

# The Elements of Style (Summary)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This is an offline given in our CSE 300 course titled ‘Technical Writing and Presentation’. We have been assigned the task of reading the book called The Elements of Style written by William Strunk JR. and E.B. White and write a summary of the whole book in about 1500 to 2500 words. The words with less than three characters as well as articles are not counted.

We have to use all the latex commands taught in the class at least once. We are instructed to write each of the rules in our own words and not to copy from the book. With each rule at least one example must be supplied and if there’s any exception, we need to cover at least one exception with example. We have to come up with the examples on our own and we must not use the examples used in the book. We are instructed to use some introductory texts at the beginning of each of the chapters/sections.

The book which I am going to summarize i.e The Element of Style is a well known book which is used by a lot of professionals throughout the world. It is well reviewed by a lot of people in sites like [Amazon](#), [Goodreads](#), [Barns & Noble](#) etc. The book gives practical advice on improving writing skills. It gives emphasis on promoting a plain English Style. The book is regarded as a classic among the professionals.

## Chapter 2

# Elementary Rules of Usage

LET HERE BE INTRODUCTIONS ar vantage na

### 2.1 Rule 1

We need to **use 's to form possessive singular of nouns**. We should follow this rule without taking into account the final consonant.

**Example:**

Nafis's Samsung Galaxy S7

Numan's iPhone7

#### 2.1.1 Exception

There're some exceptions to this rule. The exceptions are mostly related to the possessives of ancient proper names ending in *-es* and *-is*, the possessive *Jesus'* and forms like *for conscience' sake*, *for righteousness' sake*.

The possessives like *hers*, *its*, *theirs*, *yours* and *ours* are not written with apostrophe.

### 2.2 Rule 2

If there're three or more terms with single conjunction, we need to **use a comma after each term except the last one**. This type of comma is known as the "serial" comma.

**Example:**

Football, cricket, and volleyball

Anime, manga, or novel

The movie started, reached its peak, and left us overwhelmed.

### 2.2.1 Exception

This comma (serial comma) is not used in the names of companies or business firms.

**Example:**

Yukihira, Souma & Nakiri

## 2.3 Rule 3

We should **enclose parenthetical expressions between commas**. It is applicable to dates too as they often contain parenthetical words or figures.

**Example:**

Going to walk in the morning, if you can, is good for your health.

March to December, 1971

### 2.3.1 Exception

There should be no comma separating a noun from a restrictive term of identification.

**Example:**

Jack the Ripper

## 2.4 Rule 4

We should use a **comma before a conjunction that introduces an independent clause**.

**Example:**

The golden age is gone now, and we have to wait a long time before getting another one.

### 2.4.1 Exception

Comma should be omitted if the relation between the two statements is close or immediate and are connected with *and* but should be use if connected with *but*.

**Example:**

I have done the compiler offline, but I still have homeworks to do.

He is healthy and has a lot of stamina.

## 2.5 Rule 5

We should not **join independent clauses with a comma**. If two or more clauses are complete without having any conjunction to join them, using semicolon is a good choice, using period is also good.

**Example:**

Oreki's plans are interesting; they're usually full of surprises.

*or*

Oreki's plans are interesting. They're usually full of surprises.

### 2.5.1 Exception

A comma is used instead of a semicolon if the tone of the sentence is conversational.

**Example:**

He disagreed, I was ready for that.

## 2.6 Rule 6

We must not **break sentences in two**, i.e we should not use periods in place of commas. **Example:**

While walking down the road. I saw a weak man. (*wrong*)

While walking down the road, I saw a weak man. (*correct*)

## 2.7 Rule 7

We should use a **colon** after an independent clause to introduce **a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation**. A colon is used to tell the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. It has more effect than the comma, less power to separate than the semicolon, and more formality than the dash. It is usually followed by an independent clause. The colon should not separate a verb from its complement or a preposition from its object.

We can join two independent clauses with a colon if the second one amplifies the first one.

We can use colon to introduce quotation supporting the topic of the sentence.

**Example:**

The recipe requires: a tomato, a full chicken, spice and mint.

They reached the hotel: it was still open late at night.

At the end of the day happiness lies in simple things like Steve Jobs said:

"Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night saying we've done something wonderful, that's what matters to me."

## 2.8 Rule 8

We should use a **dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary**. This is because a dash is stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon and more relaxed than parentheses.

**Example:**

It's okay—even though studying engineering is hard—it'll worth the pain someday.

## 2.9 Rule 9

There must be **equal** number of **subjects** *and* **verbs**.

A plural verb should be used even in a relative clause following “one of...”.

**Example:**

Robin, Tarek and their friends were playing cards.

A singular verb is used after *each, either, everyone, everybody, neither, nobody, someone*.

