The English Style

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Contents

Introduction

- Why do we have conventions? *
- Scholarly writing as a genre *
- Grammar and Glamour *
- Professionalism *
- Particular Problems for English and History Majors *

Chapter 1. Punctuation *

- 1.1 Basic Essentials: Periods and full stops, Sentences, 'Run-ons' or 'Comma-splices', Independent Clauses *
- 1.20 Commas *
- 1.21 Commas and Parentheses *
- 1.22 Commas Separating Subjects from Verbs *
- 1.230 Commas and Relative Clauses *
- 1.231 Restrictive or Defining Relative Clauses *
- 1.232 Non-restrictive or Amplifying Relative Clauses *
- 1.233 Sentential Relative Clauses *
- 1.234 Sequences of Relative Clauses *
- 1.31 Colons and Semicolons *
- 1.4 Dashes *
- 1.50 Apostrophes *
- 1.51 The Use of the Apostrophe S for Possessives *
- 1.52 The apostrophe of omission: It's and Its, Who’s and Whose *
- 1.60 Hyphens *
- 1.61 Hyphens and Prefixes *
- 1.62 Hyphens and Suffixes *

- 1.63 Punctuating Quotations*

Chapter 2. Logic *

- 2.1 Causal Conjunctions and Logic *
- 2.2 Dangling Causes *
- 2.3 The Indefinite 'This' and Logic *
- 2.4 Like and As *
- 2.5 Loose Relations *

Chapter 3. Problems with verbs *

- 3.1 Split Infinitives *
- 3.2 Prepositional or Phrasal Verbs *
- 3.3 Agreement of Tense *
- 3.4 Agreement of Number *

Chapter 4. Lexicon (Vocabulary) *

- 4.1 Concision and Plain Style *
- 4.20 The Personal *
- 4.21 Speaking in one's own voice -- the Personal Pronoun *
- 4.22 Colloquialism *
- 4.3 Redundancy *
- 4.40 Echoes *
- 4.41 Internal Echoes *
- 4.4 External Echoes *
- 4.5 Strange Bedfellows *
- 4.6 Mixed Metaphors and Inapt Metaphors *
- 4.7 Catachresis (The incorrect use of words) *
- 4.8 Not the best word *

- 4.90 Common Lexical Errors *
- 4.91 Split Words, Combining Words *
- 4.92 Shall and Will *
- 4.930 Common Confusions and Abuses *
- 4.931 Spelling Confusions *
- 4.932 Semantic Abuse *
- 4.94 Sexism *
- 4.95 'Interestingly' *

Chapter 5. Improving a Style *

- 5.1 Paragraphing *
- 5.2 Improving Co-ordination *
- 5.3 Avoiding Using Excessive Relative Pronouns *
- 5.40 Improving Flow *
- 5.41 Keep the Structure Clear *
- 5.42 Parsing Your Thoughts; Using Logical Expressions*
- 5.43 Avoid Recapitulation *

Chapter 6. Style Conventions for Scholarly Essays and Research Papers *

- 6.1 Title Page *
- 6.2 Body Text Layout *
- 6.3 Footnotes *
- 6.40 Quotations *
- 6.41 When to Quote *
- 6.42 How to Quote: When to set off as a block. *
- 6.43 Punctuating Quotations. *
- 6.431 Punctuating Quotations: single or double. *

- 6.432 Punctuating Quotations: punctuation before the quotation. *
- 6.433 Punctuating Quotations: punctuation at the end of the quotation. *
- 6.44 Ellipsis inside quotations *
- 6.5 Citation of sources in your text *
- 6.6 Bibliography of works cited *

Chapter 7. Correction Marks *

- 7.1 Printer's and Copy Editor's Correction Marks *
- 7.2 Correction Marks Indicating Problems with Content *

Appendix: Grammars, Guides to Usage and Further Reading *

Introduction

This *Style Book* is primarily intended to provide necessary basic information for undergraduate students in the humanities. Those who have already mastered the basics are advised to consult the manuals listed in our Appendix which give more complete information. When doing so it is important to note that all style guides agree in general but differ slightly on specifics. Conventions differ from nation to nation, and from one year to the next (although with globalization they are tending to stabilize), and between one publisher and another. Students should aim to learn accuracy, consistency and naturalness and expect there to be differences between one recently published book and another.

This guide differs from most others in that it cites many examples of current bad practice in English-speaking countries and sets out to explain why they are wrong and how they can be corrected. It changes a little every year to keep in step with the latest errors (— they do, oddly, have their fashions —) and I welcome examples of recurrent errors being noticed by other teachers in the English-speaking world. As many colleagues and students have found this guide useful, I have posted it in a public place, but I am anxious neither to set up as expert nor pedant. Like many British teachers of English, I learned my grammar through Latin, then French, then through encountering problems in my teaching of English, rather than being properly taught.

No one who takes language seriously can want to impose a procrustean idea of 'right language'. Language grows and changes, but it does have to make sense. My aim has been to provide a reasoned check-list of good practice, and to do this in numbered paragraphs so that I (and others) can use it rapidly and effectively to help students when correcting essays. The reference numbers by each section point to an explanation of a common

fault and provide examples of good and bad practice. I also welcome suggestions of improvement. If *The English Style Book* reduces the time spent puzzling about what someone might have been trying to say, and gives us more time to discuss the complexities of writing and experience, I will be very pleased.

Fixing simple errors, such as the now common failure to know when to use a comma and when to use a period or full stop, is relatively simple. Improving a style - the topic of Chapter 5 - is a much harder matter. Ideas about good style differ with age and clime and I am interested in attaching to this document different kinds of comment by known authorities. If anyone wishes to email me a suggestion, I will be pleased. For the moment I merely attach a copy of an article written by Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* in 1712. It is a very interesting historical document, worthy in itself of criticism, but I doubt anyone who reads much would dispute the continuing relevance of its view.

Why do we have conventions?

One can think of language by analogy with other human processes: when driving a car, if the visible traffic signs and invisible conventions of the highway code are well understood by everyone, vehicles can execute complex manoeuvres at high speed with minimal risk of accidents. If one person fails to spot one sign or fails to observe one invisible rule, a crash can result. Similarly in dance, elegance and emotional impact depend on each performer doing just what he or she is supposed to do at exactly the right time and place. Where language is concerned, bruises or bodily death is only rarely the consequence of failure, but there are documented instances of how language misunderstood in a courtroom has led the innocent to the scaffold. More generally, the life and death of sense, and the chance of grace, are companions in every utterance. If the writer makes skilful use of the agreed conventions, complex sense can flow

rapidly and smoothly between people; if not, then chaos can result. As Robert Lowell once remarked, a comma can be intelligent, or stupid.

Scholarly writing as a genre

Scholarly writing must make exact sense (even when being deliberately ambiguous); it is highly *articulate,* a matter of joints. One thought hinges on another, and a good hinge lets you hang a door, kick a ball or hammer a nail. Articulate sentences help us *make* the world. No literary critic, historian or philosopher would question this for a moment. It follows that it is the task of all teachers and students to accept the challenge of being as *articulate* as they possibly can and that even the apparently modest comma has a crucial role to play in this process.

Grammar and Glamour

An amusement: the origin of the word 'glamour' is a Scottish variant on the word 'grammar', grammar having been associated in days of yore with the power to cast magic spells, just the sort of thing that learned persons were expected to be able to do. It follows that grammar is literally glamorous!

Professionalism

The recent spread of word-processing has radically altered the production of writing in all social contexts. Students, scholars and businessmen used to write in manuscript; their typing was done by secretaries. Now everyone uses keyboards and even businessmen type their own reports on laptops and send them direct to the boardroom. It follows that students now have to be much more exacting in their own use of English and their understanding of such matters as layout and proper punctuation. Good writing was always essential but it is now canonised and commodified as a 'transferable skill'.

Particular Problems for English and History Majors

Scholars and students who read works written in other times learn that conventons of spelling and punctuation change across time; those used in the *Spectator* essay attached above would invite correction if used to day. By the same token, if students do not understand their own conventions, they will not be able to explore the nature of historical differences. They will not be properly equipped for reading the past. It follows that a secure understanding of such issues is required.

Chapter 1. Punctuation

Punctuation marks cut the flow of words into meaningful groups and prevent confusion. There is no punctuation in speech: we use pauses to indicate grammatical units and intonation and facial expression to give emphasis. We use punctuation when writing because we lack these phonetic and visual means of indicating how our the flow of sound is to be parsed; indeed punctuation was invented 2500 years ago when Greek dramatists thought it best to guide actors where to pause, where to stop, when to exclaim, and so on. The words "comma" and "colon" date back to this time.

