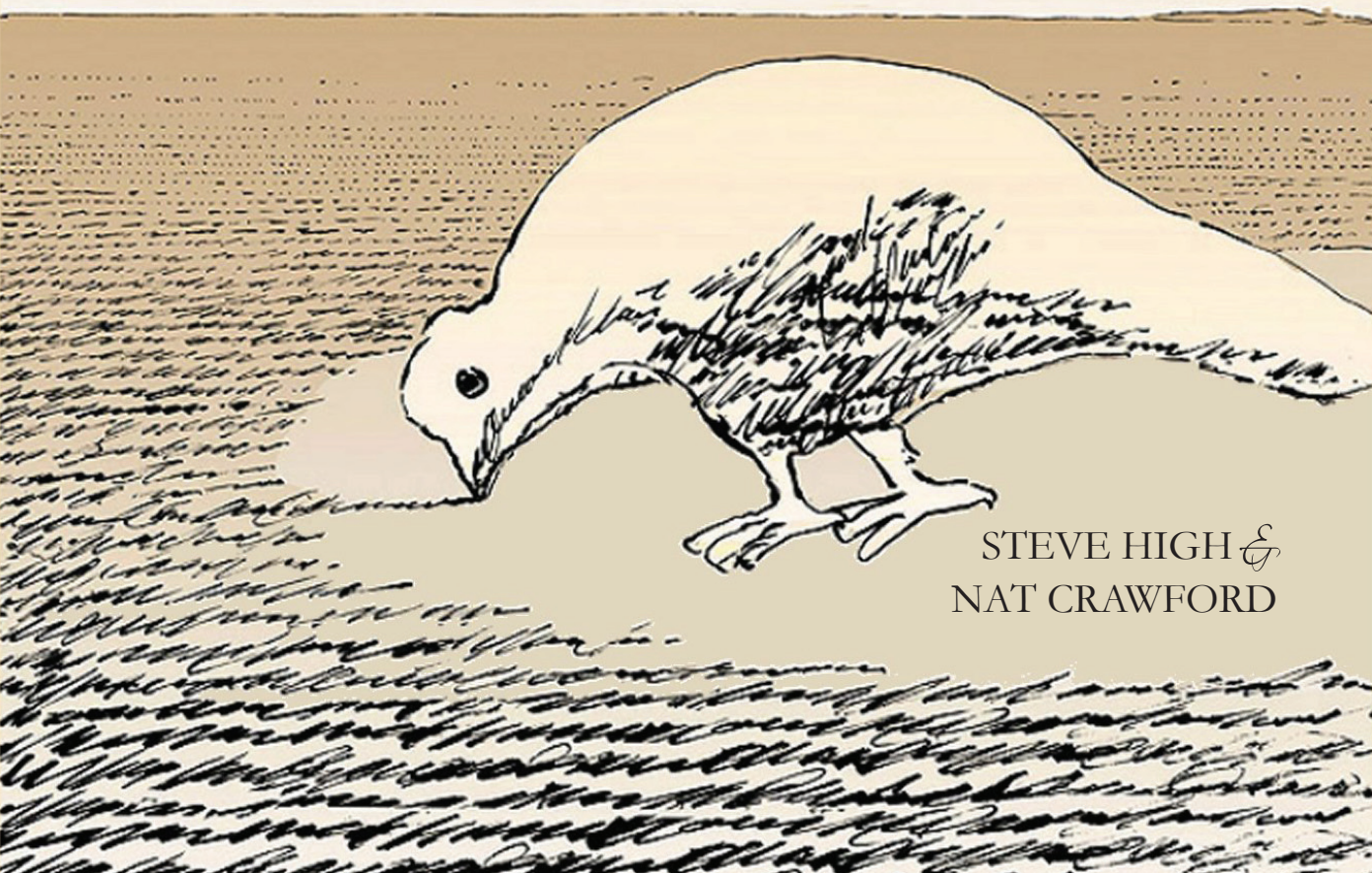
Write It Right

with Strunk & White

celebrating *The Elements of Style* 1918-1979



STEVE HIGH &
NAT CRAWFORD

Contents

How to Write an Essay

Types of Paragraphs

APPENDICES

Introduction

Want to improve your English? Write with nouns and verbs, not adjectives and adverbs. That's the advice of *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White.

White was a professional writer; Strunk was his Cornell English professor. In part for this reason, professional writers and teachers of English almost universally admire this book. The *Associated Press Stylebook*, for example, calls Strunk and White a "bible for writers." Few students graduate from an American college without buying at least one copy.

Despite its immense popularity with experts, many beginning writers find Strunk and White hard to use, rarely take it from their shelves, and privately wonder what all the heavy breathing is about. The purpose of this booklet is to explain, illustrate, and send you back to *The Elements of Style*.

Strunk and White presents 11 rules of usage, 11 rules of composition, and 22 style reminders—hints rather than rules—from E. B. White, one of America's most admired stylists. This little book, which in all editions is fewer than 100 pages, makes no pretense to replace authoritative works like the 871-page *Chicago Manual of Style*; *The Elements of Style* covers only a small part of English usage.

Strunk originally wrote it for his introductory writing class at Cornell. He printed it at his own expense in 1918 and again in 1919, the year E. B. White entered Cornell. Harcourt Brace published it as a commercial textbook in 1920. Strunk revised that edition considerably, adding for the first time the essential rule—use definite, specific, and concrete expressions. In 1934, the publisher brought out another edition, enlarged and expanded by Strunk's first and now virtually unknown collaborator, Edward Tenney. After retiring in 1940, Strunk authorized a reprint of the 1920 edition, omitting the Tenney additions and changes altogether.

In 1959, White produced the edition that gave his old professor undying fame. In 1972, he revised the book again with the help of Eleanor Packard, *The New Yorker* copy editor whom he generously acknowledges in that edition. By the release of the enlarged, expanded, and extensively rewritten third edition of 1979, the book had become what we know today as Strunk and White. The fourth edition updated examples and discussed removing gender bias. It added a charming foreword by E. B. White's son-in-law, Roger Angell; a valuable glossary; and an afterword by Charles Osgood.

Strunk and White is still as practical, useful, and necessary to the serious writer as ever. Each line is worth reading and rereading, and all 44 of its numbered recommendations are worth absorbing.

In 2005, the publishers brought out an illustrated edition with striking and amusing pictures drawn by Maira Kalman. In 2009, an edition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the first Strunk and White edition appeared. These last two editions, however, made no changes to the text of the fourth edition. While these versions are pleasant to own, we strongly recommend the fourth-edition paperback, which will fit in your pocket as readily as it does in the pocket of Charles Osgood.

Both Strunk and White assumed that you had already learned grammar before you picked up their book. Many of you, however, have not. For this reason, in this companion volume we have added some basic grammar, notably a table of irregular verbs; a guide to the correct formation of verb tenses; and a brief discussion of punctuation.

We hope that this booklet is helpful. But our real goal is to get you to pick up Strunk and White again.

The Elements of Style doesn't just help you avoid mistakes in your next writing project. It helps you write it right.

STEVE HIGH & NAT CRAWFORD

WRITE IT RIGHT

WITH STRUNK & WHITE

celebrating *The Elements of Style* 1918-1979

The Sentence

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

There is an alternative rule (James' instead of James's) for singular words ending in -s. Most editors prefer the Strunk way, but whichever you choose, you must follow it. You cannot use one rule one time and the other at another time.

In the discussion of this rule, Strunk includes the following admonition:

Do not confuse it's with its. It's means "it is."

When proofreading, mentally expand every "it's" or "its" into "it is." This exercise will spare you from condescension, embarrassment, and rejection.

To understand the following principles of sentence structure, learn the following terms: coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns, conjunctive adverbs, main clause, subordinate clause, and phrase. All these terms are explained in the glossary.

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

If you've memorized the seven coordinating conjunctions, you can easily spot the conjunction used as the final link of the three terms below:

We opened the door, walked into the room,
*looked around**, and** admired the house.*

Like Rule 1, this practice is not universally followed. The *Associated Press Stylebook*, used by all newspapers and many businesses, recommends dropping the comma before the conjunction in a series. Just make sure that, whichever standard you follow, you remain consistent. As with Rule 1, you cannot follow the AP guidelines at one point in an essay and Strunk and White at another.

Rule 3: Enclose parenthetic expressions between commas.

Parenthetic expressions provide an extra element of description to the sentence; the information in such expressions can usually be removed without damaging the meaning of the sentence. Knowing this rule can help clear up the punctuation of two grammatical structures: appositives and adjective clauses.

Usually, appositives provide parenthetic information about the noun. In the following sentence, an appositive phrase adds extra information about the father.

*My dad**, a former CIA agent,***
speaks English, French, and Thai.

