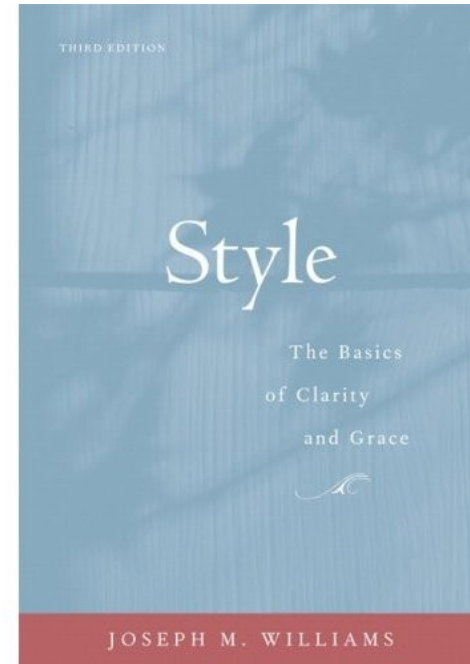
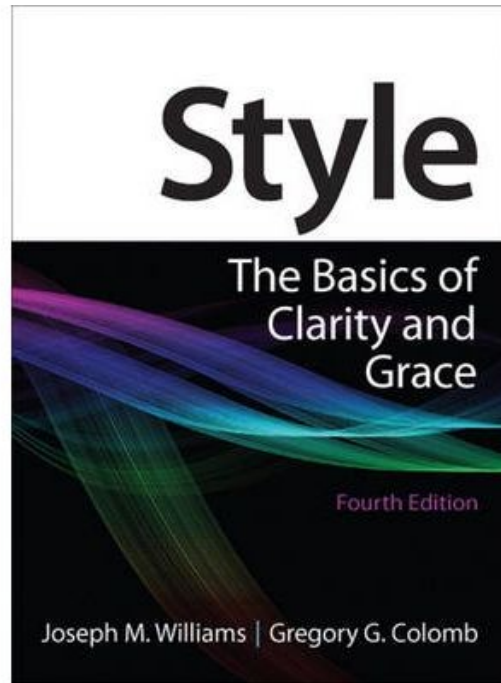




The Basics of Clarity and Grace



Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace

Joseph M. Williams

~140 pages, 15-22 EUR

Lesson One

Understanding Style



FIRST DRAFT, THEN EDIT

Lesson Two

Characters and Actions

The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

The **Federalists'** argument in regard to the destabilization of **government** by **popular democracy** was based on **their** belief in the tendency of **factions** to further **their** self-interest at the expense of the common good.

character

The **Federalists'** **argument** in regard to the destabilization of **government** by **popular democracy** was based on **their** belief in the tendency of **factions** to further **their** self-interest at the expense of the common good.

character **subject**

The Federalists' **argument** in regard to the **destabilization** of government by popular democracy was based on their **belief** in the **tendency** of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

action

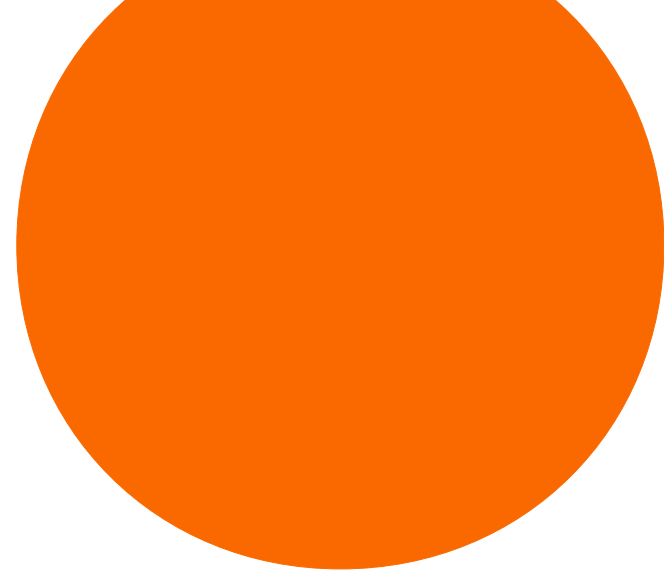
The Federalists' **argument** in regard to the **destabilization** of government by popular democracy **was based** on their **belief** in the **tendency** of factions to **further** their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

action **verb**

The Federalists ARGUED that
popular democracy DESTABILIZED government,
because they BELIEVED that
factions TENDED TO FURTHER *their* self-
interest at the expense of the common good.

subject *character* *action* VERB

here's the point



CHARACTERS AND ACTIONS

1. Make main characters subjects.
2. Make important actions verbs.

Lesson Three

Cohesion – Sense of Flow

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space.