Punctuation is today used quite tightly to mark out grammatical segments. Full stops or periods, for example, mark the end of sentences; commas mark complete clauses or phrases within sentences. These are the basic markers. Natural language functions just like software application code in which conventional markers tell a processor that a particular operation is beginning or ending. If a marker is in the wrong place, the software application will crash. The same applies to natural language punctuation. Good punctuation enables sophisticated processing; bad punctuation causes crashes and the reader is left scrabbling for sense. Here is a simple example from an essay on *Jane Eyre*:

At Lowood Jane encounters the positive mother, Miss Temple. After Miss Temple leaves Jane takes herself to Thornfield.

The reader stumbles after the second *Jane*, thinking first that the sentence means *after Miss Temple leaves Jane* then realising that the word *Jane* opens what is in fact the main clause of the sentence. *After Miss Temple leaves* is in fact a phrase establishing an implied condition on the main verb *leaves*. If the sentence is clearly punctuated the reader gets the sense

the first time around:

After Miss Temple leaves, Jane takes herself to Thornfield.

And here's another witty example. Compare:

The panda eats shoots and leaves.

The panda eats, shoots and leaves.

The first sentence might be from a zoology book; the second is a linguist's invention, but it might be from the script from an animated film. The fact that the two sentences mean very different things indicates that punctuation is not just there as a guide to how a phrase should sound; it is also semantic — it carries meaning.

1.1 Basic Essentials: Periods or Full Stops, Sentences, 'Run-ons' or 'Comma-splices', Independent Clauses

Strictly when you have a new main subject and a new main verb, you have an independent clause which should stand as a new sentence or be joined to another clause by a conjunction or a relative pronoun, or they should be joined by a period or a semi-colon (or occasionally a colon — for which see para 1.3 below).

For example, the following are correct:

Marjorie went out. Her car was parked outside.

Peter screamed and shouted but John didn't care.

It began to rain so the team decided to take tea.

Do not use commas to form this kind of conjunction. Here is an example of a common error:

Marjorie went out, her car was parked outside

By many teachers this is called a **'run-on'** or a **'comma-splice'** because there are two sentences run together: the comma should be a period because a new grammatical subject is introduced by *the car*. This error is very common. You could say

Marjorie went out; her car was parked outside

The semi-colon warns the reader to expect an independent clause.

Better perhaps to write

Marjorie went out to her car which was parked outside.

When you say *Marjorie went out to her car*, you turn the *car* from a subject of the verb *was* to an indirect object of the phrasal verb *out to*. Marjorie's car was parked outside now becomes part of a 'relative clause' introduced by the 'relative pronoun' *which*. The objects and actions in the world do not change, but their grammatical relations in language do change.

Writing strings of clauses that are not properly coordinated by punctuation or grammar is a common fault in students' essays. Here are some examples:

Othello desires Desdemona for her companionship, one could understand the speech as professing his impotence.

Heathcliff's dismissal of Isabella extends to his own child, Linton is Heathcliff's only blood relation.

The character of Heathcliff is a constant presence throughout the novel, his influence persists through Catherine in his absence.

In these cases the comma should be a full stop or semi-colon. The sentences are comprehensible but not as articulate as they could be. In the following sentence, there are actually three sentences thrown together, the subject of the first being *voices*, the subject of the second being *we*, the subject of the third being *there* (a kind of placeholder for a subject).

The voices within the novel give the reader a sense of underlying sadness, we never feel a sense of euphoria, even in the happiest moments there is the undertone of melancholy.

Some novels of this century include paratactic strings of this kind, such as *John went out of the house, he saw a car parked across the road, he picked the lock and drove away*. Using commas where there ought to be periods gives a sense of moving fast from event to event or thought to thought – almost like speaking – but the only logic of such a string is that of sequence: one thing after another. Formal academic prose, on the other hand, needs analytic subtlety, the ability to communicate complex logical relations and therefore more hypotaxis (more frequent use of subordination and relative clauses). It must therefore have more exact control over its co-ordination.

The above examples are at least still comprehensible because the conceptual subject remains roughly the same whilst the grammatical subjects change. However this way of writing tends to lead to more serious faults where sense fails entirely. For example

With new advances in medicine, invalidism cornered the social market, coupled with the boom of the leisure industry, the cult of invalidism prevailed throughout the nobility of late eighteenth-century society.

There's a lot going on here but the pattern of cause and effect is all a muddle and it is not clear whether the muddle starts in the syntax or in the

history. Certainly there should be a period after *the market*, and if there was one the problem of the first sentence might become more evident to writer and reader: how can invalidism corner a market? And is invalidism a response to the advances in medicine, or are the advances in medicine a response to invalidism. Or is it a complex dialectic that needs to be stated as such? Sloppy punctuation accompanies sloppy thought.

1.20 Commas

1.21 Commas and Parentheses

Commas are used to mark out the grammatical structure of a sentence, essentially indicating where phrases or clauses end so that readers can read more confidently and quickly. If you are unsure of the grammar of sentences, then one guide to the use of commas may be breathing: should you pause at this point to help the reader get the sense? If yes, then put a comma. However be careful that this rule of thumb does not lead to mistakes of sense and note that television drama (notably *Neighbours*) uses very odd pauses and may be entirely responsible for the generalisation of fault 1.22 listed below.

Here's an example of where commas should be used to make the sense clearer:

There is also a feeling that even when they want to people cannot link language to their sentiments.

This reads better with commas indicating the parenthetical clause: *There is also a feeling that, even when they want to, people cannot link language to their sentiments.*

In this parenthetical form, the commas mark out a qualification or a condition. In this case it is an *intensifier*.

It is quite common for students (and others!) to put a comma at the

beginning or end of a parenthetical clause or phrase, but not at the end (or at the end but not at the beginning). For example:

There is also a feeling that, even when they want to people cannot link language to their sentiments.

The first comma opens an anticipation of a closing comma to signal the end of the parenthesis. When the parenthesis does not come, a small alarm bell rings in the mind of a sophisticated reader and distracts attention from the sense of what is being argued. It may also alter the sense. For example:

Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude married King Hamlet's brother.

Even knowing the story, this takes a moment to fathom. It read much better as:

Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, married King Hamlet's brother.

1.22 Commas Separating Subjects from Verbs

A comma should not separate a subject from its verb unless a parenthetical clause intervenes. The following are egregiously wrong:

Freud in this case, pays heed to Greek poets rather than any biological proof.

Lacan's theory, takes note of 'the complicity between the laws of language and the laws of kinship'.

This kind of error may derive either from modern speech patterns, or from confusion with the correct punctuation of sentences which open with an adverb or adverbial phrase which qualifies the main verb. Thus:

Hurriedly, she put the gun in her purse.

During the opening scenes, Othello strikes us as secure in his martial authority and control of language.

In its desire to exert control over the readers' responses, the book resembles the political reflexes of the eighteenth-century magistracy.

By giving preference to the popular and persuasive over learned discourse, Granville is here reflecting the Royal Society's debt to the previous century's Ramist reforms.

You can always test whether you have understood the syntax correctly by putting the clause at the end of the sentence and seeing if it still sounds all right. Viz:

Granville is here reflecting the Royal Society's debt to the previous century's Ramist reforms by giving preference to the popular and persuasive over learned discourse.

Clauses are entire or relatively entire grammatical units that can be moved around in a sentence (like chairs in a room) without falling to pieces. The sense may shift a bit but there is no evident sense of breakage or lack when they are put in another place.

Note that this rule of not splitting subjects from verbs can be broken when you want to put an intervening parenthesis, provided that, as in the following, the parenthesis is closed before the verb:

Central to this argument is the contention that Tristram Shandy, and more specifically the character of Dr Slop, embodies Sterne's reaction to the advance of technology in Britain.

The novel illustrates how truth, in the form the region's aboriginal history, is oppressed and erased from memory in Latin America.

1.230 Commas and Relative Clauses

The question of whether or not to put a comma before *which* or *that* seems hard to fathom to some students, and not without reason. To begin with the elementary, there are a number of relative pronouns which we use to introduce relative clauses: *who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where, while*.

