Scientific writing- Gopen (American Scientific

Whether large majority of audience perceived what the writer had in mind

How readers go about reading (reader's expectation)

Readers do not simply read they interpret

Interpretive decision about the substance of prose based on clues they received from its structure.

1. Very familiarity of the tabular structure makes it easier to use
2. Easily perceived context (time) in which the significant piece of information (temperature) can be interpreted
3. Contextual material appears on the left in a pattern that produces an expectation of regularity
4. The interesting results appear on the right in a less obvious pattern, the discovery of which is the point of table.
5. Since we read from left to write => context on the left (familiarize reader), and new, important information on the write (intrigue the reader)
6. Readers have relatively fixed expectations about where in the structure of prose they will encounter particular items of its substance. => writer's degree of recognition and emphasis
7. Good writers are intuitively aware, so their prose has "shape"
8. Recognizable sections: Intro, Experim Methods, Results and Discuss. => Sections should not be confused. In smaller units of discourse, e.g. sentence, clause, also we should not have intermingle, otherwise readers are forced to divert energy, resulting in misinterpretation.
9. Information is interpreted more easily and more uniformly if it is placed where most readers expect to find it.
10. Beginning with the exciting material and ending with a lack of luster often leaves us disappointed and destroys our sense of momentum.
11. Readers expect a grammatical subject to be followed immediately by the verb. Anything of length that intervenes between subject and verb is read as an interruption, and therefore as something of lesser importance.
12. If something is put between subject and verb, the reader will not understand its importance. Subject and verb determine what the sentence is about. => structural location can hinder importance & lead reader to discover the value too late
13. The intervening material might be a mere aside that diverts attention from more important ideas; in that case the writer should have deleted it, allowing the prose to drive more directly toward its significant point.
14. Each unit of discourse, no matter what the size, is expected to serve a single function, to make a single point. => emphasis the point
15. Stress position: commonplace that reader and writers naturally emphasis the material that arrives at the end: delight to be rewarded at the end of a labor after mental breath of beginning
16. Stress of sentence is an opportunity of writer to influence reader's interpretive process.
17. Secondary stress position can be formed by the appearance of a properly used colon and semicolon.
18. Three rhetorical principles based on reader expectations:

(1) grammatical subjects should be followed as soon as possible by their verb.

(2) every unit of discourse, no matter the size, should serve a single function or make a single point;

(3) information intended to be emphasized should appear at points of syntactic closure.

1. Meaning is not inherent in discourse by itself; "meaning" requires the combined participation of text and reader.
2. We cannot succeed in making even a single sentence mean one and only one thing; we can only increase the odds that a large majority of readers will tend to interpret our discourse according to our intentions.
3. A sentence is too long when it has more viable candidates for stress positions than there are stress positions available. Without the stress position's locational clue that its material is intended to be emphasized, readers are left too much to their own devices in deciding just what else in a sentence might be considered important.
4. The information hat begins a sentence establishes for the reader a perspective for viewing the sentence as a unit.
5. Principle of stress position: Save the best for last: closure & fulfillment
6. Topic position principles: First things first: perspective and context.
7. Readers expect a unit of discourse to be a story about whoever shows up first.
8. Topic: (old familiar information)

(1) Linkage: looking back (2) context: looking forward

1. New information if important should be put in the stress position
2. We appreciate the opportunity to become familiar with a new environment before having to function in it (Comfort and Orientation).
3. The misplacement of old and new information turns out to be the No. 1 problem in American professional writing today.
4. Put in the topic position the old information that links backward; put in the stress position the new information you want the reader to emphasize.
5. When old information does not appear at all in a sentence, whether in the topic position or elsewhere, readers are left to construct the logical linkage by themselves.
6. You must explain what you stressed in the previous sentence, in the next sentence.=> spot discontinuity, make the linkage explicit => bridge the logical gap
7. We should be able to tell whose story the passage is: Only one dominant story that repeats in topic of every sentence. (repeated old information)
8. Readers expect the action of a sentence to be articulated by the verb.
9. As critical scientific readers, we would like to concentrate our energy on whether the experiments prove the hypotheses.
10. Principles:

(1) Follow a grammatical subject as soon as possible with verb

(2) place in the stress position the "new information" you want the reader to emphasize

(3) Place the person or thing whose "story" a sentence is telling at the beginning of the sentence, in the topic position.

(4) Place appropriate "old information" (material already stated in the discourse" in the topic position for linkage backward and contextualization forward.

(5) Articulate the action of every clause or sentence in its verb

(6) In general, provide context for your reader before asking that reader to consider anything new.

(7) In general, try to ensure that the relative emphases of the substance coincide with the relative expectations for emphasis raised by the structure.

1. It may seem obvious that a scientific document is incomplete without the interpretation of the writer; it may not be so obvious that the document cannot "exist" without the interpretation of each reader.

Writing Tips for Ph. D. Students

John H. Cochrane

1, 2

Graduate School of Business

University of Chicago

5807 S. Woodlawn

Chicago IL 60637.

773 702 3059.

john.cochrane@gsb.uchicago.edu

<http://gsbwww.uchicago.edu/fac/john.cochrane/research/Papers/>

June 8, 2005

1 Always put your contact info on the front page so that people can ﬁnd your paper and send

you comments! It’s the 21st century — get a web page. If your paper is ready for a faculty member

to read it, it should be on your webpage. Put the date on the paper so people know if they are

reading a new version.

1 Organization Figure out the one central and novel contribution of your paper. Write this down in one paragraph. As with all your writing, this must be concrete. Don’t write “I analyzed data on executive compensation and found many interesting results.” Explain what the central results are. For example, Fama and French 1992 start their abstract with: “Two easily measured variables, size and book-to-market equity, combine to capture the cross-sectional variation in average stock returns associated with market β, size, leverage, book-to-market equity, and earnings-price ratios.”

Distilling your one central contribution will take some thought. It will cause some pain, because you will start to realize how much you’re going to have to throw out. Once you do it, though, you’re in a much better position to focus the paper on that one contribution, and help readers to get it quickly.

Your readers are busy and impatient. No reader will ever read the whole thing from start to ﬁnish. Readers skim. You have to make it easy for them to skim. Most readers want to know your basic result. Only a few care how it is diﬀerent from others. Only a few care if it holds up with diﬀerent variable deﬁnitions, diﬀerent instrument sets, etc.

Organize the paper in “triangular” or “newspaper” style, not in “joke” or “novel” style. Notice how newspapers start with the most important part, then ﬁll in background later for the readers who kept going and want more details. A good joke or a mystery novel has a long windup to the ﬁnal punchline. Don’t write papers like that — put the punchline right up front and then slowly explain the joke. Readers don’t stick around to ﬁnd the punchline in Table 12.

The vast majority of Ph.D. student papers and workshop presentations (not all by students!) get this exactly wrong, and we never really ﬁnd out what the contribution of the paper is until the last page, the last table, and the last 5 minutes of the seminar.

A good paper is not a travelogue of your search process. We don’t care how you came to ﬁgure out the right answer. We don’t care about the hundreds of things you tried that did not work. Save it for your memoirs.

Abstract Most journals allow 100-150 words. Obey this limit now. The main function of the abstract is to communicate the one central and novel contribution, which you just ﬁgured out. You should not mention other literature in the abstract. Like everything else, the abstract must be concrete. Say what you ﬁnd, not what you look for. Here too, don’t write “data are analyzed, theorems are proved, discussion is made..”

The introduction should start with what you do in this paper, the major contribution. You must explain that contribution so that people can understand it. Don’t just state your conclusion: “My results show that the pecking-order theory is rejected.” Give the fact behind that result. “In a regression of x on y, controlling for z, the coeﬃcient is q.”

The ﬁrst sentence is the hardest. Do not start with philosophy, “Financial economists have long wondered if markets are eﬃcient.” Do not start with “The ﬁnance literature has long been interested in x.” Your paper must be interesting on its own, and not just because lots of other people wasted space on the subject. Do not start with a long motivation of how important the issue is to public policy. All of this is known to writers as “clearing your throat.” It’s a waste of space. Start with your central contribution.

Three pages is a good upper limit for the introduction. I don’t write a “roadmap” paragraph: “Section 2 sets out the model, section 3 discusses identiﬁcation, section 4 gives the main results, section 5 checks for robustness, section 6 concludes.” It seems a waste of space; readers will ﬁgure it out when they get there and I save a paragraph against the editor’s page count. Make your own mind up about this question; but realize it’s not mandatory.

Literature review Do not start your introduction with a page and a half of other literature. First, your readers are most interested in just ﬁguring out what you do. They can’t start wondering if it’s better than what others have done until they understand what you do. Second, most readers do not know the literature. It’s going to be hard enough to explain your paper in simple terms; good luck explaining everyone else’s too.

After you’ve explained your contribution, then you can write a brief literature review. Make it a separate section of otherwise set it oﬀ so people can skip it who aren’t interested. Remember, it will be very hard for people to understand how your paper is diﬀerent from others’ given that they don’t understand your paper yet, and most of them have not read the other papers.

Be generous in your citations. You do not have to say that everyone else did it all wrong for your approach and improvements to be interesting.

Literature reviews have gotten way out of hand. It is not necessary to cite every single paper in the literature or to write a Journal of Economic Literature style review. The main point of the literature review should be to set your paper oﬀ against the 2 or 3 closest current papers, and to give proper credit to people who deserve priority for things that might otherwise seem new in your paper. Some people worry a lot about strategic citations; choosing citations to hint to editors who they should assign as referees and adding loads of citations to make sure referees see themselves. Whatever one thinks of these practices, we can agree you should get rid of all the ﬂuﬀ in the ﬁnal version.

