

Writing with *Clarity, Grace, and Purpose*

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Examples in this talk are from

1. Williams, Joseph, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*
2. Strunk, William Jr., and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*.
3. Pinker, Steven, *The Sense of Style*

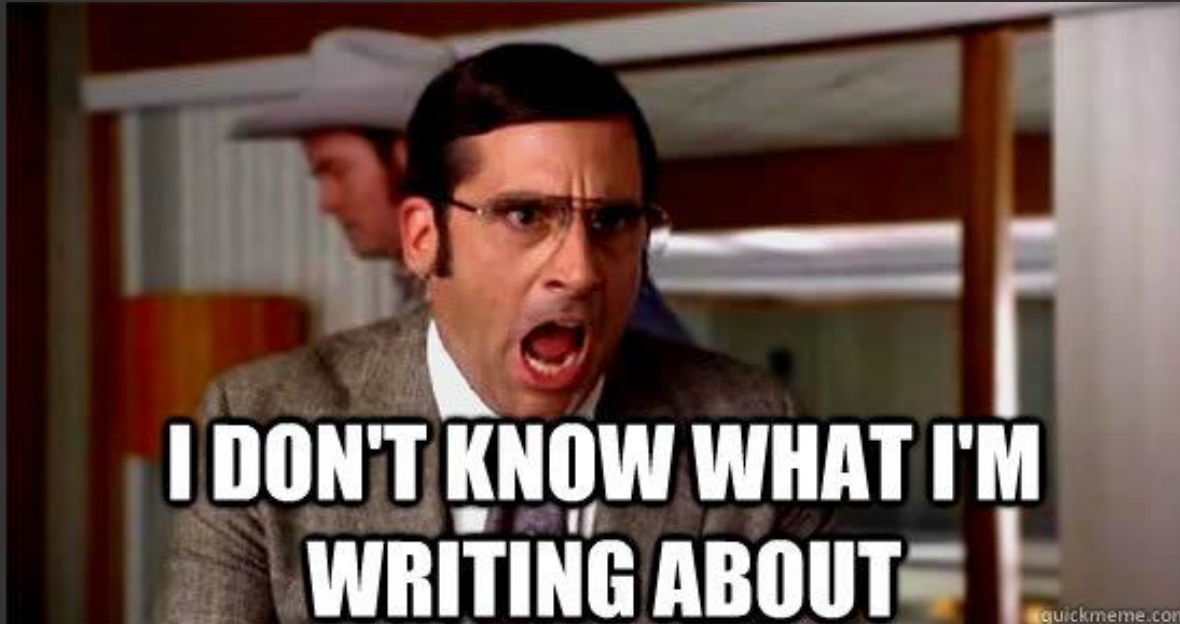
**"THERE IS NOTHING
TO WRITING.
ALL YOU DO
IS SIT DOWN
AT A TYPEWRITER
AND BLEED."**

—HEMINGWAY

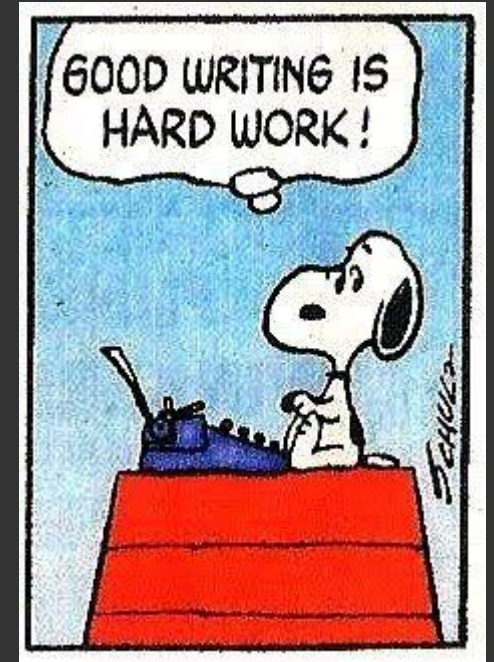


DISCLAIMER: Not Everyone is Hemingway

Most of Us are THIS GUY



OR THIS GUY



Understanding what's wrong

- *“The biggest reason we write unclearly is our ignorance of how others read our writing. What we write always seems clearer to us than it does to our readers, because we can read into it what we want our readers to get out of it. And so instead of revising our writing to meet their needs, we send it off as soon as it meets ours.”*

Where Do We Begin?

1. Correctness
2. Actions and Characters
3. Cohesion and Coherence
4. Emphasis
5. Concision

Correctness

1. Basic rules of grammar
2. Unwritten conventions, traditions of standard English
3. Rules of Thumb

Agreement of the Verb With the Subject.