Sometimes appositives provide information essential to identifying a noun. In the following sentence, we need the appositive to know which cousin is being discussed. Hence, the word is not parenthetic and has no commas surrounding it.

I have two cousins. My cousin ***Diego***
lives in Salt Lake City these days.

Adjective clauses nearly always begin with relative pronouns. If an adjective clause is not needed to specify a noun, it is a parenthetic expression; separate it from the sentence with commas.

*My father**, who worked for the CIA***
for many years, *owns a lie detector.*

*Charlie Smith**, who used to cook for us,***
has just opened his own restaurant.

If an adjective clause is needed to specify a person, place, or thing, it is not a parenthetic expression; do not separate it from the sentence with commas.

The man ***who opened the door***
was my uncle.

We saw two dogs. The dog ***that had***
black spots *was rolling on the ground.*

The *that* entry in Strunk and White's alphabetical listing of "Words and Expressions Commonly Misused" adds to Rule 3.

Rule 3 includes the following point:

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

Here's an example of an initial phrase:

For three months out of the year,
we stay with my friend in Ohio.

Here's an example of a subordinate clause beginning a sentence:

Because *we needed a place to stay,*
we called my friend in the city.

After the publication of the original *Elements of Style*, some teachers simplified punctuation by developing a corollary to this rule: if a dependent clause comes at the end of the sentence, don't put a comma before it.

We called my friend in the city,	*We called my friend in the city*
because *we needed a place to stay.*	***because*** *we needed a place to stay.*
incorrect	correct

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

This rule explains how to punctuate compound sentences and compound predicates.

If each clause can stand alone, always use a comma before the coordinating conjunction; if only one clause can stand alone, never use a comma. This is a simplification that is always correct.

compound predicate:

He tried *everything,*	*He tried everything*
but ***succeeded*** *at nothing.*	*but succeeded at nothing.*

compound sentence:

He tried *everything*	*He tried everything,*
but ***he succeeded*** *at nothing.*	*but he succeeded at nothing.*
incorrect	correct

Rule 5: Do not join independent clauses with a comma.

This rule addresses the comma splice or run-on sentence. The following sentence is incorrect:

The mouse ran away quickly,
the cat caught it anyway.

Because each half of the sentence could stand by itself as a sentence, it is incorrect to connect the two halves with a comma. You may use a comma plus a coordinating conjunction.

*The mouse ran away quickly***,**
but *the cat caught it anyway.*

You may also join independent clauses with a semicolon.

*The mouse ran away quickly***;**
the cat caught it anyway.

When you use a semicolon, the material both before and after it must be an independent clause.

*Sam put on his hat and walked out the door**;** planning his big day.*	*Sam put on his hat and walked out the door**;** he was planning his big day.*
incorrect	correct

You may also show transitions between independent clauses with conjunctive adverbs.

During the festival, the town choir will sing
at noon. ***Also,*** *the marching band will perform.*

*You answered three questions correctly***;**
however, *you must answer four correctly to win.*

Surround conjunctive adverbs in the middle of a clause with commas.

George started using better fertilizer.
*His plants****, consequently,*** *flourished.*

The soldiers wanted to go home for the weekend;
*the general****, however,*** *had other plans.*

Remember that commas are delicate little marks. Don't strew them over your

writing like rock salt on an icy road. Don't use a comma to separate compound subjects or compound adverbs.

The players, and coaches walked slowly, but cheerfully back to the locker room.	*The players and coaches walked slowly but cheerfully back to the locker room.*
incorrect	correct

Rule 6: Do not break sentences in two.

This rule addresses sentence fragments of a particular type. When you split a sentence in two—perhaps because you think it's too long—one of the two pieces may be a fragment.

If you go to Boston on Saturday.

By itself, this clause is obviously only a piece of a complete sentence, a fragment. The writer broke it off from a main clause either before or after it and mistakenly punctuated it as a sentence. In context, the fragment may be less apparent:

Be sure to say hello to your grandparents and give them my best wishes. If you go to Boston on Saturday.	*Be sure to say hello to your grandparents and give them my best wishes if you go to Boston on Saturday.*
incorrect	correct

You can write another kind of incomplete sentence by going on and on without reaching your destination, a predicate.

The tired soldiers of Company C, exhausted from the long march and homesick for their loved ones and under relentless fire that seemed endless, in a drenching rainstorm on a muddy trail winding through mountains and forests.

Such sentences are fragments even though they are not broken off from anything else.

A third type of fragment is the stylistic fragment written deliberately for the sake of, in Strunk's phrase, "some compensating merit, attained at the cost of the violation." Try this on your next school paper. If you feel lucky.

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

A colon must be preceded by an independent clause.

In the words of John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."	*John F. Kennedy said it best: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."*
incorrect	correct

Do not place a colon between a verb and its object or between a preposition and its object.

We need: pens, paper, and masking tape.	*We need the following supplies: pens, paper, and masking tape.*
We went for a drive on: Blossom Avenue.	*We went for a drive on my favorite road: Blossom Avenue.*
incorrect	correct

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

The following examples cover the most common use of the dash: setting off appositives that deserve emphasis.

Rupert's car—a Lotus with a custom apple-green paint job—was easy to spot.

At length, Eliot received one of the world's highest honors—the Nobel Prize.

Dashes can also indicate a sudden reversal.

It was impossible for anyone to escape the dungeon—and yet he had.

Do not use dashes instead of commas without a reason. For more examples, consult Strunk and White.

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

The subject is sometimes some distance from the verb. Do not be fooled by intervening material. Strunk and White uses a version of the following example:

The bittersweet ***flavor*** *of youth—its trials, its joys, its challenges—****are*** *not soon forgotten.*	*The bittersweet* ***flavor*** *of youth—its trials, its joys, its challenges—****is*** *not soon forgotten.*
incorrect	correct

You have to spot the subject, *flavor*, to find the correct form of the verb. An *-s* at the end makes the verb singular, but an *-s* at the end of a noun usually makes it plural. In most cases, therefore, a subject and verb combination should have exactly one *-s* between them.

For much more on verbs, see Appendix II.

Rule 10: Use the proper case of pronoun.

Learn to use the correct case, or form, of the nominative, objective, and possessive pronouns (e.g., *who, whom, whose; he, him, his*).

Pronoun Case

Avoid problems with pronoun case by mentally splitting compound subjects or objects.

My sister and her missed the bus.	*My sister and she missed the bus.*
~~*My sister and*~~ *her missed the bus.*	~~*My sister and*~~ *she missed the bus.*
incorrect	correct

You wouldn't say "her missed the bus" but rather "she missed the bus." The following is correct:

My sister and she missed the bus.

The same trick can be applied in the following situation:

The bus almost hit she and I.
The bus almost hit ~~she and~~ I.

The bus almost hit she and I.
The bus almost hit she ~~and I.~~

incorrect

The bus almost hit her and me.
The bus almost hit her ~~and me.~~
The bus almost hit ~~her and~~ me.

correct

You wouldn't say *The bus almost hit I*, but rather *The bus almost hit me*. By the same reasoning, *she* should become *her*. The following is correct:

The bus almost hit her and me.

This trick doesn't work with the common blunder *between you and I*. Just remember that *between you and me* is always correct and that the other is always wrong.

Rule 10 does not address pronoun-antecedent agreement although Strunk and White briefly discusses this issue in the *they* entry in "Words and Expressions Commonly Misused."

Pronoun Agreement

Match singular nouns to singular pronouns, plural nouns to plural pronouns.

incorrect

SINGULAR
When a **person** *hopes for*

PLURAL
the best, **they** *often do the worst.*

correct

SINGULAR
When a **person** *hopes for*

SINGULAR
the best, **he** *or* **she** *often does the worst.*

PLURAL
When **people** *hope for*

PLURAL
the best, **they** *often do the worst.*

A single person is obviously not a *they*; this common but illogical usage may nevertheless some day become acceptable. It is not acceptable yet.

Gender-Neutral Language

Consider these strategies to avoid an awkward overuse of *he or she* or an unintentional emphasis on the masculine:

Use the plural rather than the singular.

The ***writer*** *must address* ***his*** *readers' concerns.*	***Writers*** *must address* ***their*** *readers' concerns.*
singular, gender-biased	plural, gender-neutral

Eliminate the pronoun altogether.

The ***writer*** *must address* ***his*** *readers' concerns.*	*The* ***writer*** *must address readers' concerns.*
pronoun, gender-biased	no pronoun, gender-neutral

Substitute the second person for the third person.

The ***writer*** *must address* ***his*** *readers' concerns.*	*As a* ***writer****,* ***you*** *must address* ***your*** *readers' concerns.*
third-person, gender-biased	second-person, gender-neutral

(Adapted from Strunk and White, 3rd and 4th eds.)

