

## Elements of Style

1. **Choose a suitable design and hold to it.** One of the keys to good writing (and speaking) is clear structure that fits the topic well. So choose an organizational scheme that matches your purpose (for example, to describe a problem, communication a change, argue for a course of action)
2. **Make the paragraph the unit of composition.** Thanks to the corrupting influence of the internet and email, where every sentence is often a new paragraph, this very useful rule has fallen into disregard.

That's unfortunate, because thinking about your writing in paragraph units helps with clarity and precision. See how confusing it is when you start a new paragraph before you should?

3. **Put statements in positive form.** While it is not the case that most people don't have a problem with this rule, its abuse is no longer as widespread as it once was. Multiplying negatives makes language harder to understand.
4. **Use definite, specific, concrete language.** Many of us would prefer, you know, to use stuff that doesn't really say exactly what we, like, mean, because the thing about getting specific is that you have to have something to say. But good writing comes alive around specifics.
5. **Omit needless words.**
6. **Avoid a succession of loose sentences.** Loose sentences are joined with "and," and they tend to run on, and they don't have much of a sense of direction, and they get annoying after a while because what we really want is the writer to do the work of figuring out what is most important for us, and that saves time.
7. **Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form.** Here, our prose masters argue for parallelism in language that mirrors parallelism in thought. Blessed are the good writers, for they shall be read. Blessed are the book buyers, for they shall enable the writers to eat well. Blessed are the readers of newsletters, for they shall know more than their friends and colleagues.
8. **Keep related words together.** The alternative to this rule involves sticking parenthetical thoughts and a string of ideas in between, say, the subject and the verb of the sentence which tends to make readers work harder than they should have to and besides cuts whatever power the original thought possessed and is confusing.
9. **In summaries, keep to one tense.** Changing tenses in mid-sentence is something that all inexperienced writers have done at one time or another. It's just one of those things that made readers work harder.
10. **Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.** Because people remember the last thing they hear or read, the end of the sentence is where you should put important information.

Adapted from "Writing Well When Time is Tight," Nick Morgan, *Harvard Business Review*

Read the *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White at: <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>