

# Writing Style Guide

- Watch out for gerunds (“you are getting” → “you get”)
- Simplicity
  - Strip every sentence to its cleanest components
  - Cut any extra words.
  - Use active, precise verbs, not passive ones.
  - Don’t use adverbs unless they do necessary work. Same with adjectives.
  - Short sentences should predominate.
  - Don’t use a long word when it is no better than a short word
- Style
  - Don’t use qualifiers that weaken a sentence. (A bit, sort of, in a sense, I think, etc...)
  - Is every word doing work?
  - Keep paragraphs short.
  - Can any thought be expressed with more economy?
  - Is anything pompous or pretentious or faddish?
  - Are you including something useless just because it’s beautiful?
  - Check for clichés (and remove them!)
  - Is there a rhyme and rhythm to the piece? (read out loud)
  - Use occasional, punchy short sentences.
  - Don’t use exclamation points, unless needed.
  - Can I use “But” anywhere? If using “however”, however, it should be towards the beginning of the sentence, but not at the start.
  - Use “Yet” or “Nevertheless” instead of restating things (ex. “Despite the fact that...”)
  - Always use “that” instead of “which” wherever possible
  - Beware of ambiguous nouns and boring verbs. Watch out for [ambiguous *noun*] *is* [*description*] sentences. Add people to make them more human.
- Organization
  - “What am I trying to say? Have I said it?” Should be clear.
  - See if you can remove sentences entirely.
- Checks
  - Check for unity of pronoun (first, second, or third)

- Check for unity of tense.
- Unity of mood. Casual or formal?
- In what capacity am I going to address the reader?
- What attitude am I going to take toward the material? (Involved, detached, judgmental, ironic, amused)
- Intro
  - Get to the point quickly. Readers want to know what's in it for them, quickly.
  - Answer why the piece was written and why he ought to read it.
- Conclusion
  - At the end, can make callback to beginning for symmetry
  - Surprise can be a good ending too
- Grammar
  - Do I use dashes correctly?
  - Do I only use colons for lists?
  - Do I use semicolons? Can I not?
  - Use contractions, except for "She'd" because can be "she had" or "she would"

## Other Notes

- CMD + Shift + Y → thesaurus in Google Docs
- Humanity and warmth are two of the most important qualities of good writing
- Constantly ask "What am I trying to say? Have I said it?"
- Cut any extra words. Remove redundant adjectives and unnecessary adverbs
- Most drafts can be cut by 50% and not lose information or voice
- Checklist
  - Is every word doing work?
  - Can any thought be expressed with more economy?
  - Is anything pompous or pretentious or faddish?
  - Are you including something useless just because it's beautiful?
- Start with the paragraph where you start to sound like yourself. Avoid self-conscious attempts at fancy prologues.
- Be yourself. Never say anything in writing that you wouldn't say in conversation.
- Things like rhythm and alliteration are important. Readers *hear* your writing.

- Read your sentence aloud to see if they flow and are rhythmic.
- Overuse of the word “that” or “just”
- Start small. Corner off one part of the subject. Reader should leave with **one** *provocative thought*. Not more than one.
- The most important sentence in an article is the first one.
- Get to the point quickly. Readers want to know what’s in it for them, quickly.
  - Answer why the piece was written and why he ought to read it.
- Use funny quotes, when possible.
- Aside from the first sentence, the last sentence (and paragraph) is most important.
  - At the end, can make callback to beginning
  - Surprise can be a good ending too
- Use active, precise verbs, not passive ones.
- Don’t use adverbs unless they do necessary work. Same with adjectives.
- Short sentences should predominate.
- Don’t use exclamation points, unless needed.
- Reasons for using a dash
  - Explain the first half of the sentence
  - A parenthetical thought within a larger sentence
- Only use colons for lists.
- Use “But”. It’s stronger than however. If using however, it should be towards the beginning of the sentence, but not at the start.
- Don’t overstate things. Humor best achieved by subtlety.