

William Strunk's  
*Elements of Style*  
for  
Students of History

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## PREFACE

*The Elements of Style*, often known simply as Strunk & White, was privately published in 1918 by William Strunk Jr. (1869–1946), a professor of English at Cornell University. In 1957, E. B. White (1899–1985), a former student of Strunk’s (and today probably best known as the author of the children’s books *Charlotte’s Web* and *Stuart Little*), praised Strunk’s “little book” in *The New Yorker* as a “forty-three-page summation of the case for cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English.”

Macmillan then commissioned White to create an updated edition of *The Elements of Style*, which it published in 1959. White prefixed an introductory essay adapted from his *New Yorker* essay and crafted a handbook that has, in successive editions, sold more than ten million copies.

Although Strunk & White remains under copyright, Strunk’s original 1918 edition is in the public domain. My purpose in updating and modifying Strunk was to address the needs of college students who were preparing to write article-length essays in history.

I appreciate improvements to earlier drafts of this manual suggested by Kellen Funk, Joanie Langham, Rachel Matzko, Lincoln Mullen, Don Walden, and Robert Vejnar.

John Matzko  
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## INTRODUCTION

The object of this work is to outline the principles of plain English style. The experience of the authors has been that once past the essentials, students profit most by individual criticism of their own work.

The best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric; but unless a student is certain of doing as well, he will probably do best to follow the rules. As the late Pulitzer-Prize winner Frank McCourt wrote, “If you’re E. E. Cummings or Joyce or someone like that, you can play around because you already know the rules....But you have to know the language first; otherwise, it’s just a lot of blather.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Garvey, *Stylized: A Slightly Obsessive History of Strunk & White’s The Elements of Style* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 42.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

### 1. With some exceptions, form the possessive singular of nouns with 's.

Follow the rule whatever the final consonant.

Charles's friend  
Burns's poems  
the witch's malice

Exceptions are the possessives of ancient proper names ending in *-es* and *-is*, the possessive *Jesus's*, and such forms as *for conscience's sake*, *for righteousness's sake*. But such forms as *Moses's laws*, *Isis's temple* are commonly replaced by

the laws of Moses  
the temple of Isis

Likewise, when possible, avoid making possessives of inanimate objects with 's; use *of* instead.

Weaker: The speaker used baseball illustrations to capture the audience's attention.  
Stronger: The speaker used baseball illustrations to capture the attention of his audience.

Furthermore, do not use an apostrophe to form plurals of abbreviations and numbers ("in the 1920's"), a practice now considered old-fashioned.

During the late 1960s, the North Vietnamese taunted American POWs with stories of anti-war protests back home.

### 2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.

Write

red, white, and blue  
honest, energetic, and headstrong  
He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.

### 3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.

In the United States, unlike Great Britain, land law was not just for the rich.

This rule is difficult to apply consistently because it is frequently hard to decide whether a brief phrase word or even a single word (such as *however*) is parenthetical. If the interruption to the flow of the sentence is slight, you may omit the commas. But never omit one comma and leave the other. For instance, the following punctuation is unacceptable:

Grant's subordinate, Major General Godfrey Weitzel commanded the occupation of Richmond.

Commas should be omitted in dates given as

12 February 1918  
or  
She was born in February 1918.

In traditional date style, a comma must be included between the day and the year.

She was born on February 12, 1918.

Non-restrictive relative clauses are set off by commas.

The audience, which had at first been indifferent, became more and more engaged.  
In 1769, when Napoleon was born, Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

In these sentences the clauses introduced by *which* and *when* are non-restrictive; they do not limit the application of the words on which they depend but add statements that supplement those in the principal clauses. Each sentence is a combination of two statements that might have been made independently.

The audience was at first indifferent. Later it became more and more engaged.

Restrictive relative clauses are *not* set off by commas.

A man who has no enemies is no good.

This sentence, unlike those above, cannot be split into two independent statements.

If a parenthetical expression is preceded by a conjunction, place the first comma before the conjunction, not after it.

Amasa saw Joab approach with sword in hand, but paying it no heed, Amasa greeted him with a kiss.

#### **4. Place a comma before *and* or *but* introducing an independent clause.**

The early records of the city have disappeared, and the story of its first years can no longer be reconstructed.

The Harpers Ferry raid was abortive, but it aroused a national controversy about slavery.

Sentences of this type may profit from rewriting. Because the first half of the sentence makes complete sense when the comma is reached, the second clause has the appearance of an afterthought. Further, *and* is the least specific connective. Used between independent clauses, the *and* indicates only that a relation exists between them without defining the relation. The two sentences might be better rewritten:

Because early records of the city have disappeared, its first years can no longer be accurately reconstructed.

Although the Harpers Ferry raid was abortive, the national debate over slavery intensified.

Or the subordinate clauses might be replaced by phrases:

Because early records of the city have disappeared, its first years can no longer be accurately reconstructed.

Because of the abortive raid on Harpers Ferry, the national debate over slavery intensified.

Two-part sentences of which the second member is introduced by *as* (in the sense of *because*), *for*, *or*, *nor*, and *while* (in the sense of *and at the same time*) likewise require a comma before the conjunction.

Burr fired straight at Hamilton, while Hamilton's shot went into the air.

If a dependent clause or an introductory phrase requiring to be set off by a comma precedes the second independent clause, no comma is needed after the conjunction.