Body of the paper Your task now is to get to the central result as fast as possible. Most papers do precisely the opposite: They have a long motivation, a long literature review, a big complex model that then gets ignored, descriptive statistics, preliminary results, a side discussion or two and then ﬁnally Table 12 of “main estimates.” By then we’re all asleep. Here’s the rule: There should be nothing before the main result that a reader does not need to know in order to understand the main result.

Theory In most papers, the “main result” is empirical. There may be some theory or a model, but if you (or the editor!) ask “does this paper expand our knowledge of economic theory?,” the answer is “no.” The theory is there to help understand the empirical work. Following the rule, then, the theory must be the minimum required for the reader to understand the empirical results.

Do not write a “general” model and then “for the empirical work, we now specialize the general shock process to an AR(1), we use only 2 ﬁrms rather than a continuum, we assume agents have quadratic utility,” etc. Work out only the specialized model that you actually take to data.

Empirical work Start with the main result. Do not do warmup exercises, extensive data description (especially of well-known datasets), preliminary estimates, replication of others’ work. Do not motivate the speciﬁcation that worked with all your failures. If any of this is really important, it can come afterwards or in an appendix.

You will mightily resist this advice. If you can’t follow it, at least do not put anything before the main result that a reader does not need to know in order to understand the main result.

Follow the main result with graphs and tables that give intuition, showing how the main result is a robust feature of compelling stylized facts in the data. Follow that with limited responses to potential criticisms and robustness checks. Most of those should end up in your web appendix.

Conclusions Really, a conclusions section should not be necessary. If you did a good job of explaining your contribution in understandable prose in the introduction, and then documenting those claims in the body of the paper, (writing in good triangular style), then saying it all over again is pointless. I tried omitting the conclusions section a few times, though, and this was too radical for editors and referees. It is true that some people skip to the conclusiont o look for the main result, but that’s because they are used to authors who don’t explain it well enough in the introduction.

Thus, conclusions should be short and sweet. Do not restate all of your ﬁndings. One statement in the abstract, one in the introduction and once more in the body of the text should be enough! You can include a short paragraph or two acknowledging limitations, suggesting implications beyond those in the paper. Keep it short though — don’t write your grant application here outlining all of your plans for future research. And don’t speculate; the reader wants to know your facts not your opinions.

Appendices Appendices are a great tool. Take that delicious section that has so many insightful comments on the literature, the general version of the model, the 57 robustness exercises that you did, and dump them in to an appendix. This is a good way to get them out of the paper. Eventually you’ll dump them out of the appendix too.

Seriously, careful authors, referees and critics often want to document that the main result is robust to various other ways of doing things. You have to do that, but once you’ve veriﬁed that it does not make that much diﬀerence and you’ve found the one best way of doing things in your main result, it isn’t worth space in the paper to present all the checks and variations. Appendices are a great way to solve this problem, and you can just summarize all the things you did in the paper. You can put the appendix on your and the journal’s website. (“Bond risk premia” with Monika Piazzesi is an example of a web-appendix gone wild.)

**2Writing**

**Keep it short**

Keep the paper as short as possible. Every word must count. As you edit the paper ask yourself constantly, “can I make the same point in less space?” and “Do I really have to say this?” Final papers should be no more than 40 pages. Drafts should be shorter. (Do as I say, not as I do!) Shorter is better.

Don’t repeat things. In other words, if you’ve said it once, you don’t have to say it again. Most of all, it uses up extra space and reader’s patience to have to see the same point made over and over again. So, once again, repetition is really a bad idea. (Get the picture?!) “In other words” is a sign of trouble. Go back and say it once, right.

General points Follow the rule “ﬁrst describe what you do, then explain it, compare it to alternatives,

and compare it to others’ procedures” at the micro level as well as the macro level. For example, in describing a data transformation, just start with, say, “I adjust income by the square root of household size”. Then tell us why adjusting is important, and then talk about diﬀerent adjustment functions. Most writers do all this in the reverse order.

Previews and recalls are a good sign of poor organization. “As we will see in Table 6” “Recall from section 2” “this result previews the extra analysis of section 4” all often mean you didn’t put things in the right order.

Strive for precision. Read each sentence carefully. Does each sentence say something, and does it mean what it says?

Document your work. A fellow graduate student must be able to sit down with your paper and all alone reproduce every number in it from instructions given in the paper, and any print or web appendices. The usual student paper falls short here. There is a sea of verbiage, but I can’t ﬁgure out how the central table of results was computed, how standard errors were computed, how a simulation was conducted, etc.

Simple is better. Most students think they have to dress up a paper to look impressive. The exact opposite is true: The less math used, the better. The simpler the estimation technique, the better.

**Footnotes**

Don’t use footnotes for parenthetical comments. If it’s important, put it in the text. If it’s not important, delete it. Parenthetical comments in footnotes usually mean you haven’t organized your ideas; you haven’t ﬁgured out where to put this thought in a proper linear sequence. Do you really want the reader to stop and read this? Then it should be in the text. Do you think the average reader should not stop? Then delete the footnote. Obviously, lots of parentheses are just as bad as lots of footnotes.

Use footnotes only for things that the typical reader genuinely can skip, but a few readers might want to have attached to the current point. Long lists of references, simple bits of algebra, or other documentation are good candidates for footnotes.

Tables

Each table should have a self-contained caption so that a skimming reader can understand the fact presented without having to go searching through the text for things like the deﬁnitions of Greek letters. Don’t go nuts here; some captions are longer than the paper. In my opinion, you can leave out details of variable construction and similar items. “Book/market ratio” is ﬁne; you don’t have to tell me that you got book values in June from Compustat. The goal is to allow a skimming reader to understand the table, not to substitute for the detailed documentation that must be in the paper somewhere.

The caption of a regression table should have the regression equation and the name of the variables, especially the left hand variable.

No number should appear in a table that is not discussed in the text. You don’t have to mention each number separately; “Row 1 of Table 3 shows a u-shaped pattern” is ok. “Table 5 shows summary statistics” (period) is not ok. If it’s not worth writing about in the text, it’s not worth putting in the table.

Use the correct number of signiﬁcant digits, not whatever the program spits out. 4.56783 with a standard error of 0.6789 should be 4.6 with a standard error of 0.7. Two to three signiﬁcant digits are plenty for almost all economics and ﬁnance applications.

Use sensible units. Percentages are good. If you can report a number as 2.3 rather than 0.0000023, that’s usually easier to understand.

Figures

Good ﬁgures really make a paper come alive, and they communicate patterns in the data much better than big tables of numbers. Bad or poorly chosen ﬁgures waste a lot of space. Again, give a self-contained caption, including a verbal deﬁnition of each symbol on the graphs. Label the axes. Use sensible units. Don’t use dotted line types that are invisible when reproduced. Don’t use dashes for very volatile series.

Writing tips

The most important thing in writing is to keep track of what your reader knows and doesn’t know. Most Ph.D. students assume far too much. No, we do not have the details of every paper ever written in our heads. Keep in mind what you have explained and what you have not.

The reader usually wants most of all to understand your basic point, and won’t start criticizing it before he or she understands it. That’s behind my advice to ﬁrst state and explain what you do, and save defending it and comparing it to other approaches until much later.

Use active tense. Not: “it is assumed that τ = 3”, “data were constructed as follows..” Gee, I wonder who did that assuming and constructing? Search for “is” and “are” in the document to root out every single passive sentence.

“I” is ﬁne. Don’t use the royal “we” on a sole-authored paper. “I assume that τ =3.”“I construct the data as follows.” If it seems like too much “I,” you can often avoid the article altogether. For example, I think it’s ok to write “Table 5 presents estimates” rather than “I present estimates in Table 5”, though a purist might object to making a Table the subject of a sentence. I use “we” to mean “you (the reader) and I,” and “you” for the reader. “We can see the u-shaped coeﬃcients in Table 5” or “You can see the u-shaped coeﬃcients” is much better than “The u-shaped coeﬃcients can be seen” (passive) or “one can see the u-shaped coeﬃcients” (who, exactly?)

Much bad writing comes down to trying to avoid responsibility for what you’re saying. That’s why people resort to passive sentences, “it should be noted that”, poor organization with literature ﬁrst and your idea last, and so on. Take a deep breath, and take responsibility for what you’re writing.

Present tense is usually best. You can say “Fama and French 1993 ﬁnd that” even though 1993 was a while ago. The same goes for your own paper; describe what you ﬁnd in Table 5 not what you will ﬁnd in Table 5. Most importantly, though, keep the tense consistent. Don’t start a paragraph in past tense and ﬁnish it in the future.

Use the normal sentence structure: subject, verb, object. Not: “The insurance mechanisms that agents utilize to smooth consumption in the face of transitory earnings ﬂuctuations are diverse” Instead: “People use a variety of insurance mechanisms to smooth consumption..” (I also changed the starchy “agents” to the concrete “people,” and the simple “variety” rather than the fancy “diverse.” Actually, this whole sentence probably should be dumped; it was introducing a paragraph that described the mechanisms. It’s a throat clearing sentence that violates the rule that every sentence should mean something. The fact that people use a variety of mechanisms is not big news, the news is what the mechanisms are.)

Avoid technical jargon wherever possible.

Writing should be concrete, not abstract. (Insert concrete examples.)

Little writing tips

Don’t use adjectives to describe your work: “striking results” “very signiﬁcant” coeﬃcients, etc. If the work merits adjectives, the world will give them to you. If you must use adjectives, don’t use double adjectives. Results are certainly not “very novel.”

Use simple short words not big fancy words. “Use” not “utilize.” “several” not “diverse”.

It is usually the case that most good writers ﬁnd that everything before the “that” should be deleted from a sentence. Read that sentence again starting at “Everything”: it’s true, isn’t it? “It should be noted that” is particularly obnoxious. Just say what you want to say “It is easy to show that” means that it isn’t. Search for “that” in the document to get rid of these. Similarly, strike “A comment is in order at this point.” Just make the comment. These phrases also violate the rule that each sentence should mean what it says. Is the point of the sentence really that “it should be noted?” Or is this just a wimpy way to bring up the topic?

