himself, with only a slightly different expression than the one he'd worn on the day it went off. Well, O.K., he seemed to be saying. At least I got the elements right.

This edition has been modestly updated, with word processors and air conditioners making their first appearance among White's references, and with a light redistribution of genders to permit a feminine pronoun or female farmer to take their places among the males who once innocently served him. Sylvia Plath has knocked Keats out of the box, and I notice that "America" has become "this country" in a sample text, to forestall a subsequent and possibly demeaning "she" in the same paragraph. What is not here is anything about E-mail — the rules-free, lower-case flow that cheerfully keeps us in touch these days. E-mail is conversation, and it may be replacing the sweet and endless talking we once sustained (and tucked away) within the informal letter. But we are all writers and readers as well as communicators, with the need at times to please and satisfy ourselves (as White put it) with the clear and almost perfect thought.

Roger Angell

*Introduction**

AT THE close of the first World War, when I was a student at Cornell, I took a course called English 8. My professor was William Strunk Jr. A textbook required for the course was a slim volume called *The Elements of Style*, whose author was the professor himself. The year was 1919. The book was known on the campus in those days as "the little book," with the stress on the word "little." It had been privately printed by the author.

(* E. B. White wrote this introduction for the 1979 edition.)

I passed the course, graduated from the university, and forgot the book but not the professor. Some thirty-eight years later, the book bobbed up again in my life when Macmillan commissioned me to revise it for the college market and the general trade. Meantime, Professor Strunk had died.

The Elements of Style, when I reexamined it in 1957, seemed to me to contain rich deposits of gold. It was Will Strunk's *parvum opus*, his attempt to cut the vast tangle of English rhetoric down to size and write its rules and principles on the head of a pin. Will himself had hung the tag "little" on the book; he referred to it sardonically and with secret pride as "the *little* book," always giving the word "little" a special twist, as though he were putting a spin on a ball. In its original form, it was a forty-three page summation of the case for cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English. Today, fifty-two years later, its vigor is unimpaired, and for sheer pith I think it probably sets a record that is not likely to be broken. Even after I got through tampering with it, it was still a tiny thing, a barely tarnished gem. Seven rules of usage, eleven principles of composition, a few matters of form, and a list of words and expressions commonly misused — that was the sum and substance of Professor Strunk's work. Somewhat audaciously, and in an attempt to give my publisher his money's worth, I added a chapter called "An Approach to Style," setting forth my own prejudices, my notions of error, my articles of faith. This chapter (Chapter V) is addressed particularly to those who feel that English prose composition is not only a necessary skill but a sensible pursuit as well — a way to spend one's days. I think Professor Strunk would not object to that.

A second edition of the book was published in 1972. I have now completed a third revision. Chapter IV has been refurbished with words and expressions of a recent vintage; four rules of usage have been added to Chapter I. Fresh examples have been added to some of the rules and principles, amplification has reared its head in a few places in the text

where I felt an assault could successfully be made on the bastions of its brevity, and in general the book has received a thorough overhaul — to correct errors, delete bewhiskered entries, and enliven the argument.

Professor Strunk was a positive man. His book contains rules of grammar phrased as direct orders. In the main I have not tried to soften his commands, or modify his pronouncements, or remove the special objects of his scorn. I have tried, instead, to preserve the flavor of his discontent while slightly enlarging the scope of the discussion.

The Elements of Style does not pretend to survey the whole field. Rather it proposes to give in brief space the principal requirements of plain English style. It concentrates on fundamentals: the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated.

The reader will soon discover that these rules and principles are in the form of sharp commands, Sergeant Strunk snapping orders to his platoon. "Do not join independent clauses with a comma." (Rule 5.) "Do not break sentences in two." (Rule 6.) "Use the active voice." (Rule 14.) "Omit needless words." (Rule 17.) "Avoid a succession of loose sentences." (Rule 18.) "In summaries, keep to one tense." (Rule 21.) Each rule or principle is followed by a short hortatory essay, and usually the exhortation is followed by, or interlarded with, examples in parallel columns — the true vs. the false, the right vs. the wrong, the timid vs. the bold, the ragged vs. the trim. From every line there peers out at me the puckish face of my professor, his short hair parted neatly in the middle and combed down over his forehead, his eyes blinking incessantly behind steel-rimmed spectacles as though he had just emerged into strong light, his lips nibbling each other like nervous horses, his smile shuttling to and fro under a carefully edged mustache.

"Omit needless words!" cries the author on page 23, and into that imperative Will Strunk really put his heart and soul. In the days when I was sitting in his class, he omitted so many needless words, and omitted them so forcibly and with such eagerness and obvious relish, that he often seemed in the position of having shortchanged himself — a man left with nothing more to say yet with time to fill, a radio prophet who had out-distanced the clock. Will Strunk got out of this predicament by a simple trick: he uttered every sentence three times. When he delivered his oration on brevity to the class, he leaned forward over his desk, grasped his coat lapels in his hands, and, in a husky, conspiratorial voice, said, "Rule Seventeen. Omit needless words! Omit needless words! Omit needless words!" He was a memorable man, friendly and funny. Under the remembered sting of his kindly lash, I have been trying to omit needless words since 1919, and although there are still

many words that cry for omission and the huge task will never be accomplished, it is exciting to me to reread the masterly Strunkian elaboration of this noble theme. It goes:

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

There you have a short, valuable essay on the nature and beauty of brevity — fifty-nine words that could change the world. Having recovered from his adventure in prolixity (fifty-nine words were a lot of words in the tight world of William Strunk Jr.), the professor proceeds to give a few quick lessons in pruning. Students learn to cut the dead-wood from "this is a subject that," reducing it to "this subject," a saving of three words. They learn to trim "used for fuel purposes" down to "used for fuel." They learn that they are being chatterboxes when they say "the question as to whether" and that they should just say "whether" — a saving of four words out of a possible five.

The professor devotes a special paragraph to the vile expression *the fact that*, a phrase that causes him to quiver with revulsion. The expression, he says, should be "revised out of every sentence in which it occurs." But a shadow of gloom seems to hang over the page, and you feel that he knows how hopeless his cause is. I suppose I have written *the fact that* a thousand times in the heat of composition, revised it out maybe five hundred times in the cool aftermath. To be batting only .500 this late in the season, to fail half the time to connect with this fat pitch, saddens me, for it seems a betrayal of the man who showed me how to swing at it and made the swinging seem worthwhile.

I treasure *The Elements of Style* for its sharp advice, but I treasure it even more for the audacity and self-confidence of its author. Will knew where he stood. He was so sure of where he stood, and made his position so clear and so plausible, that his peculiar stance has continued to invigorate me — and, I am sure, thousands of other ex-students — during the years that have intervened since our first encounter. He had a number of likes and dislikes that were almost as whimsical as the choice of a necktie, yet he made them seem utterly convincing. He disliked the word *forceful* and advised us to use *forcible* instead. He felt that the word *clever* was greatly overused: "It is best restricted to ingenuity displayed in small matters." He despised the expression *student body*, which he termed gruesome, and made a special trip downtown to the *Alumni News* office one day to protest

the expression and suggest that *studentry* be substituted — a coinage of his own, which he felt was similar to *citizenry*. I am told that the *News* editor was so charmed by the visit, if not by the word, that he ordered the student body buried, never to rise again. *Studentry* has taken its place. It's not much of an improvement, but it does sound less cadaverous, and it made Will Strunk quite happy.

Some years ago, when the heir to the throne of England was a child, I noticed a headline in the *Times* about Bonnie Prince Charlie: "CHARLES' TONSILS OUT." Immediately Rule 1 leapt to mind.

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's. Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

Charles's friend

Burns's poems

the witch's malice

Clearly, Will Strunk had foreseen, as far back as 1918, the dangerous tonsillectomy of a prince, in which the surgeon removes the tonsils and the *Times* copy desk removes the final *s*. He started his book with it. I commend Rule 1 to the *Times*, and I trust that Charles's throat, not Charles' throat, is in fine shape today.

