

I

Elementary Rules of Usage

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's.

Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

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

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

- the laws of Moses
- the temple of Isis

The pronominal possessives *hers*, *its*, *theirs*, *yours*, and *ours* have no apostrophe. Indefinite pronouns, however, use the apostrophe to show possession.

- one's rights
- somebody else's umbrella

A common error is to write *it's* for *its*, or vice versa. The first is a contraction, meaning "it is." The second is a possessive.

It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas.

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

Thus write,

red, white, and blue
gold, silver, or copper

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

This comma is often referred to as the "serial" comma.

In the names of business firms the last comma is usually omitted. Follow the usage of the individual firm.

Brown, Shipley and Co.

Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith Incorporated

3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.

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

This rule is difficult to apply; it is frequently hard to decide whether a single word, such as *however*, or a brief phrase is or is not parenthetical. If the interruption to the flow of the sentence is but slight, the writer may safely omit the commas. But whether the interruption is slight or considerable, he must never omit one comma and leave the other. There is no defense for such punctuation as

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

or

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

Dates usually contain parenthetical words or figures. Punctuate as follows:

February to July, 1972

April 6, 1956

Wednesday, November 13, 1929

Note that it is customary to omit the comma in

6 April 1958

The last form is an excellent way to write a date; the figures are separated by a word and are, for that reason, quickly grasped.

A name or a title in direct address is parenthetical.

If, Sir, you refuse, I cannot predict what will happen.

Well, Susan, this is a fine mess you are in.

The abbreviations *etc.*, *i.e.*, and *e.g.*, the abbreviations for academic degrees, and titles that follow a name are parenthetical and should be punctuated accordingly.

Letters, packages, etc., should go here.

Horace Fulsome, Ph.D., presided.

Rachel Simonds, Attorney

The Reverend Harry Lang, S.J.

No comma, however, should separate a noun from a restrictive term of identification.

Billy the Kid

The novelist John Fowles

William the Conqueror

Pliny the Younger

Although *Junior*, with its abbreviation *Jr.*, has commonly been regarded as parenthetical, logic suggests that it is, in fact, restrictive and therefore not in need of a comma.

James Wright Jr.

Nonrestrictive relative clauses are parenthetical, as are similar clauses introduced by conjunctions indicating time or place. Commas are therefore needed. A non-

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restrictive clause is one that does not serve to identify or define the antecedent noun.

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

In 1769, when Napoleon was born, Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

Nether Stowey, where Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, is a few miles from Bridgewater.

In these sentences, the clauses introduced by *which*, *when*, and *where* are nonrestrictive; they do not limit or define, they merely add something. In the first example, the clause introduced by *which* does not serve to tell which of several possible audiences is meant; the reader presumably knows that already. The clause adds, parenthetically, a statement supplementing that in the main clause. Each of the three sentences is a combination of two statements that might have been made independently.

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

Napoleon was born in 1769. At that time Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* at Nether Stowey. Nether Stowey is a few miles from Bridgewater.

Restrictive clauses, by contrast, are not parenthetical and are not set off by commas. Thus,

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Here the clause introduced by *who* does serve to tell which people are meant; the sentence, unlike the sentences above, cannot be split into two independent statements. The same principle of comma use applies to participial phrases and to appositives.

People sitting in the rear couldn't hear. (*restrictive*)

Uncle Bert, being slightly deaf, moved forward. (*non-restrictive*)

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My cousin Bob is a talented harpist. (*restrictive*)

Our oldest daughter, Mary, sings. (*nonrestrictive*)

When the main clause of a sentence is preceded by a phrase or a subordinate clause, use a comma to set off these elements.

Partly by hard fighting, partly by diplomatic skill, they enlarged their dominions to the east and rose to royal rank with the possession of Sicily.

4. Place a comma before a conjunction 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.

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

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 is perilous, but if we are prepared to act promptly, there is still one chance of escape.

When the subject is the same for both clauses and is expressed only once, a comma is useful if the connective is *but*. When the connective is *and*, the comma should be omitted if the relation between the two statements is close or immediate.

I have heard his arguments, but am still unconvinced.

He has had several years' experience and is thoroughly competent.

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 com-

pound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is 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.

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

Stevenson's romances are entertaining. They are full of exciting adventures.

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

If a conjunction is inserted, the proper mark is a comma. (Rule 4.)

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

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

A comparison of the three forms given above will show clearly the advantage of the first. It is, at least in the examples given, better than the second form because it suggests the close relationship between the two statements in a way that the second does not attempt, and better than the third because it is briefer and therefore more forcible. Indeed, this simple method of indicating relationship between statements is one of the most useful devices of composition. The relationship, as above, is commonly one of cause and consequence.