The situation was perilous, but because the soldiers had been trained for such emergencies, they realized that there was still one chance for escape.

### **5. Do not join independent clauses by a comma.**

If two or more clauses, grammatically complete and not joined by a conjunction, are to form a single compound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semicolon.

David McCullough's books are worth reading; they are full of first-rate writing.  
It was nearly half past five; he could not reach town before dark.

It is of course equally correct to write the above as two sentences each, replacing the semicolons with periods.

David McCullough's books are worth reading. They are full of first-rate writing.  
It was nearly half past five. He could not reach town before dark.

Note that if the second clause is preceded by an adverb, such as *accordingly*, *besides*, *then*, *therefore*, *thus*, and *so*, and not by a conjunction, the semicolon is still required.

Like it or not, you will have to live somewhere forever; so you had better learn how to live.

If the clauses are very short and are alike in form, a comma is permissible:

Man proposes, God disposes.  
The gate swung apart, the bridge fell, the portcullis was drawn up.

### **6. A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject.**

Walking slowly down the road, he saw a woman accompanied by two children.

The word *walking* refers to *he*, the subject of the sentence, not to the woman. If the writer wishes to make it refer to the woman, he must recast the sentence:

He saw a woman, accompanied by two children, walking slowly down the road.

Sentences violating this rule are often ludicrous.

Being in a dilapidated condition, he easily destroyed the structure.  
When scientists examined glaciers around the world, the majority of them were shrinking.

### **7. Avoid unclear pronoun references.**

Because a pronoun substitutes for a noun, you must be clear as to which noun it refers. For instance, the sentence

Benjamin West's painting of St. Paul preaching demonstrates his idiosyncratic, American style.

could be absurdly interpreted to mean that St. Paul had an American style of preaching.

The best way to avoid potential confusion is to keep pronouns near the nouns they modify or to restate the nouns.

Benjamin West's painting of St. Paul preaching demonstrates West's idiosyncratic, American style.

Reword sentences that begin with unclear pronoun references. Broad demonstrative pronouns—such as *this* or *that*—at the beginning of sentences are always suspect. To increase clarity, follow an initial *this*, *that*, *these*, or *those* with a noun.

Weaker: This was one of Billy Sunday's largest.  
Stronger: This *campaign* was one of Billy Sunday's largest.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF COMPOSITION

### 8. Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph per topic.

Ordinarily, a historical essay requires subdivision into topics, each of which should be made the subject of a paragraph. The object of treating each topic in a paragraph by itself is, of course, to aid the reader. The beginning of each paragraph is a signal that a new step in the development of the essay has been reached.

Organize paragraphs so that they are coherent. Narrative paragraphs do not necessarily require a topic sentence, but the first sentence of every paragraph should at least establish its direction. Material that is not an elaboration of this first sentence should be deleted, incorporated into another paragraph, or relegated to the notes. Ending a paragraph with a digression, or with an unimportant detail, should particularly be avoided.

When the paragraph forms part of a larger composition, its relationship to the whole, may need to be explicitly indicated. Sometimes the writer can ease a transition from one sentence or paragraph to another by adding a simple word or phrase (*therefore; for the same reason*). Sometimes, however, it is better to add one or more sentences of introduction or transition. If more than one such sentence is required, the transitional sentences may be placed in a separate paragraph.

In narration and description the paragraph sometimes begins with a concise, comprehensive statement that serves to hold together the details that follow.

The breeze served them admirably.  
The campaign opened with a series of reverses.  
The following twelve pages were filled with a curious set of entries.

But this device, if too often used, becomes a mannerism. More commonly the opening sentence simply indicates by its subject the main concern of the paragraph.

Near nightfall, he tried to return to the stockade. [comma optional]  
He picked up the heavy lamp from the table and began to explore.  
Unfortunately, partisan politics undermined his idealism. [comma optional]

One-sentence paragraphs should be avoided in formal writing; but to make your writing easier to read, you should aim for two or three paragraphs per double-spaced typed page.

E. B. White has written, "Enormous blocks of print look formidable to a reader. He has a certain reluctance to tackle them; he can lose his way in them. Therefore, breaking long paragraphs in two, even if it is not necessary to do so for sense, meaning, or logical development, is often a visual help. But remember, too, that too many short paragraphs in quick succession can be distracting. Paragraph breaks used only for show read like the writing of commerce or of display advertising. Moderation and a sense of order should be the main considerations in paragraphing."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 12-13.

## 9. Prefer the active to the passive voice.

The active voice is usually more direct and vigorous than the passive:

Stronger: John Adams always remembered his first visit to Philadelphia.

Weaker: John Adams's first visit to Philadelphia was always remembered by him.

The latter sentence is less direct, less bold, and less concise. If the writer tries to make it more concise by omitting "by him,"

John Adams's first visit to Philadelphia was always remembered.

it becomes indefinite: is it John Adams, some person undisclosed, or the world at large, that will always remember Adams's visit?

This rule does not, of course, mean that the writer should entirely discard the passive voice, which is frequently convenient and sometimes necessary.

Dramatists of the Gilded Age were not well regarded by critics of the 1920s.

Critics of the 1920s had little regard for the dramatists of the Gilded Age.

The first would be the right form in a paragraph on the dramatists of the Gilded Age; the second, in a paragraph on the tastes of early twentieth-century critics. The need of making a particular word the subject of the sentence will often, as in these examples, determine which voice is to be used.