Style rules of this sort are, of course, somewhat a matter of individual preference, and even the established rules of grammar are open to challenge. Professor Strunk, although one of the most inflexible and choosy of men, was quick to acknowledge the fallacy of inflexibility and the danger of doctrine. "It is an old observation," he wrote, "that the best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric. When they do so, however, the reader will usually find in the sentence some compensating merit, attained at the cost of the violation. Unless he is certain of doing as well, he will probably do best to follow the rules." It is encouraging to see how perfectly a book, even a dusty rule book, perpetuates and extends the spirit of a man. Will Strunk loved the clear, the brief, the bold, and his book is clear, brief, bold. Boldness is perhaps its chief distinguishing mark. On page 26, explaining one of his parallels, he says, "The lefthand version gives the impression that the writer is undecided or timid, apparently unable or afraid to choose one form of expression and hold to it." And his original Rule 11 was "Make definite assertions." That was Will all over. He scorned the vague, the tame, the colorless, the irresolute. He felt it was worse to be irresolute than to be wrong. I remember a day in class when he leaned far forward, in his

characteristic pose — the pose of a man about to impart a secret — and croaked, "If you don't know how to pronounce a word, say it loud! If you don't know how to pronounce a word, say it loud!" This comical piece of advice struck me as sound at the time, and I still respect it. Why compound ignorance with inaudibility? Why run and hide?

All through *The Elements of Style* one finds evidences of the author's deep sympathy for the reader. Will felt that the reader was in serious trouble most of the time, floundering in a swamp, and that it was the duty of anyone attempting to write English to drain this swamp quickly and get the reader up on dry ground, or at least to throw a rope. In revising the text, I have tried to hold steadily in mind this belief of his, this concern for the bewildered reader. In the English classes of today, "the little book" is surrounded by longer, lower textbooks — books with permissive steering and automatic transitions. Perhaps the book has become something of a curiosity. To me, it still seems to maintain its original poise, standing, in a drafty time, erect, resolute, and assured. I still find the Strunkian wisdom a comfort, the Strunkian humor a delight, and the Strunkian attitude toward right-and- wrong a blessing undisguised.

1979

The Elements of Style

I

Elementary Rules of Usage

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's.

Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

Charles's friend

Burns's poems

the witch's malice

Exceptions are the possessives of ancient proper names ending in *-es* and *-is*, the possessive *Jesus'*, and such forms as *for conscience' sake*, *for righteousness' sake*. But such forms as *Moses' Laws*, *Isis' temple* are commonly replaced by

the laws of Moses

the temple of Isis

The pronominal possessives *hers*, *its*, *theirs*, *yours*, and *ours* have no apostrophe.

Indefinite pronouns, however, use the apostrophe to show possession.

one's rights

somebody else's umbrella

A common error is to write *it's* for *its*, or vice versa. The first is a contraction, meaning "it is." The second is a possessive.

It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas.

2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.

Thus write,

red, white, and blue gold, silver, or copper

He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.

This comma is often referred to as the "serial" comma. In the names of business firms the last comma is usually omitted. Follow the usage of the individual firm.

Little, Brown and Company Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette

3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.

The best way to see a country, unless you are pressed for time, is to travel on foot.

This rule is difficult to apply; it is frequently hard to decide whether a single word, such as *however*, or a brief phrase is or is not parenthetical. If the interruption to the flow of the sentence is but slight, the commas may be safely omitted. But whether the interruption is slight or considerable, never omit one comma and leave the other. There is no defense for such punctuation as

Marjories husband, Colonel Nelson paid us a visit yesterday.

or

My brother you will be pleased to hear, is now in perfect health.

Dates usually contain parenthetical words or figures. Punctuate as follows:

February to July, 1992

April 6, 1986

Wednesday, November 14, 1990

Note that it is customary to omit the comma in

6 April 1988

The last form is an excellent way to write a date; the figures are separated by a word and are, for that reason, quickly grasped.

A name or a title in direct address is parenthetic.

If, Sir, you refuse, I cannot predict what will happen.

Well, Susan, this is a fine mess you are in.

The abbreviations *etc.*, *i.e.*, and *e.g.*, the abbreviations for academic degrees, and titles that follow a name are parenthetic and should be punctuated accordingly.

Letters, packages, etc., should go here.

Horace Fulsome, Ph.D., presided.

Rachel Simonds, Attorney

The Reverend Harry Lang, S.J.

No comma, however, should separate a noun from a restrictive term of identification.

Billy the Kid

The novelist Jane Austen

William the Conqueror

The poet Sappho

Although *Junior*, with its abbreviation *Jr.*, has commonly been regarded as parenthetic, logic suggests that it is, in fact, restrictive and therefore not in need of a comma.

James Wright Jr.

Nonrestrictive relative clauses are parenthetic, as are similar clauses introduced by conjunctions indicating time or place. Commas are therefore needed. A nonrestrictive clause is one that does not serve to identify or define the antecedent noun.

The audience, which had at first been indifferent, became more and more interested.

In 1769, when Napoleon was born, Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

Nether Stowey, where Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, is a few miles from Bridgewater.

In these sentences, the clauses introduced by *which*, *when*, and *where* are nonrestrictive; they do not limit or define, they merely add something. In the first example, the clause introduced by *which* does not serve to tell which of several possible audiences is meant; the reader presumably knows that already. The clause adds, parenthetically, a statement supplementing that in the main clause. Each of the three sentences is a combination of two statements that might have been made independently.

The audience was at first indifferent. Later it became more and more interested.

Napoleon was born in 1769. At that time Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* at Nether Stowey. Nether Stowey is a few miles from Bridgewater.

Restrictive clauses, by contrast, are not parenthetic and are not set off by commas. Thus,

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Here the clause introduced by *who* does serve to tell which people are meant; the sentence, unlike the sentences above, cannot be split into two independent statements. The same principle of comma use applies to participial phrases and to appositives.

People sitting in the rear couldn't hear, (*restrictive*)

Uncle Bert, being slightly deaf, moved forward, (*non-restrictive*)

My cousin Bob is a talented harpist, (*restrictive*)

Our oldest daughter, Mary, sings, (*nonrestrictive*)

When the main clause of a sentence is preceded by a phrase or a subordinate clause, use a comma to set off these elements.

Partly by hard fighting, partly by diplomatic skill, they enlarged their dominions to the east and rose to royal rank with the possession of Sicily.

4. Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause.

The early records of the city have disappeared, and the story of its first years can no longer be reconstructed.

The situation is perilous, but there is still one chance of escape.

Two-part sentences of which the second member is introduced by *as* (in the sense of "because"), *for*, *or*, *nor*, or *while* (in the sense of "and at the same time") likewise require a comma before the conjunction.

If a dependent clause, or an introductory phrase requiring to be set off by a comma, precedes the second independent clause, no comma is needed after the conjunction.

The situation is perilous, but if we are prepared to act promptly, there is still one chance of escape.

When the subject is the same for both clauses and is expressed only once, a comma is useful if the connective is *but*. When the connective is *and*, the comma should be omitted if the relation between the two statements is close or immediate.

I have heard the arguments, but am still unconvinced.

He has had several years' experience and is thoroughly competent.

5. Do not join independent clauses with a comma.

If two or more clauses grammatically complete and not joined by a conjunction are to form a single compound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semicolon.

Mary Shelley's works are entertaining; they are full of engaging ideas.

It is nearly half past five; we cannot reach town before dark.

It is, of course, equally correct to write each of these as two sentences, replacing the semicolons with periods.

Mary Shelley's works are entertaining. They are full of engaging ideas.

It is nearly half past five. We cannot reach town before dark.

If a conjunction is inserted, the proper mark is a comma. (Rule 4.)

Mary Shelley's works are entertaining, for they are full of engaging ideas.

It is nearly half past five, and we cannot reach town before dark.

