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Verbs That Take Prepositions

Phrasal verbs, also known as two-word verbs, are verbs that require specific prepositions. Because preposition following the verb affects the verb's meaning, writers must use the proper verb-preposition combination in order to communicate clearly. Saying "Jane believed John" means something entirely different than saying "Jane believed **in** John." Using the wrong preposition leads to confusing or awkward prose. Saying "Jane believed **to** John," for example, does not make sense. Below are *only some* of the most common verbs that take prepositions. The UWC has excellent resources for a more comprehensive list of verbs that take prepositions. Here are a few of our favorites: [A Dictionary of Modern Usage](#) (Bryan A. Garner), [The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms](#) (Christine Ammer), and [NTC's Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and Other Idiomatic Verbal Phrases](#) (Richard A. Spears).

account for

Nothing could account for his depression.

accuse. . . of

They accused him of robbing a bank.

agree on

No one could agree on anything.

agree with

I agree with the man who is speaking.

allude to

It is not polite to allude to someone's disability.

apologize for

He did apologize for running away.

apologize to

The leader did not want to apologize to the people.

apply for

Every June college graduates apply for jobs.

approve of

We do not approve of his behavior.

argue with

It does little good to argue with a judge.

argue about

A judge does not want you to argue about anything unless you have a good case.

arrive at

He arrived at a conclusion quickly.

ask for

Children like to ask their parents for gifts, but they especially like to ask for special toys.

become of

John has disappeared; I do not know what has become of him.

believe in

Do you believe in magic?

belong to

Whom does this pet belong to? It belongs to her.

blame . . . for

Don't blame me for your problems!

blame . . . on

Don't blame your problems on me!

borrow from

He has borrowed enough money from the bank.

care for

She enjoys the time she can care for her nieces and nephews.

come from

She came from Honduras with her family.

compare with

How does a small car compare with a large car?

complain about

He is always complaining about something.

compliment on

Compliment them on their performance.

congratulate on

They deserve to be congratulated on (or for) their good work.

consent to

The parents refused to consent to their son's marriage.

consist of

The solution consists of some strange chemicals.

convince of

I am convinced of his good intentions.

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decide between

I cannot decide between the two.

delight in

My child delights in watching the ducks.

depend on/upon

Do not depend upon other people.

detract from

Such behavior detracts from your beauty.

dream about/of

We are dreaming about going to Paris.

excuse . . . for

The teacher excused the child for his behavior.

explain... to

It is difficult to explain a problem to people who don't care.

happen to

Oh, I just happened to be in the neighborhood.

hear of

Have you ever heard of something like that?

hear about

Did you hear about Mary? She's got a new job.

hear from

Did you get a letter from him? I never hear from him.

insist on

The decorator insists on blue drapes.

invite . . . to

It would be a good idea to invite him to the party.

laugh about

We laugh about the crazy things we used to do.

laugh at

It's not nice to laugh at someone.

laugh with

When a person laughs, it's good to laugh with him.

listen for

I'm listening for the mail carrier; she should be here by now.

listen to

Listen to me when I'm speaking to you.

look at

It is not polite to look at someone for a long time.

look for

My child is lost! We must look for him.

object to

Most people do not object to helping someone in need.

prefer . . . to

I prefer red cars to blue cars

plan on

Why don't you plan on staying at our place?

provide . . . with

My parents have provided me with enough money to last for one month.

recover from

It often takes a long time to recover from a serious illness.

refer to

If you are referring to me, you should say so.

rely on

I can always rely on my strength.

remind . . . of

you remind me of a bear.

search for

We searched for the lost child for three hours, but we couldn't find her.

spend . . . on

Anna spent all of her money on a new car.

substitute for

When I was absent, William substituted for me.

talk to

When I am talking to you, I expect you to listen to me.

talk about

It is not nice to talk about people when they are not present.

thank . . . for

Thank you for the nice gift.

vote for

You should vote for my candidate.

wait for

Please wait for me! I'll be ready in a moment.

wait on

No, I will not bring you breakfast in bed. I won't wait on you like that.

work for

We should all work for the good of mankind. Mukesh works for that big company.

worry about

Mothers always worry about their children, and so do fathers.

wrestle with

We spent three hours wrestling with that problem, but we could not solve it.