Another reason to avoid passive sentences is that some writers deliberately use the passive to excuse historical actors or to avoid offending the powerful. One writer has called this use of the passive the "irresponsible impersonal voice," comparing it to a two-year-old standing by the shards of his mother's vase saying, "It broke."<sup>3</sup>

In 1940, twenty thousand Polish army officers were killed in the Katyn forest.

At the height of the Watergate scandal in May 1973, White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler said, "We would all have to say that mistakes were made in terms of comments."

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<sup>3</sup> Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Forward," in Diane Ravitch, *A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks* (2004) [http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news\\_id=329&pubsubid=981#981](http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=329&pubsubid=981#981) [accessed August 2, 2008].



## 10. Put statements in positive form.

Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, non-committal language. Use the word *not* as a means of denial or in antithesis, never as a means of evasion.

Weak: He was not very often on time.

Strong: He usually came late.

Weak: He did not think that studying Latin was of much use.

Strong: He thought the study of Latin useless.

Weak: *The Taming of the Shrew* is rather weak in spots. Shakespeare does not portray Katharine as a very admirable character, nor does Bianca remain long in memory as an important character in Shakespeare's works.

Strong: The women in *The Taming of the Shrew* are unattractive. Katharine is disagreeable, Bianca insignificant.

The last example, before correction, is imprecise as well as negative. The corrected version is simply a guess at the writer's intention.

All three examples demonstrate a weakness inherent in the word *not*. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader is dissatisfied with being told what is *not*; he wishes to be told what *is*. Therefore, as a rule, it is better to express a negative in positive form.

not honest ⇒ dishonest

not important ⇒ trifling

did not remember ⇒ forgot

did not pay any attention to ⇒ ignored

did not have much confidence in ⇒ distrusted

An antithesis of negative and positive often makes a strong sentence.

Not charity, but simple justice.

Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.

## 11. Use clear, simple, formal language

On either side of the road to forceful prose lies a pitfall: on one side, "bureaucratese," on the other, colloquialism. In his essay, "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell illustrates the first with a pompous translation of Ecclesiastes 9:11:

Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Note that in Orwell's parody ("but not a very gross one"), he substitutes long abstractions for short, concrete examples and thus deliberately makes the meaning difficult to comprehend.

The pitfall on the other side of forceful prose is the use of slang, colloquialisms, contractions, clichés, and euphemisms, which also muddy thought and expend unneeded words.

Weak: Things eventually became so tight that he'd had to take a job in a restaurant.  
Strong: When his money ran out, he became a waiter.

Weak: Tragically, Smith passed away in 1952 after a long battle with cancer.  
Strong: In 1952, Smith died of cancer.

Weak: He found he could better connect with the lifestyle of party leaders if he burned the midnight oil.  
Strong: He worked tirelessly to improve his relationship with party leaders.

As E. B. White wrote in a private letter, "There are very few thoughts or concepts that can't be put into plain English, provided anyone truly wants to do it. But for everyone who strives for clarity and simplicity, there are three who for one reason or another prefer to draw the clouds across the sky."<sup>4</sup>

## 12. Omit needless words.

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words and a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. The writer need not make all his sentences short or treat his subjects only in outline, but every word should tell.

Many common expressions violate this principle:

the question as to whether ⇒ whether (the question whether)  
there is no doubt but that ⇒ no doubt (doubtless)  
used for fuel purposes ⇒ used for fuel  
he is a man who ⇒ he  
in a hasty manner ⇒ hastily  
this is a subject which ⇒ this subject  
His story is a strange one. ⇒ His story is strange.

The expression *the fact that* should be eliminated from every sentence in which it occurs.

owing to the fact that ⇒ since (because)  
in spite of the fact that ⇒ though (although)  
call your attention to the fact that ⇒ remind you (notify you)  
I was unaware of the fact that ⇒ I was unaware that (did not know)  
the fact that he had not succeeded in ⇒ his failure to  
the fact that I had arrived at ⇒ my arrival at

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Garvey, 132.

*Who is, which was*, and similar expressions are often superfluous.

His brother, who was a member of the same firm  
His brother, a member of the same firm

Trafalgar, which was Nelson's last battle  
Trafalgar, Nelson's last battle

Often instead of presenting a complex idea, step-by-step, in a series of short sentences, the entire idea may be combined into one longer one.

Macbeth was very ambitious. This led him to wish to become king of Scotland. The witches told him that this wish of his would come true. The king of Scotland at this time was Duncan. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth murdered Duncan. He was thus enabled to succeed Duncan as king. (55 words.)

Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth achieved his ambition and realized the prediction of the witches by murdering Duncan and becoming king of Scotland in his place. (26 words.)

Some writers of history become ensnared in their primary sources. The writers repeat unnecessary information, not realizing that a fact significant to a nineteenth-century reporter or his contemporary readers may be trivial to a twenty-first-century reader. Furthermore, slavish copying of newspaper stories in a chronologically lockstep fashion makes for dull reading.

### **13. Avoid a succession of loose sentences.**

Loose sentences consist of two coordinate clauses, the second introduced by a conjunction, such as *and, but, however* or a relative, such as *who, which, when, where, and while*. A single sentence of this type may prevent the style from becoming too formal, but a series quickly becomes tedious.

