

# General Writing Memo

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This memo contains general advice about writing and, in particular, legal scholarly writing. It also functions as a key for abbreviated comments that I make in the margins of papers I review.

For my hand-made proofreading marks and squiggles, go here:  
[http://www.ericejohnson.com/docs/Eric\\_E\\_Johnson\\_General\\_Writing\\_Guidance\\_Proofreading\\_Marks.pdf](http://www.ericejohnson.com/docs/Eric_E_Johnson_General_Writing_Guidance_Proofreading_Marks.pdf)

This memo makes frequent reference to Eugene Volokh's book *Academic Legal Writing*, which I usually assign to my students doing an independent writing project or a seminar paper. The particular references are keyed to the fifth edition, published in 2016. The reference "Volokh, V.B." means go to Chapter V, Section B of the fifth edition.

N.B.: In reviewing my most recent batch of papers, I realized a few abbreviations were needlessly obtuse, so I decided to transition to something more straightforward. So OSW and OPS are the new and old for "Opt for the simpler word." And QWI and QTE are the new and the old for "Quote when the exact words are of interest; otherwise paraphrase."

## — CATEGORICAL LIST —

*Common Marks*

PR	Proofread.
SYN	Synthesize.
P	Punctuation.
G	Grammar.
C	Cite.
S	Style.
OTF.	ObeY the format.
WS	Wrong source.
WW	Wrong word.
IS	Incomplete sentence.
TMY	Tell me why.
FWN	Focus on what's needed.
TMW	Tell me where you're going.
WCOT?	What comes of this?
COWN	Capitalize only when necessary.
ICF	I can't follow.
WDTM?	What does this mean?
OPY	Seems "op-eddy" in tone.

*Habitually Helpful Techniques*

SY	Simplify.
KPS	Keep paragraphs short.
KSS	Keep sentences short.
OSW (or OPS)	Opt for the simpler word.
DJZ	Dejargonize.
DARK	Don't assume the reader knows.
ARQ	Answer readers' questions.
EA	Eliminate adverbs.
BH	Bury "however."
QWI (or QTE)	Quote when the exact words are of interest; otherwise paraphrase.

*Strunk's Rules*

UAV	Use the active voice. (Rule #10)
POS	Put statements in positive form. (Rule #11)
DSC	Use definite, specific, concrete language. (Rule #12)
ONW	Omit needless words. (Rule #13)
XCS	Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form. (Rule #15)
KRWT	Keep related words together. (Rule #16)
KTOT	In summaries, keep to one tense. (Rule #17)
EWE	Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end. (Rule #18)

— ALPHABETICAL LIST —

ARQ	Answer readers' questions.
BH	Bury "however."
C	Cite.
COWN	Capitalize only when necessary.
DARK	Don't assume the reader knows.
DJZ	Dejargonize.
DSC	Use definite, specific, concrete language. (Rule #12)
EA	Eliminate adverbs.
EWE	Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end. (Rule #18)
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OPY	Seems "op-eddy" in tone.
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OTF	Obey the format.
POS	Put statements in positive form. (Rule #11)
P	Punctuation.
PR	Proofread.
QWI (or QTE)	Quote when the exact words are of interest; otherwise paraphrase.
S	Style.
SY	Simplify.
SYN	Synthesize.
TMW	Tell me where you're going.
TMY	Tell me why.
UAV	Use the active voice. (Rule #10)
WCOT?	What comes of this?
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## COMMON MARKS

The following are common marks that I make on papers.

### PR

#### Proofread.

I use this mark to denote a problem that should be obvious when you look at it. As Eugene Volokh says, “Proofread. Proofread. Proofread.” See Volokh, XII.I.

### SYN

#### Synthesize.

In the process of researching, you may accumulate a series of miniature discussions of various cases or sources, perhaps including key quotes that are representative of each source. But you will need take this list-like construction and turn it into a narrative of your own that synthesizes what you have learned into a unitary discussion. As Eugene Volokh says, *synthesize the precedents; don't summarize each one.* See Volokh, V.B.

Along these lines, also see FWN and QTE.