A comparison of the three forms given above will show clearly the advantage of the first. It is, at least in the examples given, better than the second form because it suggests the close relationship between the two statements in a way that the second does not attempt, and better than the third because it is briefer and therefore more forcible. Indeed, this simple method of indicating relationship between statements is one of the most useful devices of composition. The relationship, as above, is commonly one of cause and consequence.

Note that if the second clause is preceded by an adverb, such as *accordingly*, *besides*, *then*, *therefore*, or *thus*, and not by a conjunction, the semicolon is still required.

I had never been in the place before; besides, it was dark as a tomb.

An exception to the semicolon rule is worth noting here. A comma is preferable when the clauses are very short and alike in form, or when the tone of the sentence is easy and conversational.

Man proposes, God disposes.

The gates swung apart, the bridge fell, the portcullis was drawn up.

I hardly knew him, he was so changed.

Here today, gone tomorrow.

6. Do not break sentences in two.

In other words, do not use periods for commas.

I met them on a Cunard liner many years ago. Coming home from Liverpool to New York.

She was an interesting talker. A woman who had traveled all over the world and lived in half a dozen countries.

In both these examples, the first period should be replaced by a comma and the following word begun with a small letter.

It is permissible to make an emphatic word or expression serve the purpose of a sentence and to punctuate it accordingly:

Again and again he called out. No reply.

The writer must, however, be certain that the emphasis is warranted, lest a clipped sentence seem merely a blunder in syntax or in punctuation. Generally speaking, the place for broken sentences is in dialogue, when a character happens to speak in a clipped or fragmentary way.

Rules 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover the most important principles that govern punctuation. They should be so thoroughly mastered that their application becomes second nature.

7. Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation.

A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. The colon has more effect than the comma, less power to separate than the semicolon, and more formality than the dash. It usually follows an independent clause and should not separate a verb from its complement or a preposition from its object. The examples in the lefthand column, below, are wrong; they should be rewritten as in the righthand column.

Your dedicated whittler requires: a knife, a piece of wood, and a back porch.

Understanding is that penetrating quality of knowledge that grows from:
theory, practice, conviction, assertion, error, and humiliation.

Your dedicated whittler requires three props: a knife, a piece of wood, and a back porch.

Understanding is that penetrating quality of knowledge that grows from theory, practice, conviction, assertion, error, and humiliation.

Join two independent clauses with a colon if the second interprets or amplifies the first.

But even so, there was a directness and dispatch about animal burial: there was no stopover in the undertaker's foul parlor, no wreath or spray.

A colon may introduce a quotation that supports or contributes to the preceding clause.

The squalor of the streets reminded her of a line from Oscar Wilde: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

The colon also has certain functions of form: to follow the salutation of a formal letter, to separate hour from minute in a notation of time, and to separate the title of a work from its subtitle or a Bible chapter from a verse.

Dear Mr. Montague:

departs at 10:48 P.M.

Practical Calligraphy: An Introduction to Italic Script

Nehemiah 11:7

8. Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary.

A dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses.

His first thought on getting out of bed — if he had any thought at all — was to get back in again.

The rear axle began to make a noise — a grinding, chattering, teeth-gritting rasp.

The increasing reluctance of the sun to rise, the extra nip in the breeze, the patter of shed leaves dropping — all the evidences of fall drifting into winter were clearer each day.

Use a dash only when a more common mark of punctuation seems inadequate.

Her father's suspicions proved well-founded — it was not Edward she cared for — it was San Francisco.

Her father's suspicions proved well-founded. It was not Edward she cared for, it was San Francisco.

Violence — the kind you see on television — is not honestly violent — there lies its harm.

Violence, the kind you see on television, is not honestly violent. There lies its harm.

9. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.

Words that intervene between subject and verb do not affect the number of the verb.

The bittersweet flavor of youth — its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges — are not soon forgotten.

The bittersweet flavor of youth — its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges — is not soon forgotten.

A common blunder is the use of a singular verb form in a relative clause following "one of..." or a similar expression when the relative is the subject.

One of the ablest scientists who has attacked this problem

One of the ablest scientists who have attacked this problem

One of those people who is never ready on time

One of those people who are never ready on time

Use a singular verb form after *each*, *either*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *neither*, *nobody*, *someone*.

Everybody thinks he has a unique sense of humor.

Although both clocks strike cheerfully, neither keeps good time.

With *none*, use the singular verb when the word means "no one" or "not one."

None of us are perfect.

None of us is perfect.

A plural verb is commonly used when *none* suggests more than one thing or person.

None are so fallible as those who are sure they're right.

A compound subject formed of two or more nouns joined by *and* almost always requires a plural verb.

The walrus and the carpenter were walking close at hand.

But certain compounds, often cliches, are so inseparable they are considered a unit and so take a singular verb, as do compound subjects qualified by *each* or *every*.

The long and the short of it is ...

Bread and butter was all she served.

Give and take is essential to a happy household.

Every window, picture, and mirror was smashed.

A singular subject remains singular even if other nouns are connected to it by *with*, *as well as*, *in addition to*, *except*, *together with*, and *no less than*.

His speech as well as his manner is objectionable.

A linking verb agrees with the number of its subject.

What is wanted is a few more pairs of hands.

The trouble with truth is its many varieties.

Some nouns that appear to be plural are usually construed as singular and given a singular verb.

Politics is an art, not a science.

The Republican Headquarters is on this side of the tracks.

But

The general's quarters are across the river.

In these cases the writer must simply learn the idioms. The contents of a book is singular. The contents of a jar may be either singular or plural, depending on what's in the jar — jam or marbles.

10. Use the proper case of pronoun.

The personal pronouns, as well as the pronoun *who*, change form as they function as subject or object.

Will Jane or he be hired, do you think?

The culprit, it turned out, was he.

We heavy eaters would rather walk than ride.

Who knocks?

Give this work to whoever looks idle.

In the last example, *whoever* is the subject of *looks idle*; the object of the preposition *to* is the entire clause *whoever looks idle*. When *who* introduces a subordinate clause, its case depends on its function in that clause.

Virgil Soames is the candidate whom we think will win.

Virgil Soames is the candidate who we think will win. [We think *he* will win.]

Virgil Soames is the candidate who we hope to elect.

Virgil Soames is the candidate whom we hope to elect. [We hope to elect *him*.]

A pronoun in a comparison is nominative if it is the subject of a stated or understood verb.

Sandy writes better than I. (Than I write.)

In general, avoid "understood" verbs by supplying them.

I think Horace admires Jessica more than I.

I think Horace admires Jessica more than I do.

Polly loves cake more than me.

Polly loves cake more than she loves me.

The objective case is correct in the following examples.

The ranger offered Shirley and him some advice on campsites.

They came to meet the Baldwins and us.

Let's talk it over between us, then, you and me.

Whom should I ask?

A group of us taxpayers protested.

Us in the last example is in apposition to taxpayers, the object of the preposition *of*. The wording, although grammatically defensible, is rarely apt. "A group of us protested as taxpayers" is better, if not exactly equivalent.

Use the simple personal pronoun as a subject.

Blake and myself stayed home.

Blake and I stayed home.

Howard and yourself brought the lunch, I thought.

Howard and you brought the lunch, I thought.

The possessive case of pronouns is used to show ownership. It has two forms: the adjectival modifier, *your* hat, and the noun form, a hat *of yours*.

The dog has buried one of your gloves and one of mine in the flower bed.

Gerunds usually require the possessive case.

Mother objected to our driving on the icy roads.

A present participle as a verbal, on the other hand, takes the objective case.

They heard him singing in the shower.

The difference between a verbal participle and a gerund is not always obvious, but note what is really said in each of the following.

Do you mind me asking a question?

Do you mind my asking a question?

In the first sentence, the queried objection is to *me*, as opposed to other members of the group, asking a question. In the second example, the issue is whether a question may be asked at all.

11. A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject.

Walking slowly down the road, he saw a woman accompanied by two children.

The word *walking* refers to the subject of the sentence, not to the woman. To make it refer to the woman, the writer must recast the sentence.