Clothe the naked “this.” “This shows that markets really are irrational...” This what? “This” should always have something following it. “This regression shows that....” is ﬁne. More generally, this helps (no, that should be “this rule helps,” right?) you to avoid an unclear antecedent to the “this.” Often there are three or more things in recent memory that “this” could point to.

Hyphens are widely misused. Here’s the rule from the JFE style sheet: “Hyphens are used for true compound modiﬁers before the noun (e.g., after-tax income, risk-free rate, two-day return, three-digit SIC code, value-weighted index) unless part of the compound modiﬁer is an adverb ending in ‘ly’ (e.g., previously acquired subsidiary, equally weighted index, publicly traded stock). When there is no risk of misinterpretation, the hyphen can be omitted, but the treatment must be consistent throughout the paper.” Note the hyphen is optional, so you don’t have to construct monstrosities like “continually-rebalanced-equallyweighted portfolio.” Don’t use hyphens in other circumstances, e.g. “The paper focuses on small-stocks.”

People forget Greek letter deﬁnitions. If you deﬁne them once in an obscure part of the text and then use naked references (“θ =3givesthebestﬁt”) no one will know what you’re talking about. Deﬁne them clearly in an easy-to-ﬁnd place. It’s best to give them a name too,and then remind people of then ameand then umber(“Iﬁnd the best ﬁt when the elasticity of substitution θ equals 3.”) This is the one place where a little repetition isn’t bad. If you’ve reminded them of the name in the last paragraph or two, however, you can use the naked letter.

Strike “I leave x for future research.” We’re less interested in your plans and excuses than we are in your memoirs.

Never use the words “illustrative test” or “illustrative empirical work.” Never do illustrative work. Do real empirical work or don’t do any at all. Illustrating technique with empirical work you don’t believe in is a waste of space. Even if you do it, there is no faster way to get readers to fall asleep than to tell them that what you’re doing doesn’t really matter.

You don’t need to “assume” things about a model. Don’t write “I assume that consumers have power utility” (And, of course, don’t write “it is assumed that utility is power,” right?) You are describing a model, not reality, so you can just state the model structure. “Consumers have power utility.” (“In this model” is understood.) Save “assumptions” for things that really do modify the real world, “I assume there are no shifts in the demand curve so that the regression of price on quantity identiﬁes the supply curve.”

Keep down the number of clauses in your sentences, and the number of things kept hanging.

“Where” refers to a place. “In which” refers to a model. Don’t write “models where consumers have uninsured shocks,” write “models in which consumers have uninsured shocks.”

Don’t abbreviate authors’ names, “FF show that size really does matter.” There is always enough space to spell out people’s names. You’d want them to write out yours, no?

It is appropriate to thank people who have helped you in the author footnote. I don’t add the qualiﬁer about not blaming people I thank for comments for mistakes. It goes without saying. I don’t list every single place I’ve given the workshop in the thanks. I’m not ungrateful, but the long list can get out of hand..

Don’t start your paper with a cute quotation.

Don’t overuse italics. (I use them far too much.) It’s best to use them only when the emphasis in a sentence would otherwise not be clear — but maybe then you should rewrite the sentence so that the emphasis really is clear. (Who is that shouting in here?)

When describing the sign of a casual link, one direction is enough. “When Jane goes up (down) on the teeter-totter, Billy goes down (up) on the other side,” the stuﬀ in the parentheses is distracting. Add “and vice versa” if you must.

Every sentence should have a subject, verb and object. No sentences like “No sentences like this.”

**3Tipsforempiricalwork**

These tips verge on “how to do empirical work” rather than just “how to write empirical work,” but in the larger picture “doing” and “writing” are not that diﬀerent.

What are the three most important things for empirical work? Identiﬁcation, Identiﬁcation, Identiﬁcation. Describe your identiﬁcation strategy clearly. (Understand what it is, ﬁrst!) Much empirical work boils down to a claim that “A causes B,” usually documented by some sort of regression. Explain how the causal eﬀect you think you see in the data is identiﬁed.

1. Describe what economic mechanism caused the dispersion in your right hand variables. No, God does not hand us true natural experiments very often.

2. Describe what economic mechanism constitutes the error term. What things other than your right hand variable cause variation in the left hand variable?

3. Hence, explain why you think the error term is uncorrelated with the right hand variables in economic terms. There is no way to talk about this crucial assumption unlessyouhavedoneitems1and2!

4. Explain the economics of why your instruments are correlated with the right hand variable and not with the error term.

5. Do you understand the diﬀerence between an instrument and a control? In regressing y on x, when should z be used as an additional variable on the right hand side and when should it be an instrument for x?

6. Describe the source of variation in the data that drives your estimates, for every single number you present. For example, the underlying facts will be quite diﬀerent as you add ﬁxed eﬀects. With ﬁrm ﬁxed eﬀects, the regression coeﬃcient is driven by how the variation over time within each ﬁrm. Without ﬁrm ﬁxed eﬀects, the coeﬃcient is (mostly) driven by variation across ﬁrms at a moment in time.

7. Are you sure you’re looking at a demand curve, not a supply curve? As one way to clarify this question, ask “whose behavior are you modeling?”

Example: Suppose you are interested in how interest rates aﬀect housing demand, so you run the number of new loans on interest rates. But maybe when housing demand is large for other reasons, demand for mortgages (and other borrowing demand correlated with demand for mortgages) drives interest rates up. You implicitly assumed stable demand, so that an increase in price would lower quantity. But maybe the data are generated by a stable supply, so that increased demand raises the price, or some of both. Are you modeling the behavior of house purchasers or the behavior of savers (how savings responds to interest rates)?

8. Are you sure causality doesn’t run from y to x,or from z to y and x simultaneously? Think of the obvious reverse-causality stories. Example: You can also think about the last example as causality: Do interest rates cause changes in housing demand or vice versa (or does the overall state of the economy cause both to change)?

9. Consider carefully what controls should and should not be in the regression. Most papers have far too many right hand variables. You do not want to include all the “determinants” of y on the right hand side.

Machine generated alternative text: (a) high R2 is usually bad — it meaus you ran left shoes = a — 43 right shoes — price
+ error. Bight shoes should not be a control!
(h) DonS t run a regression like wage = a + b education — c industry + error. Of
course, adding industry helps raise the R2. and industry is an important other
determinant of wage (it was in the error term if you did #2). But the whole point
of getting an education is to help people move to better industries, not to move
from assistant burger—flipper to chief burger—flipper.

Give the stylized facts in the data that drive your result, not just estimates and p values. For a good example, look at Fama and French’s 1996 “Multifactor explanations.” In the old style we would need one number: the GRS test. Famaand French show us the expected returns of each portfolio, they show us the beta of each portfolio, and they convince us that the pattern of expected returns matches the pattern of betas. This is the most successful factor model of the last 15 years ...even though the GRS test is a disaster! They were successful because they showed us the stylized facts in the data.

Explain the economic signiﬁcance of your results. Explain the economic magnitude of the central numbers, not just their statistical signiﬁcance. Especially in large panel data sets even the tiniest of eﬀects is “statistically signiﬁcant.” (And when people show up with the usual 2.10 t statistic in large panel data sets, the eﬀect is truly tiny!)

Of course, every important number should include a standard error.

**4 Seminar presentations**

You will not believe how fast the time will go by.

Since time is limited, it’s especially important to get to the point. We can’t skim to the important stuﬀ in a seminar!

You don’t need any literature review or motivation in a seminar. Just get to the point. Gene Fama usually starts his seminars with “Look at table 1.” That’s a good model to emulate.

Don’t “preview” results. It wastes time; why say it twice rather than say it once, right?

Don’t make slides with a bullet point for every word you intend to say. This forces you into a preplanned order, and then you can’t change on the ﬂy when you ﬁgure out how fast time is going by. Slides are ﬁne that only contain equations, tables and graphs — things we really need to see. At most use words for the one or two really important things you want people to know, e.g. “Identiﬁcation: interest rates do not respond to ﬁscal shocks in the Ricardian model.” Also, you want people to remember the structure of the model, deﬁnitions of variables, etc. If you have too much junk on the slides, people can’t see the utility function while you’re talking about the production function, so they get lost. People don’t remember equations from one slide to the next.

You have to leave slides up for a decent amount of time in order for people to digest them. That means you will not be able to put up 1 slide per minute!

As in writing the paper, your main objective is to get to the #1 important contribution as fast as possible.

Most seminars are a disaster. They start with pointless motivation and policy implications, which the audience can’t follow since we don’t know the result. Then we get a long literature review, which is even more boring since we don’t know the point of this paper much less what everyone else did. Then we get a results preview. Usually, the presenter says “I’ll preview the results now because I may not have time to get to them all,” a strangely self-fulﬁlling prophecy. Since showing the main results is the only reason you came, why not just start right now! Worse, the reason we run out of time is because we wasted halfan hour on the stupid preview! The seminar then bogs down as people start asking questions about the previewed results; most of the questions are dumb (“I measure the demand elasticity at 0.3.” “But how did you identify supply shifts?”) since they will be explained in a proper presentation of the results. But the questions are totally reasonable since the claim with no documentation is meaningless. Next, we get (in empirical papers) some “theory” that is really beside the point and only serves to provoke more needless argument (no, there really is no way to distinguish the “behavioral” and “rational” explanation. Clever audience members will come up with stories that reverse all the signs.) Then we get some distracting preliminary results and tables and graphs of unrelated observations. More pointless discussion erupts; people don’t know what point the speaker is trying to make and the discussion goes oﬀ in to tangents. Finally the speaker sees there is only 10 minutes to go, tells people to be quiet, and the main results go by in a big rush. Everyone is tired and confused and doesn’t follow anything. I timed the ﬁnance workshop last winter quarter and not one paper got to the main results in under an hour!