- Subjects and verbs must AGREE with one another in number (singular or plural).
- Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

Correctness

Agreement of the Verb With the Subject.

- Subjects and verbs must AGREE with one another in number

The **dog** **chases** the cat.

↑ ↑
singular singular
-s +s

The **dogs** **chase** the cat.

↑ ↑
plural plural
+s -s

Some of the sugar **is** on the floor.

↑ ↑
singular singular

Some of the marbles **are** on the floor.

↑ ↑
plural plural

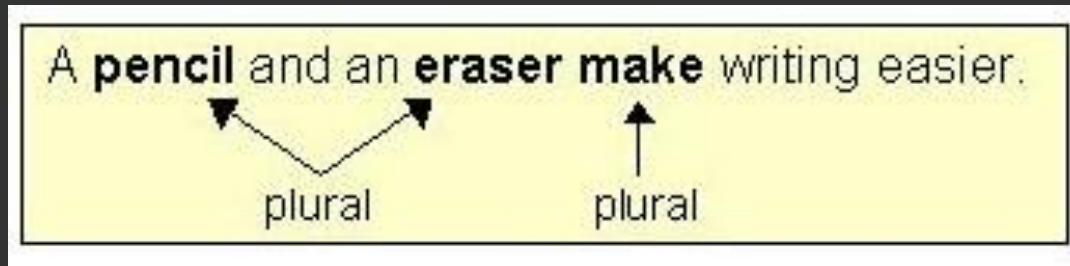
The **jury** **has** awarded custody to the grandmother.

↑ ↙
singular singular

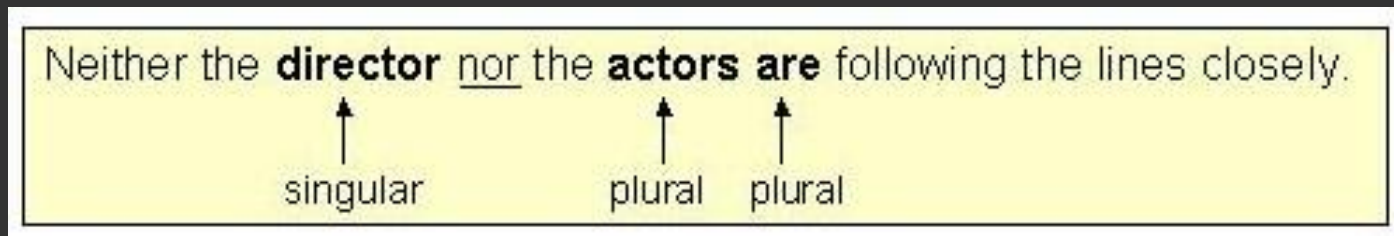
Correctness

Agreement of the Verb With the Subject.

- Compound subjects joined by and are always plural.



- With compound subjects joined by or/nor, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.



Correctness

Agreement of the Verb With the Subject.

Hannah is **one of those people who** *like* to read comic books.

↑
plural verb

- The above example implies that others besides Hannah like to read comic books. Therefore, the plural verb is the correct form to use.

Hannah is **the only one of those people who** *likes* to read comic books.

↑
singular verb

- The above example implies that no one else except for Hannah likes to read comic books. Therefore, the singular verb ...

Correctness

Agreement of the Verb With the Subject.

The number of volunteers *grows* each year.

↑
singular verb

A number of people *grow* tomatoes each summer.

↑
plural verb

Many a child *dreams* about becoming famous one day.

↑
singular verb

Correctness

Conventions and Traditions

- Don't begin sentences with AND or BUT.
- Use FEWER with nouns you can count, LESS with nouns you cannot count

I remember FEWER than five occasions when my wife punched me in the face. Honestly my wife's punch hurts LESS than my ex-wife's.

- Use SINCE and WHILE to refer to time, not to mean BECAUSE or ALTHOUGH

Since asbestos causes lung disease, I avoid it.

While we agreed on the date, we disagreed about the place.

- Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

Actions and Characters

Every sentence is a story. Match the important actions in your sentences to verbs, and make the characters in your story the subjects.

ACTIONS → VERBS

CHARACTERS → SUBJECTS

Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind the tree occurred, causing her fright.

Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened her.

Actions and Characters

Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind the tree occurred, causing her fright.

SUBJECT	VERB
A walk through the woods	Was taking place
The Wolf's jump out from behind the tree	occured

Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened her

SUBJECT / CHARACTER	VERB / ACTION
Little Red Riding Hood	Was walking
The Wolf	Jumped

Actions and Characters

The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of the government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good

SUBJECT	VERB
The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of the government by popular democracy	Was based

The Federalists argued that popular democracy destabilized government, because they believed that factions tended to further their self-interest at the expense on the common good.