The third concert of the subscription series was given last evening, and a large audience was in attendance. Mr. Edward Appleton was the soloist, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra furnished the instrumental music. The former showed himself to be an artist of the first rank, while the latter proved itself fully deserving of its high reputation. The interest aroused by the series has been very gratifying to the Committee, and it is planned to give a similar series annually hereafter. The fourth concert will be given on Tuesday, May 10, when an equally attractive program will be presented.

Apart from its triteness, the paragraph above is bad because of the structure of its sentences, with their singsong quality and mechanical symmetry.

Also, as Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff note in their classic guide, *The Modern Researcher*, some writers use myriad *however*s, often at the head of such sentences, though their use "says no more than that they are taking breath."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 5th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt, Brace, 1992), 232. Pulitzer-prize winning biographer Douglas Southall Freeman boasted of the second volume of his *Lee's Lieutenants* (1943) that there was "not a transitional 'however' in the book;

#### 14. Express coordinate ideas in similar form.

The principle of parallel construction requires that expressions of similar content and function should be outwardly similar. The likeness of form enables a reader to recognize more readily the likeness of content and function. Familiar instances from the Bible are the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.  
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

The unskillful writer often violates this principle from the mistaken belief that he should constantly vary his expressions. It is true that in repeating a statement in order to emphasize it, he may need to vary its form. But in general, he should follow the principle of parallel construction.

Weak: Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method, while now the laboratory method is employed.  
Strong: Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method; now it is taught by the laboratory method.

The first version gives the impression that the writer is undecided or timid; he seems unable or afraid to choose one form of expression and hold to it. The second version shows that the writer has at least made his choice and abided by it.

By this principle, an article or a preposition applying to all the members of a series must either be used only before the first term or else be repeated before each term.

Weaker: The French, the Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese  
Stronger: The French, the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese

Weaker: In spring, summer, or in winter  
Stronger: In spring, summer, or winter (In spring, in summer, or in winter)

Correlative expressions (*both, and; not, but; not only, but also; either, or; first, second, third; and the like*) should be followed by the same grammatical construction. Many violations of this rule can be corrected by rearranging the sentence.

It was both a long ceremony and very tedious.  
The ceremony was both long and tedious.

A time not for words but action.  
A time not for words but for action.

Either you must grant his request or incur his ill will.  
You must either grant his request or incur his ill will.

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I despise that word," the use of which he compared to a "limp handshake." David E. Johnson, *Douglas Southall Freeman* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 266, 236.

My objections are, first, the injustice of the measure; second, that it is unconstitutional.  
My objections are, first, that the measure is unjust; second, that it is unconstitutional.

The group held a jazz concert series to offset what members saw as the negative impact of hip-hop music, and a youth conference at Bob Jones University.

The group held both a series of jazz concerts – to offset what members saw as the negative impact of hip-hop music – and a youth conference at Bob Jones University.

### 15. Keep related words together.

The position of the words in an English sentence is the principal means of showing their relationship. The writer must, therefore, so far as possible, bring together the words and groups of words that are related in thought and keep apart those which are not so related.

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

Weaker: George Marsden, in *Reforming Fundamentalism*, provides a thorough discussion of Edward Carnell's mental breakdown.

Stronger: In *Reforming Fundamentalism*, George Marsden provides a thorough discussion of Edward Carnell's mental breakdown.

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

The proposal to amend the Sherman Act, which was strongly criticized...

The proposal, which was strongly criticized, to amend the Sherman Act...

The preferred order in the sentences above depends on whether the proposal or the Sherman Act was strongly criticized.

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

All the members were not present.

Not all the members were present.

He only found two mistakes.

He found only two mistakes.

Major R. E. Joyce will give a lecture on Tuesday evening in Bailey Hall, to which the public is invited, on "My Experiences in Iraq" at eight p.m.

On Tuesday evening at eight p.m. in Bailey Hall, Major R. E. Joyce will give a lecture on his experiences in Iraq. The public is invited.

## 16. Write in the simple past tense.

Unlike scholars in most other disciplines, historians generally write in the simple past tense even when summarizing literature.

~~Billy Sunday opens his campaign on January 3, 1915.~~  
~~Billy Sunday was opening his campaign on January 3, 1915.~~  
~~Billy Sunday would open his campaign on January 3, 1915.~~  
~~Billy Sunday would be opening his campaign on January 3, 1915.~~  
~~Billy Sunday began to open his campaign on January 3, 1915.~~

Billy Sunday opened his campaign on January 3, 1915.

Not only is consistent past tense less awkward, present tense summaries of literature may also erroneously suggest that modern readers interpret the literary work in the same way that its contemporaries did.

Antecedent action in the past should be expressed in the past perfect (or *pluperfect*) tense.

Before Roosevelt came to public notice in the Spanish-American War, he had served as Police Commissioner of New York City. ["Came" is a past tense; "had served" a past perfect.]

In presenting the statements or the thought of someone else, as in summarizing an essay or reporting a speech, the writer should avoid the overuse of such expressions as "he said," "he stated," "the speaker added," "the speaker then went on to say," "the author also thinks," or the like. The writer should indicate clearly at the outset that what follows is summary and then waste no words repeating the notification. Likewise, he should try to write an orderly discussion supported by evidence, not a summary with occasional comments.

