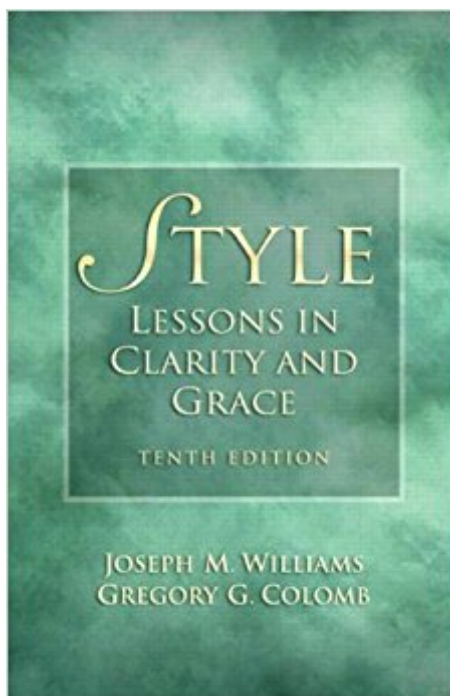


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Style: Lessons In Clarity And Grace (10th Edition)



Synopsis

Engaging and direct, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* is the guidebook for anyone who wants to write well. Engaging and direct, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* is the guidebook for anyone who wants to write well.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

.Reviewed by C.J.Singh Even a brief browsing of Joseph Williams's *STYLE: LESSONS IN CLARITY AND GRACE*, would persuade most readers that it makes the much touted Strunk & White's "The Elements of Style" look, well, elementary. Simplistic. If the seductively slender "Elements" -- easily read in a day, no exercises to do -- could deliver its claim, by the end of the day there'd be millions of excellent writers. Besides, Williams shows how Strunk & White flout their own advice to "omit unnecessary words": he edits their 199-word paragraph to just 51 words (Williams, pp. 126-28). Williams shows grace in conceding that "in boiling down that original paragraph to a quarter of its original length, I've bleached out its garrulous charm." In the preface, Williams urges the reader to "go slowly" as it's "not an amiable essay to read in a sitting or two.... Do the exercises, edit someone else's writing, then some of your own written a few weeks ago, then something you wrote that day." I often assigned *STYLE* as the main textbook in *Advanced Editorial Workshop*, a ten-week course, I taught at the University of California. Each term, students rated the book as excellent. (The prerequisite to the workshop was a review course, with the main textbook "The Harbrace College Handbook." Although *STYLE* includes a 32-page appendix summarizing grammar and punctuation rules, most readers would be well-advised to review a standard college handbook, such as the

Harbrace or Bedford. See my review of Bedford, seventh edition on .) has published numerous reviews of STYLE's various editions. The one-star reviews criticize the author's own writing in the book as lacking grace. Let's not forget that this is a text- and work-book -- so occasional pedagogic tone is to be expected. On the whole, the author's voice sounds earnest, refreshingly honest: Commenting on what's new in the recent edition: "Finally, I've also done a lot of line editing. After twenty-five years of revising this book, you'd think by this time I'd have it right, but there always seem to be sentences that make me slap my forehead, wondering how I could have written them." His expository style is clear. Two examples: Introducing the concepts of cohesion and coherence, Williams writes, "We judge sequences of sentences to be cohesive depending on how each sentence ends and the next begins. We judge a whole passage to be coherent depending on how all the sentences in a passage cumulatively begin. . . . It's easy to confuse the words cohesion and coherence because they sound alike. Think of cohesion as pairs of sentences fitting together the way two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle do. Think of coherence as seeing what all the sentences in a piece of writing add up to, the way all the pieces in a puzzle add up to the picture on the box." "You can write a long sentence but still avoid sprawl if you change relative clauses to one of three kinds of appositives, resumptive, summative, or free. You have probably never heard of these terms before, but they name stylistic devices you have read many times and so should know how to use. To create a resumptive modifier, find a key noun just before the tacked-on clause, then pause after it with a comma Then repeat the noun ... and that repeated word add a relative clause beginning with `that': 'Since mature writers often use restrictive modifiers to extend a line of thought, we need a word to name what I am about to do in this sentence, a sentence that I could have ended at that comma, but extended to show you how resumptive modifiers work.'" "To create a summative modifier, end a grammatically complete segment of a sentence with a comma Find a term that sums up the substance of the sentence so far Then continue with a relative clause beginning with `that': 'Economic changes have reduced Russian population growth to less than zero, a demographic event that will have serious social implications.'" And, free modifiers: "Like the other modifiers, a free modifier can appear at the end of a clause, but instead of repeating a key word or summing up what went before, it comments on the subject of the closest verb." "Free modifiers resemble resumptive and summative modifiers, letting you (i.e., the free modifier lets you) extend the line of a sentence while avoiding a train of ungainly phrases and clauses." In the preceding sentence, Williams simultaneously explains and exemplifies the concept of free modifiers. In the chapter titled "Elegance," Williams points out that "the device that often appears in elegant prose" is the use of resumptive and summative modifiers. An example from Joyce Carol Oates, using two