Which came in the door is not a sentence because it lacks a subject, except where it is a question-form meaning *Which one came in the door*? When it is not interrogative, *which came in the door* is a relative clause describing or modifying whatever *which* refers to and it would be wrong to write *Marjorie went out in her car. Which she had just bought*. One might, however, in certain circumstances, write *Marjorie went out in her car, which she had just bought, and found it had been splashed with red paint*. There are rules governing when it is possible or necessary to put commas before relative pronouns in this type of sentence, and these rules depend on knowing when the clause is 'restrictive' or 'non-restrictive'.

1.231 Restrictive or Defining Relative Clauses

Restrictive relative clauses, which are also called 'defining relative clauses', restrict or limit the number of possible referents of its antecedent. *That* is the most frequent relative pronoun used for introducing restrictive relative clauses, although in certain circumstances *which* or other members of the *wh-* group (*which, who, whom, whose, when, while*) may be used. Here are some examples of restrictive relative clauses:

She wrote many novels which use gothic elements.

She wrote a best-seller that grossed over two million dollars.

Novels which use gothic elements are rarely found before 1780.

Men who wear yellow ties nearly always have big feet.

Unlike non-restrictive clauses (see below), a restrictive or defining relative clause cannot be separated from the main clause by commas or other forms of punctuation unless the comma introduces a parenthesis.

1.232 Non-restrictive or Amplifying Relative Clauses

Non-restrictive clauses do not restrict the possible referents of the antecedents; rather, they amplify the sense of the antecedents. For this reason they are also called 'amplifying' clauses. They function very much like parentheses and have similar punctuation requirements. For example:

He put Kant's Critique, which he had just begun to read, on the table in front of her.

He put down Kant's Critique, which he had only just begun to read.

Sentences which include non-restrictive relative clauses contain two independent statements, one of which can be dropped without harm to the main clause. In spoken English the non-restrictive relative clause is separated from the main clause by a change in intonation. In writing the non-restrictive relative clause is always preceded by a comma and closed off by a further comma or a full stop or period. Non-restrictive relative clauses are introduced by *wh-* form pronouns, nver by *that*.

The following sentence appears wrong. Why?

It is this destruction, which symbolises the triumph of patriarchy.

Answer: the comma and the use of *which* imply that what follows is a non-restrictive clause, whereas in fact the clause is restrictive. What the writer actually means is *It is this destruction that symbolises the triumph of patriarchy*. (Cf. *She wrote a best-seller that grossed over two million dollars.*)

As a rule of thumb, therefore, in most cases you should resist the

inclination to put a comma before *which* or *that* unless you want to mark a non-restrictive parenthetical clause or phrase before resuming the main line of the sentence. For example:

The audience, which had paid a fortune to get in, was not at all pleased.

If the clause is restrictive rather than amplifying, this kind of parenthesis cannot be used. In the next example, the relative clause is inaugurated by *when* but the problem is the same:

Lear's natural authority as father is undermined by Goneril and Regan, when they force his complete abdication, demonstrating their filial ingratitude'.

Evidently the relation of *when they force his complete abdication* is restrictive so the comma before it is merely confusing.

The use of commas to indicate restriction or non-restriction can have completely change the sense of a sentece, and even have vast legal and historical implications. For example, in the following the presence or absence of commas radically changes the meaning by making the clause either restrictive or non-restrictive:

Members of the audience, who were middle class, were taken out and shot.

Members of the audience who were middle class were taken out and shot.

1.233 Sentential Relative Clauses

In this special kind of non-restrictive relative clause, the sentential relative clause amplifies the sense of an entire verb phrase or a full sentence. For example:

She wrote a best-seller, which we had long suspected she would do.

He tells Jane that he will never let her leave, which prompts Jane to confess her love for him.

In these cases the nature of the clause is almost disjunctive and the comma helps to signal that what will follow is set off against the main clause. You can test for this kind of clause by asking if the clause would stand on its own as a sentence, if the relative pronoun were replaced by *this*.

1.234 Sequences of Relative Clauses

For stylistic and grammatical reasons it is generally as well to avoid having too many relative clauses in one sentence. Very sophisticated writers, of course, by definition offer lucidity in complex structures, but it is best to realise that this is an art form in itself. What must not be done is to put two relative clauses together in the same clause or phrase, as in the following example:

As Edgar's death is approaching, having been comforted by the loss of his daughter, which may well have been a displacement which aided the process for him, he confesses to Nelly that he has 'prayed often for the approach of what is coming, and now I begin to shrink and fear it.'

This sentence violates the general guideline that you should not have more than one relative clause introduced by *which* or *that* in a sentence, unless you mark off the clauses with commas. This sentence is in fact so bad it could not be saved by inserting a comma after *displacement*.

The following sentence is similarly dire. Whilst it does at least keep the two relative clauses at a distance, it is still logically very hard to fathom.

Cathy's memories of the past and nature are curbed, allowing a repression of her love-object until the liberation, which causes the melancholia, and consequently the Death Instinct, which ultimately kills

her.

Such sentences remind me of a Charlie Chaplin cartoon in which he carries a pile of plates across a restaurant, begins to stumble, drops one plate, and trying to catch that plate stumbles some more, and so rushes across the screen trying to catch the plates and falling further from the vertical at each futile attempt to save the situation. They are so much fun, here's another:

Freud talks of the case of Judge Schreber, who wrote a book about his psychotic illness where he describes how he felt that God, who supposedly resembles Schreber's father who was a famous physician, chose to emasculate him in order for him to reproduce as a woman and create a new race of men. Schreber's case is remarkably similar to that of Victor Frankenstein who wants to make a woman without the participation of woman.

Chaplin's pathos derives from the gulf between his good-hearted intentions and the outcome. The same pathos is evident in the above where intelligence and real learning fail in their goal, and in this writing there is no *deus ex machina* to bring about a happy ending.

1.31 Colons and Semicolons

In simple terms, colons are used to signal that what follows is an explanation or an example of what has gone before. The movement is usually from a general remark to a specific example. The matter coming after a colon may involve an expansion, a list or an extended quotation. There should always be a relation of grammatical equality between what comes before and what comes after the colon, a rule which demands that each be able to stand as sentences in their own right. For example, *Many leading politicians have been notorious womanisers: David Lloyd George and Jack Kennedy were two of a kind.*

Semicolons can be seen as similar to full stops but slightly weaker. It is misleading to see them as a variant on the colon (despite the name). Semicolons are used to separate independent clauses in strings, thus:

This novel is as much about literature as it is about the history of Latin America; published in 1967, the novel is characteristically postmodern in its awareness of its own fictional status.

Or, as another example:

Oedipa Maas, as the classic private-eye, needs to know; she must struggle to bridge the gap between appearance and reality; she must question the reliability of every source.

Semicolons should not be used to separate a phrase from a clause [a clause has a subject, finite verb and predicate; a phrase lacks one or more of these parts and cannot stand as an independent unit of sense]:

One unifying factor is the teasing relation between text and reader, perhaps augmenting the conventional role played by suspense; embroiling the reader in the mystery.

Here the semicolon should be a comma.

Conversely, commas should not be used to join two clauses. Here the appropriate punctuation is a semicolon.

Austen's novels are romances; they all lead to marriage and happy endings.

One test for this use of the semicolon is that it can be exchanged for a period without violence. (See 3 above). If a conjunction is used (for example one could insert 'since' in the above) then the semicolon should not be used; a comma is appropriate.

1. 4 Dashes

Dashes can be used to set off parenthetical remarks where the integration of the material inside the host sentence is very unclear. They might be seen as rather like oral 'asides'. They are effective for introducing vivacity into a discourse but if they are used extensively they lead to a loss of precision because their grammatical relation to the host sentence is uncertain.

Typographically dashes should be typed either as a long dash (called an 'em-dash' because it is as long as a letter 'm', hence distinguished from an 'en-dash' which is as long as an 'n'), or as two hyphens (en-dashes) with no space between. Conventions differ about whether or not there should be a space before and after the dash: in American English there tends to be none; in English English there often is. For example:

An initial reading of Wuthering Heights through Freud's concept of the structure of the psyche – his Id, Ego and Super-ego – may be to align the Id with Heathcliff, the Ego with Cathy and the Super-ego with Edgar.

1.50 Apostrophes

1.51 The Use of the Apostrophe S for Possessives

In the 1970s or thereabouts many UK school teachers gave up teaching the use of the apostrophe s to indicate possession, but it is now back into the English Language GCSE syllabus because it actually matters if you wish to make your sense clear. The English language has a particular need of this sign since it is our primary method of indicating what in a language with cases (Latin, German) is called the genitive.

For example

In the singular: *the reader's responses* (meaning the response of a single reader).

