Exercise—Previously On (Week 4)

Take out your notebook and write down what you remember about the concepts covered in earlier sessions.

- Interleaving
- Notes on Nuance: "To"

What I remember from earlier sessions is that writing well depends on deliberate, intentional choices. That includes both how we write and why we write. One concept that stuck with me is interleaving. It's the practice of mixing different types of exercises or skills instead of drilling just one thing over and over. In this course, that shows up when we shift between sentence clarity, rhythm, editing for flow, punctuation, and structure, all within the same week. It makes the work harder but still helps the skills stick.

I also remember the nuance around the word "to." We looked at how the word isn't just grammatical, it can by stylistic. Used well, it adds momentum and cohesion. It creates rhythm. Phrases like "to learn is to grow" or "to write is to think" aren't just poetic, they're persuasive. That small word carries weight when it's framed intentionally. I'm starting to notice it more now, especially when people are trying to sound reflective or profound.

Exercise—Strive for Five

This exercise can be found in the "Practice Section" of Chapter 5 in *Good With Words*. If you are using the print version, the relevant pages are 115-116.

Background

The sense of sight is not the only sense good writing evokes. There are four others that can be just as powerful: sound, smell, touch, and taste. Sadly, however, these senses are often neglected. We frequently just stick to what we can see, forgetting that there are many other ways of experiencing the world. This assignment is designed to help you overcome that sensory amnesia.

Part I

Find a story you wrote in the past three years. The story can be the fact section of a brief or memo. The story can be the personal statement you used to get into law school or to apply for a fellowship. The story can be pretty much anything you want. It can be personal, political, scary, uplifting—whatever. It doesn't have to be long. It doesn't have to be polished. It just has to contain some bits of narrative description.

Once you find your story, read it over with five different-colored pens or highlighters nearby, one for each sense. Use them to indicate the answers to these questions:

- Where have I triggered the reader's sense of sight?
- Where have I triggered the reader's sense of sound?
- Where have I triggered the reader's sense of smell?
- Where have I triggered the reader's sense of touch?
- Where have I triggered the reader's sense of taste?

A good story will be covered in many colors by the end of this exercise. A terrible story will likely be covered in only one. Try not to be someone who tells terrible stories.

Part II

Once you have labeled all the triggered senses in your story, take stock of which ones are underrepresented. Some may be missing entirely. Address this deficiency by revising your story.

This may mean adding a few words, a few sentences, even a few paragraphs. As a result, the structure of your story may shift out of shape. That's okay. You don't have to hand the new version of your story in to anyone. You don't have to worry, at least for this exercise, about making everything cohere. You are simply taking some time to practice how to capture and create a more compelling range of details. Seeing is believing—but seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, *and* touching is far more effective.

As a final bit of inspiration, here is another helpful reminder from Mary Karr's *The Art of Memoir*: "In writing a scene, you must help the reader employ smell and taste and touch as well as image and noise."

Optional Additional Reading

- Chapters 18-19 of *The Syntax of Sports: Class 2*

Part I

Original Story (Sight-Dominant, Flat Sensory Range)

At 10:47 AM, the responding technician entered the server room located on the third floor of the East Wing. The overhead lights were on, and the main access panel had been left ajar. A backup drive was plugged into Port B, blinking green, but the primary drive enclosure showed no signs of activity. The technician took three photos, logged the hardware state, and secured the door. Surveillance footage from 10:33 to 10:44 appears to have been deleted or corrupted. No personal logged keycard entry during the time window in question.

Part II

Revised Story (Full Sensory Detail with Professional Tone)

At 10:47 AM, the responding technician entered the server room on the third floor of the East Wing. The ambient temperature was unusually cool, consistent with HVAN overcompensation. The air carried a faint, acrid odor, consistent with overheated plastic, likely originating from inactive hardware. The overhead lighting was functional. The main access panel was open, the interior surface was warm, indicating recent contact or usage. The backup drive connected to Port B was active (green LED blinking). The primary drive enclosure was powered off, no fan noise, vibration, or visible indicator lights.

While conducting a physical inspection, the technician experienced mild static discharge when contacting the lower frame, documented as a potential risk for future ESD-related incidents. No audible alerts or system warnings were detected. Surveillance footage between 10:33 and 10:44 was missing; the system returned a "corrupted segment" error upon access. Keycard logs for the timeframe show not recorded entries.

Photos were taken. Environment secured, Escalation to Digital Forensics approved.

Exercise—"The Pleasures of Hating"

This exercise can be found in the "Practice Section" of Chapter 5 in *Good With Words*. If you are using the print version, the relevant pages are 117-118.

