

THE
ELEMENTS
OF
Style

BY
WILLIAM STRUNK

*With Revisions, an Introduction
and a Chapter on Writing*

BY
E. B. WHITE

FOURTH EDITION



New York San Francisco Boston
London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore Mad
Mexico City Munich Paris Cape Town Hong Kong

Dell Inc. vs. Electronics and Telecommunications, IP

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Needham Heights, Massachusetts 02494

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Earlier editions © 1959, 1972 by Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

The Introduction originally appeared, in slightly different form, in *The New Yorker*, and was copyrighted in 1957 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

The Elements of Style, Revised Edition, by William Strunk Jr. and Edward A. Tenney, copyright 1935 by Oliver Strunk.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Strunk, William, 1869–1946.

The elements of style / by William Strunk, Jr. ; with revisions, an introduction, and a chapter on writing by E. B. White. — 4th ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-205-30902-X (paperback). — ISBN 0-205-31342-6 (casebound)

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English language—Style.

3. Report writing. I. White, E. B. (Elwyn Brooks), 1899–

II. Title.

PE1408.S772 1999

808'.042—dc21

99-16419

CIP

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

20 19 18

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FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

I. ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's.
2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.
3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.
4. Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause.
5. Do not join independent clauses with a comma.
6. Do not break sentences in two.
7. Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation.
8. Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary.
9. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.
10. Use the proper case of pronoun.

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

20. *Keep related words together.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unless disciplined, a dog becomes a household pest.

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

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

There was a stir in the audience that suggested disapproval.

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

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

A stir that suggested disapproval swept through the audience.

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

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

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

The Superintendent of the Chicago Division, who
No ambiguity results from the above. But

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

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

The grandson of William Henry Harrison, who	William Henry Harrison's grandson, Benjamin Harrison, who
--	---

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

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

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

All the members were not present.	Not all the members were present.
She only found two mistakes.	She found only two mistakes.
The director said he hoped all members would give generously to the Fund at a meeting of the committee yesterday.	At a meeting of the committee yesterday, the director said he hoped all members would give gen- erously to the Fund.

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

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

Note, in the last lefthand example, how swiftly meanings
parts when words are wrongly juxtaposed.

21. In summaries, keep to one tense.

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

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

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

The Friar confesses that it was he who married the

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

In presenting the statements or the thought of someone else, as in summarizing an essay or reporting a speech, do not overwork such expressions as "he said," "she said," "the speaker added," "the speaker then went on to say," "the author also thinks." Indicate clearly at the outset, or