Indefinite Reference

The pronoun *it,* like *they,* also causes problems. Like all pronouns, *it* requires an antecedent. However, writers sometimes mistakenly use *it* without one. Also, a sentence can sometimes be improved by eliminating the *it* altogether.

First, check to make sure that *it* has an antecedent. In the following example, the writer seems to think that *it* refers to *setting off fireworks*. However, that phrase does not appear in the sentence, so the *it* has no antecedent.

When people set off fireworks, ***it*** *is a way of being patriotic.*	*When* ***people*** *set off fireworks,* ***they*** *are showing their patriotism.*
incorrect	correct

Notice that the revised sentence replaces a form of *to be* with an active verb.

Second, check to see if the *it* can be eliminated.

It is important for us to see the show.	*We should see the show.*
weak	vigorous

Again, the revised sentence eliminates a form of *to be* and uses a concrete subject. These strategies will help you eliminate unnecessary words and make your writing vigorous.

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

A participial phrase describes an action, but it does not say who or what performs the action. What performs the action of the phrase must appear at the beginning of the main clause. If you neglect this rule, you will produce a dangling participle, which is often nonsensical.

Pondering the dessert choices, *a slice of cake sounded good to Tim.*	*Pondering the dessert choices, Tim* *thought a slice of cake sounded good.*
incorrect	correct

A slice of cake cannot ponder anything.

The same rule applies to prepositional phrases and elliptical clauses.

After opening the box, the present fell into my lap.	*After opening the box, I watched the present fall into my lap.*
incorrect	correct

The present cannot open the box.

If you habitually convert your words into visual images, you will avoid this error and many more.

Rule 12: Choose a suitable design and hold to it.

Begin each writing job by asking yourself what you are writing. Are you writing a cookbook? A letter to the editor? A five-paragraph essay? Almost certainly, someone has written the same kind of thing before, so study some examples before you begin.

A blank sheet of paper is often intimidating. What to write about? Where to start? Sometimes it's best to simply start typing. Writing stimulates thinking; you can (and probably will) later discard the first sentences, paragraphs, or pages you write until you reach the *real* first sentence. Unless it's good, no one will read further.

But sooner or later, you need to make decisions about not only the beginning but also the middle and the end. The last sentence you write is as important as the first (Rule 22). Here you tie a ribbon around everything you've said and present it to the reader as a gift. Knowing what you want to leave the reader with is essential to choosing a suitable design.

White's Style Reminder 3 covers the same ground as Rule 12. Read them both before getting too far into your next project. Otherwise, as White warns, there will be no end to your labors.

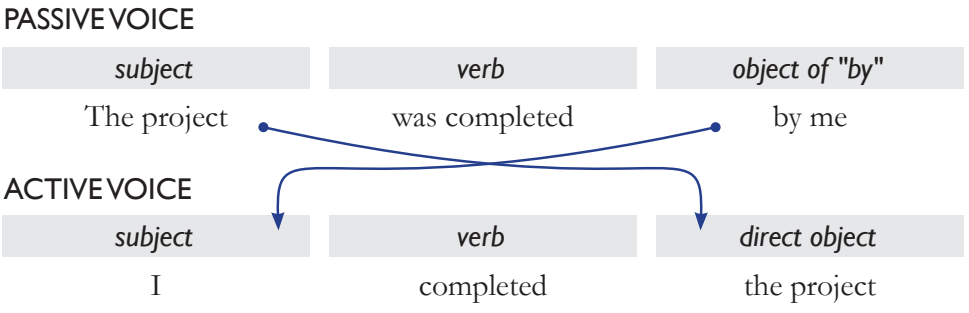
Rule 13: Make the paragraph the unit of composition.
(See Types of Paragraphs, p. 22.)

Rule 14: Use the active voice.

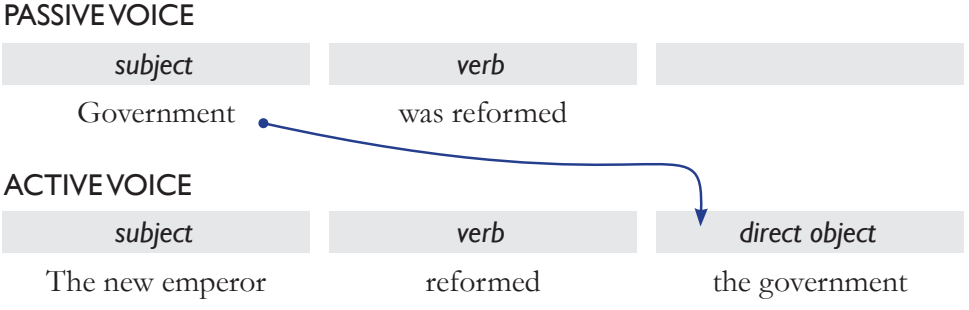
Passive Voice

Replace the passive voice with the active voice in at least 95% of your sentences; use the readability statistics of Microsoft Word™ to see if you have done so. It is easier to revise passive sentences than it is to recognize them in the first place. Take a close look at all your verbs. Habitual use of the active voice will make your writing clearer and livelier.

Here's how: make the object of the preposition *by* the subject, and make the subject the direct object:



Unfortunately, passive sentences do not always have a *by* phrase to tell who or what did the action. In such cases, add the missing word.



The Verb *To Be*

Some people mistakenly think that any use of *to be* makes a sentence passive. Not true. In passive-voice sentences, a past participle always follows a form of *to be*. The following sentences are not passive.

***to be** as helping verb*	*He **is** opening a new store next week.*
***to be** as linking verb*	*Beauty **is** truth.*

In each case, the subject performs the action of the verb or experiences a state of being. By contrast, in passive-voice sentences, the subject receives the action of the verb.

For examples of the active and passive forms in all the most common tenses, see the Verb Formation table on p. 37.

Rule 15: Put statements in positive form.

Learn to write what is, not what is not. You can often replace the adverb *not* by finding a better noun or verb.

*He **did not have confidence** in his subordinate's judgment.*	*He **distrusted** his subordinate's judgment.*
*The senator **did not tell the whole truth**.*	*The senator **dissembled**.*
*That was **not the best** decision.*	*That decision was **poor**.*
negative	positive

In the following revision, Prof. Strunk uses the principles of Rules 15 and 17 to create a much shorter sentence with a well-chosen action verb.

It was not long before he was very sorry that he had said what he had said.	*He soon repented his words.*
negative	positive

Rule 16: Use definite, specific, concrete language.

This is every writing teacher's rule. The three terms in it are best understood by contrast to their opposites.

VAGUE LANGUAGE	DEFINITE LANGUAGE
Some stuff was lying around.	*Toys, books, and crayon drawings covered the floor.*
GENERAL LANGUAGE	**SPECIFIC LANGUAGE**
Trees and grass covered the slope.	*Live oaks and olive trees covered the slope of long, brown grass.*
ABSTRACT LANGUAGE	**CONCRETE LANGUAGE**
We need more structures in which to display works of art.	*We should build more museums.*

Write with nouns and verbs and appeal to the reader's five senses. You must *visualize* as you write and use words that describe the details of your image. Strunk and White gives the following example:

The reward was pocketed by the parking lot attendant with a grateful smile.	*The parking lot attendant grinned as he pocketed the ten-dollar tip.*
indefinite	definite

Begin using this rule, and you will follow in the footsteps of the world's greatest writers. The first sentences of John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, quoted on p. 33, are a striking example. Here are some others:

> Falstaff sweats to death and lards the lean earth as he walks.
> —*Shakespeare*
>
> [He glared] at her face, as devoid of all comeliness of feature and complexion as the most miserable beggar is of money.
> —*Conrad*
>
> We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. —*Churchill*

The following entries cover common problems with indefinite, abstract, and vague language.

This / That / These / Those (demonstrative pronouns)
Add a noun after them (making them demonstrative adjectives) or replace them with concrete language.

My dad wanted to go to McDonald's, but I didn't like ***that****.*	*My dad wanted to go to McDonald's, but I didn't like that plan.*
The city council plans to raise fines for parking tickets. ***This*** *will anger residents.*	*The city council plans to raise fines for parking tickets. Residents will fume.*
indefinite	definite

Get / Got / Gotten
Eliminate these words or replace them with more accurate verbs.

People are ***getting*** *tired of watching* American Idol.	*People are tired of watching* American Idol.
Getting *the laundry done will take a while.*	*Finishing the laundry will take a while.*
wordy	concise

Bland Words: Pretty, Cool, Thing, Fun, Nice, Neat, Interesting, etc.
Eliminate or replace.