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UNDERGRADUATE WRITING CENTER

A Rough Guide to Prepositions

Most English prepositions have several different functions (for instance, one well-known dictionary lists eighteen main uses of *at*) at the same time, different prepositions can have very similar uses (*in* the morning, *on* Monday morning, *at* night). Often the correct preposition cannot be guessed, and one has to learn the expression as a whole.¹

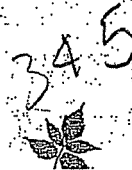
Conveying Time

Preposition	Description	Example
At	at a specific time	<i>At</i> 9:00, the bell rang.
On	on a specific day or date	My birthday is <i>on</i> June 4.
In	part of a 24 hour period	I did my homework <i>in</i> the evening.
By	by a specific time or date	My paper is due tomorrow <i>by</i> noon.

Conveying Place

Preposition	Description	Example
At	at a place at the edge of something at the corner at a target	Meet me <i>at</i> the restaurant. We were sitting <i>at</i> the bar. The bus stopped <i>at</i> the corner of 6th and Congress. She threw the dart <i>at</i> the bullseye.
On	on a surface on a street on an electric medium	The cat sat <i>on</i> the table. I live <i>on</i> Lamar Boulevard. He appeared <i>on</i> the Conan O'Brien show.
In	in an enclosed space in a geographic location in a print medium	The light is on <i>in</i> the bathroom. It is hot <i>in</i> Texas. The birth announcement was <i>in</i> the paper.
By	by a landmark	The tour goes <i>by</i> the UT tower.
Of	of a material of a kind	The moon is made <i>of</i> cheese. He is one <i>of</i> the faculty members.
From	from a specific place from a place of origin. from a source	I just came <i>from</i> the gym. I am <i>from</i> Dallas, Texas. He quoted <i>from</i> the Bible.
About	about a place about to do something about time	The papers were scattered <i>about</i> the room. I'm <i>about</i> to clean my room. It's <i>about</i> 3:00 in the afternoon.
To	to a place to a degree	I went <i>to</i> court. We'll have to compromise <i>to</i> some degree.

¹ Swan, Michael. *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 436.



Final Revisions Checklist

You've worked hard writing your paper. But when is it really ready to be turned in? This handout will help you polish your paper by showing you how to double-check main components and make a few final revisions. It's easier to spot errors on a hard copy, so print your paper and check off the following items. Remember that ultimately, *you* have to be the one to decide when you're satisfied.

First and foremost:

- Find your **thesis** and underline it. Does it clearly answer the prompt?
- Identify the **topic** of each body paragraph, and write it out to the side. Do these subtopics support your thesis?
- Label the **introduction**, **body paragraphs**, and **conclusion** in the margin. Have you clearly organized your argument?
- Make sure you've used **transitions** between paragraphs or distantly related thoughts.
- Check your **documentation of sources**. Have you followed one of the major style guides (MLA, APA, Chicago or IEEE)? Is it the one your professor specified?

While reading your paper, look for:

- **Spelling** mistakes that the spell check may have missed. For example, perhaps you meant to type the word *work*, but instead typed *word*. Spell check won't catch this error, but it will be glaringly obvious to your professor or TA.
- **Awkward grammar**. Don't rely on the computer's grammar check! Do you use commas or "to be" verbs (*is, are, was, were*) excessively? These are often indicators of an awkward sentence. Watch out for passive voice as well, and change it to active voice where possible. When in doubt, keep your sentences as simple as possible. A more complex sentence isn't always a better sentence.
- **Redundant sentence structures**. Do you use the same sentence structure again and again? Varying the syntax makes reading more interesting for your audience.
- The overall **flow** of your paper. Do your ideas logically follow one another to create a complete argument? Do paragraphs contain related information?
- The **tone** and **word choice**. Have you written appropriately for your audience?