Background

The Belgian-American writer Laure-Anne Bosselaar has a charming poem called “The Pleasures of Hating.” It appears in her 2001 book *The Sounds of Grief*. Here is a sample of things she hates:

- "men in black knee socks"
- "stickers on tomatoes"
- "roadblocks"
- "bra-clasps that draw dents in your back"

Assignment

Make a list that reflects your own "Pleasures of Hating." Try to match Bosselaar's precision and range.

"The Pleasures of Hating"

Persistent Points of Friction

- quizzes that penalize lowercase
- labs with broken links and no updates
- locked modules in self-paced courses
- screenshots with no upload instructions
- feedback that just says “good job”
- required posts no one reads or grades
- labs that censor the instructor’s prompts
- VMs that crash and wipe your progress
- lectures that reference tools not shown
- recycled videos in new packaging

- Trailhead links buried after the deadline
- scorers that ignore 90% completed work

Exercise—Word Choice, Word Confusion

[T]he difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.

—Mark Twain, quoted in The Art of Authorship (1890)*

Below is a list of some commonly confused words. The links will take you to resources that explain the difference between them. Spend as much time as you'd like with those resources. Then test your understanding by taking the quiz from the Chicago Manual of Style that follows.

Accept vs. Except

Affect vs. Effect

Altogether vs. All Together

Avenge vs. Revenge

Quiz

Chicago Manual of Style: Word Usage Part 1

*For more on the origins of the lighting-bug/lightning quip—Twain borrows it from his friend Josh Billings—check out the wonderfully useful resource The Quote Investigator.

This week's focus on commonly confused words sharpened my attention to subtle, but meaningful, differences in usage. The Twain quote about the "lightning-bug and the lightning" stood out, especially after taking the Chicago Manual of Style quiz.

I scored 80% on the quiz and learned that some of my own assumptions (such as starting a sentence with *and* being incorrect) were outdated. The distinction between *amount* and *number* was also more rigid than I expected.

This exercise reminded me how precision in word choice isn't just a grammatical preference, it's a clarity issue. Misusing "effect" vs. "affect" in a security report or legal memo could alter interpretation. I'll be more mindful of these pairs going forward, particularly in professional writing for compliance or technical documentation.

Exercise—Which vs. That

Figuring out when to use "which" and when to use "that" trips up a lot of writers and divides a lot of editors. As with many aspects of language, views on the right choice differ and evolve. Yet it is nevertheless useful to get a sense of some general guidelines, even if you ultimately deviate from them. The resources below can help. Check out at least one of them and then take the short quiz from the MLA Style Center to test your understanding.

Chicago Manual of Style: Which vs. That

Writing Explained: Which vs. That

Quiz

MLA Style Center

During Week 4 of the *Writing and Editing: Word Choice and Word Order* course, I took a short quiz from the MLA Style Center focused on the commonly confused words "which" and "that." I scored one out of three, which made it clear that I needed to review the rules surrounding restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses.

Generally, "that" is used to introduce restrictive clauses, which contain information essential to the meaning of a sentence and are not set off by commas. On the other hand, "which" introduces nonrestrictive clauses, which add extra, nonessential information and are typically set off with commas.

For example, in the sentence "The report that was submitted late will not be graded," the clause is essential and should use "that."

In contrast, "The report, which was submitted late, contained a formatting error" uses a nonrestrictive clause, meaning the lateness is not critical to identifying the report. After reviewing guidance from the Chicago Manual of Style and Writing Explained, I now have a clearer understanding of how to apply "which" and "that" accurately. I intend to use this knowledge to improve clarity and precision in my future writing, especially in technical and professional documents.

Exercise—Me, Myself, and I

"**You speak better than me."**

"Better than I do."

"Right."

–**Jonathan Safran Foer, Here I Am (2016)**

Navigating the difference between "me," "myself," and "I" can be tricky, especially when other subjects are included in the sentence or phrase. Was Janis Joplin right to title her song Me and Bobby McGee? Was Ta-Nehisi Coates right to title his memoir Between the World and Me? And what about the musical The King and I?

Use the resources below to clear up whatever confusion you might have about which word is appropriate in which situation.

I or Me (Grammarly, 2023)

Me vs. Myself (Writing Explained, 2020)

Then test your understanding with at least one of these quizzes.

I or Me? (University of Bristol, 2015)

Me, Myself, and I (Fun Trivia, 2020)

Note: The hip-hop trio De La Soul came out with a song called "Me, Myself, and I" that became a hit both in the United States and in Holland in 1989. Here's the music video in case you want to check it out.