He saw a woman, accompanied by two children, walking slowly down the road.

Participial phrases preceded by a conjunction or by a preposition, nouns in apposition, adjectives, and adjective phrases come under the same rule if they begin the sentence.

On arriving in Chicago, his friends met him at the station.

On arriving in Chicago, he was met at the station by his friends.

A soldier of proved valor, they entrusted him with the defense of the city.

A soldier of proved valor, he was entrusted with the defense of the city.

Young and inexperienced, the task seemed easy to me.

Young and inexperienced, I thought the task easy.

Without a friend to counsel him, the temptation proved irresistible.

Without a friend to counsel him, he found the temptation irresistible.

Sentences violating Rule 11 are often ludicrous:

Being in a dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house very cheap.

Wondering irresolutely what to do next, the clock struck twelve.

Elementary Principles of Composition

12. Choose a suitable design and hold to it.

A basic structural design underlies every kind of writing. Writers will in part follow this design, in part deviate from it, according to their skills, their needs, and the unexpected events that accompany the act of composition. Writing, to be effective, must follow closely the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily in the order in which those thoughts occur. This calls for a scheme of procedure. In some cases, the best design is no design, as with a love letter, which is simply an outpouring, or with a casual essay, which is a ramble. But in most cases, planning must be a deliberate prelude to writing. The first principle of composition, therefore, is to foresee or determine the shape of what is to come and pursue that shape.

A sonnet is built on a fourteen-line frame, each line containing five feet. Hence, sonneteers know exactly where they are headed, although they may not know how to get there. Most forms of composition are less clearly defined, more flexible, but all have skeletons to which the writer will bring the flesh and the blood. The more clearly the writer perceives the shape, the better are the chances of success.

13. Make the paragraph the unit of composition.

The paragraph is a convenient unit; it serves all forms of literary work. As long as it holds together, a paragraph may be of any length — a single, short sentence or a passage of great duration.

If the subject on which you are writing is of slight extent, or if you intend to treat it briefly, there may be no need to divide it into topics. Thus, a brief description, a brief book review, a brief account of a single incident, a narrative merely outlining an action, the setting forth of a single idea — any one of these is best written in a single paragraph. After the paragraph has been written, examine it to see whether division will improve it.

Ordinarily, however, a subject requires division into topics, each of which should be dealt with in a paragraph. The object of treating each topic in a paragraph by itself is, of course,

to aid the reader. The beginning of each paragraph is a signal that a new step in the development of the subject has been reached.

As a rule, single sentences should not be written or printed as paragraphs. An exception may be made of sentences of transition, indicating the relation between the parts of an exposition or argument

In dialogue, each speech, even if only a single word, is usually a paragraph by itself; that is, a new paragraph begins with each change of speaker. The application of this rule when dialogue and narrative are combined is best learned from examples in well-edited works of fiction. Sometimes a writer, seeking to create an effect of rapid talk or for some other reason, will elect not to set off each speech in a separate paragraph and instead will run speeches together. The common practice, however, and the one that serves best in most instances, is to give each speech a paragraph of its own.

As a rule, begin each paragraph either with a sentence that suggests the topic or with a sentence that helps the transition. If a paragraph forms part of a larger composition, its relation to what precedes, or its function as a part of the whole, may need to be expressed. This can sometimes be done by a mere word or phrase (*again, therefore, for the same reason*) in the first sentence. Sometimes, however, it is expedient to get into the topic slowly, by way of a sentence or two of introduction or transition.

In narration and description, the paragraph sometimes begins with a concise, comprehensive statement serving to hold together the details that follow.

The breeze served us admirably.

The campaign opened with a series of reverses.

The next ten or twelve pages were filled with a curious set of entries.

But when this device, or any device, is too often used, it becomes a mannerism. More commonly, the opening sentence simply indicates by its subject the direction the paragraph is to take.

At length I thought I might return toward the stockade.

He picked up the heavy lamp from the table and began to explore.

Another flight of steps, and they emerged on the roof.

In animated narrative, the paragraphs are likely to be short and without any semblance of a topic sentence, the writer rushing headlong, event following event in rapid succession. The break between such paragraphs merely serves the purpose of a rhetorical pause, throwing into prominence some detail of the action.

In general, remember that paragraphing calls for a good eye as well as a logical mind. Enormous blocks of print look formidable to readers, who are often reluctant to tackle them. Therefore, breaking long paragraphs in two, even if it is not necessary to do so for sense, meaning, or logical development, is often a visual help. But remember, too, that firing off many short paragraphs in quick succession can be distracting. Paragraph breaks used only for show read like the writing of commerce or of display advertising. Moderation and a sense of order should be the main considerations in paragraphing.

14. Use the active voice.

The active voice is usually more direct and vigorous than the passive:

I shall always remember my first visit to Boston.

This is much better than

My first visit to Boston will always be remembered by me.

The latter sentence is less direct, less bold, and less concise. If the writer tries to make it more concise by omitting "by me,"

My first visit to Boston will always be remembered,

it becomes indefinite: is it the writer or some undisclosed person or the world at large that will always remember this visit?

This rule does not, of course, mean that the writer should entirely discard the passive voice, which is frequently convenient and sometimes necessary.

The dramatists of the Restoration are little esteemed today.

Modern readers have little esteem for the dramatists of the Restoration.

The first would be the preferred form in a paragraph on the dramatists of the Restoration, the second in a paragraph on the tastes of modern readers. The need to make a particular

word the subject of the sentence will often, as in these examples, determine which voice is to be used.

The habitual use of the active voice, however, makes for forcible writing. This is true not only in narrative concerned principally with action but in writing of any kind. Many a tame sentence of description or exposition can be made lively and emphatic by substituting a transitive in the active voice for some such perfunctory expression as *there is* or *could be heard*.

There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground.

Dead leaves covered the ground.

At dawn the crowing of a rooster could be heard.

The cock's crow came with dawn.

The reason he left college was that his health became impaired.

Failing health compelled him to leave college.

It was not long before she was very sorry that she had said what she had.

She soon repented her words.

Note, in the examples above, that when a sentence is made stronger, it usually becomes shorter. Thus, brevity is a by-product of vigor.

15. Put statements in positive form.

Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, noncommittal language. Use the word *not* as a means of denial or in antithesis, never as a means of evasion.

He was not very often on time.

He usually came late.

She did not think that studying Latin was a sensible way to use one's time.

She thought the study of Latin a waste of time.

The Taming of the Shrew is rather weak in spots. Shakespeare does not portray Katharine as a very admirable character, nor does Bianca remain long in memory as an important character in Shakespeare's works.

The women in *The Taming of the Shrew* are unattractive. Katharine is disagreeable, Bianca insignificant.

The last example, before correction, is indefinite as well as negative. The corrected version, consequently, is simply a guess at the writer's intention.

All three examples show the weakness inherent in the word *not*. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader is dissatisfied with being told only what is not; the reader wishes to be told what is. Hence, as a rule, it is better to express even a negative in positive form.

not honest	dishonest
not important	trifling
did not remember	forgot
did not pay any attention to	ignored
did not have much confidence in	distrusted

Placing negative and positive in opposition makes for a stronger structure.

Not charity, but simple justice.

Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.

Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.

Negative words other than *not* are usually strong.

Her loveliness I never knew / Until she smiled on me.

Statements qualified with unnecessary auxiliaries or conditionals sound irresolute.

If you would let us know the time of your arrival, we would be happy to arrange your transportation from the airport.	If you will let us know the time of your arrival, we shall be happy to arrange your transportation from the airport.
Applicants can make a good impression by being neat and punctual.	Applicants will make a good impression if they are neat and punctual.
Plath may be ranked among those modem poets who died young.	Plath was one of those modern poets who died young.

If your every sentence admits a doubt, your writing will lack authority. Save the auxiliaries *would, should, could, may, might*, and *can* for situations involving real uncertainty.

16. Use definite, specific, concrete language.

Prefer the specific to the general, the definite to the vague, the concrete to the abstract.