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

I had never been in the place before; besides, it was dark as a tomb.

An exception to the semicolon rule is worth noting here. A comma is preferable when the clauses are very

short and alike in form, or when the tone of the sentence is easy and conversational.

Man proposes; God disposes.

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

I hardly knew him, he was so changed.

Here today, gone tomorrow.

6. *Do not break sentences in two.*

In other words, do not use periods for commas.

I met them on a Cunard liner many 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.

In both these examples, the first period should be replaced by a comma and the following word begun with a small letter.

It is permissible to make an emphatic word or expression serve the purpose of a sentence and to punctuate it accordingly:

Again and again he called out. No reply.

The writer must, however, be certain that the emphasis is warranted, lest his clipped sentence seem merely a blunder in syntax or in punctuation. Generally speaking, the place for broken sentences is in dialogue, when a character happens to speak in a clipped or fragmentary way.

Rules 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover the most important principles that govern punctuation. They should be so thoroughly mastered that their application becomes second nature.

7. *Use a colon after an independent clause to introduce a list of particulars, an appositive, an amplification, or an illustrative quotation.*

A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. The colon has more ef-

fect than the comma, less power to separate than the semicolon, and more formality than the dash. It usually follows an independent clause and should not separate a verb from its complement or a preposition from its object. The examples in the left-hand column, below, are wrong; they should be rewritten as in the right-hand column.

Your dedicated whittler requires: a knife, a piece of wood, and a back porch.

Understanding is that penetrating quality of knowledge that grows from theory, practice, conviction, assertion, error, and humiliation.

Join two independent clauses with a colon if the second interprets or amplifies the first.

But even so, there was a directness and dispatch about animal burial: there was no stopover in the undertaker's foul parlor, no wreath or spray.

A colon may introduce a quotation that supports or contributes to the preceding clause.

The squalor of the streets reminded him of a line from Oscar Wilde: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

The colon also has certain functions of form: to follow the salutation of a formal letter, to separate hour from minute in a notation of time, and to separate the title of a work from its subtitle or a Bible chapter from a verse.

Dear Mr. Montague:
Practical Calligraphy: An Introduction to Italic Script
 departs at 10:48 P.M.
 Nehemiah 11:7

Your dedicated whittler requires three props: a knife, a piece of wood, and a back porch.

Understanding is that penetrating quality of knowledge that grows from theory, practice, conviction, assertion, error, and humiliation.

8. Use a dash to set off an abrupt break or interruption, and to announce a long appositive or summary.

A dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses.

His first thought on getting out of bed—if he had any thought at all—was to get back in again.

The rear axle began to make a noise—a grinding, chattering, teeth-gritting rasp.

The increasing reluctance of the sun to rise, the extra nip in the breeze, the patter of shed leaves dropping—all the evidences of fall drifting into winter were clearer each day.

Use a dash only when a more common mark of punctuation seems inadequate.

Her father's suspicions proved well-founded—it was not Edward she cared for—it was San Francisco.

Violence—the kind you see on television—is not honestly violent—there lies its harm.

Her father's suspicions proved well-founded. It was not Edward she cared for, it was San Francisco.

Violence, the kind you see on television, is not honestly violent. There lies its harm.

9. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.

Words that intervene between subject and verb do not affect the number of the verb:

The bittersweet flavor of youth—its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges—are not soon forgotten.

The bittersweet flavor of youth—its trials, its joys, its adventures, its challenges—is not soon forgotten.

A common blunder is the use of a singular verb form in a relative clause following "one of . . ." or a similar expression when the relative is the subject.

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One of the ablest men who has attacked this problem One of the ablest men who have attacked this problem

One of those people who is never ready on time One of those people who are never ready on time

Use a singular verb form after *each*, *either*, *every-one*, *everybody*, *neither*, *nobody*, *someone*.

Everybody thinks he has a sense of humor.

Although both clocks strike cheerfully, neither keeps good time.

With *none*, use the singular verb when the word means "no one" or "not one."

None of us are perfect. None of us is perfect.

A plural verb is commonly used when *none* suggests more than one thing or person

None are so fallible as those who are sure they're right.

A compound subject formed of two or more nouns joined by *and* almost always requires a plural verb.

The walrus and the carpenter were walking close at hand.

But certain compounds, often clichés, are so inseparable they are considered a unit and so take a singular verb, as do compound subjects qualified by *each* or *every*.