### OTF

#### Obey the format.

You are being reminded to follow whatever directions have been given about the format of the document, including things like margins, headings, paragraph indentations, etc. If you have been asked to use a specific template, then stick to that template. If you started with the template, it is possible that you may have created a problem by cutting-and-pasting text from another document without scrubbing the formatting.

### G

#### Grammar.

There's a problem with grammar.

## P

### Punctuation.

There's a problem with punctuation. If the problem isn't clear, look it up.

## S

### Style.

There's a problem with the style. It might be a problem with citation style (bluebooking), or it might be a regular above-the-line problem. If it is bluebooking, remember to use the Bluebook's style for law review articles, not its style for briefs and legal memoranda.

## C

### Cite.

You need to put in a cite where indicated. For guidance on what cite to use, see my [Tip Sheet on Sources in Legal Scholarship](#).

## WS

### Wrong source.

You need a better cite. For guidance on what cite to use, see my [Tip Sheet on Sources in Legal Scholarship](#).

## WW

### Wrong word.

This means you used the wrong word. It may be clear what's wrong once it's pointed out. If not, look it up.

## IS

### Incomplete sentence.

This means the sentence is incomplete. If it's not immediately obvious how, take a closer look and try to find the subject and verb.

## TMY

### Tell me why.

This mark means I'd like to see an explanation given for your assertion. Giving reasons is the essence of legal argument and legal scholarship. I use this mark when more in the way of reasons is called for.

Helpful along these lines is Volokh, XII.H, regarding undefended assertions.

## FWN

### Focus on what's needed.

Read what Eugene Volokh has to say about this. See Volokh, V.A.

Your background section should not contain a full rundown of all the fruits of your research. Instead, aim to provide only what is necessary to understand your argument.

Many writers of legal scholarship start off building a huge background section that contains a relatively unprocessed record of the research done for the paper. But as the writer, it's your responsibility to tailor that background material to the claim that your paper is making. As Volokh notes, it's hard to throw away material you've spent weeks accumulating. But the writer's job is to bear the burden of upholding the reader's convenience. So cut away.

Along these lines, also see SYN and QTE in this memo.

## TMW

### Tell me where you're going.

The reader should always understand why she or he is being told something. Often that's a matter of giving a roadmap or providing orienting messages along the way. For example, the beginning of a part or subsection might say something like this:

The thrust of this article is to explore the public policy aspects of trademark registrations by sovereign governments—not to make legal arguments about whether, or to what extent, such registrations are legally permissible. Nonetheless, some understanding of trademark registrability is necessary as background for my argument, so I sketch that out here.

## WCOT?

### What comes of this?

The mark “WCOT?” means the reader needs an answer to the question of what conclusion is to be drawn from what you have set out. It’s possible you have supporting detail for a point that you don’t actually make. Or it could be there’s a conclusion you don’t explicitly draw – or at least that you don’t draw within this passage. It could also mean that this passage has detail that does not serve the ultimate purpose of advancing your argument. If that’s the case, you should consider eliminating it.

In this vein, also see TMW and TMY in this memo.

## COWN

### Capitalize only when necessary.

Don’t use capital letters unless there is a reason. For the most part, only capitalize proper nouns and first letters of sentences. Some other standard situations for capital letters are acronyms and courtesy titles that immediately precede a person’s name. But if you can’t articulate a reason for capitalizing a word, don’t do it. Government writing these days is filled with needless capitalization. But you should not follow that example.

The President greeted the Secretary and addressed the Soldiers.

The president greeted the secretary and addressed the soldiers.

Later that year Senator Smith claimed Congress was too rushed when it passed the Act. He said the Federal courts should not infer Congressional intent to overrule decades-old precedent.

Later that year Senator Smith claimed Congress was too rushed when it passed the act. He said the federal courts should not infer congressional intent to overrule decades-old precedent.

Senator Jones seems to be the only Senator who understands that the States retain Original Sovereignty.

Senator Jones seems to be the only senator who understands that the states retain original sovereignty.

## ICF

### I can’t follow.

Take a fresh look at this. Maybe try to phrase things in a different way.