A period of unfavorable weather set in.	It rained every day for a week.
He showed satisfaction as he took possession of his well-earned reward.	He grinned as he pocketed the coin.

If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on any one point, it is this: the surest way to arouse and hold the readers attention is by being specific, definite, and

concrete. The greatest writers — Homer, Dante, Shakespeare — are effective largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter. Their words call up pictures.

Jean Stafford, to cite a more modern author, demonstrates in her short story "In the Zoo" how prose is made vivid by the use of words that evoke images and sensations:

... Daisy and I in time found asylum in a small menagerie down by the railroad tracks. It belonged to a gentle alcoholic ne'er-do-well, who did nothing all day long but drink bathtub gin in rickeys and play solitaire and smile to himself and talk to his animals. He had a little, stunted red vixen and a deodorized skunk, a parrot from Tahiti that spoke Parisian French, a woebegone coyote, and two capuchin monkeys, so serious and humanized, so small and sad and sweet, and so religious-looking with their tonsured heads that it was impossible not to think their gibberish was really an ordered language with a grammar that someday some philologist would understand.

Gran knew about our visits to Mr. Murphy and she did not object, for it gave her keen pleasure to excoriate him when we came home. His vice was not a matter of guesswork; it was an established fact that he was half-seas over from dawn till midnight. "With the black Irish," said Gran, "the taste for drink is taken in with the mother's milk and is never mastered. Oh, I know all about those promises to join the temperance movement and not to touch another drop. The way to Hell is paved with good intentions."*

(* Excerpt from "In the Zoo" from *Bad Characters* by Jean Stafford. Copyright © 1964 by Jean Stafford. Copyright renewed © 1992 by Nora Cosgrove. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. Also copyright © 1969 by Jean Stafford; reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.)

If the experiences of Walter Mitty, of Molly Bloom, of Rabbit Angstrom have seemed for the moment real to countless readers, if in reading Faulkner we have almost the sense of inhabiting Yoknapatawpha County during the decline of the South, it is because the details used are definite, the terms concrete. It is not that every detail is given — that would be impossible, as well as to no purpose — but that all the significant details are given, and with such accuracy and vigor that readers, in imagination, can project themselves into the scene.

In exposition and in argument, the writer must likewise never lose hold of the concrete; and even when dealing with general principles, the writer must furnish particular instances of their application.

In his *Philosophy of Style*, Herbert Spencer gives two sentences to illustrate how the vague and general can be turned into the vivid and particular:

In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of its penal code will be severe.

In proportion as men delight in battles, bullfights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack.

To show what happens when strong writing is deprived of its vigor, George Orwell once took a passage from the Bible and drained it of its blood. On the left, below, is Orwell's translation; on the right, the verse from Ecclesiastes (King James Version).

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must inevitably be taken into account.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

17. Omit needless words.

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

Many expressions in common use violate this principle.

the question as to whether

whether (the question whether)

there is no doubt but that

no doubt (doubtless)

used for fuel purposes

used for fuel

he is a man who

he

in a hasty manner

hastily

this is a subject that

this subject

Her story is a strange one.

Her story is strange.

the reason why is that

because

The fact that is an especially debilitating expression. It should be revised out of every sentence in which it occurs.

owing to the fact that	since (because)
in spite of the fact that	though (although)
call your attention to the fact that	remind you (notify you)
I was unaware of the fact that	I was unaware that (did not know)
the fact that he had not succeeded	his failure
the fact that I had arrived	my arrival

See also the words *case*, *character*, *nature* in Chapter IV. *Who is*, *which was*, and the like are often superfluous.

His cousin, who is a member of the same firm	His cousin, a member of the same firm
Trafalgar, which was Nelson's last battle	Trafalgar, Nelson's last battle

As the active voice is more concise than the passive, and a positive statement more concise than a negative one, many of the examples given under Rules 14 and 15 illustrate this rule as well.

A common way to fall into wordiness is to present a single complex idea, step by step, in a series of sentences that might to advantage be combined into one.

Macbeth was very ambitious. This led him to wish to become king of Scotland. The witches told him that this wish of his would come true. The king of Scotland at this time was Duncan. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth murdered Duncan. He was thus enabled to succeed Duncan as king. (51 words)	Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth achieved his ambition and realized the prediction of the witches by murdering Duncan and becoming king of Scotland in his place. (26 words)
---	---

18. Avoid a succession of loose sentences.

This rule refers especially to loose sentences of a particular type: those consisting of two clauses, the second introduced by a conjunction or relative. A writer may err by making sentences too compact and periodic. An occasional loose sentence prevents the style from becoming too formal and gives the reader a certain relief. Consequently, loose sentences are common in easy, unstudied writing. The danger is that there may be too many of them.

An unskilled writer will sometimes construct a whole paragraph of sentences of this kind, using as connectives *and*, *but*, and, less frequently, *who*, *which*, *when*, *where*, and *while*, these last in nonrestrictive senses. (See Rule 3.)

The third concert of the subscription series was given last evening, and a large audience was in attendance. Mr. Edward Appleton was the soloist, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra furnished the instrumental music. The former showed himself to be an artist of the first rank, while the latter proved itself fully deserving of its high reputation. The interest aroused by the series has been very gratifying to the Committee, and it is planned to give a similar series annually hereafter. The fourth concert will be given on Tuesday, May 10, when an equally attractive program will be presented.

Apart from its triteness and emptiness, the paragraph above is bad because of the structure of its sentences, with their mechanical symmetry and singsong. Compare these sentences from the chapter "What I Believe" in E. M. Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy*.

I believe in aristocracy, though — if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others as well as for themselves, they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure, and they can take a joke.*

(* Excerpt from "What I Believe" in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, copyright 1939 and renewed 1967 by E. M. Forster, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Inc. Also, by permission of The Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge, and The Society of Authors as the literary representatives of the E. M. Forster Estate.)

A writer who has written a series of loose sentences should recast enough of them to remove the monotony, replacing them with simple sentences, sentences of two clauses joined by a semicolon, periodic sentences of two clauses, or sentences (loose or periodic) of three clauses — whichever best represent the real relations of the thought.

19. Express coordinate ideas in similar form.

This principle, that of parallel construction, requires that expressions similar in content and function be outwardly similar. The likeness of form enables the reader to recognize more readily the likeness of content and function. The familiar Beatitudes exemplify the virtue of parallel construction.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

The unskilled writer often violates this principle, mistakenly believing in the value of constantly varying the form of expression. When repeating a statement to emphasize it, the writer may need to vary its form. Otherwise, the writer should follow the principle of parallel construction.

Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method, while now the laboratory method is employed.

Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method; now it is taught by the laboratory method.

The lefthand version gives the impression that the writer is undecided or timid, apparently unable or afraid to choose one form of expression and hold to it. The righthand version shows that the writer has at least made a choice and abided by it.

By this principle, an article or a preposition applying to all the members of a series must either be used only before the first term or else be repeated before each term.

the French, the Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese

the French, the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese

in spring, summer, or in winter

in spring, summer, or winter (in spring, in summer, or in winter)

Some words require a particular preposition in certain idiomatic uses. When such words are joined in a compound construction, all the appropriate prepositions must be included, unless they are the same.

His speech was marked by disagreement
and scorn for his opponent's position.

His speech was marked by disagreement
with and scorn for his opponent's position.

Correlative expressions (*both, and; not, but; not only, but also; either, or; first, second, third*, and the like) should be followed by the same grammatical construction. Many violations of this rule can be corrected by rearranging the sentence.

It was both a long ceremony and very
tedious.

The ceremony was both long and tedious.

A time not for words but action.

A time not for words but for action.

Either you must grant his request or incur
his ill will.

You must either grant his request or incur
his ill will.

My objections are, first, the injustice of the
measure; second, that it is unconstitutional.

My objections are, first, that the measure is
unjust; second, that it is unconstitutional.