Additional Strategies

- Have someone else read your paper. Listen to their comments and make appropriate changes if necessary.
- Don't try to make all your revisions at once. As you go through your paper, quickly correct the things you can and then move on and mark those passages that still need work. Continue doing this until you have attended to all the trouble spots.
- Visit the Undergraduate Writing Center for more help. A consultant will be glad to talk with you about your final revisions.

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Saying What You Mean

Effective prose gets to the point. To paraphrase John Trimble, good prose should sound like you're having an intelligent conversation with a friend. To do this, you'll need to learn **clarity and concision**.

What is clarity? Clarity means that what you write is clear to the reader (not just to you). Imagine the reader as a stranger you must guide along a perilous mountain path. You don't know much about them, and you certainly don't know how they'd like you to lead them along. But your job, nonetheless, is to guide them along. **Look at the paper from your reader's perspective.**

After each sentence or phrase in your paper, ask some questions:

1. What does this sentence mean? Explain the sentence to yourself. If there's a more direct way to say it, wouldn't your reader appreciate hearing it?
2. Why/How? Have you explained the reason for each claim you make? Have you analyzed properly? (Ex: "*Hamlet* is Shakespeare's finest work." WHY??)
3. Like what? Are you being specific enough? (Ex. "The character of Hamlet displays the qualities of a tragic hero." LIKE WHAT???)

All in all, **be specific**. English is a reader-based language, not a writer-based one, so know when to give your audience the benefit of the doubt—and when not to.

What is concision? Concision means that you say only what you mean to say—not more. Concision means avoiding wordiness and repetition.

Look at your sentences:

1. Have you repeated a word a number of times? Could you find synonyms? Cut the word in some instances? Combine sentences so you don't have to use the word?
2. Have you repeated an *idea*? Occasionally we write two sentences in a row that say essentially the same thing. Make sure each sentence answers a question posed by the preceding one rather than simply restating it.

Tighten, Brighten, and Sharpen.

Usually, **weak verbs mean weak writing**. Verbs convey, better than anything else, exactly what you want to say. So **have you used the clearest verb** (not necessarily the fanciest verb)?

A rule of thumb for avoiding awkwardness: Don't write things you wouldn't say, but don't necessarily write anything you *would* say. Colloquial English is wordier than written English needs to be.

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Saying What You Mean, pt. 2

Rescuing Buried Verbs

Let's look at the difference between two sentences.

John kicks the ball vs. *The ball is kicked by John.*

(People are always kicking balls in grammar)

In the first sentence, what is the subject? (John) What is the verb? (kick) What is the object? (ball)

In the second sentence? Subject: ball, verb: is, object: none (John isn't even an object!)

But let's look at it another way:

Agent: Someone/something that does something to someone/something else

Action: The thing that is done

Patient: The someone/something else that the thing is done to.

Make sense? Now in both of the above sentences, does the agent/action/patient change? **No!**

John is the agent either way (because he's doing something in both cases), but in the second sentence **agency is buried**. Therefore the **action is also buried** (notice that in the second sentence, the verb was "is")

So "be" verbs are already "bad" in that they are not descriptive, but they are also SYMPTOMATIC of deeper problems! They bury what you mean!

"So how do I rescue my buried verbs?" Usually, clear verbs already lurk in disguise as **nouns**.

Ex: "Hamlet's feeling for his father's death is grievance."

Find the lurking verb... How about grievance? Grievance = grieve.

Now run the agency test: Who is doing what (to whom)?

Agent: Hamlet, **Action:** Grieves, **Patient:** Father's death

So... "Hamlet grieves his father's death." **Much simpler!**

Eliminating Unnecessary Modifiers (or, the road to Hell is paved with adverbs)

Are you using specific words? What do the following words mean?: very, definitely, extremely, truly, ultimately, honestly, etc. The answer: not a whole lot.

Instead of "the desert is very hot," why not "the desert is scorching"?

Instead of "I ate the pie quickly," why not "I devoured the pie"?