The difference between "I," "me," and "myself" often confuses even strong writers, especially when multiple subjects or objects appear in a sentence. This exercise required reviewing those distinctions and then testing our grasp through formal quizzes.

For example, “I” is the subject of a sentence ("My dog and I went to the vet"), while “me” is the object ("The vet gave my dog and me a treat"). “Myself” is reflexive or used for emphasis, as in "I gave myself time to review." Misusing "myself" to sound formal or replacing "me" with "I" in compound objects are common mistakes this lesson helped clarify. After completing the review, I scored 90% on the "I or Me?" quiz from the University of Bristol and used the Fun Trivia quiz for additional practice.

(Optional) Exercise—What Happens If You Win?

To just invent something and have a great idea is a lot of work, but it is not enough. You have to get it out in the world.

—Google cofounder Larry Page, quoted by David Vise and Mark Malseed in The Google Story (2005)

Background

Ted Olson is one of the premier appellate advocates in the United States. A former Solicitor General, he has argued over 60 cases in the Supreme Court and won more than 75% of them, including *Bush v. Gore*, *Citizens United*, and the one that opened up the opportunity for all 50 states to legalize sports gambling, *Murphy v. NCAA*. He was also given the American Bar Association's highest honor, the ABA Medal, for his work on *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, which is the 2013 case that helped put the Supreme Court on the path to safeguarding same-sex marriage.

In a 2018 article for the journal *Litigation*, Olson offered a series of advocacy tips based on his experience in these and other cases. One tip was triggered by a question his teenage son asked him before a big case: "Dad, what does it mean if you win?"

Olson insists that being able to answer this question is crucial. If you can't muster a response, he says, "you have probably not given your case the intense analysis required to make a cogent, persuasive argument."

Assignment

Olson was talking about spoken advocacy. But his advice can be extended to written advocacy as well. In particular, try to apply it to a document you'll soon be putting together. The document doesn't have to be a legal brief to a bunch of judges. It can be a pitch to investors, a proposal to some board members, or even just an idea you want to test on your friends, family, or significant other.

The point is to practice being as concrete as you can about the benefits you are offering. By the time people get to the end of your document, it should be very clear to them why World A, in which we follow your advice, is better than World B, in which we don't.

(1) Start by doing something Olson himself does: imagine what the lead sentence will be in the next day's newspaper, after the decision you propose is made. What important thing will have changed? Who will be helped? Where will the greatest gain be felt? What cost or danger will be avoided?

"Journalists have to compress the gist of a decision into the lead sentence or two," Olson explains. "Imagining what those words will be—or what you wish they will be—will help focus your thoughts."

If you need more than one or two sentences, that's okay. Take a whole paragraph at this point. For our purposes, four sentences brimming with compelling details are better than one sentence puffed up by nothing more than vague generalities. The answer to "What happens if you win?" should be vivid and affecting. Embracing this week's concept—the power of the particular—should help.

(2) Once you have your lead sentence(s), try to craft the article's headline. Be direct. Be pithy. Be the kind of person whose words get people to start nodding their head in agreement.

Verbs can help, so don't neglect them. Your headline shouldn't simply state what the proposal is *about*; it should communicate what it *does*. Actions, when properly communicated, can be quite compelling.

(3) [Optional] Record yourself reading the headline, the lead sentences, and any other context you want to give out loud. Shoot for a 30-60 second teaser, like you're previewing the news. You might not get more than that as your opening in the Supreme Court or an engaged board room.

Here are some templates to show you that there are many other contexts in which it might be helpful to ask, essentially, "What happens if you win?"

CEO to Board

- Approving this merger will _____

Nurse to Patient

- Following this treatment plan will _____

Employee to Boss

- Giving me this opportunity will _____

Boss to Employee

- Taking on this project will _____

Graduate Student to Dissertation Committee

- Greenlighting this research will _____

Hiring Committee to Job Candidate

- Joining our organization will _____

Editor to Author

- Making these changes will _____

Perspective Candidate to Hiring Manager

Hiring me fills a critical entry-level gap in your cybersecurity or compliance team, with immediate impact. I bring a rare combination of legal insight and technical training across GRC, digital forensics, cyber law, and frameworks like NIST. With over 30 industry-aligned courses completed, I'm fully prepared to contribute to internal audits, documentation workflows, threat-response planning, and compliance initiatives from day one. I'm equipped to start strong and grow even stronger with the right team.

I'm equipped with a growing foundation in early-stage risk identification and documentation practices that help prevent costly liabilities later. My background enables me to bridge communication gaps between technical teams, legal departments, and leadership. Bringing me onboard strengthens your frontline capabilities before the next audit, breach, or regulatory overhaul hits. From day one, I'll focus on adding value where it's needed the most, and growing with the role every step of the way.