It may be asked, what if you need to express a rather large number of similar ideas — say, twenty? Must you write twenty consecutive sentences of the same pattern? On closer examination, you will probably find that the difficulty is imaginary — that these twenty ideas can be classified in groups, and that you need apply the principle only within each group. Otherwise, it is best to avoid the difficulty by putting statements in the form of a table.

20. Keep related words together.

The position of the words in a sentence is the principal means of showing their relationship. Confusion and ambiguity result when words are badly placed. The writer must, therefore, bring together the words and groups of words that are related in thought and keep apart those that are not so related.

He noticed a large stain in the rug that was
right in the center.

He noticed a large stain right in the center of
the rug.

You can call your mother in London and tell
her all about George's taking you out to
dinner for just two dollars.

For just two dollars you can call your
mother in London and tell her all about
George's taking you out to dinner.

New York's first commercial human-sperm
bank opened Friday with semen samples
from eighteen men frozen in a stainless steel
tank.

New York's first commercial human- sperm
bank opened Friday when semen samples
were taken from eighteen men. The samples
were then frozen and stored in a stainless
steel tank.

In the lefthand version of the first example, the reader has no way of knowing whether the stain was in the center of the rug or the rug was in the center of the room. In the lefthand

version of the second example, the reader may well wonder which cost two dollars — the phone call or the dinner. In the lefthand version of the third example, the reader's heart goes out to those eighteen poor fellows frozen in a steel tank.

The subject of a sentence and the principal verb should not, as a rule, be separated by a phrase or clause that can be transferred to the beginning.

Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, writes about characters who have escaped from slavery but are haunted by its heritage.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes about characters who have escaped from slavery but are haunted by its heritage.

A dog, if you fail to discipline him, becomes a household pest.

Unless disciplined, a dog becomes a household pest.

Interposing a phrase or a clause, as in the lefthand examples above, interrupts the flow of the main clause. This interruption, however, is not usually bothersome when the flow is checked only by a relative clause or by an expression in apposition. Sometimes, in periodic sentences, the interruption is a deliberate device for creating suspense. (See examples under Rule 22.)

The relative pronoun should come, in most instances, immediately after its antecedent.

There was a stir in the audience that suggested disapproval.

A stir that suggested disapproval swept the audience.

He wrote three articles about his adventures in Spain, which were published in *Harper's Magazine*.

He published three articles in *Harper's Magazine* about his adventures in Spain.

This is a portrait of Benjamin Harrison, who became President in 1889. He was the grandson of William Henry Harrison.

This is a portrait of Benjamin Harrison, grandson of William Henry Harrison, who became President in 1889.

If the antecedent consists of a group of words, the relative comes at the end of the group, unless this would cause ambiguity.

The Superintendent of the Chicago Division, who

No ambiguity results from the above. But

A proposal to amend the Sherman Act, which has been variously judged

leaves the reader wondering whether it is the proposal or the Act that has been variously judged. The relative clause must be moved forward, to read, "A proposal, which has been variously judged, to amend the Sherman Act...." Similarly

The grandson of William Henry Harrison,
who

William Henry Harrison's grandson,
Benjamin Harrison, who

A noun in apposition may come between antecedent and relative, because in such a combination no real ambiguity can arise.

The Duke of York, his brother, who was regarded with hostility by the Whigs

Modifiers should come, if possible, next to the words they modify. If several expressions modify the same word, they should be arranged so that no wrong relation is suggested.

All the members were not present.

Not all the members were present.

She only found two mistakes.

She found only two mistakes.

The director said he hoped all members
would give generously to the Fund at a
meeting of the committee yesterday.

At a meeting of the committee yesterday,
the director said he hoped all members
would give generously to the Fund.

Major R. E. Joyce will give a lecture on
Tuesday evening in Bailey Hall, to which
the public is invited on "My Experiences in
Mesopotamia" at 8:00 P.M.

On Tuesday evening at eight, Major R. E.
Joyce will give a lecture in Bailey Hall on
"My Experiences in Mesopotamia." The
public is invited.

Note, in the last lefthand example, how swiftly meaning departs when words are wrongly juxtaposed.

21. In summaries, keep to one tense.

In summarizing the action of a drama, use the present tense. In summarizing a poem, story, or novel, also use the present, though you may use the past if it seems more natural to do so. If the summary is in the present tense, antecedent action should be expressed by the perfect; if in the past, by the past perfect.

Chance prevents Friar John from delivering Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo.
Meanwhile, owing to her father's arbitrary change of the day set for her
wedding, Juliet has been compelled to drink the potion on Tuesday night,
with the result that Balthasar informs Romeo of her supposed death before
Friar Lawrence learns of the nondelivery of the letter.

But whichever tense is used in the summary, a past tense in indirect discourse or in indirect question remains unchanged.

The Friar confesses that it was he who married them.

Apart from the exceptions noted, the writer should use the same tense throughout. Shifting from one tense to another gives the appearance of uncertainty and irresolution.

In presenting the statements or the thought of someone else, as in summarizing an essay or reporting a speech, do not overwork such expressions as "he said," "she stated," "the speaker added," "the speaker then went on to say," "the author also thinks." Indicate clearly at the outset, once for all, that what follows is summary, and then waste no words in repeating the notification.

In notebooks, in newspapers, in handbooks of literature, summaries of one kind or another may be indispensable, and for children in primary schools retelling a story in their own words is a useful exercise. But in the criticism or interpretation of literature, be careful to avoid dropping into summary. It may be necessary to devote one or two sentences to indicating the subject, or the opening situation, of the work being discussed, or to cite numerous details to illustrate its qualities. But you should aim at writing an orderly discussion supported by evidence, not a summary with occasional comment. Similarly, if the scope of the discussion includes a number of works, as a rule it is better not to take them up singly in chronological order but to aim from the beginning at establishing general conclusions.

22. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

The proper place in the sentence for the word or group of words that the writer desires to make most prominent is usually the end.

Humanity has hardly advanced in fortitude since that time, though it has advanced in many other ways.

Since that time, humanity has advanced in many ways, but it has hardly advanced in fortitude.

This steel is principally used for making razors, because of its hardness.

Because of its hardness, this steel is used principally for making razors.

The word or group of words entitled to this position of prominence is usually the logical predicate — that is, the *new* element in the sentence, as it is in the second example. The effectiveness of the periodic sentence arises from the prominence it gives to the main statement.

Four centuries ago, Christopher Columbus, one of the Italian mariners whom the decline of their own republics had put at the service of the world and of

adventure, seeking for Spain a westward passage to the Indies to offset the achievement of Portuguese discoverers, lighted on America.

With these hopes and in this belief I would urge you, laying aside all hindrance, thrusting away all private aims, to devote yourself unswervingly and unflinchingly to the vigorous and successful prosecution of this war.

The other prominent position in the sentence is the beginning. Any element in the sentence other than the subject becomes emphatic when placed first.

Deceit or treachery she could never forgive.

Vast and rude, fretted by the action of nearly three thousand years, the fragments of this architecture may often seem, at first sight, like works of nature.

Home is the sailor.

A subject coming first in its sentence may be emphatic, but hardly by its position alone. In the sentence

Great kings worshiped at his shrine

the emphasis upon *kings* arises largely from its meaning and from the context. To receive special emphasis, the subject of a sentence must take the position of the predicate.

Through the middle of the valley flowed a winding stream.

The principle that the proper place for what is to be made most prominent is the end applies equally to the words of a sentence, to the sentences of a paragraph, and to the paragraphs of a composition.

III

A Few Matters of Form

Colloquialisms. If you use a colloquialism or a slang word or phrase, simply use it; do not draw attention to it by enclosing it in quotation marks. To do so is to put on airs, as though you were inviting the reader to join you in a select society of those who know better.

Exclamations. Do not attempt to emphasize simple statements by using a mark of exclamation.

It was a wonderful show!

It was a wonderful show.

The exclamation mark is to be reserved for use after true exclamations or commands.

What a wonderful show!

Halt!