Our new car was very interesting.	*Our new Acura has a custom paint job and can go from 0 to 60 in nine seconds.*
vague	concrete

Similar and Different
Use these words only if you immediately explain what in particular is similar or different. Usually, you should simply state the similarities and differences, letting the qualities speak for themselves.

My mother and father are very different.	*My mother is brash and confident; my father is quiet and unassuming.*
There are many similarities and differences between the two painters.	*Like Gauguin, van Gogh was a wizard with color; in temperament, however, van Gogh was much less confident.*
abstract	concrete

Rule 17: Omit needless words.

The Elements of Style is famous for its insistence on brevity. Reduce word count by slashing empty words or by combining sentences more efficiently.

wordy	concise
The annual event is held once a year.	*The event is held once a year.*
The two sins that seem evident here are avarice and sloth.	*Two sins seem evident here: avarice and sloth.*

You can also save words by avoiding the *there is* construction, which includes *there are, there was, there were, there could be, there becomes*, and so forth. Eliminate *there* and begin the sentence with the subject; use an active verb if possible.

wordy	concise
There could be a way of fixing the problem.	*The problem has several solutions.*
There were children playing on the swings.	*Children were playing on the swings.*

Even when you do not use an active verb, eliminating *there* makes a better sentence.

wordy	concise
There was a porcelain vase on the table.	*A porcelain vase was on the table.*

Memorable paragraphs use a variety of sentence structures. Strunk and White addressed one issue in particular.

Rule 18: Avoid a succession of loose sentences.

Strunk points out that some writers habitually string their ideas together with *and* and *but* or sometimes with *who*, *which*, *when*, *where*, and *while* used non-restrictively. The occasional use of such sentences is fine, but you can improve your sentences by using more variety. We add that writers of English can choose from scores of techniques for improving sentence variety (those who wish to see a few of them can take a look at James Joyce's *Ulysses*). To develop your eye for sentence variety, simply consider the options you have for beginning a sentence.

Sample loose sentence

Mr. White carefully planned the stages of his essay, and then he wrote it.

Here are eleven different ways of writing this sentence, each beginning with a different grammatical structure. Note that some structures force the writer to change his thought and language. For definitions of the grammatical terms, refer to the glossary.

Independent Clause	Mr. White wrote the essay after carefully planning it.
Adverb Clause	Before he wrote the essay, Mr. White carefully planned it.
Adverb	Carefully, Mr. White planned the stages of his essay.
Infinitive	To write a good essay, Mr. White needed to plan carefully.
Present Participial Phrase	Carefully planning his essay, Mr. White reflected on the techniques he had developed during his career.
Past Participial Phrase	Worried about the approaching deadline, Mr. White began to plan his essay.
Gerund Phrase	Carefully planning the essay was the highlight of Mr. White's week.
Prepositional Phrase	Before writing the essay, Mr. White carefully planned it.
Demonstrative Adjective	This essay shows Mr. White's careful planning.
Adjective Clause	Mr. White, who was known for meticulous preparation, carefully planned each stage of the essay.
Absolute Phrase	His head full of ideas, Mr. White carefully planned each stage of the essay.

Rule 19: Express coordinate ideas in similar form.

This rule addresses parallelism.

Following Rule 19 is like putting on your shoes in the morning. You can choose any shoe you want. But if you choose a brown one for the left foot, choose a brown one for the right foot. As with matching shoes, so it is with parallel words, phrases, and clauses.

The school wants a teacher who knows the material and with a good work history.
relative clause + prepositional phrase

The school wants a teacher who knows the material and who has a good work history.
relative clause + relative clause

The school wants a teacher with knowledge of the subject and with a good work history.
prepositional phrase + prepositional phrase

Rule 20: Keep related words together.

Most improperly placed words are adjectives or the phrases and clauses that serve as adjectives. These expressions must occupy a fixed position in the sentence, usually right before or right after the noun or pronoun they modify.

The little *girl wore a* ***purple*** *dress.*
(Adjective)

The little girl wore a dress ***of purple****.*
(Adjective phrase)

The little girl wore a dress ***that was purple****.*
(Adjective clause)

In each case, the position of the adjective or adjective substitute is fixed; any change results in a *purple* girl or a *little* dress.

On the other hand, you can usually move the adverbial expression out of the way when the modifiers you've chosen compete for the same position.

The little girl wore a dress ***to her friend's birthday party on Friday*** *that her mother had bought.*

On Friday*, the little girl wore a dress that her mother had bought* ***to her friend's birthday party****.*

Use the flexibility of adverbial expressions to keep adjectives and nouns close together.

The shortest and simplest expression is usually best. Phrases are better than clauses, and single-word modifiers are better than either. In some cases, however, you can shorten a sentence by expanding an adverb to a phrase.

He spoke to the audience ADVERB **confidently**,	*He spoke to the audience*
but his confidence was unjustified.	ADVERB PHRASE **with unjustified confidence**.

Rule 21: In summaries, keep to one tense.

When writing a summary, choose either the past or the present tense. Most teachers prefer the present tense. Whichever you use, don't mix the two. Also, when describing action that took place before the action you are summarizing, use the perfect tense (*to have* + *past participle*).

Sample summary with inconsistent verb tense

	On the day of their marriage, Victor and
SIMPLE PAST	*Elizabeth* **enjoyed** *a boat trip on the nearby*
SIMPLE PAST	*lake. Victor* **was** *agitated because the monster*
PAST PERFECT	**had told** *him, "I will be with you on your*
	wedding night." Later, recognizing her husband's
PRESENT	*agitation, Elizabeth* **asks** *Victor what is wrong,*
PRESENT	*but he* **tries** *to calm her without revealing the truth.*

Revised sample summary in present tense

> *On the day of their marriage, Victor and Elizabeth* **enjoy** *a boat trip on the nearby lake. Victor* **is** *agitated because the monster* **has told** *him, "I will be with you on your wedding night." Later, recognizing her husband's agitation, Elizabeth* **asks** *Victor what is wrong, but he* **tries** *to calm her without revealing the truth.*

This rule has an exception: indirect discourse should preserve the past tense if the speaker uses it.

> *When he tells his story, the monster justifies his actions by saying* **that people mistreated him**.

Still, with this exception, keep summaries in one tense. Rule 12 is worth recalling here. Effective writing mirrors the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily in the order in which those thoughts occur. Similarly, your thoughts may appear in a variety of verb tenses, but in the final draft of your book report or summary, stick to just one.

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

When they read a sentence, readers are most likely to remember the information that appears at the very end. Thus, in general, put old and familiar information at the beginning of the sentence, new and unfamiliar information at the end.

Use this rule to improve thesis statements and topic sentences.

Dickens shows that the French aristocrats treat peasants like beasts in A Tale of Two Cities.	*In* A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens shows that the French aristocrats treat peasants like beasts.*
not recommended	recommended

If writing an essay explaining causes, put the causes at or toward the end of each topic sentence.

The desire for economic independence also motivated the American colonists to separate from Britain.	*The American colonists also separated from Britain because they wanted economic independence.*
not recommended	recommended

This closes the section on the 22 rules written by Strunk. When White revised the book, he added a number of pointers that he called "Style Reminders." All these are worth reading, but one is particularly important.

Style Reminder 4: Write with nouns and verbs.

Good writers give their sentences vigor by putting the important material in nouns and verbs, not by doctoring up a weak sentence with adjectives and adverbs. Compare the weakness of the left-handed version to the strength of the right handed version.

Some governments wantonly destroy innocent civilians by using despicable acts of violence and then deviously cover up those atrocious deeds with a veneer of innocuous words.	*People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called* elimination of unreliable elements. —George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
Adjectives / Adverbs: 7 **Total words: 25**	**Adjectives / Adverbs: 3** **Total words: 32**

Because Orwell writes with images, he has his choice of simple, powerful nouns and verbs. His words vividly show the contrast between the bland abstractions of the politician's language and the injustices that it conceals. Shoving forward his stark pictures of reality, he awakens readers from their comfortable daydreams.

Orwell's passage also reminds writers to respect the difference between nouns and verbs. Look again at the phrase *elimination of unreliable elements* in the previous passage, in which Orwell imitates the politician's language; it contains a noun made from a verb: *elimination*. By abandoning the verb *eliminate*, the politician frees himself from considering *who* eliminates—and also frees himself from thinking about what such actions entail.

As we've seen, converting actions (verbs) into objects (nouns) drains the life from a sentence. When revising, watch for nouns ending in *–ion*; see if you can convert them to verbs. To improve the following sentence, the writer simply converted the noun *discussion* into the active verb *discussed*.

Thomas and Charles's discussion **was** *about the French Revolution.*	*Thomas and Charles* **discussed** *the French Revolution.*

Even nouns that don't end in –ion can contain potential verbs.