## 17. Use strong verbs and avoid the use of unnecessary adjectives, adverbs, and "nominalizations."

Weaker: The reason for Bob Jones Sr.'s frequent repetition of certain themes in his messages in chapel lay in his distrust of student attentiveness to grasp the essence of them.  
Stronger: Bob Jones Sr. frequently repeated certain themes in his chapel messages because he assumed that otherwise students would forget them.

The second sentence is clearer because nominalizations are avoided, that is, the actions are expressed as verbs rather than as nouns. Note also that the first sentence contains eight prepositions (including three *ins* and three *ofs*), a certain indication of weak writing.

Avoid the verb *to be* where possible. Strong verbs are the building blocks of good historical writing.

The habitual use of strong verbs makes for forcible writing. You can often make a bland sentence lively and emphatic by substituting a strong verb for some such perfunctory expression as *there is* or *could be heard*.

There were a great number of the dead lying on the ground.  
The dead covered the ground.

The reason that he left college was that his health became impaired.  
Failing health compelled him to leave college.

It was not long before he was very sorry that he had said what he had.  
He soon repented his words.

Mobilization of the Russian army was more rapidly carried out than the Germans had anticipated.  
The Russian army mobilized more rapidly than the Germans had anticipated.

Note that sentences with strong verbs are usually shorter and cleaner than the ones using the verb “to be.”

Eliminate unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. Contrary to popular opinion, adverbs such as *very* weaken rather than strengthen prose.

Especially avoid “adjective piling,” a favorite technique of academics and bureaucrats.

The Cooperative Program was re-envisioned from a superannuated pseudo-finance structure into a dynamic, comprehensive missions strategy for Southern Baptists.

Mount Vernon was a recreated domestic environment memorializing a mythologized white male political figure, and its creative institutional persona was devised in response to the context of its mid-nineteenth century establishment.

### **18. Eliminate inconsistent verbal images.**

Barzun and Graff note that “all words convey an image—the representation more or less vivid of an act or a situation. When we say ‘Do you grasp my meaning?’ the listener half pictures a hand seizing something. When the answer is ‘No, I don’t get you,’ the image is less vivid, yet it is clearly in the same plane: both remarks depict the taking hold of an object. In hasty speaking or writing one easily passes from image to image, saying perhaps ‘It is difficult to grasp a meaning that is couched in florid language.’ The three images of ‘seizing,’ ‘lying on a bed,’ and ‘adorned as with flowers’ do not develop a single coherent image, and though the result is intelligible enough it is neither sharp nor strong. Most of us think in loosely connected images, and conscious writers make an effort to trim and adjust them.”<sup>6</sup>

Student writers sometimes try to avoid over-abstraction by using colorful words—often incorrectly—that may simultaneously annoy and amuse a reader who pictures the resulting images.

The nation’s law was a crux upon which it stood and could not be undermined by inflexibility.

The West Virginia primary plummeted Kennedy to the pinnacle of the nomination.  
Billy Sunday ran the saloon circuit with his baseball buddies.

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<sup>6</sup>Barzun and Graff, 234.

Webster's noontide continued for a few years.

Even when both words and syntax are reasonably acceptable, some images may still sound funny, and the sentence should be reworded.

Officials urged residents to react cautiously to a warning about the cancer-causing gas issued by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The preacher stressed that if his hearers wanted to become anything, they needed to follow the example of a corn of wheat and fall into the ground and die.

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) suggested to a contemporary historian that whenever he met with a passage that he thought “particularly fine, strike it out.”

### **19. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.**

The proper place for a word or group of words that the writer wishes to emphasize is usually the end of the sentence.<sup>7</sup>

Weak: Humanity has hardly advanced in fortitude since that time, though it has advanced in many other ways.

Strong: Humanity, since that time, has advanced in many other ways, but it has hardly advanced in fortitude.

Weak: The steel was principally used for making razors, because of its hardness.

Strong: Because of its hardness, the steel was principally used for making razors.

The other prominent position in the sentence is the beginning. Any element in the sentence, other than the subject, becomes emphatic when placed first.

Deceit or treachery he could never forgive.

A subject coming first in its sentence may be emphatic, but hardly by its position alone. In the sentence,

Great kings worshipped at his shrine.

the emphasis upon *kings* arises largely from its meaning and from the context. To receive special emphasis, the subject of a sentence must take the position of the predicate.

Through the middle of the valley flowed a winding stream.

Everything else being equal, dates and other references to time should come first in a sentence. When the date is put last, it is emphasized—which in certain circumstances may be most appropriate.

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<sup>7</sup> This tendency for the last word of a sentence to be emphasized is another reason why the phrase about the corn of wheat falling into the ground to die strikes us as funny.



On April 6, 1830, six men led by a twenty-four-year-old farmer's son named Joseph Smith, Jr., incorporated a new religion. But not until 1838 did Smith record the story, now canonized in Mormon scripture, that he had seen a vision of two embodied personages in 1820.

Often sentences can be improved by concluding them with shorter words.

Justice Scalia and his colleagues gave privacy rights important protections against the misuse of high technology.

Against the misuse of high technology, Justice Scalia and his colleagues provided important protections for privacy rights.

The principle that the proper place for what is to be made most prominent is the end applies equally to the words of a sentence, to the sentences of a paragraph, and to the paragraphs of an essay.

## A FEW MATTERS OF FORM

### Names

On first mention of a person new to your essay, give his first name as well as his last and introduce him to your readers. If his first name is unknown, write something like, "a certain Mr. Smith."