Empty intensifiers actually dull the effect of the word! To a reader, "very hot" doesn't really mean "more than regular-hot." It reads more like "very *ZZZZZZZZL*..." So remember to **use descriptive language!** It's more precise and more fun to use.

Remember, there's nothing more effective than a perfectly placed word.

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Diction and Conciseness

Adapted from John Trimble's *Writing with Style*

Conciseness

"Most of us write as if we're paid a dime a word" (53).

Myth: Longer sentences are more intelligent than shorter ones. The truth is that sentences don't have brains and, as such, can't be intelligent. But in seriousness, let's think about this: Are long sentences more refined than shorter sentences? We actually think in longer phrases—Trimble calls them "ready-made." He goes on to say that since these phrases have "the added attraction of sounding elegant," they—don't seem intuitively bad. But!—"This habit of thinking in prefab phrases slowly dulls our sensitivity to words as words" (53). So what's the harm? Try these bad boys of diction: **Wordiness, repetition, cliché.**

Fact #1: There's a shorter way to say it. Keep an eye on your connecting words, especially. Prepositions, conjunctions, and the like. They're usually hiding something.

1. Sometimes they're symptomatic, as in this case: "He fought with great honor." Nothing bad about the word **with**, itself. But it's **burying** an adjective, "honorably." So why not "He fought honorably"? Incidentally, the word "great" wasn't a loss to be mourned, if you remember the section on empty intensifiers from the "Saying What You Mean" handout.
2. Sometimes they're just longer than they need to be. Look at these pairs: **to/in order to, if/in the event that**. Any loss in meaning by trimming the fat? (If this seems petty to you, remember that we're developing a bag of tricks to deal with wordiness; occasionally you'll prefer "in order to" for the flow of the sentence, but make sure you're not just doing this because you want to sound more elegant. An ostrich in a tutu might also think she's elegant.)

Here's some typical sentence protraction, from *WWS*: "His bold and brash temper has been replaced by a careful and prudent manner." Where's the repetition there? Check the whopping **four** adjectives. The revised sentence was "His impetuosity has been replaced by prudence," still not a gem but not a clunker.

Vigorous Verbs

Fact #2: Good prose is direct, definite. That's a quote from *WWS* (56). Your aim is to cut to the fat and get to the point. Trimble uses the analogy of a handshake—a firm handshake inspires confidence, and so will direct prose. Remember, your goal is to make a successful argument—so sell yourself a little, will you? Meanwhile, vague writing (lots of passive voice, needlessly protracted sentences, empty intensifiers, expletives and impersonal constructions like "there is" and "it is") is like a weak handshake—or, in some cases, like shaking two potatoes. **Destroy your inner potato.**

This tip admits you into the secret writer's club: "[T]he verb acts as the power center of most sentences" (57).

So remember that impetuosity/prudence sentence? Let's check up on it: "Prudence now tempers his impetuosity." Much better!

A note: Passive voice, expletives, and the like aren't uniformly bad. There are situations where you'll find them preferable, such as when the agent doesn't matter, or when you'd like to soften your tone, or when you're using it for emphasis, such as "Charles alone was injured in the accident" (57). But don't let these be your default; use them stylistically. **Tread carefully.**

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Freshness

We've been mired in mechanics for a while now, so let's look at some prose (collected by Trimble) that sparkles with wit.

"There is no deodorant like success." –Elizabeth Taylor

". . .the drama, which develops at about the speed of creeping crab grass. . . ." –John Aldridge

"He had an upper-class Hoosier accent, which sounds like a bandsaw cutting galvanized tin." –Kurt Vonnegut

"Have I been toiling to weave a labored web of useless ingenuity?" –T.S. Eliot, after "several paragraphs of highly theoretical speculation."

Writing becomes fun when we bring words to life. We have the opportunity "to delight our reader with arresting phrases" and images. Moreover, if you're really playing the game, you'll be able to surprise your reader (as Eliot did in the above quote). Trimble thinks of baseball: "A skilled pitcher mixes up his pitches. He'll throw a fastball, then a curve, maybe a change-up, then a knuckleball. Skilled writers work the same way...feeding our appetite for...a fresh idea, a fresh phrase, or a fresh image" (59).

