

Style

Lessons in Clarity and Grace

THIRTEENTH EDITION

Joseph M. Williams

The University of Chicago

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Preface

*Most people won't realize that writing is a craft.
You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.*

—KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

In preparing this thirteenth edition of *Style*, my third, I have endeavored to refresh the book while remaining true to the qualities and features that have made it a classic of its kind. The book has demonstrated an enduring usefulness, but it is more than just a practical guide. Joseph M. Williams wrote with an urgency motivated by his conviction that clear writing not just a technical accomplishment but a social necessity and ethical good. “Writing has consequences,” Joe wrote in a 1979 article anticipating his book: “Whatever does not bear on those consequences is irrelevant to our task—to help our students become what they want to be.” In my own work with his text, I have tried to keep this high ideal in mind.

The most obvious changes are those prompted by the creation of a new interactive online version of the book and by the print edition’s shift to a color format. I also allowed myself somewhat more authorial latitude than I did in the eleventh and twelfth editions. In those editions, my standard was to make only changes I believed Joe would have embraced. In this edition, I also introduced changes that I hope I could have persuaded Joe to accept.

What’s New in the Thirteenth Edition

Here, specifically, is what’s changed:

- I have retitled several of the lessons so that they better indicate their content.
- I cut the lesson on understanding style that opened previous editions. The bulk of this lesson was devoted to a short history of unclear writing in English, which, although informative, was not directly relevant to the purposes of most readers. The book now begins with a short introduction that incorporates some of the content from that deleted lesson and moves directly to the important lesson on correctness.
- To take advantage of the new color format, I updated the coding of sentences and also the diagrams illustrating the principles of style.
- I revised and updated examples and exercises throughout the book, seeking to expand the range of topics and subjects they address.

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- I once again revised and expanded the section on gender-inclusive language in Lesson 1. This treatment was substantially revised for the twelfth edition, but our society's discourse on gender has progressed so much in even the past few years that another revision was needed. The book now also takes up the issue of gender-inclusive language from an ethical perspective in Lesson 11.
- I made a number of changes to the book's treatment of the ethics of style. Most obviously, I split what had been a single lesson into two: Lesson 11 now considers the ethics of clarity through a series of short examples, and Lesson 12 contains Williams's extended analysis inviting readers to ponder matters of style that transcend considerations of clarity. Most significantly, I added a new ethical principle to the book. Previous editions argued for what Williams called the First Rule of an ethical style: write to others as you would have others write to you. But this rule, in personalizing all writing, only awkwardly covers situations in which writers' interests might not entirely align with those of their readers. To accommodate those situations, I renamed Williams's First Rule of style the "golden rule" of style and introduced a second "silver rule": *do not* write to others as you would *not* have others write to you. If Williams's golden rule is a principle of empathy, its corollary silver rule is a principle of fairness. Not all situations allow writers to subordinate their interests to those of their readers, but we can still expect writers not to be deceptive, misleading, or unnecessarily obtuse. I also revised the treatment of the examples in Lesson 11 to invite more questions and discussion. Finally, in Lesson 12, I retired Williams's analysis of the Declaration of Independence, which had been in the book since the tenth edition, and replaced it with a version of his analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, a speech that in today's fractious political climate has a renewed relevance and resonance.
- I of course endeavored throughout to improve and refine the book's explanations of its concepts and principles and to eliminate errors where I found them.
- Finally, since the book's authorship has become more collective, I have somewhat wistfully decided to retire what Gregory G. Colomb, who edited the tenth edition, called Joe's "ubiquitous *I*'s." This change is not inconsequential, for in choosing to use *I*, Williams was embracing the struggles of ordinary writers as his own. But with this edition, it just seemed too artificial for me to put my words directly into his mouth. Still, despite the dropping of the first-person singular, the book continues to be animated by this basic solidarity with its readers.

What's The Same

For all these changes, the book continues to address the same questions it always has:

- What is it in a sentence that makes readers judge it as they do?
- How do we analyze our own prose to anticipate readers' judgments?
- How do we revise a sentence so that readers will think better of it?

The book's central point remains, in other words, what it always has been: that good style is a matter of making informed choices in the service of one's readers.

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Pearson is pleased to offer the following resource to qualified adopters of *Style*. This supplement is available to instantly download from Revel or on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at www.pearson.com/us to register for access.

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class, research activities, participation activities, and suggested readings, series, and films as well as a Revel features section. Available within Revel and on the IRC.