Listen to the questions, all the way to the end, then count to three before answering. Yes, you’re in a rush, and yes, you think you can guess what the question will be and you know the answer. This isn’t a game show, and much of the time you actually don’t know what the question will be.

Keep a sheet of paper handy. You may not have a quick answer to every question, and some questions may point to good things to change in the paper.

You cannot make it too simple. Most presenters, especially Ph. D. students overestimate dramatically how much theory people can digest in one sitting, and how quickly they can memorize and digest models and results.

Speak loudly, slowly and clearly.

There’s nothing wrong with ending early!

5 Conclusion

May economists falsely think of themselves as scientists who just “write up” research. We are not; we are primarily writers. Economics and ﬁnance papers are essays. Most good economists spend at least 50% of the time they put into any project on writing. For me, it’s more like 80%.

Pay attention to the writing in papers you read, and notice the style adopted by authors you admire.

I got a lot out of reading William Zinsser’s On Writing Well, and D. McCloskey’s Rhetoric of Economics. I also found Glenn Ellison’s “The slowdown of the economics publishing process” in the JPE useful for thinking about how papers should be structured (and refereed and edited, but that’s another story).

Style [Joseph Williams]

* 1. Basic idea:

(1) like how you teach robot to move one finger first, and then replicate the code and modify for five finger, but after all just write a module to integrate all and then just call that module to pick up objects, you need to define aggregate modules of language and use them. (Like probability): This is called knowledge building.

(2) reading & writing practice, and reading while writing

(3) Break down (second level thinker)

(4) use Memory to do efficient.

* 1. (1) causes (2)clarity (3) Cohesion (4) Emphasis (5) Coherence

(6)Concision (7) Length (8) Elegance (9) Usage

Readers & audiences

* 1. Steps:

(1) Brainstorm (2) take Notes (3) MK Scratch Outline (4) Analysis

Of Objectives (5) Define audiences (6) draft (7) revise (punc., spell)

* 1. Let act of writing generate ideas

(1) first time mk sure what on mind moves on paper

(2) reshape draft for what rdr needs

* 1. Mature writer's mistake:

(1) confusion about subject

(2) insufficient time to revise

(3) Carelessness

(4) entrenches bad habits

(5)sheer incompetence

* 1. Causal reader: social consequences (doubt of incompetence)
  2. Connect sentences by topic or even same word
  3. Practice:

(1) revise & make clear

(2) reverse & make worse (contrast to not)

* 1. Quality of writing:

measured by fell construct new knowledge from word on page

* 1. Writer overestimates what people know:

Shld give more help than he thinks they need

* 1. Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can
  2. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity:

Being sincere as speaking

* 1. Problems: French & Latin words
  2. Replace specific verbs with abstract nouns [problem]
  3. Reject all amplification, digressions, and swellings of style:

To return back to the **primitive, purity, and shortness,** when men delivered

So many things, almost in an equal number of words

* 1. **Simplicity** rather than vulgarity and exaggeration
  2. Use simple verbs rather than noun or adjective tracked on some general

Purpose verb (phrases), avoid passive voice

* 1. Use Gerunds instead of noun construction

(i.e. use by examining instead of by examination)

* 1. Reasons:

(1) not entirely understand subjects

(2) new student of subject

* 1. Style of writing in area, master new knowledge, new style of thinking,

And new voice (cognitive overload)

* 1. Continuing noun: "take unnecessary step, a step that may …"
  2. Concrete & strongly tie rather than observation loosely tied.

Talk about how they are related (not confused idea)

* 1. Learning to write clearly can help us think and feel and see
  2. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action
  3. Action is eloquence, clarity, finding a useful language
  4. Don't use abstract nouns
  5. Be clear in underlying sequence
  6. Be clear about who does it
  7. Nouns make the style abstract, which is not good
  8. Clarity is something extra to dangling participles, split infinitives, and fused genitive (higher level)
  9. Texts should not suffer from clotted abstraction
  10. First Step: Finding a useful language
  11. Turgid and awkward refer to a bad feeling behind my eyes

Sentences that make us feel we have to work harder than we think we ought to

* 1. Chronological sequence helps to make text clear
  2. Creating actions out of abstract nouns makes the text clear
  3. Don' use more words that needed
  4. Do not separate the part of the sentence that have to be kept together

Avoid disjoint with no flow sentences

* 1. Sentence should not be too technical
  2. Story telling, narrative
  3. Clarity when:

(1) subj name the cast of character

(2) verb of subj name crucial actions those charach. are part of

* 1. Locate the cast of character and their action, make them subject and verb
  2. Writing more concrete is desirable:

When turn verb to nouns and delete the charac., we fill the sentence with abstraction.

* 1. Avoid using too many propositional phrases.
  2. Write your ideas in logical order:

Don't turn verbs into nouns and then string them through propositional phrases.

* 1. Use connectors to clarify logical relationships.
  2. Write short sentences:

By matching subject and verb with characters and actions

Machine generated alternative text: FIXEE J
VARIABLE

* 1. Subject + Verb + Complement

Characters + Actions

* 1. Characters: (1) Agents
  2. Agents:

Collective agents: Faculties

Remote Agents: mayor Daley

Figurative: The White House, The business, Many instances of malignant tumor

Instrument: Studies, These new data, This evidence

* 1. Actions: (1) physical movement, (2) mental processes (3) feelings (4) relationships (5) literal or figurative.
  2. Nominalization:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Verb | Adjective |
| Discover: discovery | Careless: carelessness |
| Move: movement | Difficult: difficulty |
| Resist: resistance | Difference: difference |
| React: reaction | Elegant: elegance |
| Fail: failure | Applicable: applicability |
| Refuse: refusal | Intense: intensity |

* 1. Turn the nominalizations into verbs, and connect them with connectors , how, or why [clause beginning with them].
  2. Linking and expressing logical connection:

Simple cause: because, since, when

Conditional cause: if, provided that, so long as

Contradict expected cause: though, although, unless

* 1. Necessary nominalization that should not be revised:

(1) referring to previous sentence [help cohesive flow]

(2) nominalization as object of verb [More compact]

(3) nominalization that replaces 'the fact that'

(4) Repeated concept (e.g. abortion on demand)

(5) to introduce a topic that was developed in subsequent sentence with there is or there are

* 1. Only the author can judge whether translation has misrepresents the argument.
  2. Style should be direct rather than passive
  3. Subject express agents of an action, and the object expresses the goal or thing changed by the action.
  4. Passive vs. active selection:

(1) must our audiences know who is performing the action?

(2) Are we maintaining a logically consistent string of subjects?

(3) If string of subjects is consistent, is it a right string of subjects?

* 1. Problem of pssive voice: shifting reader from one unrelated subject to another.
  2. Active voice: use the beginning of yr sentnc to orient yr rdr to what follows
  3. Metadiscourse: writing about writing: show, cite, being by inquiring, compare.

Explain, show, argue, claim, deny, describe, suggest, contrast, add, expand, summarize.

I believe, it seems that, perhaps, probably.

Logical connc.: infer, support, prove, illustrate, therefore, in conclusion, however, on the other hand

* 1. Start with metadiscource, then end with it:

We suggested, I have shown that, We have, however, not claimed.

* 1. Not metadiscource: we investigate, study, examine, compare, know, analyze, review, evaluate, assess, find, discover (act of rsrch)
  2. Don't use unnecessary long compound noun phrases, specially when you do not use them multiple times. [Noun+Noun+Noun]: disassemble them
  3. Express actions and conditions in specific verbs, adverbs, or adjectives.
  4. When appropriate, make the subjects of your verbs characters involved in those actions. The two capital secrets in the art of prose composition are these:

(1) first the philosophy of t**ransition and connection;** or the art by which one step in an evolution of thought is made to arise out of

another: all fluent and effective composition depends on the connections;

(2) secondly, the way in which sentences are made to

**modify each other;** for the most powerful effects in written eloquence

arise out of this reverberation, as it were, from each

other in a rapid succession of sentences.

Thomas De Quincy

* 1. "Begin at the beginning," the King said, gravely, "and go on till

you come to the end; then stop."

Lewis Carroll

* 1. confusing if we fail to design them to fit their **context**, to reflect a **consistent** point of view, to **emphasize our most important** ideas
  2. Shape the sentences to fit their context and reflect those larger intentions that motivate us to write in the first place.
  3. The sentence should not be "disjointed," "abrupt," "choppy," as lacking in "flow"; but "flowing," "connected," and "cohesive."
  4. Principles of Cohesion:

(1) Put at the beginning of a sentence those ideas that you have already mentioned, referred to, or implied, or concepts that you can reasonably assume your reader is already familiar with, and will readily recognize.

(2) Put the end of your sentence the newest, the most surprising, the most significant information: information that you want to stress- perhaps the information that you will expand on in your next sentence.

* 1. Challenge: compromise between the principle of local clarity and directness, given the priority of feature of style that make our discourse seem cohesive. Help reader organize separate sentences into a single, unified whole.
  2. Prepare your reader for new and therefore important info. Move from familiar context to help them move from more familiar to the less familiar, from known to unknown.
  3. Connect something we already know to whatever new we try to learn. Each sentence something new.
  4. to end a sentence well, we need only decide which of

our ideas is the newest, probably the most complex, and then

imagine that complex idea at the end of its own sentence.

* 1. Connect a sentence to preceding: transitional meta discourse:

And, but, therefore, as a result: And therefore

* 1. Help readers evaluate what follows:

Fortunately, perhaps, allegedly, it is important to note, for the most part, under these circumstances, from a practical point of view, politically speaking.