The long and the short of it is . . .

Bread and butter was all she served.

Give and take is essential to a happy household.

Every window, picture, and mirror was smashed.

A singular subject remains singular even if other nouns are connected to it by *with*, *as well as*, *in addition to*, *except*, *together with*, and *no less than*.

His speech as well as his manner is objectionable.

A linking verb agrees with the number of its subject.

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What is wanted is a few more pairs of hands.

The trouble with truth is its many varieties.

Some nouns that appear to be plural are usually construed as singular and given a singular verb.

Politics is an art, not a science.

The Republican Headquarters is on this side of the tracks.

But

The general's quarters are over the river.

In these cases the writer must simply learn the idioms. The contents of a book is singular. The contents of a jar may be either singular or plural, depending on what's in the jar—jam or marbles.

10. Use the proper case of pronoun.

The personal pronouns, as well as the pronoun *who*, change form as they function as subject or object.

Will Jane or he be hired, do you think? .

The culprit, it turned out, was he.

We heavy eaters would rather walk than ride.

Who knocks?

Give this work to whoever looks idle.

In the last example, *whoever* is the subject of *looks idle*; the object of the preposition *to* is the entire clause *whoever looks idle*. When *who* introduces a subordinate clause, its case depends on its function in that clause.

Virgil Soames is the candidate whom we think will win.

Virgil Soames is the candidate who we think will win.

Virgil Soames is the candidate whom we hope to elect.

Virgil Soames is the candidate who we hope to elect.

A pronoun in a comparison is nominative if it is the subject of a stated or understood verb.

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Sandy writes better than I. (Than I write.)

In general, avoid "understood" verbs by supplying them.

I think Horace admires Jessica more than I.

Polly loves cake more than me.

I think Horace admires Jessica more than I do.

Polly loves cake more than she loves me.

The objective case is correct in the following examples.

The ranger offered Shirley and him some advice on campsites.

They came to meet the Baldwins and us.

Let's talk it over between us, then, you and me.

Whom should I ask?

A group of us taxpayers protested.

Us in the last example is in apposition to taxpayers, the object of the preposition of. The wording, although grammatically defensible, is rarely apt. "A group of us protested as taxpayers" is better, if not exactly equivalent.

Use the simple personal pronoun as a subject.

Blake and myself stayed home.

Blake and I stayed home.

Howard and yourself brought the lunch, I thought.

Howard and you brought the lunch, I thought.

The possessive case of pronouns is used to show ownership. It has two forms: the adjectival modifier, your hat, and the noun form, a hat of yours.

The dog has buried one of your gloves and one of mine in the flower bed.

Gerunds usually require the possessive case.

Mother objected to our driving on the icy roads.

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A present participle as a verbal, on the other hand, takes the objective case.

They heard him singing in the shower.

The difference between a verbal participle and a gerund is not always obvious, but note what is really said in each of the following.

Do you mind me asking a question?

Do you mind my asking a question?

In the first sentence, the queried objection is to me, as opposed to other members of the group, putting one of the questions. In the second example, the issue is whether a question may be asked at all.

11. 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 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.

Participial phrases preceded by a conjunction or by a preposition, nouns in apposition, adjectives, and adjectival phrases come under the same rule if they begin the sentence.

On arriving in Chicago, his friends met him at the station.

On arriving in Chicago, he was met at the station by his friends.

A soldier of proved valor, they entrusted him with the defense of the city.

A soldier of proved valor, he was entrusted with the defense of the city.

Young and inexperienced, the task seemed easy to me.

Young and inexperienced, I thought the task easy.

Without a friend to counsel him, the temptation proved irresistible. Without a friend to counsel him, he found the temptation irresistible.

Sentences violating Rule 11 are often ludicrous:

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

Wondering irresolutely what to do next, the clock struck twelve.

As a mother of five, with another on the way, my ironing board is always up.

II

Elementary Principles of Composition

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

A basic structural design underlies every kind of writing. The writer will in part follow this design, in part deviate from it, according to his skill, his needs, and the unexpected events that accompany the act of composition. Writing, to be effective, must follow closely the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily in the order in which those thoughts occur. This calls for a scheme of procedure. In some cases the best design is no design, as with a love letter, which is simply an outpouring, or with a casual essay, which is a ramble. But in most cases planning must be a deliberate prelude to writing. The first principle of composition, therefore, is to foresee or determine the shape of what is to come and pursue that shape.