Secret writer's club #2: Images and metaphors are your artillery against blandness.

"He wrote with a surgical indifference to feelings" –William Nolte

"A professor must have a theory, as a dog must have fleas." –H.L. Mencken

Wow, a **surgical indifference**? The idea, here, is to search constantly for the perfect image. Or, as Trimble says, "Always be thinking in terms of 'like'" (61). This is **seriously advanced** stuff, but if you're up to the challenge, try to incorporate some images, metaphor, or wit into your papers.

Remember, of course, that freshness is not synonymous with humorousness, and you must adapt your wit to your rhetorical situation. **Know your audience**. Just like you wouldn't crack a dead baby joke at a pro-life convention, you might not want to trot out a side-splitter in a serious research paper for a humorless professor. **Freshness**, though, is adaptable to any rhetorical situation. We always enjoy hearing something from a new perspective. In terms of a research paper or analysis, freshness might help you put a new spin on your analysis.

And everything in moderation. Freshness is a flourish intended to surprise your reader, not an enterprise to be taken on once a sentence. Works that attempt the latter are called "groaners" and promptly cast into the fire.

For more on diction, see the "Saying What You Mean" handout, which spends two pages discussing clarity, conciseness, sentence formation, and how to lead a nun across a rope bridge.

Undergraduate Writing Center

Eliminating Wordiness

In concise writing words pull their own weight. Each carries meaning essential to the content of the sentence. Try to identify which words add meaning to the sentence and which just take up space. As you revise your work, keep these enemies of concision in mind.

1. Weak words

Some words are the written equivalent of “um.” The word *very*, for example, is the epitome of verbal garbage. Filler words don’t provide content and they disrupt the flow of the sentence.

Generally speaking writers can kind of rely on certain online indexes of journals to basically start their research.

The words in boldface have little to do with the point of the sentence; they can go.

2. Repeated meanings and unneeded synonyms

We’re used to seeing some words paired: each and every, true and accurate, full and complete. All of these words can work well alone. There is no need to restate the meaning of a word by listing its synonym(s). But redundancy is not just a problem of paired words: it can be harder to spot, but repeated meaning is also a form of wordiness.

The **end result** was *brighter in color* than we had hoped, but we *plan* to repaint the wall **in the future**.

This sentence only needs the italicized words, not the bold ones:

The result was brighter than we had hoped, but we plan to repaint the wall.

3. Phrases that can be replaced by single words

If you can think of one word to replace several, use the word. Two phrases in the following sentence can be replaced.

Clothes that **swirl and slide and move** sensuously around you as you **sway to the music’s beat**—that’s what disco dressing is.

Pared down, the sentence reads like this:

Clothes that *groove* sensuously around you as you *dance*—that’s what disco dressing is.

4. Negatives

Anyone who has read an insurance policy statement knows that negative constructions can get confusing. Consider this example:

Patients should **not** submit co-payments if they are **not** notified to do so by this office, **unless** the co-payments do **not** total \$100 during one month.

Taking a sentence out of a negative construction often requires some surgery:

You should submit co-payments only if you are notified to do so by this office, unless the co-payments total less than \$100 during one month.

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5. Monologue

Writers get outside the flow of the text to inject notes about structure, spur readers to react, and clarify their intentions. None of these things is terrible, but all can get in the way of the point.

Finally, it has been noted that persons convicted of violent crimes are, according to most measures, more likely to return to prison; as we have seen, this contributes to what others have called the “nothing works” school of criminal justice.

The words in bold needlessly complicate the sentence. Try cutting references to other people’s thinking or reactions and convey the meaning through source citation:

Persons convicted of violent crimes are more likely to return to prison; this contributes to the “nothing works” school of criminal justice.

6. Caginess and boasts

Lack of confidence in your argument can also lead to wordiness. Hedging and qualifying have their place in academic writing, but this sentence almost fails to make a point:

It is possible that bare-knuckles boxing can be definitively seen as among the most safe sports to be involved in.