SUBJECT / CHARACTER	VERB / ACTION
The Federalists	Argued
Popular democracy	Destabilized
They	Believed
Factions	Tended to further

Cohesion and Coherence

It is a common Fault in Writers, to allow their Readers too much Knowledge: They begin with that which should be the Middle, and skipping backwards and forwards, 'tis impossible for any one but he who is perfect in the Subject before, to understand their Work, and such an one has no Occasion to read it. Perhaps a Habit of using good Method, cannot be better acquired, than by learning a little Geometry or Algebra.

- Benjamin Franklin (the dude on the \$100 bill)

Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion : *A Sense of FLOW*

- We feel a sentence is COHESIVE with the one before it, if: The beginning of our sentence contains information that appeared at the end of the previous sentence
- Start sentences with information that readers are familiar with
- Once you mention your main characters, readers take them as FAMILIAR INFORMATION
- End sentences with NEW INFORMATION

Cohesion and Coherence

Costa Rica is one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

The southern part of Costa Rica is characterized by dense rain forests, which contain some of the world's most unusual wildlife.

Hoping to get a bird's eye view of these animals, tourists take zip lining tours through the top canopy of the rain forest.

Located in Central America, it borders Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south.

Some of the interesting creatures found in these forests include tree frogs, white-faced monkeys, and sloths.

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Cohesion and Coherence

Coherence : *A Sense of the WHOLE*

- Coherence in writing is the logical bridge between words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Coherent writing uses devices to connect ideas within each sentence and paragraph.
- Main ideas and meaning can be difficult for the reader to follow if the writing lacks coherence.
- Subjects of sentences should make up a SET OF RELATED TOPICS, i.e. the sentences should share a common *theme* or *idea*
- Taken together, the sentences must all point to the common *theme* or *idea*

Cohesion and Coherence

Coherence : *between words*

Sarah likes to jump, running, and skate.

Sarah likes jumping, running, and skating

Coherence : *between sentences*

- through repetition and transitional devices.

The most important part of an essay is the thesis statement.

The thesis statement introduces the argument of the essay.

The thesis statement also helps to create a structure for the essay.

Cohesion and Coherence

Coherence :

- sentences that all logically follow each other (not isolated thoughts)
- Transition words connect ideas from one sentence to the next.

Therefore, However, Yet, Thus, First, Later, Then

- structuring each paragraph according to one of the following patterns helps to organize sentences
 - general to particular
 - particular to general
 - whole to parts
 - question to answer
 - or effect to cause.

Cohesion and Coherence

Coherence :

It is commonly recognized that dogs have an extreme antagonism toward cats.

This enmity between these two species can be traced back to the time of the early Egyptian dynasties.

Archaeologists in recent years have discovered Egyptian texts in which there are detailed accounts of canines brutally mauling felines.

Today this type of cruelty between these two domestic pets can be witnessed in regions as close as your own neighborhood.

For example, when dogs are walked by their masters (and they happen to catch sight of a stray cat), they will pull with all their strength on their leash until the master is forced to yield; the typical result is that a feline is chased up a tree.

The hatred between dogs and cats has lasted for many centuries, so it is unlikely that this conflict will ever end.

Emphasis

Readers typically use the start and end of a sentence to manage:

1. Long and complex phrases
2. New information / Unfamiliar information/ Technical terms

When readers get familiar with the first few words, it becomes a lot easier to follow what comes next.

A sociometric analysis of Social Security revenues for the last six decades to determine changes in deficits is the subject of the study.

In this study, we analyze Social Security revenues for the last six decades to determine changes in deficits.

Emphasis

Devices to enhance emphasis:

1. Use active-passive voice to get old and new info in the right order
(OLD first, NEW last)
2. WHAT-SHIFT

We need a monetary policy that would end fluctuations in money supply

What we need is a monetary policy that would end fluctuations in money supply.

3. NOT-ONLY, BUT-ALSO

We must clarify these issues and develop trust

We must not only clarify these issues, but also develop trust.

Emphasis

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Concision

5 Principles

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing
2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words
3. Delete words implied by other words
4. Replace a long phrase with a word
5. Change negatives to affirmatives

Concision

5 Principles

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing

Productivity actually depends on certain factors that basically involve psychology way more than technology.

Productivity depends more on psychology than on technology”;

Concision

5 Principles

3. Delete words implied by other words

Terrible tragedy

Basic fundamentals

5. Change negatives to affirmatives

Not allow → Prevent

Not different → Similar ...

References and Further Reading

1. Williams, Joseph, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*
2. Strunk, William Jr., and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*.
3. Pinker, Steven, *The Sense of Style*

Fin

**Me whenever I try to
end my presentation**



