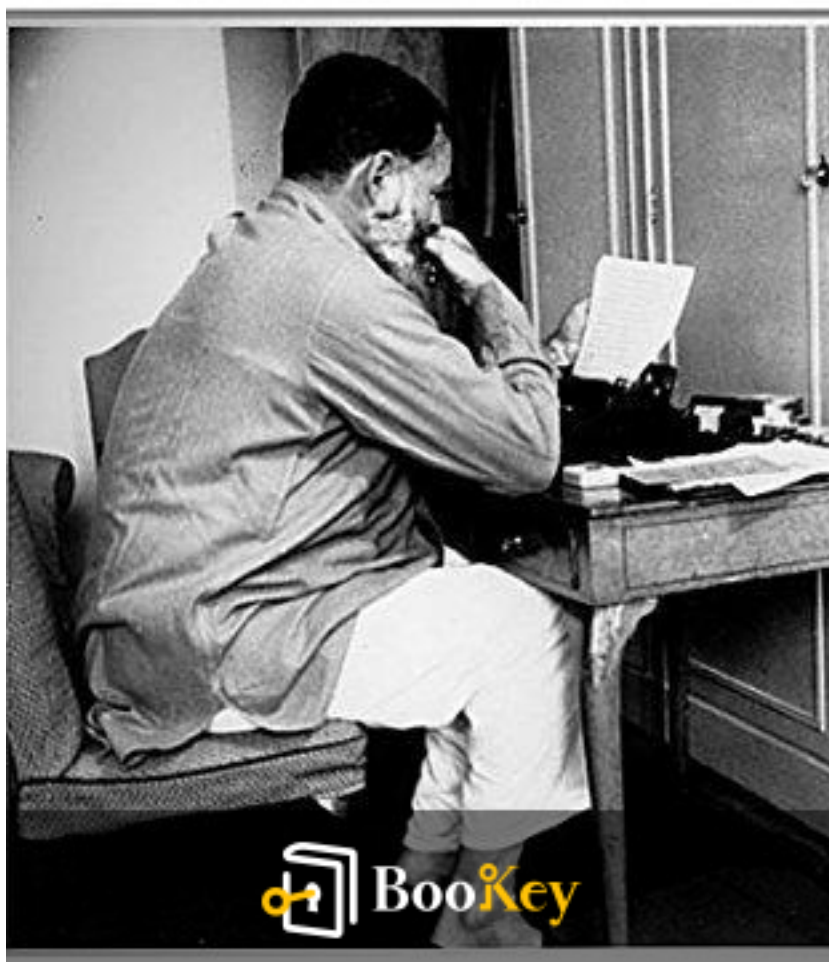


# Elements Of Style PDF (Limited Copy)

William Strunk Jr.

Strunk and White

**ELEMENTS OF STYLE**



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# **Elements Of Style Summary**

"Mastering Clear and Concise English Composition."

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## About the book

In the fast-paced world of professional writing, **"Elements of Style"** by William Strunk Jr. stands as a beacon of clarity and conciseness, revered by writers and editors alike for over a century. This essential guide distills the complexities of the English language into simple, actionable principles, empowering writers to craft sentences that are as elegant as they are clear. With its emphasis on brevity, precision, and grammatical exactitude, this timeless manual lays the foundation for anyone striving to enhance their writing flair. Strunk's rules are more than mere guidelines; they are enduring instructions that resonate with the heart of effective communication, making it an indispensable resource for linguists, creatives, and avid readers who wish to master the art of style. Whether you are crafting a novel, penning an essay, or simply seeking to polish your prose, embracing "Elements of Style" is the first step towards mastering the eloquence of polished expression.

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## About the author

William Strunk Jr., a prominent figure in American academia, was born on July 1, 1869, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He embarked on a journey of scholarly excellence that led him to become an acclaimed teacher and authority in English grammar and composition. Strunk graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1890 and furthered his literary insights with a Ph.D. from Cornell University, where he spent much of his career as a beloved professor of English. A man committed to clarity and precision in communication, Strunk penned "The Elements of Style" in 1918 as a concise manual for his students. The guide, brimming with pragmatic advice on writing, emerged as an enduring tool and testament to his pedagogical prowess, shaping generations of authors, editors, and students well beyond his tenure. His legacy, renewed through the expanded version by his former student E.B. White, marks Strunk as a pivotal architect in the realm of style and effective writing. His contribution remains a cornerstone in the world of English grammar and education.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: Elementary Rules of Usage

## Chapter 1: Elementary Rules of Usage

This chapter covers fundamental grammar rules to enhance clarity and precision in writing.