* 1. Locate action in time an place: then, later, on May 23, in Europe.
  2. Announce at the beginning of a sentence its topic- the concept that we intended to say something about.
  3. The topic of a sentence is its psychological subject. that idea we announce in the first few words of a sentence. noun phrase of some kind that the rest of the sentence characterizes, comments on, says something about
  4. We can create a topic out of the object of a verb if we shift that object to the beginning of its sentence, before the subject:
  5. We can put topics in introductory phrases.
  6. In the clearest writing, the topics of most

sentences and clauses are their grammatical subjects.

* 1. what's more important than their grammatical function is the way topics control how readers read sentences, not individually, but in sequences, and the way that writers must therefore organize sequences of those topics.
  2. The most important concern of a writer,

then, is not the individual topics of individual sentences, but the cumulative effect of the sequence of topics.

* 1. Topic is:
  2. Particular ideas toward the beginning of each clause define what a passage is centrally "about" for ,a reader
  3. a sense of coherence crucially depends on topics
  4. the thematic signposts that are provided by these ideas
  5. Helps moving through a paragraph from cumulative coherent point of view
  6. Create context for the sentence
  7. Avoids feeling of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus, and creates coherence

Machine generated alternative text: TOPIC
OLD INFORMATION
NEW INFORMATION
SUBJECT
VERB
‚‘--
CHAR ACTER S
ACTION
—
FIXED
VARIABLE
FIXED
VAR IABLE

* 1. At the beginning of every sentence, locate your reader in familiar territory;

* 1. Keep the topic visible rather than using meta discourse.
  2. Get rid of the meta discourse, make the central character-programs- the topic.
  3. Avoid "monotony" by mean of beginning sentences with the same subjects, is a bad advice.
  4. Real reasons for monotony are: (1) write one short/long sentence after another (2) if you stuff it with nominalizations and passives
  5. Managing Subjects and Topics for Flow:

(1) Passive again. Let us replace a long subject full of new info with a short one that locates the reader in the context of familiar.

(2) Subject-complement switching. Especially when what follows the linking verb be refers to something already mentioned.

(3) Subject-Clause Transformations. If you have a very long subject that does not allow you simply to switch it to the end of the clause, you can occasionally turn it into an introductory clause, allowing you to construct two shorter topics

* 1. Two principles [Nominalization and passive voice if due to these principles is fine]:

(1) Put in the subject/topic of your sentences ideas that you

have already mentioned, or ideas that are · so familiar to

your reader that if you state them at the beginning of a sentence, you will not surprise anyone.

(2) Among groups of related sentences, keep their topics consistent, if you can. They don't have to be identical, but they should constitute a string that your readers will take to be focused.

* 1. Usage of nominalization is: to sum up in one phrase actions you have just mentioned so that you can comment on them.

* 1. Revision method for topics:

Here is a quick way to determine how well you have managed

your topics in a passage. Run a line under the first five or six

words of every sentence (in fact under the subject of every verb in every clause, if you can do it). Read the phrases you underlined straight through. If any of them seems clearly outside the general set of topics, check whether it refers to ideas mentioned toward the end of the previous sentence. If not, consider revising.

* 1. Do not begin sentence with the information that the reader finds startling, unfamiliar, unexpected, disconnected

* 1. The real measure of economy is whether our readers understand or do what we want them to do.
  2. Verbs that help shift into subject topic position those characters that will best serve his purpose.
  3. The lesson to be drawn here (both politically and stylistically,

perhaps) is that all local principles must yield to higher principles. The real problem is to recognize those occasions when we should subordinate one principle to another.

* 1. Generally, use the beginning of your sentences to refer to

what you have already mentioned or knowledge that you can assume you and your reader readily share.

* 1. Choose topics that will control your reader's point of view.

This will depend on how creatively you can use verbs to make

one or another of your characters the seeming agent of an action.

Machine generated alternative text: FIXED
VARIABLE
FIXED
VARIABLE
TOPIC
OLD INFORMATION
NEW INFORMATION
SUBJECT VERB COMPLEMENT
CHARACTERS ACTION

* 1. Organize your sentences so that you open them with old information in the topic position, usually with a character as a subject. Then follow the subject with a verb that expresses a crucial action. Move complex information to the end of your sentence. Then be certain that your string of topics is consistent and appropriate.
  2. All's well that ends well. William Shakespeare
  3. In the end is my beginning. T. S. Eliot
  4. Emphasis: if you begin sentence well, the end will almost take care of itself. (build climactic rhythm)
  5. Stress of a sentence is the end of the sentence: This rising pitch and stress signal the end of a sentence.
  6. Most important information could be put in the stress of sentence (mean its end): revise sentence to give the right information right emphasis.
  7. Trim the end: lop off final unnecessary words until we get information we want to stress.
  8. Shift less important information to the left. Move unimportant phrase away from the end of sentence.
  9. Shift important information to the right. Move important information to the end of sentence.
  10. Extract and isolate: long sentence swallows your important idea that is in the middle of a long sentence. Break the sentence into two just before and just after. [Isolate the point of a long sentence by putting it into a shorter sentence of its own]
  11. Some Synctatic Devices that add weight to the end of a sentence:

(1) There. in order to push to the end of that sentence those ideas that the next sentences will build on.

(2) What. throws special emphasis on what follows a linking verb

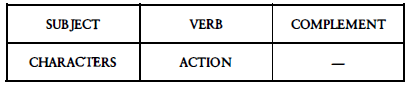
(3) It-shift 1. shift long introductory clause that would otherwise have been the subject to position after the verb.

(4) It- shift 2. simultaneously select and emphasize a topic and throw add weight on the stress.

(5) When all else fails: and your sentence ends flatly because you have to repeat a phrase you used in a previous sentence, at least try changing the phrase to a pronoun.[emphasis on the word before the pronoun]

(6) Avoid ending a sentence with meta discourse.

* 1. Nuances of Emphasis: Define words for nonexperts, and take care to locate those words at that point where my reader is most ready to receive them- at the end of sentence.
  2. Make information that are implicit more explicit.
  3. Introduce a technical term for the first time the end of a sentence, in its stress, even if you have to invent a sentence simply for the sake of defining or emphasizing that term.
  4. A writer can manipulate the stress of sentences in ways that encourage us to respond not to what is new, but to what we should take as new, what we should take as familiar.



Machine generated alternative text: TOPIC STRESS
OLD/LESS IMPORTANT NEW/MORE IMPORTANT

Machine generated alternative text: TOPIC
STRESS
OW/LESS IMPORTANT NEW/MORE LMPORTA1r
SUBJECT
VERB
COMPLEMENT
CHARACTERS
ACTION

* 1. When you want to be pompous and authoritative, then that's in the voice you project because that's what you are being. When you want to be laconic and direct, then you should be able to adopt that voice. The problem is to hear the voice you are projecting and to change it when you want to.
  2. I always write a good first line, but I have trouble in writing the

others. Moliere

* 1. Let it not be said that I have said nothing new. The arrangement

of the material is new. Blaise Pascal

* 1. Coherence Principles:
     1. Principle 1. A cohesive paragraph has consistent topic strings.
     2. Principle2: A cohesive paragraph has another set of strings running through it that we will call thematic strings.
     3. Principle 3: A cohesive paragraph introduces new topic and thematic strings in a predictable location: at the end of the sentence(s) that introduce the paragraph.
     4. Principle 4: A coherent paragraph will usually have a single sentence that clearly articulates its point.
     5. Principle 5: A coherent paragraph will typically locate that point sentence in one of two places.
  2. What's All This About? Topic Strings Again, Briefly. Principle 1: Reader will feel that a paragraph is cohesive if it has consistent topic strings.

(1) readers need familiar information at the beginning of sentences.

(2) Readers will take the main characters of the story as the most consistently familiar pieces of information.

* 1. How to topicalize: We have to decide on point of view toward our material, consider what our readers will take to be old and new information, then design sentences to meet both needs.
  2. What About the Topics? A Second Kind of String: Principle 2: A reader will feel that a paragraph is cohesive if it has other strings of related words, strings that we will call thematic strings.
  3. Your paragraph should have network of related words.[Not just repeated words but sets of conceptually related words]
  4. Themeatic string: sequence of conceptually related words.
  5. Topic strings vs. thematic strings [Conceptual architecture of passage]:
     1. Topic strings focus your reader's attention on what a passage is globally about.
     2. The thematic strings give your reader a sense that you are focusing on a core of ideas related to those topic.
  6. Conceptual architecture of passage creates a frame within which you develop your ideas.
  7. It is always prudent to underestimate a reader's knowledge and make themes explicit.
  8. How do Thematic Strings Go Wrong?
     1. Too few Strings: A paragraph that feels empty of meaning will have one or two topics, much repetition, and no specifically articulated central themes.
     2. Diffuse Strings. A reader may feel a passage is unfocused if a thematic is only implicit or if the writer uses no single word to pull together concepts that may seem to a reader wholly unrelated.
  9. Familiar advice of "Vary your word choice." is bad advice. Don't strive for "elegant variation." When you use too words for one concept, your is making your reader think you mean two concepts.