In the plural: *the readers' responses* (meaning the responses of various readers)

Where the final consonant of a singular word is already an s opinions differ about how to indicate the possessive. You can write

Dickens's novels or *Dickens' novels* (the novels of Dickens). Generally the first form is better, but observe that one would write *the parent's orders* (the orders of the parent) but avoid writing *the parents's orders* (the orders of the parents) because one would not pronounce it like this. In this case, then, *the parents' orders* is to be preferred.

Note: *the family's home*, *society's values* [not *families, societies* which are plurals]

1.52 The apostrophe of omission: *It's* and *Who's* (as opposed to *Its* and *Whose*)

The apostrophe of possession is often confused with an apostrophe marking the omission of a letter, particularly when one says or writes *it's* in place of *it is*. Because we say *Susie's car* there's a naturally tendency to think that the apostrophe in *it's* is an apostrophe marking possession. Actually, no: this apostrophe marks the omission of the *i* in *is* — *it's* means *it is*.

If you want a possessive pronoun that indicates someting is a property of something else then you use *its* without the apostropher (on a par with *hers, theirs, yours*). For example, *he polished the table until you could see your face in its shine*.

Here's an example of the use of both kinds of apostrophe in one phrase:

Its quality, it's clear, is above reproach.

In the same vein, do not confuse *who's* and *whose*. The former is a

contraction of *who is*, the latter is a possessive pronoun.

Example *Who's coming to the pub?* and *Whose car shall we go in*. These usages are rarely mistaken in English, whereas the "*its* and *it's* conundrum" bedevils everyone at some stage or other.

1.60 Hyphens

Many combinations of adjectives, adverbs and nouns into combined forms (*well-made, well-wishing, free-floating, the nineteenth-century novel*) require joining with hyphens. English is very rich in such combinations and the use of hyphens usually optional, but sometimes more or less required by predominant practice. Many of these requirements are given in dictionaries so if in doubt it is well worth checking. Sense can also be a good guide: hyphenation is a way of indicating to the reader that the first term in the sequence is there to modify what comes after it, rather than meaning to stand on its own feet. For example, we would write *some time during the nineteenth century*, but we should write *public health in nineteenth-century London*.

The following rules are worth learning:

- Always use a hyphen to link a number to a noun in a compound adjective placed before a noun. For example, *second-year students, early-nineteenth-century novels*. But note there is no hyphen in such forms as *novels of the nineteenth century*. In this case *century* is functioning as a noun, not as part of a compound modifying string.
- Similarly, use hyphens to join the following adverbs or adjectives placed before the noun they determine; *well-read, all-powerful, all-consuming, better-known, ill-constructed, under-paid, lower-class*. Note that almost all compounds beginning in *well-* and *all-* should be hyphenated. Note that when coming after the noun

('postpositive') the hyphens are dropped: *He was a very well-read man*. But *He was renowned for being very well read*.

- Use hyphens in other compound adjectives where the lack of the hyphen will lead to a problem of sense. For example, *the English-language textbooks* (i.e. textbooks on the English language, as opposed to *English language textbooks*, textbooks on language that are published in English).

There is a common and erroneous tendency to drop hyphens in compounds formed with *self*, as in *self-development*, *self-understanding*. For example, if one says *The novel depicts the neurosis of invalidism in a self obsessive world* the reader will at first think you are saying *depicts the neurosis of invalidism in a self* and only then realise that there is something more to come. *The novel depicts the neurosis of invalidism in a self-obsessive world* reads more effectively. As a rule, always hyphenate *self* in compound forms.

Note the following where hyphens are usual:

Role-model, word-play, son-in-law.

1.61 Hyphens and Prefixes

Never use a prefix followed by space, as in *post war*, *post modern*, *anti feminist*. Either close up or hyphenate.

Generally you should not hyphenate a prefix. Use *postwar* not *post-war, postmodern* not *post-modern*, *anticlimax* not *anti-climax*. However sometimes you may want to hyphenate a suffix in order to make the sense of separation clear. For example, *post-Victorian*, *post-Freudian*, *pre-Renaissance, pre-Augustan*, *anti-feminist, post-Modernists*, *anti-American, anti-Communists*, *anti-abortion, anti-apartheid*.

1.62 Hyphens and Suffixes

Using *like* as a suffix, hyphenate. For example in *doll-like*.

Chapter 2. Logic

2.1 Causal Conjunctions and Logic

Avoid ‘gestural causality’, by which I mean avoid using ‘thus' or 'because' or 'therefore' to suggest a causal relation where none has been otherwise established.

A focus on freedom -- how one is free and how that freedom is defined against society -- is a main issue in Rosmersholm. Here there is even more of a sense that you cannot be free this side of death, thus the tragic double suicide ending. Sexuality is not the tense undercurrent that it is in A Doll's House.

The writer is failing to explain how you can be free after death and why the double suicide occurs. There are such links to be made, but instead of being made they are being gestured towards.

Here is another example: *Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane suggest that modernism is a literature of crisis, that the modernist novel tries 'to handle a sense of the nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality'. Thus the focus on things such as death and sexuality starts to become so integral to the plot.*

And another where *thus* is vainly trying to establish a causality inside what is in fact a dull tautology: *The laws of polite society govern whether she is to constitute part of the 'everybody' and thus transgression of the polite society would place her outside of acceptability.*

And another where *whereby* is covering a lack of knowledge rather than helping us to learn: *In 'The Second Treatise on Government' Locke represents a fantasy world of nature whereby all men are equal and given a fair chance to succeed.*

In many cases of gestural (or specious) causality the point would be accepted if the writer used no conjunctions at all. What is being asserted is an association, a condition of concomitance, and this can best be communicated by a simple period or by 'and'.

2.2 Dangling Causes

It is rarely forceful to conclude a sentence with a causal explanation.

This desire arises from the mother lavishing too much tenderness on the boy, and can result in his inability to bond with other females when he grows into an adult, because of the guilt of unfaithfulness.

Cf.: *This desire arises from the mother lavishing too much tenderness on the boy and can result in a guilty sense that he is being unfaithful when as an adult he tries to bond with other females.*

2.3 The Indefinite 'This' and Logic

A common sign that logic is becoming weak is when one wants to begin a sentence with 'This'. This is not an invariant sign of poor logic (see this sentence as an example), but I do counsel caution every time this impulse is felt. Be sure that 'This' refers to a clear and unambiguous subject of the previous sentence or group of sentences. If 'this' gestures vaguely towards a host of complex ideas, be sure that it can legitimately hold them together, otherwise the logic wobbles and falls over. Beware equally of the use of 'this" to end a sentence, viz.:

Whilst some apologists for Burroughs have cited the satire of Jonathan Swift as the main literary inspiration for his work, he is in fact closer to de Sade, both writers sharing the same desire for human freedom from the forces and power structures that imprison them, and both using much the same methods to depict this.

To which the immediate response is to say 'This what?'

Here's another very fine example, taken from an essay on *Waiting for Godot*:

Throughout the play, the two main characters try to remember their past in order to obtain a justification for their existence. This does not satisfy them so they continue to ask what is their purpose and function: 'Estragon: " What do we do now, now that we are happy?"

What is meant by this 'this' that does not satisfy them? The trying? The remembering? The failing to remember? The writer is skating across the surface, content with vagueness, not searching out precisely what is happening in the play.

Here's an example of the same problem, but this time using 'It':

Ibsen presents a view of the struggle faced by women in a male-dominated society. It is not altogether satisfying, after all neither of his women survive, but it does highlight the importance of the social issue.

Evidently the loose use of 'it' in the second sentence is not the only problem this writing offers.

2.4 Like and As

Like and *as* are used to establish relations of identity or similitude between objects, concepts or events. *As* means 'in the manner of,' or 'in exactly the manner of', whereas *like* implies some kind of identity, whether close or loose. Therefore whilst at times the sense of both words is almost identical, because *as* implies identity rather than mere likeness there are times when *like* is just too loose. Here are some examples where *like* should be replaced by as:

Is it more or less voyeuristic to claim, like Andy Warhol once did, that . . .

In To the Lighthouse, like in Cubism, emphasis is placed on the

representation of successive perceptions in time.

Campion uses spaces conventionally when making a point about women's forced subordination, like when Ada is literally barricaded into her own home.

Like the piano was Aida's fetish, she was his fetish.

This may be because like is stronger than as so when like is used the reader will question just what the similarity is and wonder if what the writer says is valid. When the writer says as then the reader accepts a loose parallel and moves on without any question.