A sonnet is built on a fourteen-line frame, each line containing five feet. Hence, the sonneteer knows exactly where he is headed, although he may not know how to get there. Most forms of composition are less clearly defined, more flexible, but all have skeletons to which the writer will bring the flesh and the blood. The more clearly he perceives the shape, the better are his chances of success.

13. *Make the paragraph the unit of composition.*

The paragraph is a convenient unit; it serves all forms of literary work. As long as it holds together, a para-

graph may be of any length—a single, short sentence or a passage of great duration.

If the subject on which you are writing is of slight extent, or if you intend to treat it briefly, there may be no need to divide it into topics. Thus, a brief description, a brief book review, a brief account of a single incident, a narrative merely outlining an action, the setting forth of a single idea—any one of these is best written in a single paragraph. After the paragraph has been written, examine it to see whether division will improve it.

Ordinarily, however, a subject requires division into topics, each of which should be dealt with in 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 to him that a new step in the development of the subject has been reached.

As a rule, single sentences should not be written or printed as paragraphs. An exception may be made of sentences of transition, indicating the relation between the parts of an exposition or argument.

In dialogue, each speech, even if only a single word, is usually a paragraph by itself; that is, a new paragraph begins with each change of speaker. The application of this rule when dialogue and narrative are combined is best learned from examples in well-edited works of fiction. Sometimes a writer, seeking to create an effect of rapid talk or for some other reason, will elect not to set off each speech in a separate paragraph and instead will run speeches together. The common practice, however, and the one that serves best in most instances, is to give each speech a paragraph of its own.

As a rule, begin each paragraph either with a sentence that suggests the topic or with a sentence that helps the transition. If a paragraph forms part of a larger composition, its relation to what precedes, or its function as a part of the whole, may need to be expressed. This can sometimes be done by a mere word or phrase (*again; therefore; for the same reason*) in the first sentence. Sometimes, however, it is expedient to get into the

topic slowly, by way of a sentence or two of introduction or transition.

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

The breeze served us admirably.

The campaign opened with a series of reverses.

The next ten or twelve pages were filled with a curious set of entries.

But when this device, or any device, is too often used, it becomes a mannerism. More commonly the opening sentence simply indicates by its subject the direction the paragraph is to take.

At length I thought I might return toward the stockade.

He picked up the heavy lamp from the table and began to explore.

Another flight of steps, and they emerged on the roof.

In animated narrative, the paragraphs are likely to be short and without any semblance of a topic sentence, the writer rushing headlong, event following event in rapid succession. The break between such paragraphs merely serves the purpose of a rhetorical pause, throwing into prominence some detail of the action.

In general, remember that paragraphing calls for a good eye as well as a logical mind. 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 firing off 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.

14. *Use the active voice.*

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

I shall always remember my first visit to Boston.

This is much better than

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

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

My first visit to Boston will always be remembered,

it becomes indefinite: is it the writer or some person undisclosed or the world at large that will always remember this visit?

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

The dramatists of the Restoration are little esteemed today.

Modern readers have little esteem for the dramatists of the Restoration.

The first would be the preferred form in a paragraph on the dramatists of the Restoration, the second in a paragraph on the tastes of modern readers. 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.

The habitual use of the active voice, however, makes for forcible writing. This is true not only in narrative concerned principally with action but in writing of any kind. Many a tame sentence of description or exposition can be made lively and emphatic by substituting a transitive in the active voice for some such perfunctory expression as *there is* or *could be heard*.

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

Dead leaves covered the ground.

At dawn the crowing of a rooster could be heard.

The cock's crow came with dawn.

The reason 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.

Note, in the examples above, that when a sentence is made stronger, it usually becomes shorter. Thus, brevity is a by-product of vigor.

15. *Put statements in positive form.*

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

He was not very often on time.

He usually came late.

He did not think that studying Latin was a sensible way to use one's time.

He thought the study of Latin a waste of time.

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.

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

All three examples show the weakness inherent in the word *not*. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader is

dissatisfied with being told only what is not; he wishes to be told what is. Hence, as a rule, it is better to express even 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

Placing negative and positive in opposition makes for a stronger structure.

- Not charity, but simple justice.
- Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.
- Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

Negative words other than *not* are usually strong.

Her loveliness I never knew/Until she smiled on me.

Statements qualified with unnecessary auxiliaries or conditionals sound irresolute.

If you would let us know the time of your arrival, we would be happy to arrange your transportation from the airport.

If you will let us know the time of your arrival, we shall be happy to arrange your transportation from the airport.

The applicant can make a good impression by being neat and punctual.