Headline: Hiring This Candidate Adds Steady Support Before the Next Regulatory Push

Exercise—Good Sentences (Food)

"There is no love sincerer than the love of food."

—George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman* (1903)

Same drill as in the previous weeks. Select something to read from the options below and then write out your favorite sentence.

Option #1

Choose something from the Food section of the Good Sentences* library. Here are a few to consider.

- Consider the Lobster by David Foster Wallace (*Gourmet*, 2004)
- Learning to Honor Bread and Salt by M.F.K. Fisher (*Lapham's Quarterly* ,1949)
- Leveling the Field for Family Farms by Jodi Cash (*The Bitter Southerner*, 2017)
- My Restaurant Was My Life for 20 Years. Does the World Need It Anymore? by Gabrielle Hamilton (*NYTimes*, 2020)

*The Good Sentences library was originally created for University of Michigan students, so there may be some pieces that you can't access unless you are a student enrolled in a program there. But click around. There is plenty of stuff that is available to everybody.

Option #2

Choose something from the January 2020 issue of the Good Sentences monthly email.

Option #3

Choose something from this list of book excerpts.

- Kitchen Confidential by Anthony Bourdain (2000)
- 32 Yolks by Eric Ripert (2016)
- The Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan (2006)
- We Fed an Island by José Andrés (2018)

"*Your body is not a temple, it's an amusement park. Enjoy the ride."*

Why it stands out:

The line is so raw and unfiltered, it just hits, Instead of calling the body something precious or delicate, Bourdain makes it loud, messy, and real, like life actually is. "Amusement park" makes you feel it. I can picture the lights, the chaos, the freedom. That one sentence tells you exactly how he sees food, risk, and living without needing a whole paragraph to explain it.

Exercise—Thank You Letter

Step 1: Think of somebody in your life worth thanking.

Step 2: If you want to go the professional route, think of someone you might want to use your Thank You Letter to reconnect with. If you want to go the personal route, here are other possibilities:

- a former teacher
- a former boss or co-worker
- a friend
- a family member
- someone who has put up with you while you have been enrolled in this course

Step 3: Draft a Thank You Letter to that person.

Step 4: Make it good.

Step 5: Consider delivering it to the person in the coming weeks and months. Even better, consider reading it aloud to them. As the excerpt below suggests, the mental boost from taking this step could last a helpfully long time.

Several small but intriguing studies offer glimpses of what gratitude can do for us . . . . [P]sychologist Martin E. P. Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania tested the effect of different positive psychology interventions among 411 volunteers. The biggest boost in happiness scores came when participants were asked to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to a person they had never properly thanked for their kindness. The surge in happiness was larger than that from any other intervention, with benefits lasting a month. (In Praise of Gratitude , Harvard Health)

Some of this course is designed to help you write better sentences to your boss or teacher. Some of it is designed to help you write better sentences to co-workers and peers. But **ALL** of it is designed to help you write better sentences to people you care the most about.

You now have a lot more writing tools at your disposal than you did when you began Week 1. Put them to good use.

Dear Former Boss,

I've been reflecting lately on the experiences and people that have genuinely shaped my professional growth, and you came to mind immediately.

Thank you for the opportunities you gave me, especially the ones that pushed me. You had a way of trusting me with real responsibility while also making sure I never felt like I had to figure it all out alone. That balance isn't easy, but you struck it well, and I learned a lot because of it.

I still carry lessons from our time working together: the value of clear communication, how to handle pressure without panic, and how leadership often shows up in the quiet, steady ways, not just in titles or meetings. I don’t think I said it enough at the time, but your mentorship made a real difference.

I hope you’re doing well, and I’d love to reconnect when the timing is right. In the meantime, please accept this note as long-overdue appreciation for the guidance, patience, and support you offered.

With gratitude,
Natascha Martin

Course Discussion

You can use the Gamut Workbook to keep a copy of your discussion posts or posts that you really enjoyed.

This course surprised me. I didn't expect such a deep dive into the mechanics behind strong, memorable sentences, or how much precision really matters. I used to think good writing came from instinct. Now I know it comes from making deliberate choices: picking the right word, trimming the fat, and letting the specifics do the work.

What stuck with me the most was how often vague writing weakens strong ideas. Learning how to swap out generalities for sharper language has changed the way I write everything, from emails to final reflections. The "power of the particular" isn't just a writing strategy. It's a mindset.

I still have a lot to learn, but this course gave me a toolkit I'll keep using. Clearer writing, better thinking, that's the takeaway.