

GOOD ANALYTICAL WRITING  
MUST BE  
GOOD WRITING FIRST.

ADVICE  
from  
Strunk and White  
with a few  
additional thoughts

1. Elementary rules of usage
2. Elementary principles of composition
3. Wisdom from E.B. White

# ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

## 1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's

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

the heel of Achilles
the laws of Moses
the temple of Isis

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

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

red, white, and blue

honest, energetic, but headstrong

He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

### 3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas

The best way to see a country, unless you are pressed for time, is to travel on foot.

Marjorie's husband, Colonel Nelson paid us a visit yesterday,

My brother you will be pleased to hear, is now in perfect health,

Non-restrictive relative clauses are, in accordance with this rule, set off by commas.

The audience, which had at first been indifferent, became more and more interested.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

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 situation is perilous, but there is still one chance of escape.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

5. Do not join independent clauses by a comma  
(Use a semicolon.)

Stevenson's romances are entertaining;  
they are full of exciting adventures.

It is nearly half past five; we cannot reach  
town before dark.

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

Man proposes, God disposes.

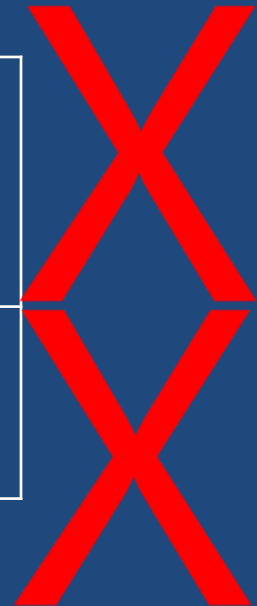
The gate swung apart, the bridge fell,  
the portcullis was drawn up.

## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

### 6. Do not break sentences in two

I met them on a Cunard liner several years ago. Coming home from Liverpool to New York.

He was an interesting talker. A man who had traveled all over the world, and lived in half a dozen countries.



## ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

7. 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.

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

### WHO IS DOING THE WALKING?

Being in a dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house very cheap.

PERHAPS, BUT ... ?



# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

8. As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning

- The topic sentence comes at (or, in rare cases, near) the beginning;
- The succeeding sentences explain or establish or develop the statement made in the topic sentence; and
- The final sentence either emphasizes the thought of the topic sentence or states some important consequence.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

8. As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning

The topic sentence is your **roadmap** for the rest of the piece.

- It tells your reader where you're taking him/her.
- It reflects the structure of your argument and overall message.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 9. Use the active voice

Avoid passive

My first visit to Boston will  
always be remembered by  
me.



I shall always remember my  
first visit to Boston.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 9. Use the active voice

Avoid “there is” / “there are”

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



Dead leaves covered the ground.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 9. Use the active voice

Just say what your reader needs to know!

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

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 10. Use definite, specific, concrete language

A period of unfavorable weather set in.	It rained every day for a week.
He showed satisfaction as he took possession of his well-earned reward.	He grinned as he pocketed the coin.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 11. Put statements in positive form

He was not very often on time.	He usually came late.
He did not think that studying Latin was much use.	He thought the study of Latin useless.
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.	The women in The Taming of the Shrew are unattractive. Katharine is disagreeable, Bianca insignificant.



# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 11. Put statements 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

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 12. Omit needless words

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.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 12. Omit needless words

owing to **the fact** that

in spite of **the fact** that

call your attention to **the fact** that

I was unaware of **the fact** that

**the fact** that he had not succeeded

**the fact** that I had arrived

since

because

though

although

remind you

notify you

I was unaware that

I did not know

his failure

my arrival

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 13. Avoid a succession of loose sentences

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.



ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 14. Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form

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

The French, the Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese	The French, the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese
---	---

In spring, summer, or in winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In spring, summer, or winter</li><li>• In spring, in summer, or in winter</li></ul>
---------------------------------	---

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 14. Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form

It was <b>both</b> a long ceremony and very tedious.	The ceremony was <b>both</b> long and tedious.
--	--

A time not <b>for</b> words, but action	A time not <b>for</b> words, but <b>for</b> action
---	--

<b>Either</b> you must grant his request or incur his ill will.	You must <b>either</b> grant his request or incur his ill will.
---	---

My objections are, first, the injustice of the measure; second, <b>that</b> it is unconstitutional.	My objections are, first, <b>that</b> the measure is unjust; second, <b>that</b> it is unconstitutional.
---	--

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 15. Keep related words together

*Don't separate grammatical parts if there's no reason to.*

Wordsworth, in the fifth book of The Excursion, gives a minute description of this church.	In the fifth book of The Excursion, Wordsworth gives a minute description of this church.
--	---

Cast iron, when treated in a Bessemer converter, is changed into steel.	By treatment in a Bessemer converter, cast iron is changed into steel.
---	--

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 15. Keep related words together

*The relative pronoun should come, as a rule, immediately after its antecedent.*

There was a **look** in his eye **that** boded mischief.