Like is clearly being over-used and abused in contemporary discourse, especially in radio discussions where you will sometimes hear *like*, and even the richly redundant expression *kinder like*, pasted into nearly every thought. Evidently this misuse indicates an attempt to see pattern or establish associations but these are intuitions or impressions loosely understood. It is an intellectual's role to find the deeper sense, and it does not take many *likes* in a string to weaken beyond reason the logic of an argument.

2.5 Loose Relations

Beware using a relative pronoun such that the articulation of the two thoughts around it is imprecise. For example

The business man is therefore able to cross previously closed social boundaries as a result of money which had the effect of loosening the social structure and eventually leading to more democratic politics.

This sentence comprises two, articulated around *which*. What comes after *which* qualifies *money* but because *which* is being used in a non-restrictive manner (see 1.232 above) one has the sense of two thoughts

being tied together with a leather thong after the fashion of a flail. Flail is what the sense does. No knee or elbow joint in this articulation.

Chapter 3. Problems with verbs

3.1 Split Infinitives

In this famous example, *To boldly go where no man has gone before*, the infinitive 'to go' is split by 'boldly'. Similarly in *to better understand, to quickly run*. Split infinitives are relatively common, sometimes amusing, sometimes inoffensive, sometimes silly. Always better to avoid them. (*Always to better avoid them*, if you see what I mean.)

For example, compare

It is tempting to initially conclude

It is tempting initially to conclude

It is initially tempting to conclude

The third version is the best since it makes clear that it is the temptation that is initial. The first version is the worst since it brings *initially* and *conclude* so close it verges on nonsense: how can one conclude (i.e. reach an end) initially (i.e. to begin with)? The second version is almost as good as the third version.

Here are some other split infinitives which may repay study:

She has enough strength to only do what she feels is right

Cf. *She has enough strength only to do what she feels is right*.

The device is used to both demonstrate and retain authority

Cf. *The device is used both to demonstrate and retain authority*

3.2 Prepositional or Phrasal Verbs

The English language makes abundant use of prepositional or phrasal

verbs (*to go up, to go down, to go around*)—indeed there are said to be more than 3000 prepositional verbs in regular use in English—but these seem to confuse more and more writers when the preposition is remote from the verb itself. Here is an example of the preposition going wrong:

This essay aims to familiarise the reader of the social environment of the time.

The writer evidently means that *this essay aims to familiarise the reader* ***with*** *the social environment of the time*. What is written implies that the reader being written about lived in a time before the time of writing, whereas logically one deduces that the reader is a contemporary of the author. In fact, the author would have been better advised to write *the writer aims to make the reader familiar with the social environment of the time*, keeping the verb and the preposition close together and so averting any potential ambiguity. There are no simple cures for problems of this kind. It is necessary re-read and to pay acute attention to how the preposition relates to the verb and to other words in its immediate context.

3.3 Agreement of Tense

Take care to avoid changes of tense inside a sentence, thus: *Crusoe was stranded on a desert island and is forced to repent for his previous sins*. This error usually arises from thinking in the continuous present and then inadvertently dropping into the past. Whilst one could put the whole in the past tense, this sentence reads better as *Crusoe is stranded on a desert island and is forced to repent for his previous sins*. Consider similarly: *Fraud was a crime worthy of death while theft is seen as something than can be condoned by circumstances*. The shift to the present in the second verb creates doubt as to whether theft *was* seen in this way or is still seen in this way.

3.4 Agreement of Number

Similarly, take care to ensure agreement in number (singular or plural) between the subject of a verb and the verb itself.

For example, *The smell of lemons causes her to sneeze*. (Not *The smell of lemons cause her to sneeze*.)

Problems usually arise when the subject and the verb are some distance apart, as in the following example: *The <u>situation</u> Roxana finds herself in as regards the threats of imprisonment or worse at the hands of the jewel collector <u>are</u> brought about by one of her previous husbands*. Arguably this writer would not have made the error if he had not produced such an ungainly structure in the first place.

Problems may also arise when using collective nouns and complex subjects, as for example:

A herd of cows is quite dangerous. [Not *are quite dangerous*.]

Chapter 4. Lexicon (Vocabulary)

The Greek word 'logos' meant word and reason (implicitly therefore 'order'). The Greek Old Testament began *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God,* and thereby signified that law and the word were simultaneously incarnate. The Latin word 'lex' meant law, and 'lexicon' meant a dictionary. Again the word was law. And more recently Jacques Lacan has provided a synoptic critique of this structure in his punning realisation the *le nom du père* (the name of the father) is also *le non du père* (the No! of the father). Radical thought admits, even as it critiques, that to speak badly is to risk that to speak or write is to risk both the promulgation and the subversion of the law.

4.1 Concision and Plain Style

Generally, good style is lean: the fewer words, the more force, provided the words are exact to their task. Similarly good style uses the simplest words for its task. The thought may be very complex, the structure may be highly articulated, but if you look at the building bocks (words, phrases), they are almost invariably the most fitted to their purpose.

The following might 'sound good' to some, *they do not disclose their hearts in shared confidences* but does it tell us more than *they do not share confidences*?

The following sounds like a government service euphemism: *Those women who recognise their need for a masculine presence within their existence*

Bad writing usually results from the writer thinking they need to sound like someone in authority and, as a general rule, it is wrong to try to sound like something one is not. Complex thought comes out of complex thinking, not out of complex style. Look closely at the sentences of most

distinguished writers and you will invariably find that the words chosen and the syntax used are fundamentally simple. What makes for complexity is the way the words fit together.

4.20 The Personal

4.21 Speaking in one's own voice -- the Personal Pronoun

It is unwise to use the first person when writing scholarly essays because foregrounding personal belief often leads to simple assertion (*'I believe', 'I find', 'I like'*) where what is needed is an intellectual demonstration of why the reader should be persuaded to agree with your contentions. [Cf. the discussion and examples in 4.94 below.] Evidently to intrude the 'I' occasionally can be honest and helpful, as when one might say, for example, *'Speaking personally I find this very hard to credit.'* However striking the right balance here needs to be recognised as a fine art.

4.22 Colloquialism

Deadening professional jargon is the Scylla of bad style; colloquialism is the Charybdis: a salty everdayness will be welcomed if it is acute to its task, but colloquialism is usually slack and imprecise. For example

Work becomes the most valuable part of Crusoe's life on the island, as that is the only thing that gets him anywhere.

This sentence is not wrong, it just passes up the opportunity to say something interesting about what work means to Robinson, or about what he actually achieves.

Or consider these pleasures:

When Gulliver starts to bad-mouth British society . . .

They lived off of what they needed . . .

The horses get Swift's moral case across . . .

Ibsen is into the truth and the freedom of humankind.

4.3 Redundancy

Redundancy is the obvious failure to be concise. In 1.1 above we quoted the phrase *invalidism cornered the social market*. Why did the writer say 'social'? Was it doing any work? Can one have an *asocial market*?

Here are some simple examples where the addition of a needless adjective weakens communication rather than improving it

. . . a mental frame of mind

. . . from a social class point of view

Here are some common spoken locutions which are needlessly fat and which should be shortened if used in written professional English:

The question as to whether	Whether
He is a man who	He
This is a subject which	This subject
In a very fluent way	Fluently
Hamlet's nature is to be indecisive	Hamlet is indecisive
Very strong	Strong

4.40 Echoes

4.41 Internal Echoes

Internal echoes occur when a word is used more than once within a few sentences. As with the repetition of musical phrases and musical notes, such repetition needs handling with great care if the repetition is not going

to sound flat, dull, weak, uninventive. Here's an instance of repetition seeming to indicate the writer has a very small range of concepts to call upon: *Brecht believed that the working class were oppressed and strongly believed that they could be given strength through organised political action.*

4.4 External Echoes

External echoes occur when words are used in such a way at to bring to mind particular ways of speaking (registers) in other discourses. Consider the following, already mentioned in 1.1. above: *With new advances in medicine, invalidism cornered the social market, coupled with the boom of the leisure industry, the cult of invalidism prevailed throughout the nobility of late eighteenth-century society*. When this phrase was written the term *social market* was often being used in the media as part of an ideological counter-attack on the supposed triumph of 'market values'. *Cornered the market* is also a phrase often used in stock-market vernacular. The writer seems to have taken his phrases from recent newspaper or radio bulletins and tried to use them to describe a complex historical process occurring in late-eighteenth-century England. Can invalidism corner anything? This transfer of sense from other discourses into the discourse of criticisms is more confusing than helpful. Good writers take care to know how words are being used in current discourses, and how they once were used. They align their own uses for or against other dominant uses. Accidental alignments therefore indicate a failure of intellectual control over your own means of making sense.