* 1. How Do New Strings Start? Signaling Topics and Themes. Principle 3: A reader will feel that a paragraph is cohesive if he is introduced to new topic and thematic strings in a predictable location: at the end of the sentence(s) that constitute the opening section of a paragraph, section, or whole document.
  2. How we open a paragraph determines how our reader will read the rest of it, because in our opening we tell them how to frame the conceptual space that they are about to enter.=> place thematic terms as close as we can to the end of the opening.
  3. We can introduce new topic strings and thematic strings in single sentence, but just as often, we create introductions consisting of two or three sentences, or (though rarely) more. To be certain that our readers do not overlook the importance of those new topic and thematic strings, we put them into the stress of the last sentence of the introduction.
  4. Paragraph=Issue + Discussion [The issue promises; the discussion delivers]
  5. Reader divides units of organized discourse-paragraphs, sections, or wholes- into two sections:

(1) A short opening segment. Toward the end of this segment, in the stress position of the last sentence, readers look for the concepts the writer will discuss in the following sections. Those words are often topics, but they must also include themes. => called issue

(2) A longer following segment- the rest of the paragraph. In this segment, the writer develops- and readers look for- new ideas against a background of repeated topic and themes. => called discussion

* 1. Issue of paragraph: 1,2,3, ore more sentence

Issue of section/short essay: 1,2,3, o4 more paragraphs

Issue of longer report: few page long

=> issue should be short

* 1. Issue is analogous to subject and topic [introductory positions]

Discussion is analogous to verb and stress[expand what proceeds]

Machine generated alternative text: FIXED
VARIABLE
FIXED
VARIABLE
FIXED
VAR LAB[.E
ISSUE
DISCUSSION
TOPIC
OLD/FAMILIAR
STRESS
NEW/UNFAMILIAR
SUBJECT
VERB
COMPLEMENT
CHARACTERS
ACTION
—

* 1. Problem of out of focus, confused due to:
  2. Introduce concept at the end of the issue that reader take to begin a theme, but you then fail to develop that concept in the discussion.
  3. Conversely, you fail to anticipate in the issue important themes that you in fact develop in the discussion.
  4. At the end of the issue you introduce a concept that readers think promises a theme, but in the discussion, you develop that concept using terms so varied that readers cannot connect them to your announced theme.
  5. You mention in the issue those themes that you develop in the discussion, but you bury the references to them inside a sentence, instead of highlighting them in the stress of final sentence of the issue.
  6. Uncentered or out of focus due to: (1) made a promise but didn't deliver, or (2) have delivered on promises you didn't make.
  7. Key for my own view: like GMAT writing you need to take out structure first and then write whole.
  8. The last thing one discovers in writing a book is what to put

first. Blaise Pascal

* 1. In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed

to conciseness. Samuel Johnson

* 1. Principle 4: A reader will feel that a paragraph is coherent if she can read a sentence that specifically articulates its point.
  2. We visibly organize essays, articles, reports, memoranda into paragraphs, subsections, and major sections to signal readers that we have finished developing one part of an idea and are moving on to another, to new thought. We also imply that we intent to make some new point, to make some new claim about the new subject matter.
  3. Through a paragraph there should be a sentence that will be logical, argumentative, expository center.=>telegram of capturing central idea.
  4. When author says that the main point was obvious, he is relying on his readers to have the same set of assumptions, the same body of knowledge, the same attitudes and values that he had. Ordinarily, however, they don't.
  5. By **point** we do not mean a general intention in the mind of the writer or the gist or summary of a passage. By Point we mean the specific sentence on the page that the writer would send as a telegram if asked "what's your point".
  6. **Principle 5**: A reader will feel that a paragraph is coherent if he finds the Point sentence in one of two predictable places in a paragraph: (1) at the end of its issue, or (2) at the end of its discussion; i.e., at the end of the paragraph (or section or whole document).
  7. When the writer wants to be as clear as possible, they locate their POINTS where their readers most expect them.

Machine generated alternative text: ISSUE DISCUSSION
or

* 1. What purposes are served by the sentences preceding the Point? They typically provide transition from a previous paragraph, make a general claim that the writer will narrow in the POINT, or make a preliminary claim that the point sentence rejects.
  2. Some writers put their point at the End of Discussions.
  3. Even when the point is put at the end of the discussion, author must still use its issue to introduce the discussion in a way that anticipates its topic and themes.
  4. Predictably a writer will put her POINT sentence at the end of the paragraph because she intends to develop, expand, elaborate, explore that point in the following series of paragraphs.
  5. **Point in the whole document**

(1) if the paragraph is a body paragraph, if it does not introduce a section or whole document, you can make your POINT sentence in either or both of two places: (a) at the end of the introductory issue, and (b) at the end of the paragraph; i.e., at the end of the discussion

(2) But if the paragraph introduces a section or even a whole document, then you should put your POINT sentence at the end of that paragraph.

* 1. If you make your point at the end of a document, you must still offer the reader an anticipatory point.
  2. In general, however, most of readers in most nonacademic situations don't like point at the end of the document.
  3. At the end of the introductory issue of your document, you must:

(1) offer some kind of specific anticipatory Point sentence(s) that clearly promise a main point still to come; and

(2) include toward the end of that anticipatory point sentence the themes and topics that you will pursue.

* 1. Whether you make your POINT early or late, you must always frame the space that your reader is about to enter.
  2. Reasons for point at the end:

(1) Timidity or politeness: on case of bad news. controversial, nasty, or unpopular matter. In fact, most professionals prefer Point-first documents, no matter how bad the news.

(2) Discovery. Hope reader would grasp it a moment before he reads the POINT sentence.

(3) Convention: it is typical for a writer first to announce (some would say invent) a problem that no one suspected until the writer pointed it out.

(4) Failure to Revise. When we draft, we often have no idea where we are going, what kind of POINT sentence we are going to write, until we discover it at the end of a paragraph, section, or even the whole document.

* 1. In most professional contexts readers prefer documents with main POINT early: the reason for abstract of article that typically contain the POINT of the article. These readers employ a reading strategy that creates a POINT-first form: if they don't find the POINT on the first page, they flip to the conclusion, where they expect to find it.
  2. **My idea**: Just like reading that when it is story you like and read it quickly and understand and go forward, when you put point early and put it in the form of topic at first, and familiar information at first, your text would be readable like a story.
  3. Unless you have good reason to withhold your main POINTS until the end, get them out early- but not immediately, not before you get to the end of a reasonably concise introductory issue. Make sure that a main point sentence encapsulates what you take to be your major claim, observation, proposition, idea, request, warning, direction, command-a sentence that you would send to your reader if you had only a post card to write it on. In those encapsulating sentence(s), be sure that you express toward the end whatever thematic or topic strings you want your readers to notice thereafter.

Machine generated alternative text: ISSUE DISCUSSION
POINT (POINT)

Machine generated alternative text: ISSUE
DISCUSSION
POINT
(POINT)
TOPIC
STRESS
OLD/FAMILIAR
NEW/UNFAMILIAR

* 1. Three principles:

(1) In the issue, introduce key thematic and topical words in its stress

(2) In the discussion, keep strings of topics consistent.

(3) In the discussion, repeat those thematic words or words related to them.

* 1. Make these principles work together well enough so that you do not confuse your reader. [Give them no reason to call it unclear]
  2. Writing usually seems clearest when readers are least conscious of it.
  3. The location of headings:

(1) find where to insert a heading to signal the end of your issue and the beginning of your discussion.=> if you can't find then there is problem

(2) In the body of discussion, locate places where you would insert at least one more equivalent level of heading.

(3) Repeat for each section until you have a heading at least every three or four pages.

(4) heading should state the new and central topic and theme=> if you couldn't identify words there is problem

* 1. Highest heading of all is your title. What should go into a useful title is straightforward: the key topics and themes that appear in the stress of your main POINT sentence.
  2. Two-part title:

Computer Assisted Instruction: Advantages and Disadvantages

* 1. If you are not certain about what to put into headings=> your reader will find your text confusing.
  2. Before drafting:

(1) List Main characters, including any abstraction that seem to act as source of actions. Decide which characters will most interest your audience, decide whose point of view you want to take. => point of view of those characters will constitute most of the topics in your topic string.

(2) List few central concepts that you think will run through your whole text. Then around each of those key concepts create clusters of additional concepts. The words for those central and subordinate concepts will provide many of your thematic strings.

(3) If you think you know exactly what has to go into your POINT sentence, write it out. Specifically use the characters that will constitute your major topic strings and the key concepts that will be the center of your clusters. Recall that the central conceptual terms will go toward the end of that POINT sentence.

(4) Subdivide the problem into manageable segments with their particular thematic strings and characters.

(5) Before you write the first word, decide whether the document is going to be POINT-early or POINT-last.

(6) If POINT-last, construct an anticipatory POINT sentence to get started. It too should have key thematic terms in it.

(7)As you draft, occasionally remind yourself of your thematic and topic strings.

(8)If you don't know your point, just start writing and hope.

(9) Once you have produce a first draft, determine whether the POINT sentence in the draft is the same as the POINT sentence you wrote before you began to draft. Look particularly for new words in the POINT in your conclusion.

(10) If they are different, which does the job better? It is likely that in the act of drafting you will have discovered something more interesting, more compelling, more pointed than you thought before you began.

(11) At this stage in the process, you can begin the more detailed diagnostic work that goes into effective revision.

* 1. Less is More. Robert Browing

There is no artifice as good and desirable as simplicity. St. Francis De Sales

Loquacity and lying are cousins. German Proverb.

To a Snail: If "compression is the first grace of style," you have it. Marianne Moore.

If you require a practical rule of me, I will present you this: Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it-wholeheartedly-and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. Murder your darling. Arthur Quiller-Couch

In composing, as a general rule, run your pen through every other word you have written; you have no idea what vigor it will give your style. Sydney Smith.

Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler. Albert Einstein

* 1. To write clearly, we have to know not only how to manage the flow of ideas, but also how to express them concisely.
  2. Concision principles:

(1) Usually, compress what you mean into the fewest words.

(2) Don't state what your reader can easily infer.

* 1. Simple Sources of Wordiness:

(1) Redundant Pairs: Full and complete, true and accurate, hopes and desires, hope and trust, each and every, first and foremost, any and all, various and sundry, basic and fundamental, questions and problems.

