

THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

WILLIAM STRUNK



MASTERPIECE EVERYWHERE

Table of Contents

The Elements of Style

William Strunk Jr.

Chapter 1 Introductory

Chapter 2 Elementary Rules of Usage

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's.
2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.
3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.
4. Place a comma before and or but introducing an independent clause.
5. Do not join independent clauses by a comma.
6. Do not break sentences in two.
7. A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject.
8. Divide words at line-ends, in accordance with their formation and pronunciation.

Chapter 3 Elementary Principles of Composition

1. Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic.
2. As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning.
3. Use the active voice.
4. Put statements in positive form.
5. Omit needless words.
6. Avoid a succession of loose sentences.
7. Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form.
8. Keep related words together.
9. In summaries, keep to one tense.
10. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

[Chapter 4 A Few Matters of Form](#)

[Chapter 5 Words and Expressions Commonly Misused](#)

[Chapter 6 Words Commonly Misspelled](#)

The Elements of Style

William Strunk Jr.

Published: 1918

Categorie(s): Non-Fiction

Chapter 1

Introductory

This book is intended for use in English courses in which the practice of composition is combined with the study of literature. It aims to give in a brief space the principal requirements of plain English style. It aims to lighten the task of instructor and student by concentrating attention (in Chapters II and III) on a few essentials, the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated. The numbers of the sections may be used as references in correcting manuscript.

The book covers only a small portion of the field of English style, but the experience of its writer has been that once past the essentials, students profit most by individual instruction based on the problems of their own work, and that each instructor has his own body of theory, which he prefers to that offered by any textbook.

The writer's colleagues in the Department of English in Cornell University have greatly helped him in the preparation of his manuscript. Mr. George McLane Wood has kindly consented to the inclusion under Rule 11 of some material from his *Suggestions to Authors*.

The following books are recommended for reference or further study: in connection with Chapters II and IV:

- F. Howard Collins, *Author and Printer* (Henry Frowde);
- Chicago University Press, *Manual of Style*;
- T. L. De Vinne *Correct Composition* (The Century Company);

- Horace Hart, *Rules for Compositors and Printers* (Oxford University Press);
- George McLane Wood, *Extracts from the Style-Book of the Government Printing Office* (United States Geological Survey);

In connection with Chapters III and V:

- Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *The Art of Writing* (Putnams), especially the chapter, Interlude on Jargon;
- George McLane Wood, *Suggestions to Authors* (United States Geological Survey);
- John Leslie Hall, *English Usage* (Scott, Foresman and Co.);
- James P. Kelly, *Workmanship in Words* (Little, Brown and Co.).

It is an old observation that the best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric. When they do so, however, the reader will usually find in the sentence some compensating merit, attained at the cost of the violation. Unless he is certain of doing as well, he will probably do best to follow the rules. After he has learned, by their guidance, to write plain English adequate for everyday uses, let him look, for the secrets of style, to the study of the masters of literature.