**1. Possessive Singular of Nouns:** Form the possessive singular by adding 's. For example, "Charles's friend" and "the witch's malice." Exceptions include ancient names like "Jesus'" and specific phrases such as "for conscience' sake." Pronominal possessives (hers, its, theirs) do not use an apostrophe. Remember, "it's" means "it is," while "its" indicates possession, as in "It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas."

**2. Use of the Serial Comma:** In a list of three or more items, place a comma after each item except the last: "red, white, and blue." However, business names often omit the last comma.

**3. Commas and Parenthetical Expressions:** Enclose parenthetical expressions with commas: "The best way to see a country, unless pressed for time, is to travel on foot." Commas are necessary if the interruption is significant. This applies to dates (e.g., April 6, 1986), names in direct address, and nonrestrictive clauses (ones adding extra information but not



essential to understanding the sentence).

**4. Commas with Conjunctions:** Place a comma before a conjunction in a compound sentence: "The situation is perilous, but there is still one chance of escape." Avoid unnecessary commas when clauses are closely related.

**5. Independent Clauses and Semicolons:** Do not join independent clauses with a comma; use a semicolon instead unless there's a conjunction: "Mary Shelley's works are entertaining; they are full of engaging ideas."

**6. Do Not Break Sentences in Two:** Avoid using periods where commas suffice. Reserve fragments for dialogue or emphasis in exceptional cases.

**7. Use of Colons:** Use a colon to introduce lists or to amplify a preceding statement: "Your dedicated whittler requires three items: a knife, a piece of wood, and a back porch."

**8. Dashes for Abrupt Breaks:** A dash indicates an abrupt change or adds supplementary information: "His first thought on waking — if he had any thought — was to go back to sleep."

**9. Subject-Verb Agreement:** Ensure the verb matches the subject, regardless of intervening phrases: "The flavor of youth — its trials, joys, challenges — is unforgettable."

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10. **Proper Pronoun Case:** Use the correct pronoun form depending on its function: "Who knocks?" and "Give this to whoever looks idle."

11. **Participial Phrases:** Ensure the participial phrase at the sentence's beginning refers to the subject: "Walking slowly down the road, he saw a woman accompanied by children."

These rules aim to foster clear, precise communication by standardizing how grammatical elements are structured and punctuated.

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## Chapter 2 Summary: Elementary Principles of Composition

Chapter 2 of this writing guide focuses on fundamental principles of composition, offering practical advice to writers on structuring their work effectively.

### **12. Choose a suitable design and hold to it.**

Every composition requires a structural design, which serves as the foundation of the writing. Experienced writers know that effective writing may diverge from this design in order to best convey their ideas. For some writing, such as love letters or casual essays, a rigid structure may not be necessary, allowing for a more spontaneous expression. However, in most cases, deliberate planning is crucial. Writers should conceptualize the direction and form of their work beforehand, enhancing clarity and ensuring coherence. For example, in a sonnet, the fourteen-line structure guides the poet, although they have flexibility in achieving their poetic aims.

### **13. Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic.**

Paragraphs are critical structural elements in literature, acting as units of composition. A cohesive paragraph can vary in length but should always



center around a single topic. If the topic is minor, a single paragraph might suffice, but generally, each significant topic should have its own paragraph. This aids reader comprehension by signaling new stages in the text's development. While single-sentence paragraphs should be rare, exceptions exist in dialogues or transitional sentences. In narrative style writing, paragraphs might not have explicit topic sentences but should still serve logical pauses to highlight details. Effective paragraphing relies on both logical reasoning and a keen visual sense, ensuring readability and engagement without overwhelming the reader.

#### **14. Use the active voice.**

Active voice strengthens writing, making sentences direct and vigorous. For example, "I shall always remember my first visit to Boston" is more assertive than the passive "My first visit to Boston will always be remembered by me." Although the passive voice is sometimes necessary, especially for emphasis on the object, using the active voice habitually results in more dynamic and concise expression. Active sentences often become shorter, a natural byproduct of their vigor.

