

### Opening comments

- The book rests on two principles: Its good to write clearly, and anyone can. The second half is understandably easier said than done.
- The overall disclaimer given is that this text is not about writing, it is about rewriting. Principles are useful before and after we write, but help no one caught up in the act of writing.

### 1. Understanding Style

- Avoid the “ese” (legalese)- “intended or not, it is the style of pretension and intimidation, a kind of exclusionary language that a democratic society cannot tolerate as its standard of civic discourse.

### 2. Correctness

- There are rules that designate the standard structure of English, rules that define the standard written form, and then there are rules that were invented by grammarians about trivial points of usage.
- Selective observance- good grammar is defined not by random errors but by the consensus of usage established by the habitual usage of writers.
- Example- if vast numbers of otherwise careful writers choose to begin a sentence with the word but and the majority of educated careful readers don’t notice, then regardless of what any editor says, beginning a sentence with the word but can be neither a grammatical error nor a violation of good usage.
- It is impossible to obey all the rules all the time

### 3/4. Clarity in Actions & Characters

- Readers feel they are reading clear prose when you meet two expectations:
  - You use subjects to name your central characters
  - You express their most important actions as verbs
- When you consistently write sentences whose subjects are characters (agents or doers), your readers will judge your prose to be clearer
- Subjects may be characters and verbs may be actions, but those are not fixed actions. We can turn verbs into nouns; we can move characters into different positions allowing them to be dropped altogether. We can also turn characters into verbs (chair a meeting, guard a prisoner). While we are free to do this, readers prefer sentences whose parts fit traditional “ninth grade definitions”: subjects as characters, actions as verbs
- As a result the readers have fewer reads to read, its more concrete, sequence is more coherent, and logical connections are clear.
- The best place for important characters is in the subject of a verb, especially when the character is the agent of the actions expressed by the verb
- In our writing: Most readers prefer separate flesh-and-bone characters as subjects. But when writing about concepts, treat as if they are real by making them the subjects of verbs that seem to indicate an action.
- “Intention has a complex cognitive component”
- Choose the passive when you don’t know who did it, your readers don’t care who did it, or you don’t want them to know who did it. Use a passive if it lets you rewrite a long subject into a short one. When convenient rewrite ling compound noun phrases.

5. Cohesion & Coherence

- With every sequence of sentences that we write we have to find the best trade off between the principles that make individual sentences clear and the principles that give a passage of sentences a sense of a cohesive flow. But in that compromise we always give priority to those features of style that help readers create a sense of cohesion. Readers may understand individual sentence just fine, but if they cannot see how they hang together those individual clear sentences will add up to no coherently cumulative meaning.
- Words like furthermore hence and but help the reader see real connection but if you are using more than 3 per page examine your writing. You may try to impose a factitious cohesion on a passage that is intrinsically coherent
- Readers impose coherence when they see two things:
  - They can identify topics of sentences easily
  - They can see how topics hang together as a logical set

6. Point of View

- Artful misdirection

7. Emphasis

- Readers best comprehend long complex units after they have read a relatively short and clear subject and verb sequence. Don't start a sentence by forcing the, to go through a list of items, conditions, or abstractions.
- When readers see a technical term for the first time, particularly an unfamiliar term, they best grasp that term if it appears at the end of a sentence
- Readers pay attention to the last few words of a sentence that introduces a passage of sentences. These words signal the central concepts to follow.

8. Concision

- Don't use words whose meaning adds nothing to the sentence
- When you use a familiar pair of adjectives, your readers probably need only one of them (full and complete, hope and trust)
- When a word implies its modifier, drop the modifier (continue **on**, return **back** to, penetrate **into**)
- When a general category word is attached to a specific modifier, drop the category word (large in **size**, unusual in **nature**, round in **shape**)
- Don't tell your readers what you are certain they already know
- Look for a word that says the same thing as a phrase or a clause
- To be direct, choose the affirmative
- The difference between the experienced and inexperienced writer is that the experienced writer knows that summarizing is a good idea and does it deliberately but also knows when to discard it from the final draft. The inexperienced writer has to learn to use summary not as an end in itself, but in the service of analysis and argument.

9. Shape

- Readers want to get from the subject to main clause quickly, help them by keeping introductory phrases short, breaking them into their own sentences, or moving them to the ends of their sentences.
- One clause per sentence
- Don't break the link between the subject and the verb with a clause

10. Elegance

Summary of summaries

1. Mark your style direct by putting characters in your subjects, then join them immediately with verbs naming significant actions
2. Make your style emphatic by ending sentences on you most rhetorically salient words
3. Create flow by maintaining crucial connections between major grammatical elements
4. Make prose cohesive and coherent by helping your readers see how sentences hang together
5. Make sentences concise by reducing redundancy