The applicant will make a good impression if he is neat and punctual.

Keats may be ranked among those romantic poets who died young.

Keats was one of those romantic poets who died young.

If your every sentence admits a doubt, your writing will lack authority. Save the auxiliaries *would*, *should*, *could*, *may*, *might*, and *can* for situations involving real uncertainty.

16. Use definite, specific, concrete language.

Prefer the specific to the general, the definite to the vague, the concrete to the abstract.

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.

If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on any one point, it is on this: the surest way to arouse and hold the attention of the reader is by being specific, definite, and concrete. The greatest writers—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—are effective largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter. Their words call up pictures.

Jean Stafford, to cite a modern author, demonstrates in her short story "In the Zoo" how prose is made vivid by the use of words that evoke images and sensations:

... Daisy and I in time found asylum in a small managerie down by the railroad tracks. It belonged to a gentle alcoholic ne'er-do-well, who did nothing all day long but drink bathtub gin in rickeys and play solitaire and smile to himself and talk to his animals. He had a little, stunted red vixen and a deodorized skunk, a parrot from Tahiti that spoke Parisian French, a woebegone coyote, and two capuchin monkeys, so serious and humanized, so small and sad and sweet, and so religious-looking with their tonsured heads that it was impossible not to think their gibberish was really an ordered language with a grammar that someday some philologist would understand.

Gran knew about our visits to Mr. Murphy and she did not object, for it gave her keen pleasure to excoriate him when we came home. His vice was not a matter of guesswork; it was an established fact that he was half-seas over from dawn till midnight. "With the black Irish," said Gran, "the taste for drink is taken in with the mother's milk and is never mastered. Oh, I know all about those promises to join the temperance movement and not

to touch another drop. The way to Hell is paved with good intentions."

We were still little girls when we discovered Mr. Murphy, before the shattering disease of adolescence was to make our bones and brains ache even more painfully than before, and we loved him and we hoped to marry him when we grew up. We loved him, and we loved his monkeys to exactly the same degree and in exactly the same way; they were husbands and fathers and brothers, these little, ugly, dark, secret men who minded their own business and let us mind ours. If we stuck our fingers through the bars of the cage, the monkeys would sometimes take them in their tight, tiny hands and look into our faces with a tentative, somehow absent-minded sorrow, as if they terribly regretted that they could not place us but were glad to see us all the same. Mr. Murphy, playing a solitaire game of cards called "once in a blue moon" on a kitchen table in his back yard beside the pens, would occasionally look up and blink his beautiful blue eyes and say, "You're peaches to make over my wee friends. I love you for it." There was nothing demanding in his voice, and nothing sticky; on his lips the word "love" was jocose and forthright, it had no strings attached. We would sit on either side of him and watch him regiment his ranks of cards and stop to drink as deeply as if he were dying of thirst and wave to his animals and say to them, "Yes, lads, you're dandies."*

If the experiences of Walter Mitty, of Dick Diver, of Rabbit Angstrom have seemed for the moment real to countless readers, if in reading Faulkner we have almost the sense of inhabiting Yoknapatawpha County during the decline of the South, it is because the details used are definite, the terms concrete. It is not that every detail is given—that would be impossible, as well as to no purpose—but that all the significant details are given, and with such accuracy and vigor that the reader, in imagination, can project himself into the scene. In exposition and in argument, the writer must like.

* A selection from "In the Zoo" from *Bad Characters* by Jean Stafford. Copyright © 1953, 1964 by Jean Stafford. This selection appeared originally in *The New Yorker*. Reprinted with the permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.

wise never lose his hold upon the concrete; and even when he is dealing with general principles, he must furnish particular instances of their application.

In his *Philosophy of Style*, Herbert Spencer gives two sentences to illustrate how the vague and general can be turned into the vivid and particular:

In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of its penal code will be severe.

In proportion as men delight in battles, bullfights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack.

To show what happens when strong writing is deprived of its vigor, George Orwell once took a passage from the Bible and drained it of its blood. On the left, below, is Orwell's translation; on the right, the verse from Ecclesiastes (King James Version).

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels 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 inevitably 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.

17. Omit needless words.

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

Many expressions in common use violate this principle.

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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 that	this subject
His story is a strange one.	His story is strange.
the reason why is that	because

An expression that is especially debilitating is *the fact that*. It should be revised out of 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	his failure
the fact that I had arrived	my arrival

See also the words *case, character, nature* in Chapter IV.

Who is, which was, and the like are often superfluous.