#### **15. Put statements in positive form.**

Making definitive assertions enhances clarity. Avoid weak, noncommittal language or over-relying on negatives such as "not" which leads to



ambiguous statements. For example, "He usually came late" is more definitive than "He was not very often on time." Positives are favored, as they communicate more directly and with greater impact. When negative statements are unavoidable, they should be placed in opposition to positives for stronger structure.

## **16. Use definite, specific, concrete language.**

Specific language is more engaging than general or vague expressions. For instance, "It rained every day for a week" is clearer than "A period of unfavorable weather set in." Specificity draws readers in, making scenes more tangible and vivid, akin to the detailed descriptions found in works of authors like Homer, Shakespeare, or Jean Stafford. Exposition and argument writing benefits from concrete examples, sparking readers' imagination and involvement.

## **17. Omit needless words.**

Conciseness is a hallmark of vigorous writing. Each sentence should be stripped of unnecessary words, and paragraphs devoid of superfluous sentences. Overuse of phrases like "the fact that" should be avoided; instead, linguistic economy should be practiced for clarity and impact. This principle parallels the efficiency seen in fields such as art and machinery, where excess leads to distraction and confusion.



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

Varied sentence structure is crucial to maintaining reader interest. Loose sentences, typically featuring two clauses separated by conjunctions, can become monotonous if overused. Writers should instead aim for a mix of sentence styles—simple, compound, or periodic—to match the logical relationships within their thoughts. This dynamic approach keeps writing engaging and lively.

## **19. Express coordinate ideas in similar form.**

Parallel construction is key when expressing ideas that share content and function. Uniform forms enable readers to grasp similarities more readily, as illustrated by biblical texts like the Beatitudes. In decision-making or classifications, consistent structure demonstrates decisiveness, preventing unnecessary variation that may lead readers to perceive indecisiveness or mistrust.

## **20. Keep related words together.**

Proper word placement is essential to clearly indicate relationships within a sentence. Words and ideas that belong together should be placed adjacent to each other to avoid ambiguity. For example, clarifying subject-verb



agreements or properly positioning modifiers ensures accurate communication of ideas. Misplaced words can greatly alter the reader's understanding, as seen in examples where modifying phrases are incorrectly placed, causing confusion about actions or descriptions.

## **21. In summaries, keep to one tense.**

Consistency in tense is crucial when summarizing works, typically staying in the present tense for novels or dramatic action, though past tense can be used if more natural. Retaining the same tense avoids reader confusion and maintains focus. Use appropriate tenses for indirect discourse or antecedent actions, establishing clarity early without repetitive attributions throughout the summary.

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

Emphasis is best achieved by placing important words or ideas at the end of sentences. This placement highlights the logical predicate, often the new element of the sentence, exemplified by the effectiveness of a periodic sentence. Initial positions can also create emphasis, though context is necessary to fully understand the sentence's significance. This strategy applies across sentences, paragraphs, and compositions, ensuring that critical elements stand out and resonate with the audience, enhancing the overall impact of the writing.





This chapter serves as a toolkit for writers, guiding them in crafting clear, compelling, and structured prose by focusing on these fundamental composition principles.

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# Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Omit needless words.

**Critical Interpretation:** "When you focus on all aspects of your life, stripping away distractions, unnecessary burdens, or even the clutter that dilutes your daily experience, an astonishing transformation occurs. Apply the principle 'Omit needless words' not just to writing, but to your thoughts, emotions, and surroundings. Imagine life as a narrative - each moment a sentence, every day a paragraph - and witness the beauty of clarity emerge. When you remove what's redundant, you create space for meaning, allowing purpose to flourish and your true intentions to resonate more deeply. Such simplicity and focus enhance every interaction, decision, and action."

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## Chapter 3 Summary: A Few Matters of Form

Chapter 3, "A Few Matters of Form," delves into essential guidelines for writing with clarity and precision, particularly emphasizing typography and punctuation. It begins by advising against using quotation marks to highlight colloquial expressions or slang, as this can appear pretentious. Similarly, it discourages overusing exclamation marks, reserving them for genuine exclamations or commands to maintain their impact.

