



Style: Toward Clarity and Grace

Joseph M. Williams, Gregory G. Colomb

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This acclaimed book is a master teacher's tested program for turning clumsy prose into clear, powerful, and effective writing. A logical, expert, easy-to-use plan for achieving excellence in expression, *Style* offers neither simplistic rules nor endless lists of dos and don'ts. Rather, Joseph Williams explains how to be concise, how to be focused, how to be organized. Filled with realistic examples of good, bad, and better writing, and step-by-step strategies for crafting a sentence or organizing a paragraph, *Style* does much more than teach mechanics: it helps anyone who must write clearly and persuasively transform even the roughest of drafts into a polished work of clarity, coherence, impact, and personality.

"Buy Williams's book. And dig out from storage your dog-eared old copy of *The Elements of Style*. Set them side by side on your reference shelf."—Barbara Walraff, *Atlantic*

"Let newcomer writers discover this, and let their teachers and readers rejoice. It is a practical, disciplined text that is also a pleasure to read."—*Christian Century*

"An excellent book....It provides a sensible, well-balanced approach, featuring prescriptions that work."—Donald Karzenski, *Journal of Business Communication*

"Intensive fitness training for the expressive mind."—*Booklist*

(The college textbook version, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 9th edition, is available from Longman. ISBN 9780321479358.)

Style: Toward Clarity and Grace Details

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Patrick Garrett says

A Rather Expensive Guide with Little Unique Content

Though well written--a prerequisite for a style book--I wasn't blown away by this guide's content. A required text for a rhetorical studies seminar at UC, Riverside, we compared this book with Virginia Tufte's *Artful Sentences* to glean practical value from a spectrum of books that have the intention of distilling style into a couple hundred pages. The approach in this text comes in response to, and in some ways falls short of, the seminal *Elements of Style*. That is, presenting some fundamental rules, which claim to be more universal than others, and urging writers to adopt them judiciously. Tufte's approach, however, categorizing sentences broadly and provides many (my classmates thought too many) examples in each category--a stylistic immersion of a kind. If immersion isn't for you, and you're looking for a sort of check-list for grammar and style, I would suggest going with *Elements of Style*. If you've already read EOS, your looking for the same rules in a fresh voice, and you have a few bucks to spend, go ahead and buy this guide.

Ksenia Anske says

A book to buy to have in your reference library, along with *The Elements of Style* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Though you'll find it mostly discussing non-fiction examples, the lessons are the same. You can apply them to any writing, fiction included. And you'll chuckle, too, recognizing your own ineptnesses described so eloquently here, and with such fine humor (especially when you get to the last chapter that includes a brief history of good English and the separation of real grammatical rules from mere linguistic folklore insisted upon by purists but ignored by all good writers).

Anna Kander says

I especially appreciated lessons 6, 7, and 8.

Joe S says

For the tens of people out there who actually have to *teach* reading and writing, I've decided to start reviewing the heap of atrocious textbooks I've had to slog through while building my syllabi.

This book is brilliant. I feel like a better writer for having read it. I wish it had been required when I was taking first-year comp. It fucks the old-school conservatism of Strunk-n-White right in the ear. Williams sidesteps the paralyzing imperatives for pre- and mid-writing processes and skips right to rewriting, walking through the revision process on a sentence level. And not once does he say "you must" or "you must never" (two phrases that freeze freshman brains quicker than "pop quiz"). Instead, he basically says readers are monkeys who need help understanding. And here's how you lead those monkeys by the hand. Subtle change

in focus, huge change in distribution of power.

Less one star for the omnipresent linguistic terms that even I didn't remember. I'm not quite sure it was absolutely necessary to refer so often to nominalizations and resumptive modifiers. Probably not so good for an ESL class. Or maybe even better. I'd never have known what the crunk a resumptive modifier was if I hadn't taken a foreign language.

Denis says

I fell in love with the way that Williams debunked the invented rules that grammarians use to bludgeon writers and rant about the death of the English language. I don't agree with everything he said, but his book is the first style manual I've ever read that I would have no qualms about suggesting to others.

Cathy Douglas says

This is my favorite left-brained writing book. It's taking me forever to read it, but that's okay, and when I finish, I might just go back and read it again. I like it that Williams gets me to think about sentences. I naturally write like a runner, as if getting to the finish line first were the only measure of success. I'm too damn old to run like a runner any more, no why not plug on with paragraphs and pages as if they were timed laps on the track? But of course that isn't the way writing works. It's more like a performance than a race, slow and persnickety.

This book works mostly at the sentence level, which is my weakest point. The examples come from business and technical writing, but that's okay -- it doesn't take much imagination to generalize the lessons. Like all writing books, it's a bunch of ideas stated as facts. That's okay too. We don't have anything to go on *but* ideas.

Vanessa says

Writing is a difficult task (to say nothing of writing with a second language), no one is in more need of guidance and help than a writer who doesn't know how to put her thoughts into words in a captivating and convincing way. "Style toward Clarity and Grace" can help, it is a thorough, elaborated yet comprehensible guide book on communicating complexity effectively and elegantly. The precursor of this book was a text book of writing for undergraduate students in US, which is to say this may not be the right book for everyone. A couple of things ESL learners may want to know before they pick up this book: it says little about grammar, nothing about choosing the right words and collocation; it is not a book on how to write correctly, but how to write well.