**Example:**

Everybody lies the only variable is about what.

While using the word *none*, singular verb is only used if the word means “no one ” or “not one” and a plural verb is used when it suggests more than one thing or person.

**Example:**

none have the courage to do such a shameful deed.

None are allowed to go there at this late night.

A compound subject formed by two or more nouns joined by *and* requires a plural verb.

**Example:**

The technician and the engineer were coming soon.

A singular subject doesn't become plural if other nouns are connected with it using *with, as, as well as, in addition to, except, together with* and *no less than*.

**Example:**

He as well as his brother was a gentleman.

### 2.9.1 Exception

Some nouns may appear plural but are usually used as singular and given a singular verb. This case is usually occur with idioms.

**Example:**

Powerful economics is needed to make a powerful country.

## 2.10 Rule 10

We must use **the proper case of pronoun**. The pronoun *who* and the personal pronouns change with the change of subject or object.

**Example:**

Who goes there?

He who is enlightened is sure to succeed.

A pronoun in a comparison is nominative if it is the subject of a stated or understood verb. We should avoid “understood” verbs by supplying them.



**Example:**

He plays better than I.      He plays better than I do.

## 2.11 Rule 11

When using a participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence, it must **refer to the grammatical subject**. Violating this rule may often make sentences ludicrous.

**Example:**

Approaching slowly to the crowded place, I found that an exhibition is going on.

## Chapter 3

# Elementary Principles of Composition

HERE SHOULD BE SOME TEXT

### 3.1 Choosing a Suitable Design

While writing, whether it's an essay, a formal writing, an article or a business purpose writing, a basic structural design is needed. But the writing should follow the writer's thoughts, but not necessarily in a certain order. So we need to determine the structure of our writing and stick with that structure.

While writing *scientific papers*, the scientist knows how his writing content is organized and where he would use those, thus they know where they're headed while writing.

### 3.2 Paragraph as the Unit Of Composition

Whenever there're several topics to cover on a particular subject, each of the topic should be dealt with in a paragraph. Single sentences shouldn't be in a paragraph. But there can be exceptions which may indicate the relation between different parts of a same topic. In general, paragraphing requires good eye and a logical mind.

Enormous blocks of writing pushed together may look odd to read to the readers and this may discourage them to read at all. By breaking, this paragraph into pieces may help the readers to better understand it.

### 3.3 Using Active Voice

To write more direct, bold and concise sentence using active voice is preferred over passive voice. Using passive voice can even make the sentence indefinite,

especially when ‘by...’ is omitted. Whether to use active voice or passive voice is often determined by the need to make a particular word the subject of a sentence.

**Example:**

I did it. (*Active*)

It was done (by me). (*Passive*)

### 3.4 Putting Statements in Positive Form

We should use definite assertions. Whenever there’re multiple ways to put a sentence, we should try to put it in a positive form and avoid using words like *not*. Also placing negative and positive in opposition can make stronger structure. To avoid unnecessary doubt, auxiliaries like *would*, *should*, *could*, *may*, *might*, and *can* should be used only when real uncertainty is involved.

**Example:**

His proposal was disapproved.

I don’t want pity or revenge but justice.

He never knew his affection for his country.

### 3.5 Using Definite, Specific, Concrete Language

While writing, it is better to be specific and to the point, rather than being general and vague about a topic. The readers are usually more attracted to this kind of writings. The writer must never be vague in exposition and in argument. We can see example from Herber Spencer’s *Philosophy of Style*: The vague sentence—

*In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of its penal code will be severe.*—can be turned into something particular in the following way—

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

### 3.6 Omitting Needless Words

A sentence must not contain unnecessary words. This can be explained using an analogy— just like a good snippet of *code* doesn’t need unnecessary commands, lines or operations— a good sentence mustn’t have words or lines that are not necessary.

**Example:**

Using ‘This’ instead of ‘This is what....’      Using ‘disapproved’ instead of ‘Not approved’

### 3.7 Avoiding a Succession of Loose Sentences

The loose sentences are sentences, consisting of two clauses, the second one being added by a conjunction. Loose sentences may be used to rectify the content of the topic and also to make the sentences easier, but using too many loose sentences may result in ambiguous empty writing, specially when the writer is not skilled enough.

**Example:**

He might consider paying the higher fees at a private university, if the teacher/student ratio is small, the teachers are highly qualified, and the job placement rate is high. *A Loose Sentence*

He might consider paying the higher fees as a private university if the teacher/student ratio is small. Also the teachers should be highly qualified too and the job placement rate need to be high. *Not A Loose Sentence*

### 3.8 Expressing Coordinate Ideas in Similar Form

The similar content and function of a particular topic should be outwardly similar. To do this the writer should group similar words and left out the dissimilar ones.