When preparing a manuscript for publication, spacing and presentation are crucial. The chapter recommends leaving significant space at the top of the first page for editorial notes and placing the title lower down. The chapter cautions against using periods after headings, unless a question mark or exclamation point is warranted.

Hyphen usage is another focal point. Compound adjectives generally require hyphens, such as in "leisure-class pursuits," while words that can stand alone like "waterfowl" should not be hyphenated. Errors in hyphenation can lead to confusion, exemplified by the accidental misnaming of the "Chattanooga News-Free Press," which sounds as if the paper lacks news.

Consistency in margins is important, with more allowance needed for editing on the left margin. When it comes to numerals, dates and formal references are shown in figures, while dialogue prefers them spelled out entirely to



match conversational tone.

Parentheses within sentences should be managed so that punctuation treats them as if they were absent, save for enclosed questions or exclamations.

Quotations warrant their own rules: formal quotations as evidence are introduced with colons, ordinary quotations require commas, and indirect discourse introduced by "that" omits quotation marks. Lengthier quotations should be formatted distinctively and without extraneous quotation marks.

For references in academic work, brevity in recurring titles alongside a full alphabetical list is preferable, and in-text citations take the form of parentheses or footnotes. Titles of literary works should be italicized with capitalized initials, adhering to the preferences of the specific publication.

Overall, this chapter underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between the conventions of formal writing and the clear conveyance of content, ensuring that readers receive information in an unimpeded, professional manner.



## Chapter 4: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused

Chapter 4 of the book deals with words and expressions commonly misused in English, emphasizing that these misuses often reflect poor writing style rather than incorrect grammar. The chapter provides detailed explanations of various words and phrases, encouraging readers to replace vague language with precise statements.

The text begins by acknowledging that English is not a rigid language with unchangeable rules. Readers are encouraged to consult reputable dictionaries and usage guides for further exploration of the words and expressions discussed.

The chapter then delves into specific examples, highlighting common confusions and suggesting corrections. For instance, the misuse of "aggravate" (to worsen) versus "irritate" (to annoy) is explained. Similarly, it distinguishes between "allude" and "elude," noting their distinct meanings. The chapter also advises against using "all right" as one word and clarifies that "alternate" and "alternative" are not always interchangeable.

Furthermore, the discussion tackles the overuse and misplacement of certain words, like "and/or," which can cause ambiguity, suggesting more precise constructions. It emphasizes choosing the right prepositions, such as using "between" for two entities and "among" for more than two. Words like



"anyone," "anybody," "somebody," and "nobody" should remain single-word constructs, and the text advises on appropriate contexts for "as yet" versus "yet."

The chapter points out redundancies and the importance of clear, concise writing. It suggests avoiding phrases like "as good or better than" by rearranging sentences to maintain clarity. Certain words, such as "but," "case," "certainly," and "character," are frequently overused and can weaken writing.

Moreover, the chapter addresses commonly misused verbs such as "claim," "compare," and "consider," highlighting the nuances in their correct usage. It also warns against vague terms like "contact" and "cope" without specifying the interaction or situation.

Beyond individual words, the text critiques the creation of pompous-sounding adjectives and adverbs, like "irregardless" or overused suffixes like "-ize." It encourages writers to be wary of newly coined or trendy terms that may cloud clarity.

Lastly, the chapter advocates for precise language, instructing writers to avoid embellishing with unnecessary adjectives such as "meaningful" or overused phrases like "in the last analysis." The guidance provided aims to cultivate a sharp, readable style in writing, steering clear of confusion and





verbosity.

Overall, this section serves as a detailed guide for writers to refine their prose by choosing words that convey exact meanings, thereby improving the overall quality and readability of English writing.

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## Chapter 5 Summary: An Approach to Style (With a List of Reminders)

Chapter 5 of "The Elements of Style," titled "An Approach to Style," delves into the nuanced realm of writing style, moving beyond the previous chapters' focus on grammatical correctness and acceptable English usage. Style, in this context, is described as both distinguished and mysterious, an element that transcends mere technical proficiency. The chapter acknowledges the enigmatic essence of style, akin to the inexplicable allure of certain musical notes or literary phrases that resonate profoundly.