Related to the **removal** *of passive sentences from your writing is a broader* **attempt** *to replace all weak verbs with vigorous action verbs.*	*In addition to* **removing** *passive sentences from your writing, you should* **attempt** *to replace all weak verbs with vigorous action verbs.*

The poor sentence buries actions—*to remove, to attempt*—in nouns—*removal, attempt*. The improved sentence turns the noun *removal* into the verbal *removing*, and the noun *attempt* into a verb.

The revised sentence suggests a further improvement:

Remove *passive sentences from your writing,*
and **try** *to replace all weak verbs with vigorous action verbs.*

Good writing usually requires several stages of revision.

Just as it is too easy to convert verbs into nouns by adding –ion, it is also too easy to convert nouns into verbs by adding *–ize*. Strunk and White points out that some uses of the *–ize* ending, like *fertilize* and *summarize*, are acceptable because they have gained widespread use. However, the book cautions writers against inventing verbs by adding *–ize* to nouns. Some of these inventions, like *utilize* and *finalize*, are ugly and unnecessary. To revise such aberrations, you may need to add words to the sentence.

We should ***utilize*** *more of our steel reserves.*	*We should* ***use*** *more of our steel reserves.*
Let's ***finalize*** *the project.*	*Let's* ***finish*** *the project.*
We need to ***productize*** *our services.*	*We need to* ***develop*** *our services* ***into products****.*
not recommended	recommended

Up until this point we have considered problems at the level of the sentence. Now we turn to organization.

How to Write an Essay

1. Limit the subject relentlessly. Divide and subdivide it; splinter it, and then write about one of the splinters.

Many a short essay is foredoomed because its author chose a broad, vague, general subject. See the following examples.

A good title accurately indicates the subject of the essay either literally or figuratively. Thus, "A Runaway Street Car" is a literal title; "Unharnessed Steel" is a figurative title for the same subject.

Example 1

Very bad	Education in America
Worse yet	Education
Still very bad	The American High School
Bad	Our High School
Bad	What I Learned in High School
Too broad	My Last Year in High School
Somewhat less broad	My Training in Chemistry
Better, but still too broad	My First Day in a Chemistry Laboratory
Good title	How I Learned to Bend Glass

Example 2

Very general	Dogs
Unnatural and pretentious	Canines
General and dull	Lap Dogs
Too general	Tim and I Go Hunting
Thin	Bessie, My Lap Dog
Thin	Tim, My Pointer
Better	Why Bessie Squints
Better	How Tim Lost His Right Ear

2. Begin promptly.

Eliminate preliminary flourishes. The opening of a short essay should resemble the start of a foot race in which the runners are off at the crack of the gun.

In "Harriette Wilson," Virginia Woolf begins, "Across the broad continent of a woman's life falls the shadow of a sword." A less experienced writer might have written, "I have noted in the course of a long life that there are two main aspects of a woman's life, and as I have turned these matters over in my mind, I have noticed that there is a very sharp division between the two."

Some subjects demand an introductory sentence, some a paragraph, and some no preliminaries whatsoever. But the principle *Begin promptly* holds true for them all.

3. Give body to the essay. Consistently develop one idea.

4. End when you're done. Your essay should end as decisively as it begins.

(*Adapted from Strunk and Tenney, 1934*)

Types of Paragraphs

Introductions

Avoid dictionary definitions at the beginning of your essay.

For the introductory paragraph, you have many options. To learn them, read many essays. If, when writing your own essay, you find yourself stuck, try one of the following methods:

Give background on the topic (if it is a historical event).

Discuss different points of view on the topic.

Discuss the topic in general terms (if it is a general topic).

Tell a story about the topic.

1. Give background on the topic.

Prompt: "If you could change any historical event, which would you choose?"

In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president of the United States because he promised to use government to improve the American economy. He announced a "New Deal" with the American people. At the time, America—in fact, the whole world—was experiencing the worst recession in history. Roosevelt, in his first 100 days, promptly began using government to pump money into the economy. Americans received money for painting murals, building roads, and even digging ditches that would never be used. As years went by, the economy slowly improved. Eventually, with some help from World War II, America emerged from its depression to become the economic leader of the world. It is tempting to think that Roosevelt's government programs brought the country out of its depression. However, this optimistic assessment of the New Deal is mistaken. The New Deal, in fact, slowed U.S. economic recovery and worsened the effects of the economic downturn; therefore, the United States should not have used the New Deal to combat the Great Depression.

2. Describe different points of view on the matter.

Prompt: "If you could change any historical event, which would you choose?"

Historians debate whether the New Deal helped or hindered the United States as it emerged from the depression of the 1930s. Some argue that the massive government spending provided what the country needed to jump-start the economy. Others argue that government spending provided temporary benefits, but also created long-term burdens. Understanding this problem would help voters and politicians decide how the government should handle the current economic crisis. In fact, a look at the evidence suggests that government spending in the 1930s improved the U.S. economy. Therefore, the United States was right to combat the Great Depression with the New Deal.

Prompt: "Do people have the right to violate laws they consider unjust?" Discuss.

Many laws help people to make ethical choices; for instance, laws against theft, murder, and bribery restrain violent, destructive urges. At the same time, the majority of laws often seem to be petty restrictions on human freedom; laws regulating traffic and commerce often fall into this category. In addition, mindlessly following the law can be unethical, as supporters of the Nazi Party learned after World War II. To live in a society ruled by law, then, forces people to choose which laws to follow. But how do people know which choices to make? More important, at what point do people have the right to violate laws that they consider unjust? People have the right to violate laws if they can show that such laws violate universal human rights.

3. Discuss the topic in general terms.

Prompt: "Do people have the right to violate laws they consider unjust?" Discuss.

Law is the foundation of civilized society. Without law, companies could not enforce contracts, people could not buy and sell goods, and families could not protect their children. Law raises society out of the "war of all against all" described by Thomas Hobbes. Yet history offers many examples of societies that have established unjust laws. Among these are laws prohibiting interracial marriage, laws discriminating against blacks, even laws sanctioning the murder of Jews. Such laws are unjust because they violate individual rights to life and liberty. When governments make unjust laws, people have the right—perhaps even the duty—to disobey those laws, provided that they can show how the laws in question violate universal human rights.

4. Tell a story.

Prompt: "Do people have the right to violate laws they consider unjust?" Discuss.

Last week, a group of environmental activists illegally entered property that a lumber company purchased from the government. The environmentalists pounded spikes into the trees. Because the spikes could damage mill machinery and injure or maim mill workers, the trees were unharvestable. The owners of the lumber company and some of its loggers attacked the environmental group for violating the law and threatening their livelihood. The envi-

ronmental group, for its part, charged that the logging company had used political maneuvers to illegally obtain public lands. "The community as a whole derives more benefit from this forest if it is left intact," said a spokesman from the environmental group. "We are acting to prevent governments from violating the community's rights to a healthy environment."

This incident raises an important question: do people have the right to violate laws that they consider unjust? A brief answer is yes—provided that they can show how the laws in question violate more general human rights.

Conclusions

Leave out the words *to conclude* or *in conclusion*. You are in the last paragraph of the essay; your reader knows that you are about to conclude. Make your words count.

First, restate thesis in new words, and recap your argument.

Example 1
The New Deal did not alleviate the Great Depression but instead prolonged it. Both theory and empirical evidence support this viewpoint.

Example 2
People must respect the law but also be prepared to violate it, at least if we are to take seriously the opinions of great leaders and legal thinkers.

After you have restated your thesis, explain why your thesis matters.

1. **Explain some consequences of your thesis's being true.** What effects can we expect a decision to have, or what course of action should we take?

   Parents and teachers train children to be obedient. But they should also train them to question authority. The law is important, but people should not allow it to drown the natural understanding of the heart.

2. **Issue a call to action.** You can follow up with a consequence of choosing that action.

   Example 1
   The experience of the Great Depression suggests that Congress should continue to stimulate the economy with public money. Future generations will thank us for making this sacrifice, just as we

thank the generations that planted victory gardens to help fight two world wars.

Example 2
The aftereffects of the Great Depression suggest that Congress should abandon its dream of spending its way out of the financial crisis. Left to its own devices, the economy will recover. Although the road will be difficult, future generations will thank us for spending only our money instead of theirs.

3. If you began with an anecdote, you may return to it. Explain how your thesis sheds new light on the anecdote.

Which is more important, protecting the community from the machinations of businessmen or allowing its members the freedom to work as they choose? The environmental group is still awaiting the judge's decision. But whatever the law may decide in the group's case, the rights it has asserted are real and worth fighting for.

4. End with a quotation.

Example 1
As the King James version of the Bible says, "the law is good, if a man use it lawfully."