## WDTM?

### What does this mean?

As a reader, I'm left with this question. Revise to resolve.

## OPY

### Seems op-eddy in tone.

The marked text has something of the tone of a newspaper op-ed. It may sound boosterish, strident, or too partisan in tone. Work on revising this to have a tone more in tune with legal scholarship. Lean on the law review articles you've read for guidance. Legal scholarship shouldn't be wishy-washy, of course. But it should convey some level of academic detachedness that suggests the writer is more interested in getting the analysis right than in winning converts.

## HABITUALLY HELPFUL TECHNIQUES

These are tips for better writing that I've collected over years of teaching writing. These tips are applicable not just to legal scholarship, but to all writing.

## SY

### Simplify.

I take this one-word command from William Zinsser's book, *On Writing Well*. "Simplify," is general advice, of course, but it's nonetheless helpful. Working to simplify your writing almost always makes it better. Many pieces of advice that follow in this memo (e.g., KPS, KSS, OSW) are specific instances of the general advice to simplify.

Also see Volokh, XV.C., concerning long phrases that are synonyms for single words and short phrases.

## KPS

### Keep paragraphs short.

Josh Zive—a friend of mine who studied rhetoric and is now a D.C. lawyer—gave some pretty great advice to my writing class a few years ago. He said a lot of dense writing can be made instantly better just by inserting paragraph breaks.

He's right. The effect is almost magical. For readers, white space is like oxygen. So give them plenty.

Also see Volokh, XIII.B, regarding long paragraphs, as well as Volokh, XIII.A, regarding paragraphs without a common theme.

## KSS

### Keep sentences short.

All else being equal, shorter sentences are better. The brain analyzes every sentence as a whole. Shorter sentences give the reader less to keep track of—less to hold in the brain's memory buffer. And that's good, because you want it to be as easy as possible for the reader to take in what you're saying.

But use longer sentences when there is a good reason. Good reasons include: (1) to include context or specifics that aren't important enough for a separate sentence, and (2) to create variety that is pleasing to the ear.

## OSW (or "OPS")

### Opt for the simpler word.

If there's not a reason to use a rarer or more complex word, then stick with the simpler word. The goal is to eliminate as much as possible between your brain's thoughts and your reader's comprehension. Using vocabulary for vocabulary's sake just adds more stuff between your mind and your reader's.

The room lacked natural illumination.

The room lacked natural light.

She declared, "That's correct."

She said, "That's correct."

He [rejoined, asserted, exclaimed, averred, answered], "That's wrong."

He said, "That's wrong."

The municipal detention facility was cacophonous.

The jail was noisy.

There are of course good reasons to use fancier words. But if you can't articulate such a reason, or if you aren't convinced it's right, then using the simpler word is the best bet.

See also Volokh, XV.M., about the use of needlessly fancy words.

## DJZ

### Dejargonize.

Do away with jargon wherever you can. This tip also comes from William Zinsser's book.

If you are writing legal scholarship, then the threshold for what counts as legal jargon is higher than, for instance, newspaper writing or blogging. To an audience of lawyers, "covenant," "interrogatory," and "tort" aren't jargon, they're technical terms that helpfully convey technical meaning. But you should still aim to keep your writing as accessible as possible, choosing commonly used words over insider terminology whenever possible. And within any given field of academic writing you will want to avoid importing jargon from any other. In legal writing, for instance, keep anthropology jargon at bay. Or if you must use it, explain it.

See also OPS and SY in this memo, as well as Volokh, XV.A., about legalese and bureaucratese.

## DARK

### Don't assume the reader knows.

This is more advice from Zinsser. Give the needed background to what you are saying as you go along. Keep your writing accessible, and avoid leaving the reader feeling like an outcast for not bringing more prior knowledge to the task of reading your paper.

In this vein, also see DJZ and ARQ in this memo.

## ARQ

### Answer readers' questions.

If you create a question in the reader's mind, answer it. Consider this:

According to 2016 data, Louisiana has the second highest incarceration rate in the United States.