4.5 Strange Bedfellows

Maria and Julia do generally have an extent of intimacy.

Can intimacy be spatial? Can one extend it? We tend to think of intimacy as intensive, not extensive. You can extend acquaintance, but surely you deepen intimacy? Effective writing thinks harder about what words

means and the kinds of association the meanings wish to set in place.

4.6 Mixed Metaphors and Inapt Metaphors

In the following the metaphor 'area' is mixed with the metaphor 'spinning'

We find these two areas of concern spinning rapidly around the novel.

How does one imagine an area spinning? And does this effort of imagining help one better to understand the condition being described? Generally mixed metaphors add a distracting confusion to the semantics of a sentence. Here are some other examples:

. . . a focal point upon which the seeker can attach a necessary importance . . .

. . . to sink back on a wave of sympathetic emotion . . .

In the following sentence we encounter a problem of metaphorisation which is also a problem of the logic of similitude:

Laertes' delayed reaction is in line with mourning.

What kind of relation is the writer wishing to establish between Laertes and mourning? The point is interesting and potentially valid, Freud having established that those who are mourning are inclined to delay. However, using the expression 'in line' conjures echoes of 'standing in line' and 'being in line for' and the very linearity of the term does not strike me as particularly helpful to establishing the relationship. It certainly does not deepen the recognition.

4.7 Catachresis (The incorrect use of words)

The underlined words in the following examples are not being properly used but all the examples come from third year honours students for degrees in English Literature. The sentences or clauses as they stand are

meaningless and it is worth reflecting that if a foreign learner were to select these words in a Cambridge Proficiency Examination they would be considered failures.

The Dashwoods are privy to unnecessary cruelty at the hands of their half-brother and his wife

The prevalence of the new bride over the single woman

This device pre-empts that both men learn what is acceptable

Austen therefore provides an implicit social impact upon the individual character

Critics who assert that the works are mere fairy tales are juxtaposed by those who claim they are social critiques.

Catachresis is like a fungal blight: not always fatal, always a blemish, always a reduction to health and beauty, it is cured by regular consultation of a dictionary and paying acute attention to what people mean when they write and speak.

4.8 Not the best word

Catachresis is a manifest lexical mistake, but there are many softer versions of this fault where the writer has chosen a word which works, but which does not give the best possible sense. For example, a student writes *If speech is a means of gaining social recognition, then by refusing to utter meaningful oratory this character refuses to be socially integrated.* The expression *meaningful oratory* is far too grandiose for the desired sense. The character is not refusing to orate, only to engage in normal conversation. The over-done is always a distraction and mistake.

4.90 Common Lexical Errors

4.91 Split Words, Combining Words

a) Do not split the following

Any one	Anyone
Any thing	Anything
Can not	Cannot
Mean time	Meantime
Never the less	Nevertheless
Some one	Someone
Some thing	Something
Some what	Somewhat
What ever	Whatever

b) note, that, just to be awkward, whilst (British) English prefers *anyway, anything, anyone, anybody* it does not accept *anytime*. This should be *any time*. Similarly, whilst we have contracted *nevertheless*, opinions divide about *none the less* or *nonetheless*. Take your pick on this one.

c) Take care with *into* and *in to*, *onto* and *on to*. Where the *in* or *on* are part of a phrasal verb, they are not fused with *to*. For example, *he fell onto the roof; the soldier fell in to line; the car ran into a bus; the student gave the essay in to the teacher*.

4.92 Shall and Will

When someone writes *This essay shall consider Pope's use of the mock-heroic* it sounds odd. In fact this of *shall* used to be correct English and the

use of *shall* to form futures in spoken English is still common: *I shall go to the beach tomorrow*. However there is a change going on in the usage of *shall*. *Shall* generally implies compulsion, obligation or determination, especially when used in the second or third person (for example: *the tenant shall ensure that rent is paid on time, I shall climb Everest before I am forty!*) so nowadays *will* is normally used to form the future in all three persons. It is therefore probably best to reserve *shall* for usages where you wish to imply compulsion, obligation or determination.

4.930 Common Confusions and Abuses

One could take the temperature of a culture by noticing what words are frequently used and abused at any moment. These days the following errors tend to scream out:

4.931 Spelling Confusions

Independent	There is no such word as *independant*. A *dependant* is someone, usually a relative, who needs financial support. Someone who clings on to your shirt tail is very *dependent*.
Loose used for lose	To *loose* is to 'let go'. To *lose* is to go home hungry.
Lead used for led	*Led is the correct past form, even though it sounds like a dull metal.*
Sprung for sprang	*sprung is the past participle, to be used in such forms as he had sprung. Sprang is the past tense, to be used in such forms as she sprang to his help*
Bourgeoisie for	*Bourgeoisie is the name of the social class,*

bourgeois	*bourgeois is the correct adjective*

4.932 Semantic Abuse

Affect and effect	To *affect* someone is to influence them emotionally, usually negatively, hence to disturb; or it means to put on a show. To *effect* is to bring about or accomplish. The *effect* is the consequence of an action; the *affect* is its emotional reception.
Advancement	Means promotion in rank or status by someone. E.g. *He sought advancement in the court*. It should not be used other forms of improvement or progress.
Brilliant	Now used variously to mean 'thank you', or 'good', with no sense of either a literal polish or a figurative intellectual illumination.
Dependant and dependent	See *Independent* in 4.831 above.
Due to	As in *'it is due to the fact'* : generally careful users of English avoid using *due to* as a preposition (i.e. before the noun to which it refers) in the written form. *Because of* is nearly always preferred. Some users believe that *due to* should be restricted to its monetary meaning.
Fabulous	As above, a word presiding over the death of the truly marvellous as advertising makes each new

	banal material conquest into a index of the divine. See Roland Barthes' brilliant essay on 'The New Citroen' in his *Mythologies* as a prophylactic.
Infer	Often incorrectly confused with *imply*. *To infer* should only be used in the sense of *to deduce*. You cannot logically *infer something to someone*.
It's ironic that	Thrown about when no irony is intended or possible, usually to mean just odd, curious, funny, strange.
Pre-empt	The proper meaning is to acquire in advance of or, to the exclusion of, others; to appropriate; as in the military use, pre-emptive strike.
Societal for social	*Societal is a relatively new term emphasising of society, whereas the older term social goes back to the sense of companion, comrade, friend and implies a community, an inter-related group. To distinguish the societal from the social therefore implies that you can have a group that is not a community; it is a term that fits with a market economics view of society. Personally I think we should not go along with this general slippage.*
Tragic	Now being used in newspapers to whip up emotion about any public death.
Utilise for use	*utilise means to make practical or worthwhile use of. Through its relations with utility and utilitarian it stresses the tool-like aspect of use.*

Much used (utilised) by military technologists and distribution managers because it sounds male and scientific. Utilised is definitely not to be used in place of use for fear that all words will be made tool-like things.

4.94 Sexism

It should go without saying these days that no sentence should imply that *man* is a sign that can stand for all men and women. This trope, common to writing before the mid 1970s, relied on the assumption (which used to be general law) that the male identity *covered* the female and was superior to it. Such sentences as the following, written by a female student aged 20 in 1999, should no longer be written: *In our contemporary society where the individual is cut off from his religious roots, man feels lost and his inexplicable actions appear absurd and useless*. This sentence should have read: *In our contemporary society where individuals are cut off from their religious roots, people feel lost and their inexplicable actions appear absurd and useless*. Use the plural and *people* instead of the singular *man*.

4.95 'Interestingly'

The problem with *'interestingly*', or *'it is interesting to note that'*, is that this you have to be very sure that what you say immediately after it does in fact justify this rhetorical flourish. If you use the word and say no more, then it reads like an empty claim. It is therefore best used with great caution, if at all. My favourite example of the misuse of this word is the following: *'Interestingly Moll's role as a woman fascinates me.*' To which one might respond, *'Good for you.'*

Chapter 5. Improving a Style

5.1 Paragraphing

Pagraphing can be seen as a larger kind of segmenting than the sentence, and as smaller than the essay, chapter or section. Paragraphing has much to do with how much material the human brain can process before it needs to digest and store what has been said. It can therefore be thought of by analogy with eating, and with computer processing. In all such processes, only so much can be taken in before the batch has to be dealt with and put into storage. Paragraphs that are too short feel bitty and insubstantial; paragraphs that are long are hard to digest. The happy size of a paragraph is related to its content. Dense work, like shortbread, needs to be taken in small bites; lighter work, like soufflés, can be taken on big spoons.