Example 2
Perhaps the greatest danger of using the government to improve the economy is that people will come to see the government as responsible for alleviating needs during periods of general hardship. If the government is at some point unable to meet such expectations, it may find itself facing citizens who, as Edmund Burke said, "having looked to government for bread, on the very first scarcity ... will turn and bite the hand that fed them."

Example 3
As Samuel Johnson said, "A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization."

NOTE: In timed writing, if you can't remember the exact words of the quote, you may use an indirect quote. See the following examples:

1. Edmund Burke said that people who expect government help will, when dissatisfied, bite the hand that feeds them.
2. The Bible says that the law must be used well to be considered good.
3. Samuel Johnson said that good societies provide for their poor.

Body Paragraphs

A good body paragraph is well organized and has good support. The following material, reproduced from the 1918 edition of Strunk, explains how to organize and develop a body paragraph.

> *Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic. (Strunk, 1918)*

> *As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning. (Strunk, 1918)*

Strunk elaborated on this rule as follows:

- **Begin** with a topic sentence that discusses your topic in general terms.
- Next, **support** the topic sentence with arguments and examples.
- **Conclude** with a wrap-up sentence that either strengthens your argument or derives some consequences from it.

You may relate the body of the paragraph to the topic sentence in several different ways.

- You may make the meaning of the topic sentence clearer by
  - restating it in other forms.
  - defining its terms.
  - denying the converse.
  - giving illustrations or specific instances.
- You may establish the meaning of the topic sentence by proofs.
- You may develop the claim of the topic sentence by showing its implications and consequences.

In a long paragraph, you may carry out several of these processes.

(Adapted from Strunk, 1918)

Here are a sample topic and a sample wrap-up sentence for a paragraph on the pay of professional athletes.

Topic sentence: Athletes should be paid less than they currently receive because they are bad role models.

Wrap-up sentence: When they damage a community, people should receive fines, not millions of dollars.

Because the following text is substantially reproduced, we have not noted weaknesses (e.g. passive voice) that we otherwise might have.

Sample Body Paragraph 1

This paragraph makes an argument about how to take a walking tour.

[1] *Topic sentence.*	[1] Now, to be properly enjoyed, a walking tour should be gone upon alone.
[2] *The meaning made clearer by denial of the contrary.*	[2] If you go in a company, or even in pairs, it is no longer a walking tour in anything but name; it is something else and more in the nature of a picnic.
[3] *The topic sentence repeated, in abridged form, and supported by three reasons; the meaning of the third ("you must have your own pace") made clearer by denying the converse.*	[3] A walking tour should be gone upon alone, because freedom is of the essence; because you should be able to stop and go on, and follow this way or that, as the freak* takes you; and because you must have your own pace, and neither trot alongside a champion walker nor nor mince in time with a girl.
[4] *A fourth reason, stated in two forms.*	[4] And you must be open to all impressions and let your thoughts take color from what you see.
[5] *The same reason, stated in still another form.*	[5] You should be as a pipe for any wind to play upon.
[6–7] *The same reason as stated by Hazlitt and agreed to by the author.*	[6] "I cannot see the wit," says Hazlitt, "of walking and talking at the same time. [7] When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country," which is the gist of all that can be said upon the matter.
[8] *Repetition, in paraphrase, of the quotation from Hazlitt.*	[8] There should be no cackle of voices at your elbow to jar on the meditative silence of the morning.
[9] *Final statement of the fourth reason, in language amplified and heightened to form a strong conclusion.*	[9] And so long as a man is reasoning he cannot surrender himself to that fine intoxication that comes of much motion in the open air, that begins in a sort of dazzle and sluggishness of the brain, and ends in a peace that passes comprehension. *–Robert Louis Stevenson, "Walking Tours"*

**freak: a sudden turn of mind (1563)*

Sample Body Paragraph 2

Unlike the previous paragraph, the following one does not make an argument; instead, it simply describes.

[1] *Topic sentence.*	[1] It was chiefly in the eighteenth century that a very different conception of history grew up.
[2] *The meaning of the topic sentence made clearer; the new conception of history defined.*	[2] Historians then came to believe that their task was not so much to paint a picture as to solve a problem: to explain or illustrate the successive phases of national growth, prosperity, and adversity.
[3] *The definition expanded.*	[3] The history of morals, of industry, of intellect, and of art; the changes that take place in manners or beliefs; the dominant ideas that prevailed in successive periods; the rise, fall, and modification of political constitutions; in a word, all the conditions of national well-being became the subjects of their works.
[4] *The definition explained by contrast.*	[4] They sought rather to write a history of peoples than a history of kings.
[5] *The definition supplemented: another element in the new conception of history.*	[5] They looked especially in history for the chain of causes and effects.
[6] *Conclusion: an important consequence of the new conception of history.*	[6] They undertook to study in the past the physiology of nations, and hoped by applying the experimental method on a large scale to deduce some lessons of real value about the conditions on which the welfare of society mainly depend. –*Lecky,* The Political Value of History

The previous section suggested how to organize a paragraph with a topic sentence and how to support a topic sentence with various types of arguments. In this section, we return to the most important technique for writing effective paragraphs.

More about Rule 16: Use definite, specific, concrete language.

This rule is the single most important piece of advice in every edition of *The Elements of Style* since 1920, important enough to demand more illustration. The following sections give examples of how to use such language in argumentative and descriptive paragraphs.

Argumentative Paragraphs

Basic

Prompt: Is smoking a bad habit?

When you smoke, it makes your outer appearance very ugly. Smokers often have yellow teeth, bad breath, yellow fingernails, early skin aging, and hair loss. Chemicals from the cigarette can stain your hands and alter the conditions in your mouth to cause bad breath. In addition, when people smoke, in a way, they fast-forward their lives. Smoking accelerates hair loss and wrinkles on people's faces.

Prompt: What makes a good student?

High school students also need to be able to have fun. Studying too much dulls the mind and tires people out. For example, suppose some students are preparing for a big vocab test. They will need to mix flash card work with more enjoyable ways of learning, such as talking with friends about the words, drawing pictures of the words, and maybe even writing some poems using the words. But they'll also need to take breaks from studying; they might play basketball, or go swimming, or take long walks in the park. After the breaks, when they return to learning their words, they will feel refreshed. Also, running around and talking with friends will keep them fit and cheerful.

Prompt: If you were to be deprived of one of your five senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing), which one would you most hate to give up? Explain.

Without vision, I wouldn't be able to drive. As just one consequence, I wouldn't be able to travel quickly. Walking to school would take 45 minutes; driving takes five. Going to San Francisco and back would take all day rather than a couple of hours. Also, without a driver's license, I wouldn't be able to transport my own furniture or materials. If I wanted to pick up a stereo system, a set of chairs, boards for a fence, or even a big rock, I'd be stuck. Lack of vision would limit my freedom to move about and my ability to work.

Intermediate

Prompt: If you were to be deprived of one of your five senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing), which one would you most hate to give up? Explain.

Without vision, I wouldn't be able to enjoy movies or television. Imagine not being able to see a summer blockbuster like *Iron Man*. You wouldn't be able to experience Tony Stark's gravity-defying acrobatics; you wouldn't be able to admire the way he bamboozles Obadiah by jumping on his back. You'd just hear a lot of whooshes, swooshes, and explosions, along with a few power chords. Or consider a TV show like *The Simpsons*. Half of the humor comes from watching Homer smack his head or seeing Maggie fall down. Sure, the voices would still be amusing. But they wouldn't be connected with slapstick action. And you wouldn't be able to see what Bart is writing on the chalkboard at the beginning of each episode.

Prompt: Should smoking be illegal in public places?

Smoking bans go against the spirit of the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution gives Americans many freedoms, such as the right to bear arms, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech. These freedoms entail dangers: the right to bear arms can put guns in the hands of people unable to use them wisely; freedom of assembly can lead to riots. Both of these freedoms are far more dangerous than a few puffs of tobacco that someone might inhale while outside a bar. Since the Constitution grants people dangerous freedoms, the government created by the Constitution shouldn't restrict minor annoyances.

Advanced

As it is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase, that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this same [bartering] disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labor. In a tribe of hunters or shepherds, a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison, with his companions; and he finds at last that he can, in this manner, get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of [weapons manufacturer]. Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbors, who reward

> him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, till at last he finds it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a [brass worker]; a fourth, a tanner or [preparer] of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labor, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labor as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent of genius he may possess for that particular species of business.
>
> —Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*

Smith begins with a simple statement of economic principles and illustrates it with two developed examples and two shorter ones. Having used concrete language to anchor the examples in readers' minds, he returns to a general statement of economic principles. In this paragraph, Smith combines abstract language with definite, specific, concrete language. To make your arguments last, do the same.

