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THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE (ILLUSTRATED)



Synopsis

It aims to lighten the task of instructor and student by concentrating attention (in Chapters II and III) on a few essentials, the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated. In accordance with this plan it lays down three rules for the use of the comma, instead of a score or more, and one for the use of the semicolon, in the belief that these four rules provide for all the internal punctuation that is required by nineteen sentences out of twenty.

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Customer Reviews

First of all, great book. Been writing professionally for 20 years, and I still use this book occasionally.
WARNING on REVIEWS: is using the same customer reviews for "The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition" by Strunk and White (1999) and "The Elements of Style - the Original Edition" by Strunk (without White) (1920), re-published September 2007. Since the republication of Strunk's original work was released in September 2007, all reviews before that date pertain to "Strunk & White." Any review after that date, unless clearly indicated, could pertain to either book. The books are markedly different, but is using the same customer reviews for both.

When I write a book I use only a handful of reference tools: dictionary, thesaurus, Gregg's Reference Handbook, Writers Market, and the Elements of Style. Strunk and White is a wonderfully-written, extraordinarily concise tool that pays homage to classic high-end English. It takes language insight to make this prediction in 1979: "By the time this paragraph makes print, uptight... rap, dude, vibes, copout, and funky will be the words of yesteryear." The book begins with eleven "Elementary Rules of Usage," and then continues with eleven more "Elementary Rules of Composition," and eleven "Matters of Form." Each is presented as a brief statement followed by another sentence or two of explanation and a few clarifying examples. This amazing compilation fills only thirty-eight pages, yet covers ninety percent of good writing fundamentals. My favorite section is Chapter IV, a twenty-seven-page, alphabetical listing of commonly misused words and expressions. Here's a trade secret: when my manuscript is "done," I then turn to this chapter and use my word processor's Find function to study every instance of all these problematic words and phrases. I never fail to find errors this way. Many great writers are so only because they've learned to make use of the best available tools. The end of the book contains an essay on "An Approach to Style" with a list of twenty-one "Reminders." Those who fight the apparently-natural tendency to go against these recommendations succeed as writers. Those who don't, fail. It's that simple. The single drawback of The Elements of Style is that it's too concise; it does not stand alone as an all-encompassing tutorial or reference guide. Many readers will seek other sources for more in-depth explanation of style elements. Despite that, it easily replaces ten pounds of other reference material. --Christopher Bonn Jonnes, author of Wake Up Dead.

This jazzy edition of the classic "The Elements of Style," by Strunk and White, features stylized, exuberant, riotously colorful, and often whimsical illustrations by Maira Kalman. In addition, a few references have been changed to make the book more relevant. For instance, in the earlier edition, the authors cautioned against the use of acronyms with this example: "Not everyone knows that SALT means Strategic Arms Limitation Talks." The new edition states, "Not everyone knows that MADD means Mothers Against Drunk Driving." In the section on slang, Strunk and White advised writers to use standard language and avoid such words as "uptight, groovy, rap, hangup, vibes, copout, and dig." In the new edition, examples of slang are "psyched, nerd, ripoff, dude, geek, and funky." Strunk and White advocated "using scissors on the manuscript, cutting it to pieces and fitting the pieces together in a better order." In the current edition, writers are encouraged to use a word processor to move text from place to place. Is a new edition of this handbook really necessary? I believe that it is, not only because of the archaic references that needed updating, but also because

today's younger writers need visual stimulation and pizzazz to capture their attention; this edition has both. Strunk and White's words of wisdom are, for the most part, reprinted as they appeared in earlier editions. The authors discuss such topics as elementary rules of usage, principles of composition and form, words commonly misused, and tips on how to develop an effective and natural style. Even experienced writers would do well to review "The Elements of Style" now and then to remind them of the importance of clarity, brevity, simplicity, and consistency.

As the 'rules' in this iconic book take up only 14 pages, it continually amazes me how often I can find the answer to a grammar or punctuation question within those pages. It doesn't cover everything, and some of the 'rules' are of course changing with the passage of time - but if a wannabe writer can't afford a whole bookcase of tomes on How to Write, then this is the one he or she should buy. Beyond those 14 pithy pages, however, are another 100 or so that extend the value of the book immeasurably: Principles of Composition, Commonly Misused Words, and perhaps the most valuable: An Approach to Style, which gives excellent advice along the lines of Do not overwrite, Avoid qualifiers, Don't over-explain, Avoid adverbs, Avoid dialect, Don't inject opinion, and tons of others. When all's said and done, however, one of the very best parts is a wonderful essay by the inimitable EB White himself - the Introduction, which serves as a perfect example of all that the rest of the small book preaches: write concisely, clearly, and well, and say something worthwhile. Other books for writers to consider: Bird by Bird, On Writing, and Writing Down the Bones.

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