His brother, who is 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

As a positive statement is more concise than a negative one, and the active voice more concise than the passive, many of the examples given under Rules 14 and 15 illustrate this rule as well.

A common way to fall into wordiness is to present a

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single complex idea, step by step, in a series of sentences that might to advantage be combined into 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. (51 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)

18. *Avoid a succession of loose sentences.*

This rule refers especially to loose sentences of a particular type: those consisting of two clauses, the second introduced by a conjunction or relative. A writer may err by making his sentences too compact and periodic. An occasional loose sentence prevents the style from becoming too formal and gives the reader a certain relief. Consequently, loose sentences are common in easy, unstudied writing. The danger is that there may be too many of them.

An unskilled writer will sometimes construct a whole paragraph of sentences of this kind, using as connectives *and, but, and*, less frequently, *who, which, when, where*, and *while*, these last in nonrestrictive senses. (See Rule 3.)

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 and emptiness, the paragraph above is bad because of the structure of its sentences, with their mechanical symmetry and singsong. Compare these sentences from the chapter "What I Believe" in E. M. Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy*:

I believe in aristocracy, though—if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others as well as for themselves, they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure, and they can take a joke.*

If the writer finds that he has written a series of loose sentences, he should recast enough of them to remove the monotony, replacing them by simple sentences, by sentences of two clauses joined by a semicolon, by periodic sentences of two clauses, by sentences (loose or periodic) of three clauses—whichever best represent the real relations of the thought.

19. *Express coordinate ideas in similar form.*

This principle, that of parallel construction, requires that expressions similar in content and function be outwardly similar. The likeness of form enables the reader to recognize more readily the likeness of content and function. The familiar Beatitudes exemplify the virtue of parallel construction.

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.

* From *Two Cheers for Democracy*, copyright, 1951, by E. M. Forster. Published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

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

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 left-hand 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 right-hand 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.

the French, the Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese

the French, the Italians, the Spanish, and the Portuguese

in spring, summer, or in winter

in spring, summer, or winter (in spring, in summer, or in winter)

Some words require a particular preposition in certain idiomatic uses. When such words are joined in a compound construction, all the appropriate prepositions must be included, unless they are the same.

His speech was marked by disagreement and scorn for his opponent's position.

His speech was marked by disagreement with and scorn for his opponent's position.

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 con-

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struction. Many violations of this rule can be corrected by rearranging the sentence.

It was both a long ceremony and very tedious.

A time not for words but for action.

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

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

It may be asked, what if a writer needs to express a rather large number of similar ideas—say, twenty? Must he write twenty consecutive sentences of the same pattern? On closer examination he will probably find that the difficulty is imaginary—that his twenty ideas can be classified in groups, and that he need apply the principle only within each group. Otherwise he had best avoid the difficulty by putting his statements in the form of a table.

20. *Keep related words together.*

The position of the words in a sentence is the principal means of showing their relationship. Confusion and ambiguity result when words are badly placed. The writer must, therefore, bring together the words and groups of words that are related in thought and keep apart those that are not so related.

He noticed a large stain in the rug that was right in the center.

You can call your mother in London and tell her all about George's taking you out to dinner for just sixty cents.

The ceremony was both long and tedious.

A time not for words but for action.

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

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

He noticed a large stain right in the center of the rug.

For just sixty cents you can call your mother in London and tell her all about George's taking you out to dinner.

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New York's first commercial human-sperm bank opened Friday with semen samples from 18 men frozen in a stainless steel tank.

New York's first commercial human-sperm bank opened Friday when semen samples were taken from 18 men. The samples were then frozen and stored in a stainless steel tank.

In the left-hand version of the first example, the reader has no way of knowing whether the stain was in the center of the rug or the rug was in the center of the room. In the left-hand version of the second example, the reader may well wonder which cost sixty cents—the phone call or the dinner. In the left-hand version of the third example, the reader's heart goes out to those eighteen poor fellows frozen in a steel tank.

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.

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

A dog, if you fail to discipline him, becomes a household pest.

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

Unless disciplined, a dog becomes a household pest.

Interposing a phrase or a clause, as in the left-hand examples above, interrupts the flow of the main clause. This interruption, however, is not usually bothersome when the flow is checked only by a relative clause or by an expression in apposition. Sometimes, in periodic sentences, the interruption is a deliberate device for creating suspense. (See examples under Rule 22.)

The relative pronoun should come, in most instances, immediately after its antecedent.

There was a stir in the audience that suggested disapproval.

He wrote three articles about his adventures in

A stir that suggested disapproval swept the audience.