Do not call historical actors (especially women) by their first names unless there is a good reason to do so. For instance, Billy Sunday should be referred to as "Sunday" unless, for instance, you are referring to him as a child or in the same paragraph with his wife.

Titles such as *Mrs.*, *Dr.*, or *Honorable* should generally be dropped when writing history, especially if the historical figure is dead.<sup>8</sup>

### Numbers

Do not spell out dates or other serial numbers. Write them in figures or in Roman notation.

February 12, 1918  
Chapter XII  
Rule 3  
352d Infantry

In writing about dates, a *from* demands a *to* or a *through*.

Incorrect: From the 1920s-40s  
Correct: From the 1920s through the 1940s

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<sup>8</sup> There are conventional exceptions for certain historical figures, such as the Venerable Bede (c. 672-c.735), Chancellor James Kent (1763-1847), and Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784).

Incorrect: From 1927-2009

Correct: From 1927 to 2009

Otherwise, it is difficult to be entirely consistent in the treatment of numbers. According to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, one should write out “whole numbers from one through one hundred, round numbers, and numbers beginning a sentence.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, a recent tendency has been to substitute numbers for words.

He wrote a senior paper of five thousand words.

The State Historical Society accessioned approximately twenty-four linear feet of his files.

The four-floor parking garage, completed in 2007, had 405 spaces in 150,274 square feet of building footprint.

The twenty-third general assembly of Illinois, which convened on January 5, 1863, consisted of thirty Republicans and fifty-eight Democrats.

In formal writing, sentences should not begin with numerals, and in cases where it is cumbersome to spell out the numbers at the beginning of a sentence, the sentence should be recast.

### **Abbreviations**

Do not abbreviate in formal writing. For instance, postal abbreviations should not be used in place of the full name of a state, nor should “World War II” be abbreviated as “WWII.” The full name of an organization that is often repeated in your essay may be abbreviated after one full mention followed by its abbreviation in parentheses.

In 1933, the National Park Service (NPS) became the primary custodian of federally held historic properties in the United States.

### **Contractions**

In formal writing, avoid the use of contractions, such as “don’t” and “wouldn’t.”

### **Lists**

Everything else being equal, words and phrases with fewer syllables should appear before those with more syllables.

With varying results, the islanders planted grapes, peaches, pineapples, and avocados.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

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<sup>9</sup> *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 380.

## Parentheses

A sentence containing an expression in parentheses is punctuated, outside of the marks of parenthesis, exactly as if the expression in parentheses were absent. The expression within the marks is punctuated as if it stood by itself, except that the final stop is omitted unless it is a question mark or an exclamation point.

Adams went to his house (his third attempt to see him), but he had left town.  
He declared (and why should they have doubted his good intentions?) that he was certain of success.

When a wholly detached expression or sentence is parenthesized, the final stop comes before the last mark of parenthesis.

Joseph Smith's most important assistant in making the transcription was Oliver Cowdery.  
(Cowdery died in 1850.)

## Quotations

Block quotations should be avoided. Paraphrase wherever possible and weave necessary quotations into the fabric of your own sentences. Quotations should be limited to occasions in which

- the source lends authority to your thesis,
- the original words are so distinctive that a paraphrase would diminish their impact,
- the original words are so concise that a paraphrase would be longer or clumsier, and
- as a matter of fairness, you quote exact wording before disagreeing with a source.

Formal quotations, cited as documentary evidence, are introduced by a colon and enclosed in quotation marks.

Lincoln made clear the source of his ideology: "I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

Quotations that are grammatically in apposition or that are the direct objects of verbs are preceded by a comma and enclosed in quotation marks.

He recalled the advice of Epictetus, "If you wish to be a writer, write."

Quotations of an entire line or more of verse are begun on a fresh line and centered but not enclosed in quotation marks.

Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the French Revolution was at first unbounded:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!

Quotations introduced by *that* are regarded as in indirect discourse; only the words of the original are enclosed in quotation marks. Also note how a short quotation can sometimes make a commonplace notion more vivid.

Edgar Rice Burroughs said that creating his Tarzan series was more a matter of hard work than intellectual brilliance.

Edgar Rice Burroughs said his “only stroke of genius was in naming [his] principal character Tarzan.”

Proverbial expressions and familiar phrases of literary origin require no quotation marks.

These are the times that try men’s souls.  
Pride goes before a fall.

Quotation marks may be placed around an unusual word or phrase—on first mention only—preceding an appropriate definition.

To project his voice, Sunday used an “augiphone,” a large sounding board that extended over the platform.

Avoid the use of “sneer quotes” (sometimes called “scare quotes”), which are often a writer’s way of feigning superiority to anyone who might use such a term without critical distance.

The Stonewall Riots of 1969 were a catalyst for the “gay rights” movement.  
D. L. Moody experienced a religious “conversion” that altered the course of his life.  
The Daughters of American Revolution sponsored a “pilgrimage” to the historic “shrine.”

Note that in American practice, periods and commas go inside quotation marks, whereas in British practice they go outside. Also, the British style is to use single quotation marks first and reserve double quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Ralph Smith of the University of Kansas argued that Jesse James had “fought for honor as well as for ‘his share of the loot.’”  
Ralph Burke-Smith of Magdalene College, Cambridge, argued that Sir James had ‘fought for honour as well as for “his Corne and Tolls”’.