Acknowledgments

Revising this book once again has been a true pleasure, and I have benefited tremendously from my conversations and correspondence with many students, colleagues, and readers. Each year, the students in my Modern English Grammar and Style Seminar at Boston University give me an opportunity to test the ideas in this book on a new audience, and the book is better for their questions and insights. I likewise learned much from the participants in the seminars I facilitated on teaching with Style at the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network (BRAWN) Summer Institute in 2014 and 2017, as well as from the participants in a series of workshops on academic writing I conducted at Columbia University between 2012 and 2017, first for the Institute for Social & Economic Research & Policy (ISERP) and later for the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics (INCITE). I thank William McAllister and his team for organizing and sponsoring these events.

A number of readers of previous editions of the book have emailed me detailed comments and suggestions as well as descriptions of their own experiences reading or teaching the book. Some of these initial contacts have evolved into ongoing correspondences about the book. I am grateful to all of these readers, especially William Entriiken, Susan J. Fabian, Charles Fishkin, Antonio Gidi, and John Muse.

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I remain indebted to Joe Williams for the time we spent together in 2008, when he visited the writing program I was then directing, and to Greg Colomb for his intellectual and professional guidance at crucial moments and for his friendship. My wife Annmarie and daughters Grace and Charlotte continue to sustain me with their love and support.

In the ninth edition, Joe acknowledged a great many people, including his students at the University of Chicago, other scholars to whom he was intellectually indebted, and the many readers and colleagues who shared observations and ideas with him. These include Theresa Ammirati, Yvonne Atkinson, Margaret Batschelt, Nancy Barendse, Charles Bazerman, Randy Berlin, Cheryl Brooke, Ken Bruffee, Christopher Buck, Douglas Butturff, Donald Byker, Bruce Campbell, Elaine Chaika, Avon Crismore, Constance Gefvert, Darren Cambridge, Mark Canada, Paul Continno, Don Freeman, Jim Garrett, Jill Gladstein, Karen Gocsik, Richard Grande, Jeanne Gunner, Maxine Hairston, Stan Henning, George Hoffman, Rebecca Moore Howard, John Hyman, Sandra Jamieson, Richard Jenseth, Elizabeth Bourque Johnson, Julie Kalish, Seth Katz, Bernadette Longo, Ted Lowe, Brij Lunine, Richard McLain, Joel Margulis, Susan Miller, Linda Mitchell, Ellen Moody, Ed Moritz, Patricia Murray, Neil Nakadate, Janice Neuleib, Ann Palkovich, Matthew Parfitt, Donna Burns Philips, Mike Pownall, Peter Priest, Keith Rhodes, John Ruszkiewicz, Margaret Shaklee, Nancy Sommers, Laura Bartlett Snyder, John Taylor, Mary Taylor, Bill Vande Kopppe, James Vanden Bosch, Stephen Witte, Joseph Wappel, Alison Warriner, Wendy Wayman, Patricia Webb, Kevin Wilson, Linda Ziff. I thank them again here on his behalf.

I allow Joe to acknowledge his family himself:

And again, those who contribute to my life more than I let them know: Oliver, Michele, and Eleanor; Chris and Ingrid; Dave, Patty, Owen, and Matilde; Megan, Phil, Lily, and Calvin; and Joe, Christine, Nicholas, and Katherine. And at beginning and end still, Joan, whose patience and love flow more generously than I deserve.

Joseph Bizup
Boston, Massachusetts

In Memoriam

Joseph M. Williams, 1933–2008
il miglior fabbro [the best craftsman]
(by Gregory G. Colomb)

On February 22, 2008, the world lost a great scholar and teacher, and I lost a dear friend. For almost thirty years, Joe Williams and I taught together, researched together, wrote together, drank together, traveled together, and argued together and apart. When those “apart” arguments led to what in the last edition he called “our intemperate shouting matches,” we grew closer—and wrote more thoughtfully—than ever. I knew his faults, but he was the best man I knew.

My epitaph for Joe—*il miglior fabbro*—puts him in exalted company: I take it from Dante, who applied it to the twelfth-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel, praised by Plutarch as the “Grand Master” of his craft. In the last century, T. S. Eliot famously said it of Ezra Pound. Of course, these poets were all known not for their clarity and grace but for their depth and difficulty. No matter, none have been better than they at their craft, just as none have been better than Joe at his. And Joe has the added distinction that his craft daily multiplies its good a thousand fold and more, in all those papers, reports, memos, and other documents that have served their readers better because of him.