In his eye was a **look that** boded mischief.

He wrote three **articles** about his adventures in Spain, **which** were published in Harper's Magazine.

He published in Harper's Magazine three articles about his adventures in Spain.

This is a portrait of Benjamin **Harrison**, grandson of William Henry Harrison, **who** became President in 1889.

This is a portrait of Benjamin Harrison, grandson of William Henry Harrison. He became President in 1889.



# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 15. Keep related words together

*Also important: Modifiers should come, whenever possible, next to the word(s) 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 Mesopotamia" at **eight P.M.**

On Tuesday **evening at eight P.M.**, Major R. E. Joyce will give in Bailey Hall a lecture on "My Experiences in Mesopotamia." The public is invited.

# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 16. In summaries, keep to one tense

When World War II started, he  
is working in a widget factory.



# ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

## 17. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end

<p>Humanity has hardly advanced in fortitude since that time, though it has advanced in many other ways.</p>	<p>Humanity, since that time, has advanced in many other ways, but it has hardly advanced in fortitude.</p>
<p>This steel is principally used for making razors, because of its hardness.</p>	<p>Because of its hardness, this steel is principally used in making razors.</p>

# HANDOUT: “Suggestions and Cautionary Hints”

## “SUGGESTIONS AND CAUTIONARY HINTS”

*Adapted and augmented for writers of analysis from essays by E.B. White*

1. Place yourself in the background.
  - Your mood and temper are secondary.
  - Don't affect a style; be natural.
  - Know the difference between opinion and analysis.
2. Write in a way that comes naturally.
  - Relax and write in your own voice.
  - Add in formal touches later.
3. Work from a suitable design.
  - Think through what you want your product to look like – length, approach.
4. Write with nouns and verbs.
  - Adjectives and adverbs don't make your case; they feel like manipulation.
5. Revise and rewrite.
  - You will discover serious flaws; fix them.
  - Pride doesn't come from the first draft.
6. Do not overwrite.
  - Rich, ornate prose is indigestible.
  - Overstatement kills your case.
7. Avoid the use of qualifiers.
  - They are rather unhelpful, very unnecessary, little valuable, and pretty boring.
8. Do not affect a breezy manner.
  - The lack of discipline suggests an overconfidence that readers care about your every whim.
  - Don't waste people's time.
9. Use orthodox spelling.
  - It's not rite to put readers thru such abuse.
10. Do not explain too much.
  - People don't need your details, and they don't need you to be overly explicit (especially with adjectives and adverbs).
11. Do not construct awkward adverbs.
  - Don't do it even if you're writing tiredly.
12. Avoid fancy words.
  - Showing off turns people off.
  - Save the jargon for people who don't need to read your work.
13. Be clear.
  - Clear?

# HANDOUT: “How to Write Good”

## How to Write Good



Two classic sets of rules.

### Frank L. Visco (June 1986 issue of *Writers' Digest*)

1. Avoid alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid cliches like the plague. (They're old hat.)
4. Employ the vernacular.
5. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
6. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
7. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
8. Contractions aren't necessary.
9. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
10. One should never generalize.
11. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
12. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
13. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
14. Profanity sucks.
15. Be more or less specific.
16. Understatement is always best.
17. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
18. One-word sentences? Eliminate.
19. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
20. The passive voice is to be avoided.
21. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
22. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
23. Who needs rhetorical questions?

### William Safire's *Rules for Writers*

1. Parenthetical words however must be enclosed in commas.
2. It behooves you to avoid archaic expressions.
3. Avoid archaic spellings too.
4. Don't repeat yourself, or say again what you have said before.
5. Don't use commas, that, are not, necessary.
6. Do not use hyperbole; not one in a million can do it effectively.
7. Never use a big word when a diminutive alternative would suffice.
8. Subject and verb always has to agree.
9. Placing a comma between subject and predicate, is not correct.
10. Use your spell checker to avoid misspelling and to catch typographical errors.
11. Don't repeat yourself, or say again what you have said before.
12. Use the apostrophe in its proper place and omit it when its not needed.
13. Don't never use no double negatives.
14. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
15. Hopefully, you will use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
16. Eschew obfuscation.
17. No sentence fragments.
18. Don't indulge in sesquipedalian lexicological constructions.
19. A writer must not shift your point of view.
20. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!
21. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.
22. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
23. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
24. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
25. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
26. Always pick on the correct idiom.
27. The adverb always follows the verb.
28. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.
29. If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be by rereading and editing.
30. And always be sure to finish what

GOOD ANALYTICAL WRITING  
MUST BE  
GOOD WRITING FIRST.

Questions? Comments?