The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying **black holes in space**.

The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a **black hole**.

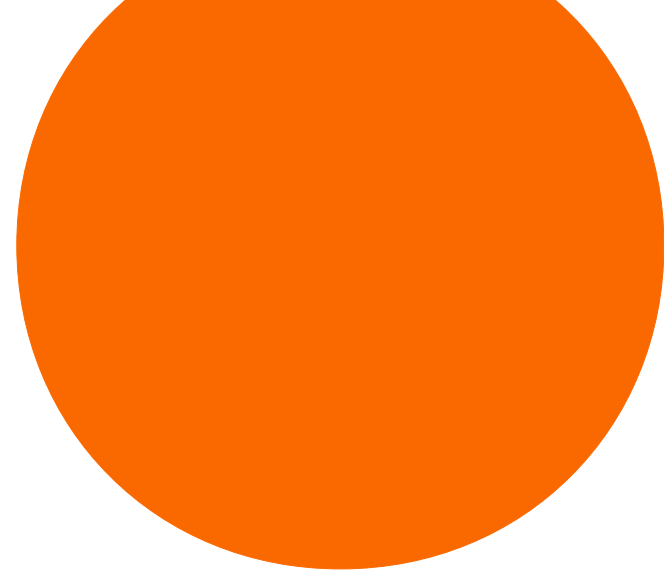
old **new**

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying **black holes in space**.

A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble.

old new

here's the point



COHESION – SENSE OF FLOW

1. Begin sentences with **information familiar to your readers.**
2. End sentences with **information readers cannot predict.**

Lesson Four

Coherence – Themes of Paragraphs

Consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects, help readers understand what a passage is generally about. A sense of coherence arises when a sequence of topics comprises a narrow set of related ideas. But the context of each sentence is lost by seemingly random shifts of topics. Unfocused, even disorganized paragraphs result when that happens.

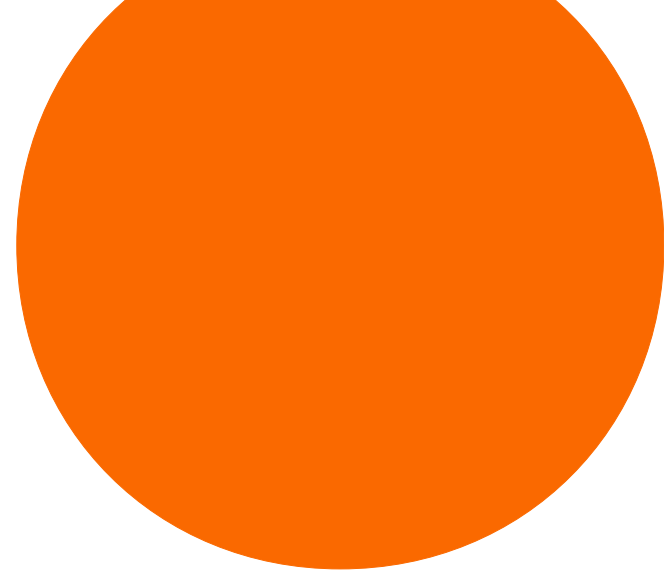
Consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects, help readers understand what a passage is generally about. A sense of coherence arises when a sequence of topics comprises a narrow set of related ideas. But the context of each sentence is lost by seemingly random shifts of topics. Unfocused, even disorganized paragraphs result when that happens.

idea as subject

Readers understand what a passage is generally about when they see consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects. They feel a passage is coherent when they read a sequence of topics that focuses on a narrow set of related ideas. But when topics seem to shift randomly, readers lose the context of each sentence. When that happens, they feel they are reading paragraphs that are unfocused and even disorganized.

idea as subject

here's the point



COHERENCE

Start with the subject and make that subject the topic of most sentences in a paragraph.

Lesson Five

Emphasis

The role of calcium blockers in the control of cardiac irregularity can be seen through an understanding of the role of calcium in the activation of muscle cells. The proteins actin, myosin, tropomyosin, and troponin make up the sarcomere, the basic unit of muscle contraction. The energy-producing, or ATPase, protein myosin makes up its thick filament, while the regulatory proteins actin, tropomyosin, and troponin make up its thin filament. Interaction of myosin and actin triggers muscle contraction.