Descriptive Paragraphs

Basic

> Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and Aunt Em, who was the farmer's wife. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon many miles. There were four walls, a floor and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty looking cookstove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds.
>
> —L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*

Intermediate

> The great masses of rock on the ocean's coast shone white in the moonlight. Through the gaunt outlying rocks, lashed apart by furious storms, boiled the ponderous breakers, tossing aloft the sparkling clouds of spray, breaking in the pools like a million silver fishes. High above the waves, growing out of the crevices of the massive rocks of the shore, were weird old cypresses, their bodies bent from the ocean as if petrified in flight before the mightier foe.

> On their gaunt outstretched arms and gray bodies, seamed with time, knobs like human muscles jutted; between the broken bark the red blood showed.
>
> —Gertrude Atherton, "The Ears of Twenty Americans"

Advanced

> Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flop-houses.
>
> —John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

Both the Atherton and Steinbeck paragraphs give a vivid picture of California's central coast. But notice how Steinbeck uses nouns in place of adjectives to create an even stronger and more memorable picture, complete with sights, sounds, and smells.

Strunk and White does not have the final word on writing well, but its concise recommendations give writers at every level a push in the right direction:

Use definite, concrete, specific expressions.
Report the details that matter.
Write with nouns and verbs.

Remember E. B. White's advice:

Style Reminder 5: Revise and rewrite.

Ernest Hemingway rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times in order to "get the words right." As White says, revision is no sign of weakness.

Appendices

Appendix I: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused

This is a short list of specific editing suggestions that will help you follow Rules 15 and 17. Read the entire list in Strunk and White, and, for many more, consult Bruce Ross-Larsen's extremely valuable *Edit Yourself*.

not honest	*change to*	dishonest
not important	*change to*	trivial
did not remember	*change to*	forgot
did not pay any attention to	*change to*	ignored
did not have much confidence in	*change to*	distrusted
as to whether	*change to*	whether
as yet	*change to*	yet
regarded as being	*change to*	regarded as
case	*cut*	
I'll contact you	*change to*	I'll phone/email you
due to	*change to*	because of
each and every	*change to*	every, us all
factor	*cut*	
finalize	*change to*	finish, complete
feature	*cut*	
he is a man who	*change to*	he
in the final analysis	*cut*	
interesting	*cut*	
literal, literally	*try to cut*	
ongoing	*cut*	
one of the most	*cut*	
personalize	*cut*	
personally	*change to*	I thought …
possess	*change to*	have, own
prestigious	*cut*	
relate	*change*	This word relates to being happy. *to* This word suggests happiness.

firstly, secondly, thirdly	*change to*	first, second, third
the foreseeable future	*cut*	
The truth/fact is	*cut*	
thrust	*change to*	
transpire ("to become known")	*change to*	happen
utilize	*cut*	use
very	*cut*	
worthwhile	*change to*	promising, useful, valuable
it has been shown that	*cut*	
it is recognized that	*cut*	
it has been demonstrated that	*cut*	
it must be remembered that	*cut*	
it may be seen that	*cut*	
what is known as	*cut*	
it is worthy of note	*cut*	
it will be appreciated that	*cut*	
it is found that	*cut*	
it may be mentioned that	*cut*	
it is the intention of this writer to	*cut*	
deemed it necessary to	*cut*	

(Adapted from Bruce Ross-Larsen's Edit Yourself*)*

Appendix II: Using Verbs Correctly

Every sentence has a verb, so every sentence has an opportunity for a mistake. Some verbs are formed incorrectly; others use incorrect forms. "My mama done told me," if used in formal English, illustrates both violations. First, the helping verb *do* is always—100% of the time—followed by the infinitive. Second, the simple past form of *do* is *did; done* is the past participle, never used as a helping verb.

The principal parts of *do* are irregular: *do, did, done*. But 12,408 of 12,608 English verbs, from *abacinate* to *zoutch*, are regular: *abacinate, abacinated, abacinated; zoutch, zoutched, zoutched*. (*Abacinate* means to blind with a hot plate held before the eyes; *zoutch* means to stew fish with just enough water to cover them.)

Learn the verb formation rules and memorize the principal parts of 100 irregular verbs, and you'll be sure of getting the most important word in each of your sentences right.

a. Using Verbs Correctly

VERB FORMATION

Present	Basic Form + *s*
Perfect	*Have* + Past Participle
Progressive	*Be* + Present Participle
Perfect-Progressive	Perfect of *Be* + Present Participle
Passive Voice	*Be* + Past Participle
Intensive	*Do* + Basic Form
Modals	Modal + Basic Form *Modals: Shall, will, must, might, can, could, would, should, may*

The following chart gives the third person singular (he, she, or it) form of the verb *say*. Intransitive verbs do not have a passive form.

	ACTIVE	PASSIVE
Simple Present	says	is said
Present Perfect	has said	has been said
Pres. Progressive	is saying	is being said
Pres. Perf.-Prog.	has been saying	has been being said
Simple Past	said	was said
Past Perfect	had said	had been said
Past Progressive	was saying	was being said
Past Perf.-Prog.	had been saying	had been being said
Simple Modal	would say	would be said
Modal Perfect	would have said	would have been said
Modal Prog.	would be saying	would be being said
Mod. Perf.-Prog.	would have been saying	would have been being said
Present Intensive	does say	———
Past Intensive	did say	———

b. Using Verbs Correctly

ONE HUNDRED IRREGULAR VERBS

	INFINITIVE	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
1	say	said	said
2	make	made	made
3	go	went	gone
4	take	took	taken
5	come	came	come
6	see	saw	seen
7	know	knew	known
8	get	got	gotten
9	give	gave	given
10	find	found	found
11	think	thought	thought
12	tell	told	told
13	become	became	become
14	show	showed	shown
15	leave	left	left
16	feel	felt	felt
17	put	put	put
18	bring	brought	brought
19	begin	began	begun
20	keep	kept	kept
21	hold	held	held
22	write	wrote	written
23	stand	stood	stood
24	hear	heard	heard
25	let	let	let
26	mean	meant	meant
27	set	set	set
28	meet	met	met
29	run	ran	run
30	pay	paid	paid
31	sit	sat	sat
32	speak	spoke	spoken
33	lie	lay	lain
34	lead	led	led
35	read	read	read
36	grow	grew	grown
37	lose	lost	lost
38	fall	fell	fallen
39	send	sent	sent
40	build	built	built
41	understand	understood	understood

b. Using Verbs Correctly

ONE HUNDRED IRREGULAR VERBS

	INFINITIVE	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
42	draw	drew	drawn
43	break	broke	broken
44	spend	spent	spent
45	cut	cut	cut
46	rise	rose	risen
47	drive	drove	driven
48	buy	bought	bought
49	wear	wore	worn
50	choose	chose	chosen
51	seek	sought	sought
52	throw	threw	thrown
53	catch	caught	caught
54	deal	dealt	dealt
55	win	won	won
56	forget	forgot	forgotten
57	lay	laid	laid
58	sell	sold	sold
59	fight	fought	fought
60	bear	bore	borne
61	teach	taught	taught
62	eat	ate	eaten
63	sing	sang	sung
64	strike	struck	struck
65	hang	hung	hung
66	shake	shook	shaken
67	ride	rode	ridden
68	feed	fed	fed
69	shoot	shot	shot
70	drink	drank	drunk
71	hit	hit	hit
72	arise	arose	arisen
73	fly	flew	flown
74	spread	spread	spread
75	sleep	slept	slept
76	cost	cost	cost
77	beat	beat	beaten
78	light	lit	lit
79	bind	bound	bound
80	cast	cast	cast
81	hide	hid	hidden
82	swing	swung	swung

b. Using Verbs Correctly

ONE HUNDRED IRREGULAR VERBS

	INFINITIVE	PAST	PAST PARTICIPLE
83	blow	blew	blown
84	swim	swam	swum
85	bend	bent	bent
86	wake	woke	woken
87	stick	stuck	stuck
88	sweep	swept	swept
89	undertake	undertook	undertaken
90	shut	shut	shut
91	steal	stole	stolen
92	tear	tore	torn
93	hurt	hurt	hurt
94	ring	rang	rung
95	lend	lent	lent
96	sink	sank	sunk
97	overcome	overcame	overcome
98	freeze	froze	frozen
99	shine	shone	shone
100	withdraw	withdrew	withdrawn

GLOSSARY

FANBOYS is a common acronym for the **coordinating conjunctions**. Possible acronyms for **subordinating conjunctions** and **conjunctive adverbs** are IS-SAWWAUUBBOAT and CHINASOFFT. The relative pronouns are easy to remember.