To find guidance on the appropriate length, examine examples of effective writing. As a simple guide, five to fifteen lines is normal, and no paragraph should be longer than a page.

The first sentence of each paragraph should announce the topic which succeeding sentences will expand upon. When the paragraph is not the first in a section, the first sentence should also establish a relationship with the preceding paragraph, perhaps helping to draw what was said in the preceding paragraph together as it establishes the ground for what is about to be discussed. This process will be helped if the last sentence of the preceding paragraph has worked to bring the matters discussed in that paragraph together.

5.2 Improving Coordination

The following paragraph from an essay on T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* brings together a number of valuable perceptions, but tends simple to associate them in a loose collocation.

The 'Burial of the Dead' claims London to be an 'unreal city' and includes the often quoted lines ' a crowd flowed over London Bridge/ I never knew that death had undone so many'. This is a reference to the modern urbanisation and the artist's sense of alienation within it. There is a possible touch of personal pessimism here. Eliot was one of the rush hour 'masses' when he worked for Lloyds of London; a period when he felt his artistic creativity stifled. The Waste Land expresses a fear of the masses; they are 'so many' and they keep flowing. Their sheer number is threatening and their movement, whilst continual, is not progressive. They are the living dead and they allude to the soldiers of the First World War marching to their death. The tone is pessimistic and relays a sense of hopelessness as 'each man fixed his eyes before his feet', unable to look far ahead. They are the sacrifice of war not the salvation for a decaying civilisation.

By making small stylistic adjustments throughout, the same 'matter' can be made to read better and make much more powerful sense:

The 'Burial of the Dead' <u>represents</u> London <u>as</u> an 'unreal city' and includes the often quoted lines 'a crowd flowed over London Bridge/ I never knew that death had undone so many', which <u>capture in one graphic image the idea of</u> modern urbanisation and the artist's sense of alienation within it, <u>an alienation which has a personal ring</u> because Eliot was one of the rush hour 'masses' when he worked for Lloyds of London. The Waste Land expresses a fear of the masses, of their sheer number and of their movement <u>which is</u> continual <u>but</u> not progressive. The masses are the living dead and there is something in their manner -- 'each man fixed his eyes before his feet', unable to face the future – which alludes to the soldiers of the First World War, marching to their death. They are the sacrificial victims of modernisation and of war, not the salvation for a decaying civilisation.

5.3 Avoiding Using Excessive Relative Pronouns

In the following example, *The grief which they undergo at his death is magnified by their loss of income . . .* , it is permitted to remove the relative pronoun, thus: *The grief they undergo at his death is magnified by their loss of income*. (Grammatically the clause remains a relative clause but it has a zero relative pronoun.) Whilst in simple sentences this economy produces a small gain, in more complex sentences the improved digestion of the sense is more noticeable: for example, *The consequences for his daughters lives reads* better than *The consequences which this has on his daughters lives*.

5.40 Improving Flow

5.41 Keep the Structure Clear

The following is needlessly jumbled:

It could be argued that Edmund is symptomatic of the Oedipal desires, as cited by Freud, in his quest to avenge his father's adultery . . .

This could be revised thus:

It could be argued that Edmund's quest to avenge his father's adultery is symptomatic of the Oedipus complex as described by Freud

Generally it is best to keep the main parts of the main clause as close together as possible. For example, keep subjects and verbs close together. Compare

The legal status of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was little better than that of slaves.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the legal status of women was little better than that of slaves.

5.42 Parsing Your Thoughts; Using Logical Expressions

To parse is to assign constituent structure to a sentence or the words in a sentence. In the following there are two thoughts compressed together: *The book is a commodity in that to buy the book is to purchase the illusive Moll Flanders herself*. There are two problems here. Firstly, the writer should say *illusory* not *illusive* (a confusion with *elusive*); secondly the writer's use of *in that* has the effect of joining two similar but different thoughts: a) all printed books are commodities, b) the 'Moll Flanders' offered in the book is also a commodity, a virtual object which the consumer buys the book to get. These thoughts need parsing out, not forcing together, since the book would still be a commodity even if it were an atlas selling useful information about the world. Saying *in that* tends allows the writer to avoid the larger implications of this thoughts. Whilst brevity is the soul of wit, it is also essential to have enough sentences, properly articulated, to bring out the full complexity of one's understanding.

Here's an example of a similar error: *The themes expressed in 'Othello' allow sexual anxieties to develop*. The *themes* do not *allow* anything to develop; the themes might involve the development of sexual anxieties; or sexual anxiety might be said to be one of the themes.

5.43 Avoid Recapitulation

One sentence must clearly relate to another in order that mutually they can make sense. Indeed it is worth thinking about language in terms of *gestalt* psychology: the sum of the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. (If you prefer a less scholarly model, then consider a house: the house is a lot more than a pile of timber, sand, cement and bricks.) Paratactic sentences ('one damn thing after another') are simple ways of building *gestalt* effects; hypotactic sentences (using co-ordination and subordination) are evolved ways of building effects. Recapitulating a former sentence inside of a later sentence is a fairly poor way of building

such effects:

Ada seems to attach sexual desire to the piano. The first time we see Ada play the piano it is in the middle of the night. She is interrupted by a disapproving woman and Ada stops playing abruptly. It is as if she was doing something very private, for example performing a sexual act. The piano is constantly seen as an object of desire. Baines employs a piano tuner to tune it before Ada visits to give him a lesson. The piano tuner admires the piano tuner as beautiful and unusual, like Ada. He sniffs it in an intimate fashion as if he can smell perfume on it. All these factors promote the piano as a sexual object. The way Baines and Ada touch it also shows its sexual presence. For example, Baines walks around it naked and wipes dust off it with his underwear. Ada's tiny fingers constantly caress the strong substantial keys of the piano. When Ada plays the piano her body language implies the reaches an almost physical ecstasy from rhythmically playing the keys.

There are thirteen sentences here, ten of which mention the piano and eight of which mention Ada. The ideas are interesting, but the style is tiring, probably because the writer lacks confidence about syntactic structure. It could have been done like this:

Ada seems to attach sexual desire to the piano. The first time we see her play it is in the middle of the night when she is interrupted by a disapproving woman and stops playing abruptly, as if she was doing something very private, for example performing a sexual act. The piano is constantly seen as an object of desire. The piano tuner sniffs it intimately, as if it were a woman. Baines walks around it naked and wipes dust off it with his underwear. Ada's tiny fingers caress the keys sensuously as she plays and she seems almost to reach physical ecstasy.

Six sentences, six mentions of the piano and three mentions of Ada.

Chapter 6.

Style Conventions for Scholarly Essays and Research Papers

6.1 Title Page

It makes a good impression to present your essay with a separate title page with the text centred and in larger font than normal.

6.2 Body Text Layout

The text of your essay should be in 12 point font and double spaced or one and half space, not single spaced. It should preferably be set in justified text, i.e. with regular right and left margins. It should be typed on one side of the page and allow margins of 25mm. or 1 inch on both sides. It should have page numbers at bottom right and ideally have a running header giving your name and the essay title.

6.3 Footnotes

Essays for assessment should use footnotes rather than endnotes and have a final bibliography giving full bibliographic citations of works consulted. Endnote numbers should be inserted at the end of the relevant sentence outside the full stop (not inside the full stop and not, unless some special point of clarity requires it, in the middle of the sentence.)

6.40 Quotations

6.41 When to Quote

The first principle is that quotation should be useful. It follows that quotation should be made:

- to evidence a point which might be contentious

- to introduce a thought that is particularly well-expressed by another writer
- to provide an example of a writer's style

Quotation not for these reasons detracts from the argument being made. For example:

The consummation of his marriage to Elizabeth must be terrifying to Victor and he describes his feelings on their impending marriage: 'Alas! to me the idea of an immediate union with my Elizabeth was one of horror and dismay'.

As the quotation simply evidences an uncontentious observation, readers are likely feel the quotation is redundant. Such effects are, of course, a test of the writer's sense of the intended reader: what needs be said to a secondary-school class is usually taken as understood in a university seminar.

