

The Elements of Style

ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's

Charles's friend

Burns's poems

the witch's malice

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.

Enclose parenthetic expressions between commas

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

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.

Do not join independent clauses by a comma

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

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

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.

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.

Divide words at line-ends, in accordance with their formation and pronunciation

know-ledge (not knowl-edge); Shake-speare (not Shakes-peare); de-scribe (not des-crite); atmo-sphere (not atmosphere);

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic

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

1. the topic sentence comes at or near the beginning;
2. the succeeding sentences explain or establish or develop the statement made in the topic sentence; and
3. the final sentence either emphasizes the thought of the topic sentence or states some important consequence.

Use the active voice

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.

Put statements in positive form

He was not very often on time.

He did not think that studying Latin was much use.

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.

He usually came late.

He thought the study of Latin useless.

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

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.

Avoid a succession of loose sentences

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.

Keep related words together

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.

In summaries, keep to one tense

An unforeseen chance prevents Friar John from delivering Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo. Juliet, meanwhile, owing to her father's arbitrary change of the day set for her wedding, 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 non-delivery of the letter.

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

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

Place the emphatic words of a sentence at 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.

A FEW MATTERS OF FORM

Headings

Leave a blank line, or its equivalent in space, after the title or heading of a manuscript. On succeeding pages, if using ruled paper, begin on the first line.

Numerals

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

Parentheses

A sentence containing an expression in parenthesis is punctuated, outside of the marks of parenthesis, exactly as if the expression in parenthesis were absent. The expression within 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.

Quotations

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

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 parenthesis 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.

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.

WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS COMMONLY MISUSED

All right. In the sense, "Agreed," or "Go ahead." In other uses better avoided. Always written as two words.

As good or better than. Should be corrected by rearranging the sentence.

As to whether. Whether is sufficient.

Bid. Takes the infinitive without to. The past tense is bade.

Case. "Instance of a thing's occurring; usual state of affairs." In these two senses, the word is usually unnecessary.

Certainly. Used by some speakers to intensify any and every statement. A mannerism ; bad in speech; worse in writing.

Character. Often simply redundant, used from a mere habit of wordiness.

Claim, vb. Means *lay claim to*. Used with a dependent clause if this sense is clearly involved. Not to be used as a substitute for *declare, maintain, or charge*.

Compare. To *compare to* is to point out or imply resemblances, between objects regarded as essentially of different order; to *compare with* is mainly to point out differences, between objects regarded as essentially of the same order.

Clever. Greatly overused; it is best restricted to ingenuity displayed in small matters.

Consider. Not followed by *as* when it means, "believe to be."

Dependable. A needless substitute for *reliable, trustworthy*.

Due to. Incorrectly used for *through, because of, or owing to*, in adverbial phrases. In correct use related as predicate or as modifier to a particular noun.

Effect. As noun, means *result*; as verb, means *to bring about, accomplish* (not to be confused with *affect*, which means "to influence").

Etc. Not to be used of persons. Equivalent to *and the rest, and so forth*, and hence not to be used if one of these would be insufficient. Least open to objection when it represents the last terms of a list already given in full, or immaterial words at the end of a quotation.

WORDS OFTEN MISSPELLED

accidentally	formerly	privilege	advice	humorous
affect	hypocrisy	repetition	beginning	immediately
rhyme	believe	incidentally	rhythm	benefit
latter	ridiculous	challenge	led	sacrilegious
criticize	lose	seize	deceive	marriage
separate	definite	mischief	shepherd	describe
murmur	siege	despise	necessary	similar
develop	occurred	simile	disappoint	parallel
too	duel	Philip	tragedy	ecstasy
playwright	tries	effect	preceding	undoubtedly
existence	prejudice	until	fiery	principal

Write to-day, to-night, to-morrow (but not together) with hyphen. Write any one, every one, some one, some time (except the sense of formerly) as two words.

Fact. Use this word only of matters of a kind capable of direct verification, not of matters of judgment.

Factor. A hackneyed word; can usually be replaced by something more direct and idiomatic.

Feature. Like *factor* it can be omitted.

Fix. Colloquial for *arrange, prepare, mend*. Restrict it to its literary senses, *fasten, make firm or immovable*, etc.

He is a man who. A common type of redundant expression.

However. In the meaning *nevertheless*, not to come first in its sentence or clause.

Kind of. Not to be used as a substitute for *rather*.

Less. Should not be misused for *fewer*.

Line, along these lines. In the sense of *procedure, conduct, thought*, is allowable, but has been overworked.

Literal, literally. Often incorrectly used in support of exaggeration or violent metaphor.

Nature. Often simply redundant, used like *character*.

One of the most. Avoid beginning essays or paragraphs with this formula.

Respective, respectively. These words may usually be omitted with advantage.

So. Avoid, in writing, the use of *so* as an intensifier: "so good;" "so warm;" "so delightful."

Sort of. See under **Kind of**.

Thanking you in advance. This sounds as if the writer meant, "It will not be worth my while to write to you again." Simply write, "Thanking you," and if the favor which you have requested is granted, write a letter of acknowledgment.

They. A common inaccuracy is the use of the plural pronoun when the antecedent is a distributive expression such as *each, each one, everybody, every one, many a man*, which, though implying more than one person, requires the pronoun to be in the singular.

While. Avoid the indiscriminate use of this word for *and, but, and although*.

Whom. Often incorrectly used for *who* before *he said* or similar expressions, when it is really the subject of a following verb.

The Elements of Electronic Mail

Be Brief

E-mail sh ould be no more than one screen, 25 to 30 lines, long.

Get to the Point

Get to the point of your e-mail within the first paragraph preferably within the first two lines. Reiterate your goal in your closing paragraph.

Always Use the Subject Line

Never leave the subject line blank. Your e-mail may be mistaken for junk or overlooked.

Avoid Abuses of Case

Always follow the rules of proper grammar. Use punctuation, not capitalization, to show emphasis.

Follow Uniform Resource Identifier Standards

When including links to Intemet resources follow accepted standards. Write <http://www.yahoo.com> not Yahoo.com.

Never Send Unsolicited Attachments

Unsolicited attachments maybe ignored or deleted. Check with the recipient beforehand.

Quote the Original E-Mail in Your Reply

Include pertinent excerpts from the original e-mail in your response.

Make Sure to Include a Signature

Your e-mail signature should always be included with any e-mail and should only contain contact information.