(2) Redundant Modifiers:Completely finish, past memories, various different, each individual, basic fundamentals, true facts, important essentials, future plans, personal beliefs, consensus of opinion, sudden crisis, terrible tragedy, end result, final outcome, initial preparation, free gift, revolve around, return back, penetrate into, split apart, progress forward, continue.

(3) Redundant Categories:Specific words imply their general categories. Time is a period, mucous membrane is an area, ping is a color, shiny is an appearance, large in size, of a bright color, heavy in weight, round in shape, at an early time, of a cheap quality, honest in character, of an uncertain condition, in a confused state, unusual in nature, extreme in degree, of a strange type, curative process, regulation system, economics field, area of mathematics, criminal problem.

Eliminate a general category by changing an adjective into n adverb.

Change an adjective into a noun and drop the redundant noun.

(4) Meaningless Modifier: clear throat used unconsciously. Kind of, really, basically, definitely, practically, actually, virtually, generally, certain, particular, individual, given, various, different, specific, for all intents and purposes.

When we prune both the empty nouns and meaningless modifiers, we have a clearer and sharper sentence.

(5) Pompous Diction: Replacing unnecessary formal words with more common ones may not reduce wordiness, but you will make your diction sharper and more direct.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Contingent upon = dependent on | Deam=think |
| Endeavor= try | Envisage= think, regard, see |
| Utilization=use | Advert to= mention |
| Termination=end | Apprise=inform |
| Initiate=begin | Eventuate=happen |
| Is desirous of=wants | Transpire=happen |
| Cognizant of= aware of | Render= make, give |
| Ascertain=find out | Transmit=send |
| Facilitate=help | Prior to= before |
| Implement= start, carry out, begin | Subsequent to=after |

* 1. Complex Wordiness:

(1) Belaboring the Obvious: needlessly stating what everyone knows: imagine implies picture, trying to learn implies engaged in an activity; chess implies game; game implies playing.

(2) Excessive Detail: irrelevant details. How much detail we should provide depends on how much our readers already know. In technical writing addressed to an informed audience, we can usually assume a good deal of shared knowledge.

* 1. We signal that we are members of a community in what we say and how we say it. But more certain sign of our socialization is in what we don't say, in what we take for granted as part of a shared but rarely articulated body of knowledge and value.
  2. When writer articulate the obvious in speech or in writing, they help themselves learn that information. One way we get knowledge under control is by writing it out.
  3. The more old knowledge we have about a subject, the more new knowledge we can retain:

(1) because new knowledge sticks to old knowledge

(2) because if we are rich in knowledge about a subject, we probably have organized that knowledge in a way that allows us to incorporate new knowledge into it quickly and efficiently.

* 1. If we are novices, if we do not have that rich and well structured base of knowledge, we are more likely to feel that we have to instantiate and rehearse that knowledge on a page before we can get it under control in our minds.
  2. Even if we are knowledgeable in a filed, we may find it easier to get new knowledge under control by writing it out, even if we never use that summary in a final draft.
  3. Redundancy of a phrase for a word: Always be alert for opportunities to compress several words into a word or two.
  4. Compressions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The reason for |  |
| For the reason that |  |
| Due to the fact that |  |
| Owing to the fact that |  |
| In light of the fact that | Because, since, why |
| Considering the fact that |  |
| On the grounds that |  |
| This is why |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Despite the fact that |  |
| Regardless of the fact that | Although, even though |
| Notwithstanding the fact that |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| In the event that |  |
| If it should transpire/happen that | If |
| Under circumstances in which |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| On the occasion of |  |
| In a situation in which | When |
| Under circumstances in which |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| As regards |  |
| In reference to |  |
| With regard to | About |
| Concerning the matter of |  |
| Where …… is concerned |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| It is crucial that |  |
| It is necessary that |  |
| There is a need/necessary for | Must, should |
| It is important that |  |
| It is incumbent upon |  |
| Cannot be avoided |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is able to |  |
| Is in a position to |  |
| Has the opportunity to | Can |
| Has the capacity for |  |
| Has the ability to |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| It is possible that |  |
| There is a chance that |  |
| It could happen that | May, might, can, could |
| The possibility exists for |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Prior to |  |
| In anticipation of |  |
| Subsequent to | Before, after, as |
| Following on |  |
| At the same time as |  |
| Simultaneously with |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Increase | More, less/fewer; better, worse |
| decrease |  |

* 1. The problem is to recognize when metadiscourse s useful and then to control it. Some writers use so much metadiscourse that they bury their ideas.
  2. Read widely in your field with an eye to how metadiscourse is used by writers you think are clear, concise, and successful.
  3. Hedges and Emphatics:

Common hedges: usually, often, sometimes, almost, virtually, possibly, perhaps, apparently, seemingly, in some ways, to a certain extent, sort of, somewhat, more or less, for the most part, for all intents and purposes, in some respects, in my opinion at least, may, might, can, could seem, tend, try, attempt, seek, hope.

Common emphatics(mean Believe me): => arrogant or at least makes defensive

As everyone knows, it is generally agreed that, it is quite true that, it's clear that, it is obvious that, the fact is, as we can plainly see, literally, clearly, obviously, undoubtedly, certainly, of course, indeed, inevitably, very, invariably, always, key, central, crucial, basic, fundamental, major, cardinal, primary, principal, essential.

* 1. Sequencer and Topicalizers: words or phrases, and sentences that lead your reader through your text. The least useful kind are overelaborte introductions.
  2. Unless your paper is so complex that you have to lay out its plan in an elaborate introduction, assume that just naming the problem is sufficient to announce it as your topic, and that naming its parts suggests your organization.
  3. Revise introductory sentences that you begin with metadiscourse, into a straight forward point that doesn't need an intro announcing the writer's intentions.
  4. Attributors or Narrators: tell your reader where you got your ideas or facts or opinions. If we eliminate the narrators and refocus attention on what the reader needs to know, we make the passage more pointed. e.g. I was concerned with. I attempted, I have concluded, I think. Has been found, have been observed, have been determined.
  5. Belaboring the obvious in meta discourse may signal a writer who is a novice in a field. You need to suppress in your prose the metadiscourse that records your thinking, allowing little or none of the intellectual process to reach the surface in your prose, or at least to remain in the final draft.
  6. Not the negative. To be more concise and direct, we should prefer affirmative. We can't translate every negative into an affirmative. But we can rephrase many:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Not many | Few |
| Not the same | Different |
| Not different | Alike/similar |
| Does not have | Lacks |
| Did not stay | Left |
| Not old enough | Too young |
| Did not remember | Forgot |
| Did not consider | Ignored |
| Did not allow | Prevented |
| Did not accept | Rejected |
| Not clearly | Unclearly |
| Not possible | Impossible |
| Not able | Unable |
| Not certain | uncertain |

Now certainly this does not apply to those sentences that raise and issue by contradicting or denying some point that we intend to correct.

* 1. When you combine negative with passives, nominalizations and compounds in sentences that are already a bit complex, your writing can become opaque.
  2. Which you put first- the outcome or the condition- depends on what the reader already knows, or what the reader is looking for.
  3. Avoid using negative and connecting words such as:

Verbs: preclude, prevent, lack, fail, doubt, reject, avoid, deny, refuse, exclude, contradict, prohibit, bar, etc.

Conjunctions: except, unless, provided, however; without, against, lacking, absent, but for.

* 1. For negative use the translation:

X may not do Y unless/except/without doing Z.

--> X may do Y only if X does Z

--> In order to do Y, X must do Z

* 1. Length: Sentence in their variety run from simplicity to complexity, a progression not necessarily reflected in length: a long sentence may be extremely simple in construction-indeed must be simple if it is to convey its sense easily. Sir Herbert Read

A long complicated sentence should force itself upon you, make you know yourself knowing it. Gertrude Stein.

* 1. Ways to extend a sentence and still keep it clear and graceful.

(1) Coordination: joint grammatically equal segments with and, but, yet, or 'or'

(2) Subordination

* 1. Vigorous sentence moves quickly from a short and specific subject through a strong verb to its complement. If we extend a sentence by coordinating its parts, we should coordinate after the subject.
  2. In using coordination to avoid long sentences we have to avoid two problems:

(1) Faulty Parallelism. A common rule of rhetoric and grammar allows parallelism among same grammatical structure:

Clause and clause, predicate and predicate, prepositional phrase and prepositional phrase.

(2) Lost connections. Coordination so long that reader lose track of its internal connection, or, worse, misread them. To revise(1) try to shorten the first half of the coordination, so that the second half is closer to that point in the sentence, where the coordination begins. (2) try repeating a word that will remind the reader where the second half of the coordination begins.

* 1. Subordination:

(1) Resumptive modifier: simple device that lets you extend any sentence almost indefinitely. Repeat a key word close to the end of a clause and then resume the line of thought with a relative clause, elaborating on what went before. [You can do with part of speech other than nouns too]

(2) Summative Modifier: end a segment of sentence with a comma, then sum up in a noun or noun phrase what you have just said, and continue with a relative clause. => helps you get rid of vague which

(3) Free Modifiers: Follows the verb but comments on its subject. Makes more specific what you assert in the preceding clause that you attached it to. often begins with and -ing participle. Sometimes they begin with a past participle form of verb e.g. driven, or by adjective.