Headings. If a manuscript is to be submitted for publication, leave plenty of space at the top of page 1. The editor will need this space to write directions to the compositor. Place the heading, or title, at least a fourth of the way down the page. Leave a blank line, or its equivalent in space, after the heading. On succeeding pages, begin near the top, but not so near as to give a crowded appearance. Omit the period after a title or heading. A question mark or an exclamation point may be used if the heading calls for it.

Hyphen. When two or more words are combined to form a compound adjective, a hyphen is usually required.

"He belonged to the leisure class and enjoyed leisure-class pursuits." "She entered her boat in the round-the-island race."

Do not use a hyphen between words that can better be written as one word: *water-fowl*, *waterfowl*. Common sense will aid you in the decision, but a dictionary is more reliable. The steady evolution of the language seems to favor union: two words eventually become one, usually after a period of hyphenation.

bed chamber	bed-chamber	bedchamber
wild life	wild-life	wildlife
bell boy	bell-boy	bellboy

The hyphen can play tricks on the unwary, as it did in Chattanooga when two newspapers merged — the *News* and the *Free Press*. Someone introduced a hyphen into the merger, and the paper became *The Chattanooga News-Free Press*, which sounds as though the paper were news-free, or devoid of news. Obviously, we ask too much of a hyphen when we ask it to cast its spell over words it does not adjoin.

Margins. Keep righthand and lefthand margins roughly the same width. Exception: If a great deal of annotating or editing is anticipated, the lefthand margin should be roomy enough to accommodate this work.

Numerals. Do not spell out dates or other serial numbers. Write them in figures or in Roman notation, as appropriate.

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Part XII

Rule 3

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Exception: When they occur in dialogue, most dates and numbers are best spelled out.

"I arrived home on August ninth."

"In the year 1990, I turned twenty-one."

"Read Chapter Twelve."

Parentheses. A sentence containing an expression in parentheses is punctuated outside the last mark of parenthesis exactly as if the parenthetical expression were absent. The expression within the marks is punctuated as if it stood by itself, except that the final stop is omitted unless it is a question mark or an exclamation point.

I went to her house yesterday (my third attempt to see her), but she had left town.

He declares (and why should we doubt his good faith?) that he is now certain of success.

(When a wholly detached expression or sentence is parenthesized, the final stop comes before the last mark of parenthesis.)

Quotations. Formal quotations cited as documentary evidence are introduced by a colon and enclosed in quotation marks.

The United States Coast Pilot has this to say of the place: "Bracy Cove, 0.5 mile eastward of Bear Island, is exposed to southeast winds, has a rocky and uneven bottom, and is unfit for anchorage."

A quotation grammatically in apposition or the direct object of a verb is preceded by a comma and enclosed in quotation marks.

I am reminded of the advice of my neighbor, "Never worry about your heart till it stops beating."

Mark Twain says, "A classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read."

When a quotation is followed by an attributive phrase, the comma is enclosed within the quotation marks.

"I can't attend," she said.

Typographical usage dictates that the comma be inside the marks, though logically it often seems not to belong there.

"The Fish," "Poetry," and "The Monkeys" are in Marianne Moore's *Selected Poems*.

When quotations of an entire line, or more, of either verse or prose are to be distinguished typographically from text matter, as are the quotations in this book, begin on a fresh line and indent. Quotation marks should not be used unless they appear in the original, as in dialogue.

Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the French Revolution was at first unbounded:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!

Quotations introduced by *that* are indirect discourse and not enclosed in quotation marks.

Keats declares that beauty is truth, truth beauty.

Dickinson states that a coffin is a small domain.

Proverbial expressions and familiar phrases of literary origin require no quotation marks.

These are the times that try men's souls.

He lives far from the madding crowd.

References. In scholarly work requiring exact references, abbreviate titles that occur frequently, giving the full forms in an alphabetical list at the end. As a general practice, give the references in parentheses or in footnotes, not in the body of the sentence. Omit the words *act*, *scene*, *line*, *book*, *volume*, *page*, except when referring to only one of them. Punctuate as indicated below.

in the second scene of the third act

in III.ii (Better still, simply insert m.ii in parentheses at the proper place in the sentence.)

After the killing of Polonius, Hamlet is placed under guard (IV.ii.14).

2 Samuel i: 17-27

Othello II.iii. 264-267, III.iii. 155-161

Syllabication. When a word must be divided at the end of a line, consult a dictionary to learn the syllables between which division should be made. The student will do well to examine the syllable division in a number of pages of any carefully printed book.

Titles. For the titles of literary works, scholarly usage prefers italics with capitalized initials. The usage of editors and publishers varies, some using italics with capitalized initials, others using Roman with capitalized initials and with or without quotation marks. Use italics (indicated in manuscript by underscoring) except in writing for a periodical that follows a different practice. Omit initial A or *The* from titles when you place the possessive before them.

A Tale of Two Cities; Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*.

The Age of Innocence; Wharton's *Age of Innocence*.

IV

Words and Expressions Commonly Misused

MANY of the words and expressions listed here are not so much bad English as bad style, the commonplaces of careless writing. As illustrated under *Feature*, the proper correction is likely to be not the replacement of one word or set of words by another but the replacement of vague generality by definite statement.

The shape of our language is not rigid; in questions of usage we have no lawgiver whose word is final. Students whose curiosity is aroused by the interpretations that follow, or whose doubts are raised, will wish to pursue their investigations further. Books useful in such pursuits are *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition; *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition; *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*; *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, Third Edition, edited by R. W. Burchfield; *Modern American Usage: A Guide* by Wilson Follett and Erik Wensberg; and *The Careful Writer* by Theodore M. Bernstein.

Aggravate. Irritate. The first means "to add to" an already troublesome or vexing matter or condition. The second means "to vex" or "to annoy" or "to chafe."

All right. Idiomatic in familiar speech as a detached phrase in the sense "Agreed," or "Go ahead," or "O.K." Properly written as two words — *all right*.

Allude. Do not confuse with *elude*. You *allude* to a book; you *elude* a pursuer. Note, too, that *allude* is not synonymous with *refer*. An allusion is an indirect mention, a reference is a specific one.

Allusion. Easily confused with *illusion*. The first means "an indirect reference"; the second means "an unreal image" or "a false impression."

Alternate. Alternative. The words are not always interchangeable as nouns or adjectives. The first means every other one in a series; the second, one of two possibilities. As the other one of a series of two, an *alternate* may stand for "a substitute," but an *alternative*, although used in a similar sense, connotes a matter of choice that is never present with *alternate*.

As the flooded road left them no alternative, they took the alternate route.

Among. Between. When more than two things or persons are involved, *among* is usually called for: "The money was divided among the four players." When, however, more than

two are involved but each is considered individually, *between* is preferred: "an agreement between the six heirs."

And / or. A device, or shortcut, that damages a sentence and often leads to confusion or ambiguity.

First of all, would an honor system
successfully cut down on the amount of
stealing and/or cheating?

First of all, would an honor system reduce
the incidence of stealing or cheating or
both?

Anticipate. Use *expect* in the sense of simple expectation.

I anticipated that he would look older.

I expected that he would look older.

My brother anticipated the upturn in the
market.

My brother expected the upturn in the
market.

In the second example, the word *anticipated* is ambiguous. It could mean simply that the brother believed the upturn would occur, or it could mean that he acted in advance of the expected upturn — by buying stock, perhaps.

Anybody. In the sense of "any person," not to be written as two words. *Any body* means "any corpse," or "any human form," or "any group." The rule holds equally for *everybody*, *nobody*, and *somebody*.

Anyone. In the sense of "anybody," written as one word. *Any one* means "any single person" or "any single thing."

As good or better than. Expressions of this type should be corrected by rearranging the sentences.

My opinion is as good or better than his.

My opinion is as good as his, or better (if not better).

As to whether. *Whether* is sufficient.

As yet. *Yet* nearly always is as good, if not better.

No agreement has been reached as yet.

No agreement has yet been reached.

The chief exception is at the beginning of a sentence, where *yet* means something different.

Yet (*or despite everything*) he has not succeeded.