That will leave your readers scratching their heads wondering who is number one. And until you answer their question – it’s Oklahoma<sup>1</sup> – you may lose them to distraction.

## EA

### Eliminate adverbs.

I thank Mike Strub, an attorney I worked with at Irell & Manella in Los Angeles, for making me a believer in this piece of advice. It turns out this is standard advice for good writing of all kinds. I found the web filled with people preaching the gospel of adverb deletion. But I’m convinced it has special usefulness in the context of writing about the law.

For each adverb, ask yourself if you could possibly do without it. If so, delete it. Your writing will be more powerful, and you will sound more authoritative.

The Fifth Circuit was very prescient in carefully examining the wisdom of the traditional rule.

The Fifth Circuit was prescient in examining the wisdom of the traditional rule.

The complaint is utterly without the supporting detail that *Twombly* clearly requires.

The complaint is without the supporting detail that *Twombly* requires.

Eliminating adverbs is also a way to make correspondence with an adversary less confrontational and more civil.

## BH

### Bury “however.”

Avoid beginning a sentence with “however.” Instead, bury it within a sentence.

Some states still use contributory negligence. However, most states have replaced this

Some states still use contributory negligence. Most states, however, have replaced this

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of incarceration rates for all states plus the federal system, see DANIELLE KAEBLE & MARY COWHIG, BUREAU OF JUST. STAT., CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2016 at 11 app. tbl. 1 (Apr. 2018), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus16.pdf>

doctrine with some form of comparative negligence.

doctrine with some form of comparative negligence.

Plaintiffs can still sue. However, there are many procedural hurdles to recovery.

Plaintiffs can still sue. There are, however, many procedural hurdles to recovery.

You can also replace “however” with “but” or “yet.” Doing so often improves the sentence.

I often fail. However, I try my hardest.

I often fail. But I try my hardest.

Note that it’s fine to begin a sentence with “but” or “yet.”

Burying “however” is a style issue, a tip for better writing. Beginning a sentence with “however” is not a technical error — so long as you punctuate it correctly. Here’s the punctuation rule for “however” at the beginning of a sentence: As a synonym for “nevertheless,” “however” needs a comma after it. But as a synonym for “no matter how,” there’s no appended comma. The following is punctuated correctly:

However things start, they always seem to end badly.

Things start well. However, they always seem to end badly.

The reason to avoid “however” at the beginning of sentences is that it’s slightly jarring, forcing the reader to pause in a situation where you want the reader to forge ahead. That’s why “but” or “yet” is the habitual better choice: It keeps the reader moving along at speed.

Things start well, yet they always seem to end badly.

Even keeping “however” where it is in a series of words, you can usually improve the situation by linking the two sentences with a semicolon. That retains the reader’s momentum.

Things start well; however, they always seem to end badly.

Note that you cannot link two sentences with just a comma and “however.” You need the semicolon. Unlike “but” or “yet,” “however” isn’t a coordinating conjunction that can join up two independent clauses with a mere comma.

## QWI (or QTE)

Quote when the exact words are of interest; otherwise paraphrase.

In general, your writing should be your own. You've formed a relationship with the reader; the reader is trusting you to provide the important content. Thus, the reader is expecting you to keep both hands on the wheel. When you quote someone, it shouldn't be because you're letting someone else drive. It should be because you want to draw the reader's attention to the quoted person's particular words.

In other words, when you quote, you must retain control – it's just that you're using that control to direct the reader to scrutinize someone else's words.

If the only reason to quote someone is that you want your reader to receive content that someone else has already reduced to writing, then paraphrase instead of quoting.

The *Smith v. Jones* court wrote that “[c]opyright was designed to encourage creative expression by providing authors with a limited term of exclusive rights to their work[.]”

The *Smith v. Jones* court reasoned that the purpose of copyright law is to encourage authors to create by providing them with exclusive rights to their creations for a limited time.

In open court, the judge said the defense attorney was “a lying, yellow-bellied coward.”

← The exact words are of interest, so the quotation is justified.