## **Titles**

For the titles of literary works, scholarly usage prefers italics with capitalized initials. Omit the initial *A* or *The* from titles after a possessive.

*A Tale of Two Cities*  
Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities*

## **Margins**

Leave a margin of at least one inch on all four edges of the page.

## Typefaces

Text should be in a twelve-point typeface with serifs (fine lines that finish off the main strokes) such as Times Roman, Palatino, or Book Antiqua; avoid sans serif and ornamental typefaces.<sup>10</sup>

## References

Give references in footnotes or endnotes. Occasionally sources will differ from one another or from you, and you will need to refer to the names of sources in the text. But as a general rule, avoid mentioning sources in the body of the paper (“*The Morning Advertiser* said”).

Footnotes in scholarly papers may provide both references – the evidence for an author’s statements – as well as explanatory material, which though not essential to the text may be helpful or interesting to the reader. Both citations to evidence and supplementary material can be combined in a single footnote. References to more than one source may be given in one footnote; usually these references are separated by a semi-colon.

Citations that credit other scholars for their ideas allow the reader (at least in theory) to replicate your research, but you do not need to cite the source of commonly known information. For example, the statement “Billy Sunday conducted an evangelistic campaign in New York City” does not require a citation because that information could be found in all but the most abbreviated biographies of Sunday. However, the method of constructing Sunday’s tabernacle in New York City is not commonly known, and therefore, the source of that information should be cited.

Citation reference numbers should appear at the end, rather than in the middle, of sentences. As a rule, there should be no more than one reference per sentence and preferably no more than two or three per paragraph.

Footnotes or endnotes should be in the same font and size as the text or in the same font but a smaller size.

## GUIDE TO CITATION

Writers of history use different citation rules than most other academic disciplines, and scholarly publishers of historical works generally prefer sequential footnotes or endnotes. The most widely recognized citation guide for historians is Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) [808.02 T84 2007], which is an abbreviated and slightly modified version of the rules contained in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) [REF 808.027 Un3 2010].

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<sup>10</sup>Although in the United States, sans serif typefaces were traditionally used only for headings, recently sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Helvetica, MS Sans Serif, Tahoma, and Verdana, have become nearly standard for electronic body text.

The first line of footnotes and endnotes may be indented five or six spaces with the second line returning to the left margin, or notes may be entered flush with the left margin. The notes themselves are single spaced, but there should be a bit more space between them. Note that in citations, the author's name appears in first name-last name order, not inverted as it would be the case in a bibliography.

### **Books**

The first three citations are given in footnote style with superscript numerals; the next four in endnote style with full-sized, on-line numerals followed by periods.

<sup>1</sup>Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 153.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Harbaugh, *Lawyer's Lawyer: The Life of John W. Davis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973; reprint, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 510-11.

<sup>3</sup>*Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 533.

<sup>4</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Quotable Lewis*, ed. Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 299.

<sup>5</sup>*Journal of Rudolph Friderich Kurz*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 115 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), 124, 199-200.

<sup>6</sup>Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History* (Arlington Heights, IL: Forum Press, 1989), 137.

The place of publication is usually only a city, such as New York or Chicago, but where the city of publication might be unknown to readers, add the postal abbreviation of the state as in "Arlington Heights, IL." No state name is necessary when the publisher's name includes the name of the state: "Columbia: University of South Carolina Press."

<sup>7</sup>*An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, ed. Scott H. Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), xiii.

In cases where the author's name appears in the title, begin the citation with the title.

### **Articles in Journals, Magazines, and Books**

<sup>8</sup>David L. Calkins, "Billy Sunday's Cincinnati Crusade," *Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin*, 27 (1966): 83; "Sunday into Heaven," *Time*, November 18, 1935, 46.

In this example there are two citations in one footnote separated by a semicolon – one of an article from a scholarly journal and the other from a popular magazine. The "27" in the first example refers to the volume number and "83" to the page.

<sup>9</sup>Astrid Norvelle, "'80 Percent Bill,' Court Injunctions, and Arizona Labor: Billy Truax's Two Supreme Court Cases," *Western Legal History*, 17, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2004): 165-76.

<sup>10</sup>"Relacion de La Armade Qu Estava Presta Para Ir A La Florida en el Puerto de Dieppe Que es en Normandia," in Antoine Tibesar, "A Spy's Report on the Expedition of Jean Ribault to Florida, 1565," *Americas* 11 (April 1955), 590. This spy's report, translated by Ramon Jiminez and first printed here, gives crucial information on the size and content of Ribault's fleet which otherwise could not be known.

The preceding example is a good illustration of a citation combined with explanatory material. Note that the citation itself is ended with a period and not a semicolon.

<sup>11</sup>Albro Martin, "Ralph Budd," in Keith L. Bryant, Jr., ed., *Railroads in the Age of Regulation, 1900-1980* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1988), 56-60.

<sup>12</sup>Howard A. Kelly, "A Personal Testimony," in R.A. Torrey et al., eds., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917), 4: 324-27.

"Et al." means that there are more than three authors. The "4" refers to the volume number.

### Newspaper articles

<sup>13</sup>*New York Times*, 2 April 1917, 13.

<sup>14</sup>*Williston (ND) Herald*, 27 February 1989.

State names or their abbreviations are added after the city of publication when its location is not obvious. Page numbers are often given for convenience, but Turabian omits page numbers because "a newspaper may have several editions in which items may appear on different pages or may even be dropped."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>15</sup>"Boom Goes Bust for Town," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1982, B1.