Style is depicted as an inherent increment in writing, revealing the writer's spirit, habits, capacities, and biases. It is communication that allows the Self to escape into the open. In illustrating style's elusive nature, the text challenges readers to rewrite famous sentences and observe how their power dissipates in alternate forms, highlighting the subtle magic of specific word arrangements.

Emphasizing that style cannot be pursued through conscious effort or adornment, the chapter advises young writers to cultivate style through plainness, simplicity, sincerity, and orderliness. Writing is portrayed as a slow, labor-intensive process where the mind races ahead of the pen, necessitating patience and perseverance to capture fleeting thoughts.



The chapter provides several guidelines for developing a satisfactory style:

1. **Place Yourself in the Background** Write in a manner that highlights the writing's content rather than the author's mood. As proficiency in language grows, the writer's style naturally emerges.
2. **Write Naturally:** Use language that flows easily and naturally, avoiding conscious imitation while admiring and learning from good examples.
3. **Work from a Suitable Design:** Plan the structure of your writing, understanding the nature of the work, whether simple or complex, allowing impulse and emotion to shape certain types of writing.
4. **Use Nouns and Verbs** Prioritize nouns and verbs for their strength and color, utilizing adjectives and adverbs sparingly.
5. **Revise and Rewrite:** Accept that revising is a crucial part of writing; embrace the process of refining and restructuring until achieving clarity and strength.
6. **Avoid Overwriting** Steer clear of excessively ornate prose, which can become tedious and overwhelming.



7. **Do Not Overstate:** Avoid exaggeration, as it can undermine the reader's trust.
8. **Avoid Excessive Qualifiers:** Refrain from overusing words like "rather," "very," and "pretty," which weaken prose.
9. **Avoid a Breezy Manner:** Recognize that a casual, overly informal style can dilute the substance of writing.
10. **Use Orthodox Spelling:** Stick to conventional spelling to prevent distracting readers.
11. **Do Not Explain Too Much:** Let dialogue and context reveal meaning without excessive adverbial explanations.
12. **Avoid Constructing Awkward Adverbs:** Refrain from forming unnatural adverbs; opt for simplicity.
13. **Ensure Clarity in Dialogue:** Attribute dialogue clearly to avoid confusion.
14. **Avoid Fancy Words:** Opt for straightforward language over elaborate terms unless necessity dictates otherwise.



15. **Use Dialect with Caution:** Only employ dialect when truly familiar with it to maintain consistency and clarity.
16. **Strive for Clarity:** Although not always easy, clarity remains a fundamental virtue in effective writing.
17. **Avoid Injecting Unnecessary Opinions** Reserve opinions for appropriate contexts.
18. **Use Figures of Speech Sparingly:** Deploy metaphors and similes with caution to prevent confusion.
19. **Avoid Shortcuts that Sacrifice Clarity.** Prioritize clarity over conciseness, especially with acronyms or jargon.
20. **Avoid Foreign Languages** Keep the writing primarily in English to maintain reader comprehension.
21. **Prefer Standard to Offbeat:** Embrace established usage over experimental expressions unless truly justified.

Ultimately, the chapter suggests that style emanates from the writer's attitudes and beliefs rather than grammatical prowess. It encourages writers to write honestly for themselves, treating writing as an act of faith and





trusting the reader's ability to engage with the text. This blend of technical mastery and authentic self-expression cultivates a distinctive style that resonates with clarity and purpose.

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# Critical Thinking

**Key Point:** Place Yourself in the Background

**Critical Interpretation:** Imagine yourself stepping aside as your words come alive, allowing your message to shine through without the distractions of personal flair or mood. This humble yet powerful approach to writing isn't about erasing your identity; rather, it's about channeling your unique voice unobtrusively so the truth of your message takes center stage. By learning to place yourself in the background, you're crafting a platform for your ideas to truly resonate, inspiring others without eclipsing them with ego. Just as in life, where humility allows our actions to speak louder than our words, writing with this mindset fosters clarity, understanding, and authenticity. It's a call to let your essence flow naturally, connecting soul to soul, making an enduring impact without shouting your own presence. Your style then becomes an echo of your innermost thoughts, gracefully guiding readers through the narrative tapestry you weave.

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