Coordinating Conjunctions	Subordinating Conjunctions	Relative Pronouns	Conjunctive Adverbs
FOR	**I**F	WHO	**C**ONSEQUENTLY
AND	**S**INCE	WHOM	**H**OWEVER
NOR	**S**O THAT	WHOSE	**I**NSTEAD
BUT	**A**S		**N**EVERTHELESS
OR	**W**HEN	THAT	**A**LSO
YET	**W**HILE	WHICH	**S**TILL
SO	**A**FTER		**O**THERWISE
	UNLESS		**F**URTHERMORE
	UNTIL		**T**HUS
	BEFORE		**T**HEREFORE
	BECAUSE		
	ONCE		
	ALTHOUGH		
	THOUGH		

Absolute Phrase: A phrase that modifies the entire sentence.
Most absolute phrases look like a clause that is missing a form of "to be."

His head shaking, *Alfredo turned away from his father.*
(His head was shaking.)

The flowers, ***their proud heads wilted by the sun****,*
lay on the slab of concrete.

Adjective: A word that modifies, quantifies, or otherwise describes a noun or pronoun.

Drizzly *November; midnight* ***dreary****;*
only *requirement;* ***that*** *movie.*

Adjective Clause: A dependent clause that modifies a noun. Most adjective clauses are introduced with the relative pronouns ***that, which,*** and ***who (whom, whose)***.

Any kid ***who finds a twenty dollar bill***
would be foolish not to spend it.

Adverb: A word that modifies or otherwise qualifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

VERB *gestures* ***gracefully***
ADJECTIVE ***exceptionally*** *quiet engine*
ADVERB *ran* ***too quickly***

Antecedent: The noun to which a pronoun refers.

James *put his clothes in a chair; he sighed heavily.*

Appositive: A word that renames a noun or pronoun.

My uncle ***Charles*** *left us nothing in his will.*

Saul, a former ***contestant*** *on a popular game show,*
was always quick to answer trivia.

Case: The form of a noun or pronoun that reflects its grammatical function in a sentence as *subject* (they), *object* (them), or *possessor* (their).

She *gave* ***her*** *employees a raise that pleased* ***them*** *greatly.*

Clause: A group of related words that contains a *subject* and a *verb*.

Squirrels burrow *in the ground.*

While the ***carpenter was pounding*** *the nail,*
sawdust drifted *to the floor.*

Compound Sentence: Two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction, a correlative conjunction, or a semicolon.

Caesar conquered Gaul, but
Alexander the Great conquered the world.

Compound Subject: Two or more simple subjects joined by a coordinating or correlative conjunction.

Hemingway and Fitzgerald *had little in common.*

Conjunctive Adverb: An adverb that provides transition between two clauses. For examples, see the table at the beginning of the glossary.

Coordinating Conjunction: The words ***for***, ***and***, ***nor***, ***but***, ***or***, ***yet***, ***so***. Use them to join grammatically equivalent elements. See the table at the beginning of the glossary.

Dependent Clause. See subordinate clause.

Demonstrative Pronoun/Adjective: The demonstratives are the words ***this, that, these,*** and ***those***. They can be used as pronouns:

This *disturbed the swallows.*

When followed by nouns, demonstrative pronouns function as adjectives:

This *hawk disturbed the swallows.*

Direct Object: A noun or pronoun that receives the action of a transitive verb.

Pearson publishes ***books***.

Gerund: The -ing form of a verb that functions as a noun:

Hiking *is good exercise.*
She was praised for her ***playing***.

Indefinite Pronoun: A pronoun that refers to an unspecified person (anybody) or thing (something).

Indirect Object: A noun or pronoun that indicates to whom or for whom, to what or for what the action of a transitive verb is performed.

I asked ***her*** *a question. Ed gave the* ***door*** *a kick.*

Infinitive/Split Infinitive: The basic form of the verb (***write***). Infinitives are often preceded by ***to*** (***to write***) A split infinitive occurs when one or more words separate to and the verb (***to boldly go***).

Intransitive Verb: A verb that does not take a direct object.

His nerve ***failed***.

Linking Verb: A verb that joins the subject of a sentence to a subject complement (predicate nominative or predicate adjective).

Professor Chapman ***is*** *a philosophy teacher.*

They ***became*** *ecstatic. The parsley* ***smells*** *fragrant.*

Main Clause: A clause that can stand alone as a sentence.

The astronauts are spacewalking.

Your clothes are dirty, so I will put them in the washer.

Nonrestrictive Modifier: A modifier that simply provides extra description for the word that it modifies; it could be removed without creating ambiguous reference.

Our 10th-grade English teacher, ***a veteran of three school systems****, has a solution for every writing problem.*

Michael Jackson, ***who inspired millions with his music****, passed away in 2009.*

Object: The noun or pronoun that completes a prepositional phrase or the meaning of a transitive verb. (See also direct object, indirect object, and preposition.)

Frost gave a memorable poetic ***performance***.

The book on the table ***belongs*** *to my* ***aunt***.

Participle: A word derived from a verb that functions like an adjective. Present participles end in *-ing* (blinking). Past participles end in *-d* or *-ed* (injured), *-n* (broken), or are irregular (struck).

Blinking*, we stepped onto the stage.*

We returned to our homes, ***shaken***.

Participles can also be part of participial phrases:

The poster, ***fastened to the wall with tacks****, announced a new play.*

Phrase: A group of related words that lacks a subject and verb.

In the morning*, we left gladly.*

Flailing wildly*, the tightrope walker plunged into the net.*

Please burn ***after reading***.

Predicate Nominative, **Predicate Adjective**. See *subject complement*.

Preposition: A word that relates its object (a noun, pronoun, or -ing verb form) to another word in the sentence. She is the leader ***of*** our group. We opened the door ***by*** picking the lock. She went ***out*** the window.

Prepositional Phrase: A group of words consisting of a preposition, its object, and any of the object's modifiers. Georgia ***on my mind***.

Relative Pronoun: A pronoun that connects a dependent clause to a main clause in a sentence. The pronoun is called relative because it relates to the word that it modifies. For examples, see the table at the beginning of the summary.

Restrictive Modifier: A modifier essential to identifying the word it modifies.

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

The snowflakes ***falling over the lake*** *quickly dissolved in the steaming water.*

The soldier ***on the left*** *dropped to his knees and fired.*

Restrictive Term, Element, Clause: A phrase or clause that limits the meaning of the sentence element it modifies or identifies.

Professional athletes ***who perform exceptionally***
should earn stratospheric salaries.

Since there are no commas before and after the boldfaced clause, the boldfaced clause is restrictive and suggests that only those athletes who perform exceptionally are entitled to such salaries. If commas were added before who and after exceptionally, the clause would be nonrestrictive and would suggest that all professional athletes should receive stratospheric salaries.

Subject Complement: A word that follows a linking verb and repeats, identifies, or describes the subject. A subject complement can be a noun, in which case it is sometimes called a predicate nominative.

My friend was a good ***runner***.

A subject complement can be an adjective, in which case, it is sometimes called a predicate adjective.

The boys grew ***thoughtful***.

Subject: The noun or pronoun that indicates what a sentence is about and which the principal verb of a sentence elaborates.

The new Steven Spielberg ***movie*** *is a box office hit.*

Subordinate Clause: A clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence; it must be attached to a main clause.

After we opened the bottles*, we gave a toast.*

The cheese, ***which had sat in the fridge for a month****,*
was coated with white mold.

The letter ***that Sam had opened*** *remained on the table.*

Subordinating Conjunction: A conjunction that introduces a dependent clause. For examples, see the table at the beginning of the glossary.

Tense: The time of a verb's action or state of being, such as past, present, or future. ***Saw; see; will see***.

Transitive Verb: A verb that requires a direct object to complete its meaning:

They ***washed*** *their new car.*

An intransitive verb does not require an object to complete its meaning:

The audience ***laughed****.*

Many verbs can be both transitive and intransitive:

The wind ***blew*** *furiously.*

My car ***blew*** *a gasket.*

Verb: A word or group of words that expresses the action or indicates the state of being of the subject.

Verbs ***activate*** *sentences.*

Verbal: A verb form that functions in a sentence as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb rather than as a principal verb.

Thinking *can be fun.*

An ***embroidered*** *handkerchief.*

(See also *gerund*, *infinitive*, and *participle*.)

(Adapted from Robert DiYanni, "Glossary," Strunk and White, 4th edition)

STEVE HIGH,
president of Improve Your English, graduated from U.C. Berkeley. He has an M.A. in English and taught at San Jose State University. Published in many newspapers and magazines, he has been a writer and tutor in Silicon Valley for many years.

NAT CRAWFORD
graduated from the University of Chicago. While a doctoral candidate at Stanford University, he taught writing and Honors English at Pinewood School in Los Altos. Currently he serves as director of tutoring at Improve Your English.