resumptive modifiers: "Far from being locked inside our own skins, inside the 'dungeons' of ourselves . . . our minds belong . . . to a collective 'mind,' a mind in which we share . . . the inner and outer experience of existence." In the final chapter, "The Ethics of Style," Williams takes on academics who "rationalize opacity," with a ". . . claim that their prose style must be difficult because their ideas are new, they are, as a matter of simple fact, more often wrong than right. . . . Whatever can be written can usually be written more clearly, with just a little more effort." Well-crafted writing emerges only from repeated rewriting. This five-star text- and workbook teaches the exacting--and joyously rewarding--craft of rewriting. Moreover, I wholly agree with the author's observation on writing clearly and cognitive psychology: "The more clearly we write, the more clearly we see and feel and think."-- C J Singh

Williams stands out in a crowded field of experts on writing. He delves into more detail than any other expert on the topics of clarity and coherence, providing a systematic approach to diagnosing a piece of writing and correcting its flaws. He even has insights about concepts for which I thought no new insight was possible, such as the concept of topic sentences. While most writing instructors will teach you to use topic sentences and where to place it, Williams goes into extensive detail about what makes a proper topic sentence (what he calls a point sentence) and how it must introduce not only the paragraph's characters and actions, but also the paragraph's themes or concepts. You might uncover the same principles of clear writing if you carefully study several style books, but why work so hard when Williams has distilled and explained the principles already in one book?

Williams does a phenomenal job of breaking down writing into its basic components, then shows the reader how to build up language into something sophisticated and clear. There are tons of examples in the book that illustrate how one seemingly small difference can make or break a passage of text. I have used this book twice now while teaching a college reading and composition course. My students, most of whom are majors in the sciences, business and engineering, enjoy reading this book and seem to learn a lot -- even if they start out highly skeptical about Williams' method of simplifying text before making it complex. It's an enjoyable read, whether you just want to absorb good writing through reading-osmosis or would like a refresher course in the practicalities of writing. All academics should read this so the world can benefit from more clarity in how ideas are expressed!

I have read over a dozen books on writing and this is the only one that logically breaks down writing

and helps you to understand what gives writing its lively and easy-to-read essence. This book gives you nuts and bolts instruction on sentence structure, syntax, and word choice to correct bureaucratese, legalese, and academese—all harbingers of someone who thinks they write well but instead just confuses the reader. I had always thought good writing was both art and science. This book does not cover the art of writing, but instead it covers the science, giving you a formulaic approach to diagnose and correct your writing.

Get one of the older versions that Williams wrote alone. The later versions, like this one, are co-edited---poorly---by an academic with many extraneous prejudices and none of Williams' gifts.

This book has so much good advice on how to write more clearly and with better style. The author is not dogmatic about strict grammar rules, but instead the emphasis is on making the wording both clear and elegant.

Got one that was used/ In decent shape. Using it for class/

The book does a great job at teaching how to restructure sentences to make writing flow better and content easier to follow.

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