The role of **calcium blockers** in the control of **cardiac irregularity** can be seen through an understanding of the role of calcium in the activation of muscle cells. **The proteins actin, myosin, tropomyosin, and troponin** make up the **sarcomere**, the basic unit of muscle contraction. **The energy-producing, or ATPase,** protein myosin makes up its thick filament, while **the regulatory proteins** actin, tropomyosin, and troponin make up its thin filament. **Interaction of myosin and actin** triggers muscle contraction.

complex meaning

When a muscle contracts, it uses **calcium**.

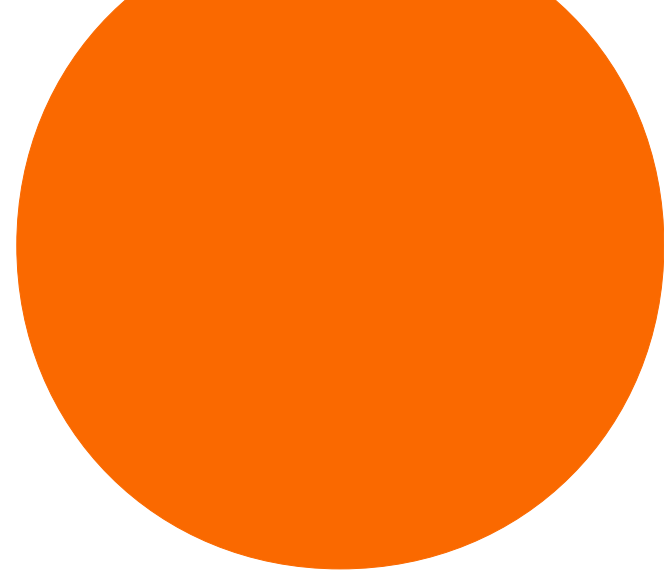
We must therefore understand how calcium affects muscle cells to understand how **cardiac irregularity** is controlled by the drugs called “**calcium blockers**”.

The basic unit of muscle contraction is the **sarcomere**.

It has two filaments, one thin and one thick. Those filaments consist of four proteins that regulate contraction: **actin, tropomyosin, and troponin** in the thin filament and **myosin** in the thick one. Muscles contract when the regulatory protein actin in the thin filament interacts with myosin, **an energy-producing or ATPase protein** in the thick filament.

complex meaning

here's the point



EMPHASIS (1)

Shift long, complex phrases and clauses toward the end of a sentence.

In recent years, researchers have made great strides in the early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. [...]

But in the accuracy of these new tests lies the risk of another kind of human tragedy:

[...] (*about risks*)

In recent years, researchers have made great strides in the **early and accurate diagnosis** of Alzheimer's disease. [...]

But in the accuracy of these new tests lies the **risk** of another kind of human tragedy:

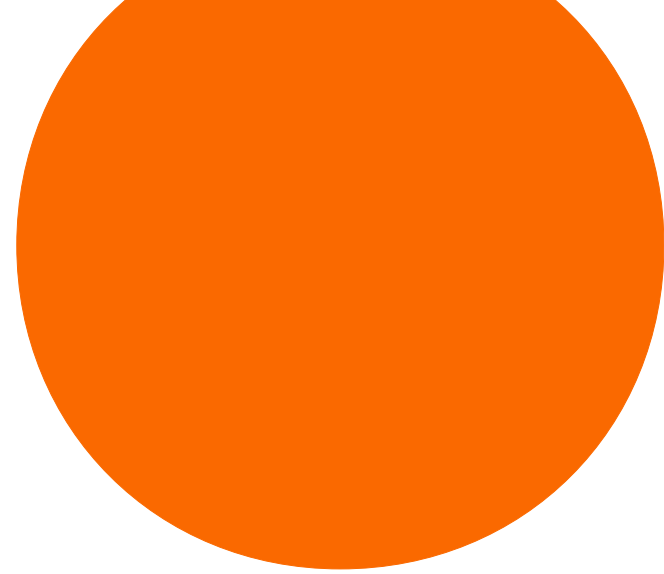
[...] (*about risks*)

themes

In recent years, researchers have made great strides in the early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease but those diagnoses have raised a new problem about informing those most at risk who show no symptoms of it. [...]

themes

here's the point



EMPHASIS (2)

Put the theme of a paragraph at the end of the opening sentence.