**Example:**

I saw a man on a hill with a telescope. (Not Coordinated)      I saw a man on a hill with my telescope. (Coordinated)

### 3.9 Keeping Summaries in One Tense

While summarizing something, a fixed tense should be kept throughout the whole summary. Shifting from one tense to another brings the appearance of uncertainty.

### 3.10 Placing Emphatic Words at the End of a Sentence

The proper place of the most important words the writer wants to convey is the end of the sentence. This rule equally applied to the paragraphs of a composition and articles. **Example:**

Although the drug is highly effective, it has significant side effects.

## Chapter 4

# A Few Matters of Form

### 4.1 Colloquialisms

If a colloquialism or a slang word or phrase is used, no quotation marks should be used.

### 4.2 Exclamations

Simple sentences should not be emphasized by using exclamation mark.

**Example:**

This is OK!      This is OK.

### 4.3 Headings

If a manuscript is prepared for publication, a lot of space should be left at the top page 1 for editorial purposes. Placing the heading or title at least a fourth of the way down the page, a blank line should be left or its equivalent space after the heading. There should be no period after the heading, an exclamation or question mark may be used if the heading suits that.

### 4.4 Hyphens

A hyphen is usually needed when two or more words are combined to form a compound adjective and it shouldn't be used in words that can be written in a single word.

**Example:**

Hyper-text      Hypertext.

## 4.5 Margins

Keeping righthand and lefthand margins equally wide is a good practice. However, only the lefthand margin should be used if the writings need lots of editing.

## 4.6 Numerals

Dates or other serial numbers should be written in figures or in Roman notations if they don't occur in dialogue.

**Example:**

September 19,1993              Chapter V Part III  
"Read verse twelve from chapter one", He said.

## 4.7 Parenthesis

The sentence inside the parenthesis is usually punctuated as if no parenthesis is present. It is usually used to describe something in more detail.

**Example:**

When I reached home (around 7 PM), she was waiting for me.

## 4.8 Quotations

Quotations cited as evidence are usually introduced by a colon and enclosed quotation marks.

**Example:**

Here's what Arthur Conan Doyle said about it:"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact."

When a quotation is followed by an attribute phrase, the comma is enclosed within the quotation marks.

**Example:**

"I wasn't there," he said.

Quotations started with *that* are indirect and not used in quotation marks.

**Example:**

Leonard Cohen said that, poetry is just the evidence of life.

## 4.9 Reference

In general, references should be given in parenthesis or in footnotes, not in the body.

## 4.10 Syllabication

If a word is needed to be divided into pieces, we should use a dictionary to learn the syllables between which division should be made.

## 4.11 Titles

There're few rules about how the title should look like. The literary works's title should be italic with capitalized initials.

**Example:**

*The Game of Thrones*

## Chapter 5

# Commonly Misused Words and Expressions

SOME TEXT

**All right** Used in the sense of “Agreed”

**Example:**

There was none of that sure, all right look of the Americans about her.

**Allude** It’s often being confused with *elude*. Allude means to *refer*.

**Example:**

They know not the thing you distantly allude to.

**Allusion** It’s confused with *Illusion* which means imaginary things, whereas allusion means to refer indirectly.

**Example:**

The penchant for classical allusion in Irish lyrics is not exclusive to this type of music.

**Among. Between** When more than two things are compared *among* is used. *Between* is used to compare two things.

**Example:**

And there’s a mighty difference between a living thump and a dead thump.

The bees were buzzing among the flowers.

**Anybody** It refers to “any person” and must be written in one word.

**Example:**

Has anybody ever told you that you’re beautiful?

**As to whether** Shouldn’t be used, instead just whether is enough.

**Example:**

Whether or not you take my deal, I’ll help her.



**As yet** Using *yet* is almost always sufficient.

**Example:**

And yet, he came home after work every night.

**Can** It means someone “am(is,are) able” and must not be used instead of just *may*

**Example:**

I can take care of myself.

**Care less** It is misused with the phrase “couldn’t care less”. If the *n’t* is disappeared, the meaning gets destroyed.

**Example:**

He had enough of those dirty lies, he couldn’t care less anymore.

**Certainly** If this word is used indiscriminately to intensify the statements, it can produce bad speech and if used in writing it’d be even worse.

**Example:**

Now we are certainly on the fuzzy edges, a place where words, often fuzzy in their meanings, begin to fail us.

**Clever** It’s a negative word and is often misused instead of “intelligent”.

**Example:**

”You were pretty clever for a couple of kids,” Dean said.

**Literal. Literally** These words are often used incorrectly.

**Example:**

Guilt literally drowned him. (*Wrong*)

Guilt drowned him. (*Correct*)

“Literally” is literally one of the most misused words.