

TWELFTH EDITION

# *Style*

*Lessons in  
Clarity and Grace*

JOSEPH M. WILLIAMS

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# STYLE

## *Lessons in Clarity and Grace*

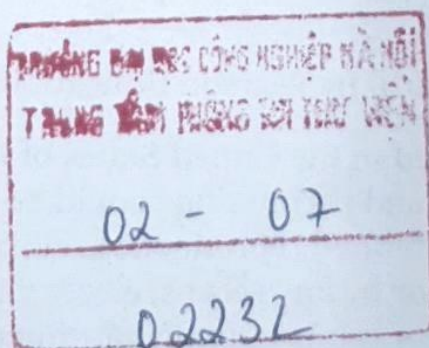
TWELFTH EDITION

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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

## THE TWELFTH EDITION

This edition of *Style* is my second, but it is the book's twelfth. As I have revised the book a second time, it has inevitably become more my own. But it also remains emphatically Joseph Williams's. I added nothing I believe he would have rejected, and I only made changes I believe he would have embraced. "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." I have worked with this ideal in mind.

## What's New

In preparing this edition, I sought to amplify the book's central point: that good style is a matter of making informed choices in the service of one's readers. Here, specifically, is what's changed:

- I rewrote the section on pronouns and gender-neutral language in Lesson 2. It now focuses less on the problem of gender-biased language than on the many options available to writers who want to write in a gender-neutral fashion.
- I expanded the explanations that accompany the book's hallmark diagrams of the principles of style (Lessons 3–6).
- I revised the section on metadiscourse in Lesson 4 so that it outlines more fully the different ways writers can use this device.
- I included new examples of elegant passages in Lesson 11.
- I rewrote the discussion of sources in Appendix 2. This appendix still addresses plagiarism and the mechanics of citation, but it now



gives more attention to the stylistic effects of different ways of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting.

- I modified the book's treatment of revision in two ways. First, I changed language that could seem to suggest that revision is a matter of editing only, that is, of holding the meaning of a sentence or passage constant while adjusting its form. Given his concern with how readers understand texts, Joe naturally focused on how writers could edit their prose to make it clearer for their readers. But he fully understood that writing is a complex, recursive process involving thinking, planning, drafting, rewriting, and editing, and that each of these activities could potentially affect any of the others. The book is now more careful to avoid implying, falsely, that revision means *only* editing. Second, I changed the terms the book uses to discuss revision, replacing *diagnose* and *diagnosis* with *analyze* and *analysis*. The book now presents revision less as a matter of identifying and fixing problems than as a matter of understanding and assessing options.
- I adjusted the book's examples, explanations, and exercises to soften their explicitly American perspective. This change acknowledges the book's global readership and is consistent with the book's core values. The book continues to insist, as it always has, that good style is an ethical and civic virtue.
- I tried to be more precise about the scope of the book's advice. The principles concerning the clarity and coherence of sentences and passages apply to prose of all kinds, but the book's guidance about more global matters of style—motivation (Lesson 8), organization (Lesson 9), using sources (Appendix 2)—is most relevant to various kinds of academic and professional writing.
- Finally, I endeavored throughout to improve and refine the book's explanations of its concepts and principles and to eliminate errors where I found them.

## 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 their judgments?
- How do we revise a sentence so that readers will think better of it?



Gregory G. Colomb, who revised the tenth edition of *Style*, saw in these questions the essence of the book's "enduring genius": its insight that writers have at their disposal *principles* that allow them to reliably predict readers' responses and to revise accordingly. Although Joe occasionally used the word *rules* to describe his advice, he preferred the word *principles*, because his goal was not to prescribe a correct style but to help writers recognize their options and make informed choices among them.

Following Greg's example, I have preserved Joe's personal voice, not just as a matter of style but because it is crucial to the book's message. Joe knew that every style, even the most transparent, is a choice. In choosing to load his text with what Greg called his "ubiquitous *I*'s," Joe was embracing the limitations and struggles of ordinary writers as his own. If the longevity of *Style* can be attributed to the sound advice Joe gives, the affection the book inspires can be attributed to the solidarity with readers he shows.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of this book:

- Be sure you know at least these grammatical terms: SUBJECT, VERB, NOUN, ACTIVE, PASSIVE, CLAUSE, PREPOSITION, and COORDINATION. All grammatical terms are capitalized the first time they appear and are defined in the text or the Glossary.
- If you are using this book for a class, work as much as you can with your fellow students. Discuss the lessons and exercises. Share and comment on one another's writing. Learn from one another.
- If you are using this book on your own, go slowly. Take the lessons a few pages at a time. Do the exercises. Edit someone else's writing. Then edit something you wrote yourself a few weeks ago, then something you wrote that day.
- Understand that as you try to apply the book's principles, you may write more slowly. That's natural, and it passes.
- Finally, remember that the book's principles have less to do with drafting than with revision. If there is a first principle of drafting, it is to ignore most of the advice about it.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to this edition, and it is my privilege to recognize them here.

For their guidance and insights as I revised this edition, I thank Joseph Opiela, Katharine Glynn, Samantha Bertschmann, and Denise Phillip Grant at Pearson Education. For their work preparing the text for publication, I thank Prathiba Naveenkumar and Revathi Viswanathan at Lumina Datamatics Ltd.

I thank my colleagues in the College of Arts & Sciences Writing Program at Boston University and elsewhere for our many conversations about Joseph Williams's ideas. I especially thank Deborah Breen, John Brereton, Martin Fido, Cinthia Gannett, Stacey Goguen, Gwen Kordonowy, Sarah Madsen Hardy, Christopher McVey, James Pasto, Thomas Underwood, Anthony Wallace, Christopher Walsh, and Maria Zlateva for sharing their ideas about how the book could be made better; Talia Vestri Croan, Ryan Weberling, and Erica Zimmer for their help preparing the text for this edition; and Jonathan Buehl and William FitzGerald for reading and commenting on sections of this revision. Through his blog, "Lokasenna" led me to the quotation from Mary Wollstonecraft I've added to Lesson 11. I thank also those students who have used the book as well as those readers who have emailed me their often detailed comments and suggestions. It has been a true pleasure to learn what they value in the book and to correspond with them.

I thank the following reviewers for their comments on the eleventh edition: Lee R. Cerling, University of Southern California; Dr. Crystal Elerson, University of Texas at Arlington; Mike Jerbic, San Jose State University; Shirley Kahlert, Merced College; William James Owen, Columbus State University; Sabrina Taylor, Louisiana State University; and Kayla Walker-Edin, Milligan College.

I am deeply grateful to Joe Williams for the time we spent together in 2008, when he visited the writing program I was then directing. And I owe a tremendous debt to Greg Colomb, both for his intellectual and professional guidance and for his friendship. Finally, I thank Annmarie, Grace, and Charlotte for all the love and joy we share together.



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 Batschelet, 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 Contino, 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 Kopple, 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.

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