He published three articles in *Harper's Magazine*

Spain, which were published in *Harper's Magazine*, 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, who became President in 1889. He was the grandson of William Henry Harrison.

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

The Superintendent of the Chicago Division, who No ambiguity results from the above. But

A proposal to amend the Sherman Act, which has been variously judged leaves the reader wondering whether it is the proposal or the Act that has been variously judged. The relative clause must be moved forward, to read, "A proposal, which has been variously judged, to amend the Sherman Act. . . ." Similarly

The grandson of William Henry Harrison, who William Henry Harrison's grandson, Benjamin Harrison, who

A noun in apposition may come between antecedent and relative, because in such a combination no real ambiguity can arise.

The Duke of York, his brother, who was regarded with hostility by the Whigs

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.

The chairman said he hoped all members would give generously to the Fund at a meeting of the committee yesterday.

At a meeting of the committee yesterday, the chairman said he hoped all members would give generously to the Fund.

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, Major R. E. Joyce will give a lecture in Bailey Hall on "My Experiences in Mesopotamia." The public is invited.

Note, in the last left-hand example, how swiftly meaning departs when words are wrongly juxtaposed.

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

In summarizing the action of a drama, the writer should use the present tense. In summarizing a poem, story, or novel, he should also use the present, though he may use the past if it seems more natural to do so. If the summary is in the present tense, antecedent action should be expressed by the perfect; if in the past, by the past perfect.

Chance prevents Friar John from delivering Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo. Meanwhile, owing to her father's arbitrary change of the day set for her wedding, Juliet has been compelled to drink the potion on Tuesday night, with the result that Balthasar informs Romeo of her supposed death before Friar Lawrence learns of the nondelivery of the letter.

But whichever tense is used in the summary, a past tense in indirect discourse or in indirect question remains unchanged.

The Friar confesses that it was he who married them.

Apart from the exceptions noted, whichever tense the writer chooses he should use throughout. Shifting from one tense to another gives the appearance of uncertainty and irresolution.

In presenting the statements or the thought of someone else, as in summarizing an essay or reporting a

speech, the writer should not overwork such expressions as "he said," "he stated," "the speaker added," "the speaker then went on to say," "the author also thinks." He should indicate clearly at the outset, once for all, that what follows is summary, and then waste no words in repeating the notification.

In notebooks, in newspapers, in handbooks of literature, summaries of one kind or another may be indispensable, and for children in primary schools retelling a story in their own words is a useful exercise. But in the criticism or interpretation of literature the writer should be careful to avoid dropping into summary. He may find it necessary to devote one or two sentences to indicating the subject, or the opening situation, of the work he is discussing; he may cite numerous details to illustrate its qualities. But he should aim at writing an orderly discussion supported by evidence, not a summary with occasional comment. Similarly, if the scope of his discussion includes a number of works, he will as a rule do better not to take them up singly in chronological order but to aim from the beginning at establishing general conclusions.

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

The proper place in the sentence for the word or group of words that the writer desires to make most prominent is usually the end.

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

This steel is principally used for making razors, because of its hardness.

Since that time, humanity has advanced in many ways, but it has hardly advanced in fortitude.

Because of its hardness, this steel is used principally for making razors.

The word or group of words entitled to this position of prominence is usually the logical predicate—that is, the new element in the sentence, as it is in the second example.

The effectiveness of the periodic sentence arises from the prominence it gives to the main statement.

Four centuries ago, Christopher Columbus, one of the Italian mariners whom the decline of their own republics had put at the service of the world and of adventure, seeking for Spain a westward passage to the Indies to offset the achievement of Portuguese discoverers, lighted on America.

With these hopes and in this belief I would urge you, laying aside all hindrance, thrusting away all private aims, to devote yourself unswervingly and unflinchingly to the vigorous and successful prosecution of this war.

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.

Vast and rude, fretted by the action of nearly three thousand years, the fragments of this architecture may often seem, at first sight, like works of nature.

Home is the sailor.

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

Great kings worshiped 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.

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 a composition.

III

A Few Matters of Form

Colloquialisms. If you use a colloquialism or a slang word or phrase, simply use it; do not draw attention to it by enclosing it in quotation marks. To do so is to put on airs, as though you were inviting the reader to join you in a select society of those who know better.

Exclamations. Do not attempt to emphasize simple statements by using a mark of exclamation.

It was a wonderful show! It was a wonderful show.

The exclamation mark is to be reserved for use after true exclamations or commands.

What a wonderful show!

Halt!