<sup>16</sup>Fred Smith, "Remembering a Forgotten Place," *Bismarck Tribune*, 15 June 1986, 1C.

Newspaper article citations may, or may not, include authors and the titles of articles.

<sup>17</sup>*Charleston Courier*, November 12, 1923; December 13, 1923; *Charleston Post*, November 11, 1923; December 3, 1923.

The preceding example presents multiple newspaper articles under one citation number.

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<sup>11</sup> Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 186-87.

## Interviews and Personal Communications

<sup>18</sup>Paul Hedren, interview by author, Williston, ND, June 18, 1996.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas D. Theissen, ed., "An Interview with Wilfred D. Logan, Career National Park Service Archeologist," unpublished manuscript (1992), Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>20</sup>Edward A. Hummel, interview by S. Herbert Evison, January 5, 1971, Oral History Project, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center Library, Harpers Ferry, WV.

21. Stephen Jones, e-mail message to author, September 18, 2006.

## Unpublished Manuscripts

<sup>22</sup>Paul Rexford Brees, "A Comparative Study of the Devices of Persuasion Used in Ten Sermons by Harry Emerson Fosdick and Eight Sermons by William Ashley Sunday," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1948), 56.

Note that contemporary style drops periods in "MA" and "PhD."

<sup>23</sup>Letitia Andrews, "Miss Luena A. Barker," (senior history paper, Bob Jones University, 1982), 6, University Archives, Mack Library, Greenville, SC.

## Electronic Documents

<sup>24</sup>National Park Service, "Fort Union Trading Post: Grandest Fort on the Missouri," *Fort Union Trading Post NHS*, <http://www.nps.gov/fous/InDepth.htm> (accessed January 11, 2008).

<sup>25</sup>William Lyon Phelps, "Christ or Caesar," *William Lyon Phelps Foundation*, [http://www.wlphf.org/ChristorCaesar/christ\\_or\\_caesar\\_by\\_william\\_lyon\\_phelps.htm](http://www.wlphf.org/ChristorCaesar/christ_or_caesar_by_william_lyon_phelps.htm) (accessed January 14, 2004).

<sup>26</sup>Stephen Nissenbaum, "There Arose Such a Clatter: Who Really Wrote 'The Night before Christmas'? (And Why Does It Matter?)," *Common-Place* (January 2001), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-02/moore/> (accessed December 24, 2002).

## Manuscript Collections

Manuscript collections often require some degree of improvisation. You should consider how you could best describe to a reader where the document might be found. Using "in possession of author," as does the last example, is something of a last resort.

<sup>27</sup>"Largest Crowds of Campaign," 16 October 1916, unidentified newspaper clipping, Scrapbook 18, Box 14, Papers of William and Helen Sunday, microfilm reel 26.



<sup>28</sup>Barry Mackintosh, "Fort Scott National Historic Site," unpublished manuscript, park files, National Register, History and Education, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

<sup>29</sup>Mott to Edward Dzierzawski, 30 September 1987, Box 8, William Penn Mott Papers, Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, SC.

<sup>30</sup>W. A. Shoup to Charles Kessler, 19 March 1918, Kessler Papers, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA.

<sup>31</sup>"Miscellaneous Church Files of Palmyra"; Woman's Society of the Western Presbyterian Church, comp., *Palmyra, Wayne County, New York* (Rochester: Herald Press, 1907), microfilm 900 no. 61, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

The note above illustrates how complicated citing manuscript collections can sometimes be. Here, in one note, are references to both manuscript material and a commemorative book – both reproduced on the same microfilm reel.

<sup>32</sup>. Rodd Wheaton to author, 29 May 1998, in possession of author.

### **Subsequent References**

After a work has been cited once in complete form, subsequent references are shortened. How much the original citation should be shortened is a matter of clarity and personal taste. Generally, reference to the author's family name and the pages cited is sufficient unless more than one work by the same author is used in the text.

<sup>33</sup>Nixon, 154.

<sup>34</sup>"Sunday into Heaven," 46.

<sup>35</sup>*Chicago Manual of Style*, 582-83.

<sup>36</sup>*Williston Herald*, 27 February 1989.

<sup>37</sup>Hummel interview.

<sup>38</sup>. Paul Sunday to Helen Sunday, no date (3-14), Reel 5, SP.

Here the "3-14" stands for "Box 3, Folder 14" and SP for "Sunday Papers." Citation shortcuts should be explained at first mention, for instance, "Sunday Papers, hereafter SP."

39. Rogers, *American Bar Leaders*, 222; Rogers, "Fifty Years," 223-24; Whitelock to Taft, April 10, 1916, Taft Papers. The *New York Times* also mentioned, however, that Republicans tended to support Sutherland while Democrats were supporting Smith. (September 1, 1916, 20; September 2, 1916, 16); *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 1, 1916, 1; Silas H. Strawn, 52 *ABA Rep* 130 (1927); Gurney Newlin, 53 *ABA Rep* 154 (1928); George Sutherland to Hampton Carson, September 8, 1919; William Hunter to T. J. O'Donnell, February 13, 1919, Carson Papers.

The preceding example might appear in a scholarly article or book. Note its use of both semicolons and periods.

Specialized citations for book reviews, sources in the visual and performing arts, pre-modern literary works, and public documents can be found in Turabian or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.