

**Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style* (A Distillation)  
“Elementary Principles of Composition”**

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

- “Writing, to be effective, must follow closely the thoughts of the writer, but not necessarily in the order in which those thoughts occur” (p. 15).

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

- “After the paragraph has been written, examine it to see whether division will improve it” (p. 16).
- “As a rule, begin each paragraph either with a sentence that suggests the topic or with a sentence that helps the transition” (p. 16).

3. *Use the active voice.*

“My first visit to Boston will always be remembered.”  
“My first visit to Boston will always be remembered by me.”  
“I shall always remember my first visit to Boston.”

“The reason he left college was that his health became impaired.”  
“Failing health compelled him to leave college.”

“It was not long before she was very sorry that she had said what she had.”  
“She soon repented her words.”

4. *Put statements in positive form.*

“*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.”

“did not pay any attention to” ...  
“did not have much confidence in” ...

- “Save the auxiliaries *would, should, could, may, might, and can* for situations involving real uncertainty.” (p. 20)

5. *Use definite, specific, concrete language.*

“He showed satisfaction as he took possession of his well-earned reward.”  
“He grinned as he pocketed the coin.”

“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.”

6. *Omit needless words.*

“the fact that he had not succeeded” ...

7. *Avoid a succession of loose sentences.*

“[1] The third concert of the subscription series was given last evening, and a large audience was in attendance. [2] Mr. Edward Appleton was the soloist, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra furnished the instrumental music. [3] The former showed himself to be an artist of the first rank, while the latter proved itself fully deserving of its high reputation. [4] The interest aroused by the series has been very gratifying to the Committee, and it is planned to give a similar series annually hereafter. [5] The fourth concert will be given on Tuesday, May 10, when an equally attractive program will be presented.”

8. *Express coordinate ideas in similar form.*

“not only going to the opera but also a member of the symphony”

9. *Keep related words together.*

“You can call your mother in London and tell her all about George's taking you out to dinner for just two dollars.”

“For just two dollars you can call your mother in London and tell her all about George's taking you out to dinner.”

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

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

“Having written his best work in a lifetime, the entire building congratulated Aaron.”

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

11. *Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.*

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

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