Headings. If a manuscript is to be submitted for publication, leave plenty of space at the top of page 1. The editor will need this space for his penciled directions to the compositor. Place the heading, or title, at least a fourth of the way down the page. Leave a blank line, or its equivalent in space, after the heading. On succeeding pages, begin near the top, but not so near as to give a crowded appearance. Omit the period after a title or heading. A question mark or an exclamation point may be used if the heading calls for it.

Hyphen. When two or more words are combined to form a compound adjective, a hyphen is usually re-

A FEW MATTERS OF FORM

quired. "He belonged to the leisure class and enjoyed leisure-class pursuits." "He entered his boat in the round-the-island race."

Do not use a hyphen between words that can better be written as one word: *water-fowl*, *waterfowl*. Your common sense will aid you in the decision, but a dictionary is more reliable. The steady evolution of the language seems to favor union: two words eventually become one, usually after a period of hyphenation.

bed chamber	bed-chamber	bedchamber
wild life	wild-life	wildlife
bell boy	bell-boy	bellboy

The hyphen can play tricks on the unwary, as it did in Chattanooga when two newspapers merged—the *News* and the *Free Press*. Someone introduced a hyphen into the merger, and the paper became *The Chattanooga News-Free Press*, which sounds as though the paper were news-free, or devoid of news. Obviously, we ask too much of a hyphen when we ask it to cast its spell over words it does not adjoin.

Margins. Keep right-hand and left-hand margins roughly the same width. Exception: If a great deal of annotating or editing is anticipated, the left-hand margin should be roomy enough to accommodate this work.

Numerals. Do not spell out dates or other serial numbers. Write them in figures or in Roman notation, as may be appropriate.

August 9, 1968

Chapter XII

Rule 3

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Exception: When they occur in dialogue, most dates and numbers are best spelled out.

"I arrived home on August ninth."

"In the year 1970, I turned twenty-one."

"I shall read Chapter Twelve."

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Parentheses. A sentence containing an expression in parentheses is punctuated outside the marks of parenthesis exactly as if the parenthetical expression 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.

I went to his house yesterday (my third attempt to see him), but he had left town.

He declares (and why should we doubt his good faith?) that he is now certain of success.

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

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

The United States Coast Pilot has this to say of the place: "Bracy Cove, 0.5 mile eastward of Bear Island, is exposed to southeast winds, has a rocky and uneven bottom, and is unfit for anchorage."

A quotation grammatically in apposition or the direct object of a verb is preceded by a comma and enclosed in quotation marks.

I am reminded of the advice of my neighbor, "Never worry about your heart till it stops beating."

Mark Twain says, "A classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read."

When a quotation is followed by an attributive phrase, the comma is enclosed within the quotation marks.

"I can't attend," she said.

Typographical usage dictates that the comma be inside the marks, though logically it often seems not to belong there.

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"The Clerks," "Luke Havergal," and "Richard Cory" are in Robinson's *Children of the Night*.

When quotations of an entire line, or more, of either verse or prose are to be distinguished typographically from text matter, as are the quotations in this book, begin on a fresh line and indent. Quotation marks should not be used unless they appear in the original, as in dialogue.

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 indirect discourse and not enclosed in quotation marks.

Keats declares that beauty is truth, truth beauty.

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

These are the times that try men's souls.

He lives far from the madding crowd.

References. In scholarly work requiring exact references, abbreviate titles that occur frequently, giving the full forms in an alphabetical list at the end. As a general practice, give the references in parentheses or in footnotes, not in the body of the sentence. Omit the words *act, scene, line, book, volume, page*, except when referring by only one of them. Punctuate as indicated below.

in the second scene of
the third act

in *iii.ii* (Still better, simply insert *iii.ii* in parentheses at the proper place in the sentence.)

After the killing of Polonius, Hamlet is placed under guard (*iv.ii. 14*).

2 Samuel *i:17-27*

Othello *ii.iii. 264-267, iii.iii. 155-161*

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Syllabication. When a word must be divided at the end of a line, consult a dictionary to learn the syllables between which division should be made. The student will do well to examine the syllable division in a number of pages of any carefully printed book.

Titles. For the titles of literary works, scholarly usage prefers italics with capitalized initials. The usage of editors and publishers varies, some using italics with capitalized initials, others using Roman with capitalized initials and with or without quotation marks. Use italics (indicated in manuscript by underscoring) except in writing for a periodical that follows a different practice. Omit initial *A* or *The* from titles when you place the possessive before them.

A Tale of Two Cities; Dickens's Tale of Two Cities.