## STRUNK'S RULES

The following are highly useful rules from William Strunk Jr.'s classic *The Elements of Style*.<sup>2</sup> His book is in the public domain, so I have just taken portions of his text and done a little editing. Strunk referred to his rules by number, but I find it easier to call up his rules by a handy abbreviation consisting of letters. Below I've included my abbreviations and his original numbering.

### UAV

#### Use the active voice. (Rule #10)

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 person undisclosed, 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 right form in a paragraph on the dramatists of the Restoration; the second, in a paragraph on the tastes of modern readers. The need of making a particular word the subject of the sentence will often, as in these examples, determine which voice is to be used.

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I have used the 1920 version, Strunk's last. It is downloadable for free from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/37134/37134-h/37134-h.htm>. Strunk's 1918 original is at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37134>. After Strunk died, a former student of his, novelist and essayist E.B. White, expanded *The Elements of Style* into a larger book. "Strunk and White's," as it became popularly known, was first published in 1959 and continues to be reprinted today.

As a rule, avoid making one passive depend directly upon another.

Gold was not allowed to be exported.

It was forbidden to export gold (The export of gold was prohibited).

He has been proved to have been seen entering the building.

It has been proved that he was seen to enter the building.

In both the examples above, before correction, the word properly related to the second passive is made the subject of the first.

A common fault is to use as the subject of a passive construction a noun which expresses the entire action, leaving to the verb no function beyond that of completing the sentence.

A survey of this region was made in 1900.

This region was surveyed in 1900.

Mobilization of the army was rapidly effected.

The army was rapidly mobilized.

Confirmation of these reports cannot be obtained.

These reports cannot be confirmed.

Compare the sentence, "The export of gold was prohibited," in which the predicate "was prohibited" expresses something not implied in "export."

The habitual use of the active voice makes for forcible writing. This is true not only in narrative principally concerned 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 verb 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.

The sound of a guitar somewhere in the house could be heard.

Somewhere in the house a guitar hummed sleepily.

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

Failing health compelled him to leave college.

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

He soon repented his words.

[Regarding passive voice, also see Volokh, XV.B.]

## POS

### Put statements in positive form.

#### (Rule #11)

Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, non-committal 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.

He did not think that studying Latin was much use.

He thought the study of Latin was useless.

*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; he 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

The antithesis of negative and positive is strong:

Not charity, but simple justice.

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

Negative words other than *not* are usually strong:

The sun never sets upon the British flag.

## DSC

### Use definite, specific, concrete language. (Rule #12)

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.

There is a general agreement among those who have enjoyed the experience that surf-riding is productive of great exhilaration.

All who have tried surf-riding agree that it is most exhilarating.

If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on any one point, it is on this, that the surest method of arousing and holding the attention of the reader is by being

specific, definite, and concrete. Critics have pointed out how much of the effectiveness of the greatest writers, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, results from their constant definiteness and concreteness.

In exposition and in argument, the writer must likewise never lose his hold upon the concrete, and even when he is dealing with general principles, he must give particular instances of their application.

Herbert Spencer's *Philosophy of Style* offers this:

This superiority of specific expressions is clearly due to the effort required to translate words into thoughts. As we do not think in generals, but in particulars – as whenever any class of things is referred to, we represent it to ourselves by calling to mind individual members of it, it follows that when an abstract word is used, the hearer or reader has to choose, from his stock of images, one or more by which he may figure to himself the genus mentioned. In doing this, some delay must arise, some force be expended; and if by employing a specific term an appropriate image can be at once suggested, an economy is achieved, and a more vivid impression produced.

The following illustrates Spencer's principle:

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

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

## ONW

Omit needless words.

(Rule #13)

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 doesn't mean making all sentences short, nor does it mean avoiding all detail and treating subjects only in outline. It requires, instead, 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 which

this subject

His story is a strange one.

His story is strange.

In particular the expression *the fact that* 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

*Who is, which was, and the like* are often superfluous.

His brother, who is a member of the same firm

His brother, a member of the same firm

Trafalgar, which was Nelson's last battle

Trafalgar, Nelson's last battle

As positive statement is more concise than negative, and the active voice more concise than the passive, many of the examples given under Rules 11 and 12 illustrate this rule as well.