* 1. The resumptive modifiers let us pause for a moment, catch our breath, and then move on.
  2. Movement and Momentum: If a sentence is to flow easily, its writer should also avoid making us hesitate over words and phrases that break its major grammatical links- subject-verb, verb-object. We should be able to complete those links quickly and surely. Good sentence lets reader take a breath half way through, when he finish the introductory clause.
  3. Grammatical Connections: In most sentences the normal word order is subject-verb-object. If you delay or muddy the subject-verb connection your reader may have to hesitate, backtrack, reread looking for it. => one solution is to move a long modifying phrase or clause to the beginning of the sentence.
  4. When you place your modifier at the beginning of its sentence, you avoid the flicker of hesitation which, if repeated can break the flow.
  5. If you want to avoid even the smallest hitch in the rhythm of a sentence, you might look closely for adjectives that have become separated from the phrases that modify them.=> adjective being compared should not be split from its following phrase.
  6. We can maintain in a smoother rhythm if we put the adjective after the noun, next to the phrase that completes the adjective.
  7. Adjective that we most frequently split off their modifying phrases , but we shouldn't:

More… than, less ..than, other...than, as...as, similar...to, equal...to, identical...to, same...as, different...from, such...as, separate...from, distant...from, related...to, close...to, next...to, difficult...to, easy...t, necessary...to

* 1. Artful Interruptions. Insert aside when it is interesting for reader to know definition, qualifications, self-corrections, and fuller specifications.
  2. Sometimes interrupt style may also suggest not a mind recorded in the act of thinking, but a mind that has already achieved a thought so nuanced, so complex that the writer cannot state it simple and whole, but must, rather, qualify it in every other phrase.
  3. Problem with Modifiers: When we add several modifiers to a clause, sentences may become confusing because the reader will lose track of the logical and grammatical connections between the modifier and the things modified.

(1) Dangling modifiers: when its implied subject differs from the specific subject of the clause that follows it. Either rewrite the introductory phrase so that it has its own subject or make the subject of the main clause agree with the implied subject of the introductory phrase.

(2) Misplaced Modifiers. Seem to modify two things, or the wrong thing.(1) Can either refer to forward or backward. => move modifier to unambiguous position. (2) modifier at the end of a clause or sentence can modify either a neighboring or a more distant phrase. => first solution to move, second solution resemptive modifer

* 1. If either the modifier or the subject of the main clause is part of the metadiscourse, the modifier will seem entirely appropriate to most readers..
  2. We should not cause our reader to pause even for a moment to understand how one idea connects to another.
  3. Pronoun Reference: when there is a chance that pronoun will confuse reader. => (1)repeat the antecedent. (2) If you can conveniently make one of your nouns plural and another singular, your can use singular and plural pronouns to distinguish what you're referring to.
  4. Elegance: Anything is better than not to write clearly. There is nothing to be said against lucidity, and against simplicity only the possibility of dryness. This is a risk well worth taking when you reflect how much better it is to be bald than to wear a curly wig. Somerset Maugham

But clarity and brevity, though a good beginning, are only a beginning. By themselves, they may remain bare and bleak. When Calvin Coolidge, asked by his wife what the preacher had preached on, replied "Sin," and, asked what the preacher had said, replied "He was against it," he was brief enough. But one hardly envies Mrs. Coolidge. F.L.Lucas.

There are two sorts of eloquence; the one indeed scarce deserves the name of it, which consists chiefly in labored and polished periods, an over-curious and artificial arrangement of figures, tinseled over with a gaudy embellishment of words,… The other sort of eloquence is quite the reverse to this, and which may be said to be the true characteristic of the holy Scriptures; where the eloquence does not arise from a labored and farfetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty… Laurence Sterne

In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language; the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it. G. B. Shaw

* 1. Elegance tool 1: Balance and Symmetry: (1) coordination to extend a sentence beyond a few words => rhytmic. (2) balance phrase against phrase, clause against clause, creating architectural symmetry.
  2. Principles to enhance rhythm and grace of coordination:

(1) a coordinate series will move more gracefully if each succeeding coordinate element is longer than that one before it. So if you coordinate within a coordination, do it in the last branch of the main coordination.

* 1. Correlative conjunctions to signify a balance coordination and give emphasis:

Both X and Y

Not only X but also Y

Neither X nor Y

* 1. The richest kind of balance and parallelism counterpoints both grammar and meaning.
  2. You can achieve the same effect when you balance parts of sentences that are not coordinated.=> for example (1) predicate and relative clause in a subject is balanced against the predicate of the whole sentence. (2) A direct object balanced against the object of proposition. (3) introductory subordinate clause balanced against the main clause.(4) Object of the subordinate clause balance against the object of following propositional phrase. (5) object of main clause balanced against the object in two following propositional phrase.
  3. Like every other artful device, these balanced phrases and clauses can eventually become self-defeating--or at least monotonously arch. But if we use them unobtrusively when you want to emphasize an important point or conclude the line of an argument, you can give your prose a shape and cadence that most ordinary writing lacks.
  4. Emphasis and Rhythm: emphasis is about controlling way sentence ends.
  5. Different parts of speech carry different weights. Prepositions are very light-- one reason why we sometimes avoid leaving a preposition at the end. Sentences should move toward strength; a preposition can dilute that strength. Adjective and adverbs are heavier than propositions, but lighter than verbs and nouns. The heaviest, the most emphatic words are nominalizations.
  6. We should eliminate nominalization at the beginning of sentences, where we want to get off to a brisk start. However, when we end a sentence with a nominalization, we create a different effect. We bring the sentence to an end with a climactic thump.
  7. Elegant complexity shows itself in the writing that combines nominalization with balanced and parallel construction, when the writer draws on resumptive and summative modifier to extend the line of sentence.
  8. Length and Rhythm: In artful prose, length is more deliberately controlled.
  9. Some accomplished stylists can write one short sentence after another, perhaps to strike a note of urgency. or terse certainty, or fire.
  10. Equally accomplished writers write one long sentence after another to suggest a mind exploring an idea in the act of writing the sentence.
  11. Metaphor: Clarity, vigor, symmetry, rhythm-- prose so graced would more than satisfy most of use. And yet, it is offered no virtue other thane these, such prose would excite an admiration only for our craft, not for the reach of our imagination. Figure of speech embedded in a comparison.
  12. More elegant passage illuminates music--and pleasure
  13. Aristotle wrote about metaphor:

By far the greatest thing is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others. It is a sign of genius, for a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of similarity among dissimilar.

* 1. Metaphore invites us to look at two things in a same way. Similes do the same, but less intensely, the like or as moderating the force of the comparison. e.g. prison, turnkeys, and torture, fish and fruit => they create fresh imagination
  2. Elegant writer uses his comparisons not to emphasize but entirely to explain;
  3. Less misleading, but more embarrassing, are those passages that confuse emphasis with extravagance.
  4. Metaphors also invite trouble if we aren't sensitive to the way their literal meanings can unexpectedly intrude.
  5. **Usage:**

God does not much mind bad grammar, but He does not take any particular pleasure in it. Erasmus

It is not the business of grammar, as some critics seem preposterously to imagine, to give law to the fashions which regulate our speech. On the contrary, from its conformity to these, and from that alone, it derives all its authority and value. George Campbell

No grammatical rules have sufficient authority to control the firm and established usage of language. Established custom, in speaking and writing, is the standard to which we must at last resort for determining every controverted point in language and style. Hugh Blair

English usage is sometimes more than mere taste, judgment, and education-sometimes it's sheer luck, like getting across the street. E. B. White

* 1. Style, Grammar, and choice:

Rules:

Don't begin a sentence with and or but.

Don't end a sentence with a proposition.

Don't split infinitives.

Don't use double negatives.

* 1. The English language is being treated nowadays exactly as slave traders once handled the merchandise in their slave ships, or as the inmates of concentration camps were dealt with by their Nazi jailers. John Simon, a Pop-Grammarian.
  2. Three kinds of Rules:

(1) Some rules characterize the basic structure of English--articles precede nouns, verbs regularly precede objects, questions begin with a verb or who, when, why, etc. No native speaker of English has to think about these rules at all.

(2) Some rules distinguish standard from nonstandard speech: you was vs. you were, He don't earn no money vs. he doesn't earn any money. The only writer and speaker who worry about these rules are those upwardly mobile types who are striving to join the educated class of writers and speakers. Those who already count themselves as educated think about these rules only when they see or hear them violated.

(3) Finally, some grammarians try to impose on those who already write educated standard English particular items of usage that they think those educated writers should observe-- don't split infinitive; use that, not which for restrictive clause; use fewer, not less for countable nouns; don't use hopefully to mean I hope. These are matters that few speakers and writers of non-standard English worry about. They are, however, items about which educated writers disagree. Indeed, the very fact that grammarians have for centuries been able to cite violations of these rules in the writing of the educated is proof enough that for centuries many educated speakers and writers have ignored both the grammarians and their rules. Which has been fortunate for the grammarians, of course, because if those educated speakers had all obeyed all the rules, the grammarians would have to had to invent new ones.

* 1. Heart of problem: there are different kinds of rules:

(1) Some rules account for the fundamental structure of English: I saw a horse yesterday vs. Horse yesterday a saw I.

(2) Some rules distinguish the dialects of the educated and the uneducated: knowed vs. knew, he don't have no idea vs. he doesn't have any idea.

(3) And some rules belong to that category of rules observed by some well-educated people, and ignored by other equally well-educated: split infinitive, which for that, etc.

* 1. We could adopt the worse-case policy: follow all the rules all the time because somewhere, sometime, someone might criticize us for something--beginning a sentence with and or ending it with up. And so, with a stack of grammar books and usage manual close by, we scrutinize every sentence for all possible errors, until we have learned the rules so well that we obey them without thought.
  2. The first type of rule: the most important category of rules includes those whose violation would generally brand one as a writer of nonstandard English:

(1) Double negative: The engine had hardly no systematic care.

(2) Nonstandard verb forms: They knowed that nothing would happen.

(3) Double comparative: This way is more quicker.

(4) Some objectives for adverbs: They did the work real good.

(5) Pleonastic subjects: These ideas they need explanation.

(6) Some incorrect pronouns: Him and me will study the problem.

(7) Some subject-verb disagreement. They was ready to begin.