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??This book consists of 8 parts: causes, clarity, cohesion, emphasis, coherence, concision, length, elegance and usage. At the very first beginning of the book, Mr. Williams shows us it is very difficult to write in a clear, precise and elegant style by providing examples of professional and educated writings that doesn't measure up to this standard. After explaining why it is easy to fall short, he uses the following parts to deal with sentences construction and prose rendering: in parts that titled clarity, cohesion and emphasis Mr Williams teaches us skills from the basic level of constructing a sentence as readable and unequivocal to the

advanced level of refining a sentence as graceful and powerful; in parts that titled coherence, concision and length he centers on ways of linking sentences smoothly and climatically, and then, on manners of unveiling sufficient evidence to entrance the readers rather than to stifle them; in the part titled elegance he talks about the whole presentation of writing as in how to write beautifully even poetically (the more advanced writing tools such as metaphor and rhythm are briefly mentioned in this part.)

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??One of the things that makes this book great is that it doesn't instill dogmas like other writing books always do, Mr Williams provides methods that can be used to make our writing clear and elegant at the same time empathizes the importance of maintaining our creativity and cultivating our own style. In the final part, Mr Williams introduces the idea that some grammar rules can be broken to best serve our writing.

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??Reading this book was a journey that taught me the playfulness and fulfillment of writing, it not only helps me write better but also inspires me to write more.

Terence says

This is a brilliant little guide to improving your writing that I wish I had known about when I was an English teacher.

Williams begins with the basics and builds up to chapters on style and usage. The underlying themes throughout are two: Good writing is not limited to professional authors - anyone can do it with sufficient practice and a decent amount of concern about what you write; and the rules of grammar and syntax are **guides** to clear communication. Writers can "bend" and even break them in the interests of that communication.

Definitely recommended to anyone who writes (prose, poetry or nonfiction) and to those of us who edit them.

Jo Deurbrouck says

Yum, grammar porn! I could watch Williams parse beautiful, grammatically sophisticated sentences all day long. I also appreciate his easy refreshers for concepts like 'nominalization,' 'summative clause,' and the difference between coherence and cohesion. These things only stay fresh in my mind if I take myself back to school now and then. Some reviewers have dinged the man for being a less-than-graceful writer from time to time. This doesn't detract from the book's value for me. What would, I think, if I had read them, were the exercises. I have no interest in reading bad writing for the sole purpose of practicing ways to improve it. I believe a fine-tuned ear comes from what you read. I skipped all of the exercises, wishing all the while that Williams had taken the Francine Prose approach, giving me page after page of lovely examples I could wallow in instead of messes he thought I'd enjoy cleaning up.

Vanessa says

Not too bad for an English textbook. My favorite parts are when Williams makes the very mistakes he chastises other writers for doing.

Juliana says

This book changed the way I think about sentence structure, and I'm the type of girl who thinks about sentence structure all the time.

Rommel says

I am a Spanish native speaker that learned how to chew some words in English rather than formally took classes in a language school: that's on life, true; but is not an excuse to conduct me incorrectly using English as my professional language: that's on me.

I've got the recommendation of this volume from my Ph.D. advisor.

Might sound trite, but because of he is neither a native English speaker, he had understood the power of written expression in conveying an idea, more importantly when it is not in your first language.

I have understood shape, correctness, and clarity through the 150 pages of this title. It will make a difference for all texts I'll have to write further from now. The principles are concise, clear and extend enough to put them into practice right away.

Of course, elegance and grace will come with time and practice. Though, as an introduction to writing, I am more than satisfied.

Cara says

This book was super interesting and taught me a lot. Already applying what I learned in my work.

Omar Halabieh says

I recently finished reading *Style - The Basics of Clarity and Grace* - by Joseph M. Williams.

Below are key excerpts from the book that I found particularly insightful:

When we don't know what we're talking about (or have no confidence in what we do know) we typically write long sentences choked with abstract words.

I suspect that those who choose to observe all the rules all the time do so not because they think they are protecting the integrity of the language or the quality of our culture, but because they want to assert a style of their own.

We began with two principles: •Make central characters subjects of verbs. • Use verbs to name the actions those characters are involved in.

Most readers prefer subjects of verbs to name the main characters in your story, and those main characters to be flesh-and-blood characters. When you write about concepts, however, you can turn them into virtual characters by making them the subjects of verbs that communicate actions.

Your readers want you to use the end of your sentences to communicate two kinds of difficulty: long and complex phrases and clauses; and new information, particularly unfamiliar technical terms.

Five Principles of Concision: 1. Delete words that mean little or nothing. 2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words. 3. Delete words implied by other words. 4. Replace a phrase with a word. 5. Change negatives to affirmatives.

A highly recommended read in the area of writing.

Vera says

I'm so happy I met this book.

In contrast to many writing guides, it does not offer any pedestrian advice on common mistakes such as its/it's or affect/effect, it does not overuse jargon, and it does not digress from its purpose. It provides clear, step-by-step instructions for writing tighter sentences and more coherent paragraphs.

A lot of stuff I read in grad school is so dense and cluttered that it is barely comprehensible, so I'm glad that there is a book on how to write sentences that are sophisticated AND clear at the same time.