A common violation of conciseness is the presentation of a single complex idea, step by step, in a series of sentences or independent clauses which 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.)

There were several less important courses, but these were the most important, and although they did not come every day, they came often enough to keep you in such a state of mind that you never knew what your next move would be. (43 words.)

These, the most important courses of all, came, if not daily, at least often enough to keep one under constant strain. (21 words.)

[Also see Volokh, XV.C., about long phrases that are synonyms for single words and short phrases.]

# XCS

## Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form.

### (Rule #15)

This principle, that of parallel construction, requires that expressions of similar content and function should be outwardly similar. The likeness of form enables the reader to recognize more readily the likeness of content and function. Familiar instances from the Bible are the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

The unskillful writer often violates this principle, from a mistaken belief that he should constantly vary the form of his expressions. It is true that in repeating a statement in order to emphasize it he may have need to vary its form. But apart from this, he 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 left-hand version gives the impression that the writer is undecided or timid; he seems unable or afraid to choose one form of expression and hold to it. The right-hand version shows that the writer has at least made his 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)

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, that is, virtually, by the same part of speech. (Such combinations as "both Henry and I," "not silk, but a cheap substitute," are obviously within the rule.) Many violations of this rule (as the first three below) arise from faulty arrangement; others (as the last) from the use of unlike constructions.

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 a writer needs to express a very large number of similar ideas, say 20? Does that mean writing 20 consecutive sentences of the same pattern? On closer examination the writer will probably find that the difficulty is imaginary, that the 20 ideas can be classified in groups, and that the principle applies appropriately within each group. Otherwise it is better to avoid difficulty by putting the statements in the form of a table.

## KRWT

### Keep related words together. (Rule #16)

The position of the words in a sentence is the principal means of showing their relationship. The writer must therefore, so far as possible, bring together the words, and groups of words, that are related in thought, and keep apart those which are not so related.

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.

Wordsworth, in the fifth book of *The Excursion*, gives a minute description of this church.

In the fifth book of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth gives a minute description of this church.

Cast iron, when treated in a Bessemer converter, is changed into steel.

By treatment in a Bessemer converter, cast iron is changed into steel.

The objection is that the interposed phrase or clause needlessly interrupts the natural order of the main clause. Usually, however, this objection does not hold when the order is interrupted only by a relative clause or by an expression in apposition. Nor does it hold in periodic sentences in which the interruption is a deliberately used means of creating suspense.

The relative pronoun should come, as a rule, immediately after its antecedent.

There was a look in his eye that boded mischief.

In his eye was a look that boded mischief.

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

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

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

This is a portrait of Benjamin Harrison, grandson of William Henry Harrison. He 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 grandson of William Henry Harrison, who

William Henry Harrison's grandson, 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 word they modify. If several expressions modify the same word, they should be so arranged that no wrong relation is suggested.

All the members were not present.

Not all the members were present.

He only found two mistakes.

He found only two mistakes.

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 p.m.

On Tuesday evening at 8 p.m., Major R. E. Joyce will give in Bailey Hall a lecture on "My Experiences in Mesopotamia." The public is invited.

## KTOT

### In summaries, keep to one tense. (Rule #17)

In summarizing the action of a drama, the writer should always use the present tense. In summarizing a poem, story, or novel, he should preferably use the present, though he may use the past if he prefers. If the summary is in the present tense, antecedent action should be expressed by the perfect; if in the past, by the past perfect.

An unforeseen 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 non-delivery of the letter.

But whichever tense be 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, whichever tense the writer chooses, he should use throughout. Shifting from one tense to the other gives the appearance of uncertainty and irresolution (compare Rule 15).

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

## EWE

Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

(Rule #18)

The proper place in the sentence for the word, or group of words, which 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.

Humanity, since that time, has advanced in many other 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 principally used in 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 other prominent position in the sentence is the beginning. Any element in the sentence, other than the subject, may become emphatic when placed first.

Deceit or treachery he could never forgive.

So 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.

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

Great kings worshipped 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.

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