6.42 How to Quote: When to set off as a block.

Prose quotations of up to five lines should be run into the text between inverted commas and not set off as blocks. Prose quotations longer than five lines should be set off as blocks by indenting from the left (and from the right if you know how) and by leaving clear lines above and below. In this case, no inverted commas should be used. When quoting verse, if the quotation is short, the quoted matter is run into the text inside quotes with a forward slash (/) indicating the line endings. If over about three lines, the quoted matter is usually set as a text block in the same manner as prose but with lineation respected.

6.43 Punctuating Quotations.

6.431 Punctuating Quotations: single inverted commas or double?

Some British publishers prefer single, some prefer double. North American publishers tend to prefer double. Whichever you use, if your quotation includes another quotation, use the other set of inverted commas: use single inside double, or double inside single.

6.432 Punctuating Quotations: punctuation before the quotation

Guiding principle: the quotation should always be inserted without violence to the ordinary rules of punctuation and grammar. The punctuation of the following is therefore wrong:

Marianne is said to have, "screamed with agony".

This would read so much better without the comma:

Marianne is said to have "screamed with agony".

Some students have developed the habit of putting a colon before **all** quotations, but colons should only be used before a quotation where required by the natural punctuation of the sentence. The following is therefore evidently wrong:

Indeed Jameson observes that: "this objectivity was only that of the pure gaze."

and should be punctuated thus:

Indeed Jameson observes that "this objectivity was only that of the pure gaze".

If, however, you do need a colon because the quotation stands as an example or explanation of what has gone before (concordant with point 1.31 above), then do use one. For example:

This is an observation often made by Marcuse: "Can one really distinguish between mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?"

6.432 Punctuation at the end of the quotation

At the end of a quotation, place the quotation mark outside the punctuation of the original. For example:

Woolf said that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."

In this case the full stop or period comes inside the quotation mark because one is quoting a full sentence. By the same logic, when one quotes part of a sentence, the quotation mark comes after the quoted matter and before the full stop, thus:

Woolf said that "life is a luminous halo".

But note that some guides, the *MLA* for example, would punctuate this as

Woolf said that "life is a luminous halo."

Arguably this is ill-advised since the quotation gives the impression that the original ends with the word *halo* when in fact it does not.

A similar example is provided by the question mark. For example:

"How do you define evil?" the philosopher asked.

The philosopher asked "How do you define evil?"

In both examples, the question mark comes inside the quotation marks because it is part of the matter quoted. However, if the question is posed by the writer who quotes, then the question mark comes outside the quotes:

Where does Plato ask how we "define evil"?

6.44 Indicating Omissions: Ellipsis inside quotations

Omitting words inside a quotation is called an 'ellipsis' (the plural is 'ellipses'). Ellipses should be marked with three space periods. Some style guides also specify that these ellipsis points should be placed inside square brackets to indicate that they are insertions made by the quoting author, thus *[. . .]*.

Although he said he was instructed to shoot . . . the jury did not believe him.

or

Although he said he was instructed to shoot [. . .] the jury did not believe him.

Either practice is acceptable as long as it is consistent.

If one or more entire sentences is omitted, then end the previous sentence with a period and place the ellipsis mark after that.

He said was instructed to shoot. . . . The jury did not believe him.

Do not begin a quotation with an ellipsis mark thus '*. . . as Eve said to Adam.'* since it is obvious that a quotation is cut from something longer.

Where a line of poetry is omitted from a quotation set off as an indented block, then use a series of points equivalent to the length of the omitted line placed within square brackets.

6.5 Citation of sources in your text

The source of all quotations should be given either in numbered footnotes or using the 'author-date' system inserting references in the text inside

brackets thus (Smith, 1995, p. 40). If using the footnote system - which is generally thought more elegant in the humanities - be sure to give full bibliographical information for the reference in the first footnote. Later references to the same item can be truncated provided there is no ambiguity about what is being referred to. Thus an initial citation would read 'Jane Austen, *Emma* (1814; rpt. London: Everyman, 1995), p. 25.' An immediately subsequent citation would read 'Ibid, p. 15'. A later citation would read 'Austen, *Emma*, p. 243.' When inserting footnotes, put the footnote number after any punctuation marks, not before. For examples of style conventions see the *MLA Style Manual* or *Chicago Manual of Style,* or almost any scholarly publication.

6.6 Bibliography of works cited

Your essay should end with a list of works cited and works consulted presented in alphabetical order. Where two works by the same author are listed, the secondary order is by date. The following examples indicate one of the style conventions you can follow. The aim is always to ensure that scholarly credit is clearly given and that readers can look up your sources if they wish. The style used follows the *MLA Style Manual* (edition cited below) which sets out generally accepted styles in the USA, and is therefore globally influential Note that some UK publishers follow other conventions. All that need concern undergraduate authors is that the convention used is consistent and clear. Students who expect to work in publishing or go on to higher degrees should, however, develop familiarity with correct citation.

The basic style rules for bibliographic citation are that the titles of articles or essays are put inside quotation marks, and the titles of books are italicised. Do not use both italics and quotations (thus *"Wuthering Heights"*) unless the title is appearing inside another title (see Clark on *Dombey and Son* below for example). Note also that for reprints it is

important to cite the original publication date as well as the date of publication of the version your are consulting, as in Zandvoort in *Further*

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 2nd ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1998.

Clark, Robert. "Riddling the Family Firm: The Sexual Economy in *Dombey and Son*," *English Literary History*, 51 (1984), 69-84.

Clark, Robert and Thomas Healy, eds. *The Arnold Anthology of British and Irish Literature in English*. London: Arnold, 1997.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Ed. F. W. Robinson. 2nd ed. Boston:
Clark, Robert. "The Transatlantic Romance of Henry James." *American Fiction: New Readings*. Ed. Richard Gray. London: Vision Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1983. 100-114.

Clark. Robert. "Riddling the Family Firm: The Sexual Economy in *Dombey and Son*." *ELH* 51 (1984): 69-84. Rpt. in *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. 4. vols. Ed. Michael Hollington. Robertsbridge: Helm Information; New York: Routledge, 1995. Vol 3. 101-119.

Clark, Robert. Introduction. *Emma*. By Jane Austen. London: Everyman, 1994. i-xlv.

Clark, Robert, ed. *The Annotated Bibliography for English Studies*. CD-ROM. Lisse, NL.: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1998. Diskette. Vers. 1998, part 1.

Internet Site:

Victorian Women Writers Project. Ed. Perry Willett. March 1997. Indiana University 26 April 1997. <http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwp/>

Styles for other kinds of publication can be found in the *MLA Style Manual*.

Chapter 7. Correction Marks

7.1 Printer's and Copy Editor's Correction Marks

Please click **here** to open the table of correction marks in HTML format. These marks, or others very much like them, are in standard use in the English-speaking world.

7.2 Correction Marks Indicating Problems with Content

The following non-standard marginal marks may be helpful to teachers and others when correcting written work.

1.22	Refers to paragraph 1.22 in this document.
Cat	Catachresis. Misapplication of a word.
Exp.	General fault in English expression -- not normal or natural English
Lex.	Lexicon: Wrong or poor word choice. Check meaning in a dictionary.

Num Failure of agreement in the number of the subject of a verb (singular or plural) and in adjectives or clauses referring to the subject, or between number of the subject of the verb.

Punc Punctuation defective.

Style Failure to follow scholarly style conventions.

Syn A fault in syntax or general grammar.

Appendix: Grammars, Guides to Usage and Further Reading

There are many manuals of English usage and many grammars and dictionaries which also comment on usage. The most widely used Style Guide is *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi (New York: The Modern Language Association of America). The most recent edition is the sixth, published in 2003. We are all hugely

indebted to Gibaldi's work.

On matters of grammar, the most recent, most expensive, and probably most user-friendly grammar of English is the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1999) written by Douglas Biber, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad and Edward Finegan. This work is set out in an attractive modern style with an abundance of well-chosen examples and clear explication. It supports its formal grammar with frequency tables showing how the frequency of forms differs from one English speech community to another (especially the difference between British and American written and spoken, formal and informal, styles). These tables give a valuable guide to style, and help us to understand that, whilst rule-governed, language is constantly changing.

Quirk, Randolph, and Sidney Greenbaum. *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman, 1973.
Greenbaum, Sidney and Janet Whitcut. *Longman Guide to English Usage* Harlow: Longman, 1988.
Howard, Godfrey. *The Good English Guide: English Usage in the 1990s*. London: Macmillan, 1993.
Zandvoort, R.W. *A Handbook of English Grammar*. Seventh Edition. 1957 rpt. London: Longman, 1975.