As yet (*or so far*) he has not succeeded.

Being. Not appropriate after *regard ... as*.

He is regarded as being the best dancer in
the club

He is regarded as the best dancer in the club.

But. Unnecessary after *doubt* and *help*.

I have no doubt but that

I have no doubt that

He could not help but see that

He could not help seeing that

The too-frequent use of *but* as a conjunction leads to the fault discussed under Rule 18. A loose sentence formed with *but* can usually be converted into a periodic sentence formed with *although*.

Particularly awkward is one *but* closely following another, thus making a contrast to a contrast, or a reservation to a reservation. This is easily corrected by rearrangement.

Our country had vast resources but seemed almost wholly unprepared for war. But within a year it had created an army of four million.

Our country seemed almost wholly unprepared for war, but it had vast resources. Within a year it had created an army of four million.

Can. Means "am (is, are) able." Not to be used as a substitute for *may*.

Care less. The dismissive "I couldn't care less" is often used with the shortened "not" mistakenly (and mysteriously) omitted: "I could care less." The error destroys the meaning of the sentence and is careless indeed.

Case. Often unnecessary.

In many cases, the rooms lacked air conditioning.

Many of the rooms lacked air conditioning.

It has rarely been the case that any mistake has been made.

Few mistakes have been made.

Certainly. Used indiscriminately by some speakers, much as others use *very*, in an attempt to intensify any and every statement. A mannerism of this kind, bad in speech, is even worse in writing.

Character. Often simply redundant, used from a mere habit of wordiness.

acts of a hostile character

hostile acts

Claim. (*verb*). With object-noun, means "lay claim to." May be used with a dependent clause if this sense is clearly intended: "She claimed that she was the sole heir." (But even here *claimed to be* would be better.) Not to be used as a substitute for *declare*, *maintain*, or *charge*.

He claimed he knew how.

He declared he knew how.

Clever. Note that the word means one thing when applied to people, another when applied to horses. A clever horse is a good-natured one, not an ingenious one.

Compare. To *compare to* is to point out or imply resemblances between objects regarded as essentially of a different order; to *compare with* is mainly to point out differences

between objects regarded as essentially of the same order. Thus, life has been *compared to* a pilgrimage, *to* a drama, *to* a battle; Congress may be *compared with* the British Parliament. Paris has been *compared to* ancient Athens; it may be *compared with* modern London.

Comprise. Literally, "embrace": A zoo comprises mammals, reptiles, and birds (because it "embraces," or "includes," them). But animals do not comprise ("embrace") a zoo — they constitute a zoo.

Consider. Not followed by *as* when it means "believe to be."

I consider him as competent.

I consider him competent.

When *considered* means "examined" or "discussed," it is followed by *as*:

The lecturer considered Eisenhower first as soldier and second as administrator.

Contact. As a transitive verb, the word is vague and self-important. Do not *contact* people; get in touch with them, look them up, phone them, find them, or meet them.

Cope. An intransitive verb used with *with*. In formal writing, one doesn't "cope," one "copes with" something or somebody.

I knew they'd cope. (jocular)

I knew they would cope with the situation.

Currently. In the sense of *now* with a verb in the present tense, *currently* is usually redundant; emphasis is better achieved through a more precise reference to time.

We are currently reviewing your application. We are at this moment reviewing your application.

Data. Like *strata*, *phenomena*, and *media*, *data* is a plural and is best used with a plural verb. The word, however, is slowly gaining acceptance as a singular.

The data is misleading.

These data are misleading.

Different than. Here logic supports established usage: one thing differs *from* another, hence, *different from*. Or, *other than*, *unlike*.

Disinterested. Means "impartial." Do not confuse it *with uninterested*, which means "not interested in."

Let a disinterested person judge our dispute, (an impartial person)

This man is obviously uninterested in our dispute, (couldn't care less)

Divided into. Not to be misused for *composed of*. The line is sometimes difficult to draw; doubtless plays are divided into acts, but poems are composed of stanzas. An apple, halved, is divided into sections, but an apple is composed of seeds, flesh, and skin.

Due to. Loosely used for *through*, *because of*, or *owing to*, in adverbial phrases.

He lost the first game due to carelessness.

He lost the first game because of carelessness.

In correct use, synonymous with *attributable to*: "The accident was due to bad weather"; "losses due to preventable fires."

Each and every one. Pitchman's jargon. Avoid, except in dialogue.

It should be a lesson to each and every one of us.

It should be a lesson to every one of us (to us all).

Effect. As a noun, means "result"; as a verb, means "to bring about," "to accomplish" (not to be confused with *affect*, which means "to influence").

As a noun, often loosely used in perfunctory writing about fashions, music, painting, and other arts: "a Southwestern effect"; "effects in pale green"; "very delicate effects"; "subtle effects"; "a charming effect was produced." The writer who has a definite meaning to express will not take refuge in such vagueness.

Enormity. Use only in the sense of "monstrous wickedness." Misleading, if not wrong, when used to express bigness.

Enthuse. An annoying verb growing out of the noun *enthusiasm*. Not recommended.

She was enthused about her new car.

She was enthusiastic about her new car.

She enthused about her new car.

She talked enthusiastically (expressed enthusiasm) about her new car.

Etc. Literally, "and other things"; sometimes loosely used to mean "and other persons."

The phrase is equivalent to *and the rest*, *and so forth*, and hence is not to be used if one of these would be insufficient — that is, if the reader would be left in doubt as to any important particulars. Least open to objection when it represents the last terms of a list already given almost in full, or immaterial words at the end of a quotation.

At the end of a list introduced by *such as*, *for example*, or any similar expression, *etc.* is incorrect. In formal writing, *etc.* is a misfit. An item important enough to call for *etc.* is probably important enough to be named.

Fact. Use this word only of matters capable of direct verification, not of matters of judgment. That a particular event happened on a given date and that lead melts at a certain temperature are facts. But such conclusions as that Napoleon was the greatest of

modern generals or that the climate of California is delightful, however defensible they may be, are not properly called facts.

Facility. Why must jails, hospitals, and schools suddenly become "facilities"?

Parents complained bitterly about the fire hazard in the wooden facility.

Parents complained bitterly about the fire hazard in the wooden schoolhouse.

He has been appointed warden of the new facility.

He has been appointed warden of the new prison.

Factor. A hackneyed word; the expressions of which it is a part can usually be replaced by something more direct and idiomatic.

Her superior training was the great factor in her winning the match.

She won the match by being better trained.

Air power is becoming an increasingly important factor in deciding battles.

Air power is playing a larger and larger part in deciding battles.

Farther. Further. The two words are commonly interchanged, but there is a distinction worth observing: *farther* serves best as a distance word, *further* as a time or quantity word. You chase a ball *farther* than the other fellow; you pursue a subject *further*.

Feature. Another hackneyed word; like *factor*, it usually adds nothing to the sentence in which it occurs.

A feature of the entertainment especially worthy of mention was the singing of Allison Jones.

(Better use the same number of words to tell what Allison Jones sang and how she sang it.)

As a verb, in the sense of "offer as a special attraction," it is to be avoided.

Finalize. A pompous, ambiguous verb. (See Chapter V, Reminder 21.)

Fix. Colloquial in America for *arrange*, *prepare*, *mend*. The usage is well established. But bear in mind that this verb is from *figere*: "to make firm," "to place definitely." These are the preferred meanings of the word.

Flammable. An oddity, chiefly useful in saving lives. The common word meaning "combustible" is *flammable*. But some people are thrown off by the *in-* and think *flammable* means "not combustible." For this reason, trucks carrying gasoline or explosives are now marked FLAMMABLE. Unless you are operating such a truck and hence are concerned with the safety of children and illiterates, use *flammable*.

Folk. A collective noun, equivalent to *people*. Use the singular form only. *Folks*, in the sense of "parents," "family," "those present," is colloquial and too folksy for formal writing.

Her folks arrived by the afternoon train.

Her father and mother arrived by the afternoon train.