Lesson Six

Concision – Keep it short.

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing.

Productivity actually depends on certain factors that basically involve psychology more than any particular technology.

meaningful

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing.

Productivity depends on psychology more than on technology.

meaningful

2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words.

each and every

first and foremost

basic and fundamental

3. Delete what readers can infer.

Do not try to predict those future events that will completely revolutionize society, because past history shows that it is the final outcome of minor events that unexpectedly surprises us more.

can be inferred

3. Delete what readers can infer.

Do not try to predict revolutionary events, because history shows that the outcome of minor events surprises us more.

4. Replace a phrase with a word.

As you carefully read what you have written to improve wording and catch errors of spelling and punctuation, the thing to do before anything else is to see whether you can use sequences of subjects and verbs instead of the same ideas expressed in nouns.

phrase

4. Replace a phrase with a word.

As you edit, first replace nominalizations with clauses.

word replacing a phrase

5. Change negatives to affirmatives

not careful → careless

not many → few

not the same → different

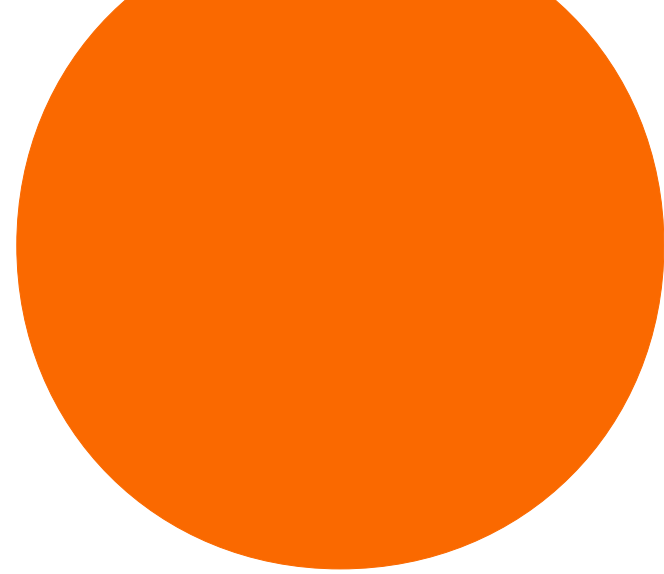
not notice → overlook

6. Delete adjectives and adverbs

Try deleting every adverb and every adjective before a noun.

Then restore *only* those that readers need to understand the passage.

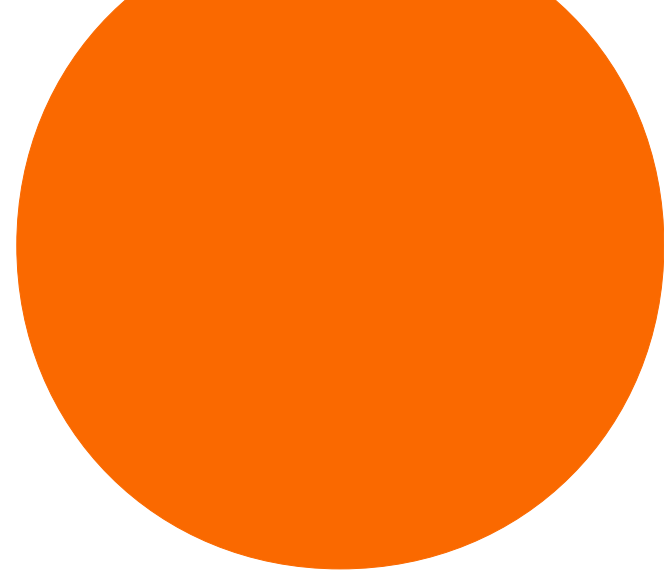
here's the point



CONCISION

Use only enough words
to say what you mean.

here's the point



SIX PRINCIPLES OF CONCISION

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing.
2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words.
3. Delete words implied by other words.
4. Replace a phrase with a word.
5. Change negatives to affirmatives.
6. Delete useless adjectives and adverbs.

Further Lessons

Shape

Elegance

Global Coherence

The Ethics of Style

Have something to say,
and say it as clearly as you can.
That is the only secret of style.

MATTHEW ARNOLD
1822-1888

