

Resources for Writing Well

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This document keeps my favourite writing resources in one easy-to-share place. It was written for my students, but feel free to use, distribute, or email/ tweet me similar links you find useful.

Orwell's six elementary rules

The six golden rules below can be found in Orwell's *Politics and the English Language*, but I've taken them directly from *The Economist Style Guide*:

1. Never use a Metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
4. Never use the Passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a Jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Delete bad words

Ctrl+F is a wonderful thing. Remove the following words¹ or use sparingly:

this, that, these, via, the process of, intra, and/or, hypothesize, obviously, interestingly, clearly, very, respectively, thus, however, overall, basic, factor, he/she, individuals, agents, structure, existence of, time frame, former, latter, very, for convenience, due to, literature, in terms of, in order to (to), whether or not (whether), is equal to (equals), and many more.

Three related points:

1. Check all your *thats*. It is also often seen *that* you can usually delete many words which come before *that*.
2. Sign post words (e.g., former, latter, next I will, as discussed above) are unnecessary if you have arranged the text well.
3. Try to avoid adverbs and qualifiers; they usually weaken the writing and the writer.

For the time poor

The Economist Style Guide introduction

<http://www.economist.com/styleguide/introduction>

Mankiw's *ERP Writing Guidelines*

<http://gregmankiw.blogspot.com.au/2006/10/how-to-write-well.html>

McCloskey's Executive Summary of *Economical Writing*.

http://www.deirdremccloskey.com/docs/pdf/Article_309.pdf

¹ Taken shamelessly from McCloskey's *Economical Writing* and Mankiw's *ERP Writing Guidelines*

For everyone

Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* is the seminal reference. Pay particular attention to the rules of composition.

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Elements-Style-Fourth-Edition/dp/020530902X>

The Economist Style Guide is packed full of gems (and dry British humour). I have an old version, but the newer ones are far more comprehensive. A free version is on the magazine's website.

<http://www.economist.com/styleguide/introduction>

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Economist-Style-Guide/dp/1846681758>

Orwell's *Politics and the English Language*

<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/o/orwell/george/o79p/>

I also enjoyed Royal's *The Little Red Writing Book*

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Little-Red-Writing-Book/dp/1582975213>

For practice exercises, see the University of Bristol's Faculty of Arts page on writing, which focuses mostly on grammar and punctuation.

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/index.htm

For economists and students of economics

My favourite writing reference is hands-down McCloskey's *Economical Writing*. Although written for economists, it is a pleasure to read and most of the content applies more broadly. Buy the little book. Re-read it every year.

Buy it on Amazon

Download the older Economic Inquiry article

Download an open-access PDF

For papers, the key reference is Cochrane's *Writing Tips for Ph. D Students*.
http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/research/papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf

If you heed McCloskey and Cochrane's advice, you will be a better writer than half of the people whose work you are citing. I cannot think of many pedagogical pieces that beat these two in practical value.