The opposite is just as bad. Without significant evidence and a command of the entire field, statements like these will get a writer in trouble:

Bare-knuckles boxing is the ultimate safe sport.

7. Nonessential information

Information about whom, when, or where is often nonessential to the meaning of your sentence. Avoid superfluous prepositional phrases when the information is obvious, implied, or irrelevant:

I turned the paper **for English in to the teacher** two days late, so **when she got it** the grader took ten points **off from my grade**.

The phrases in bold, set off by prepositions like *for*, *to*, or *in*, provide trivial information, don’t enhance the meaning of the sentence, and interrupt flow. The sentence would be clearer by omitting them:

I turned the paper in two days late, so the grader took ten points off.

8. Clichés

Cliches are phrases that have become meaningless through overuse.

The powers that be are pushing the envelope with this management initiative.

Though you won’t be able to get rid of all of them, you can revise to remove most of them. Consider this revision:

Upper management’s initiative is innovative.

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Readability and Clarity

Adapted from John Trimble's *Writing with Style*

The Godlike Pose

"[E]very time we're asked to produce a serious piece of writing...fear compels us to try to appear godlike: wise, rational, authoritative...donning the trappings of pure rationality and authority: studied 'objectivity,' impersonality of address, elevated diction, a grave manner, elaborate sentences, and the rest. It can be pretty convincing. We can even fool ourselves with our stylistic majesty" (67).

The Dogma of Formalism (Or, But I Learned It in High School). When you write, remember, you must think of the effect your prose will have on your reader. This elicits a "no duh." But before you strike me down with your out-dated slang, ask yourself this question: **How does my reader feel about my bombastic, ornate, painfully academic prose style?** (The key SAT word here, by the way, is "grandiloquent.")

Your high school teachers (as well as the College Board and IBO) probably weren't concerned much with style—if they were, play along for a moment. They were concerned with making you not write like you talk, since the way you talked (and you'll excuse Trimble insulting you for a moment) was "loose, banal, and imprecise" (68). But, as the story goes, the plan worked a little *too* well and produced the kind of grandiloquent gobbledygook we just discussed.

Trimble finds two problems with the formal style:

1. It's, as Mencken says, "bow-wow language." I'm not sure what that means, either, but apparently it includes "stilted diction, abstract phraseology, frozen sentence rhythms" etc.
2. It saves you the trouble of having to think when you write. Don't you sometimes find it easier to put on your Pretentious Academic hat (I imagine a graduation cap) than take the time to phrase things in an inventive and, more importantly **honest** manner?

The Rule So Far: Don't write like you talk, but don't write like you don't talk. WHAT???

The "General English" Style

If you'll notice, the problem with both the formal style and the informal un-style seems to be an excess of meaningless prose. It happens when we don't think about our words, because—hey, *I* understand what I'm saying. Why shouldn't the reader? (If that's a serious question, go back to the "Why Style?" handout)

There exists a middle ground, readable but not mundane. It's everything good prose should be: precise, concise, easy, and fresh. Somerset Maugham said that "good prose should resemble the conversation of a well-bred man." Trimble adds, "Or woman, he surely meant to say."

The Revised Rule, Perhaps: Don't write a sentence you couldn't plausibly say, but don't write a sentence you'd hear at a Limited Too. Instead, find a style that's yours—as you might converse with an intelligent friend.

Trimble's Version: View your reader as a companionable friend—someone with a warm sense of humor and a love of simple directness. Write like you're actually talking to that friend, but talking with enough leisure to frame your thoughts concisely and interestingly (73).

Unfortunately, since General English doesn't let you autopilot like the other two styles, it's probably the most difficult to use correctly. Let's figure out how to use it, shall we?

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Tips for Improving Your Readability

1. If you've written three long sentences in a row, try mixing it up with a short one. Maybe even a super-short one.
2. If your professor allows it, use the occasional contraction. But being too promiscuous with them will cheapen the effect.
3. That, not Which. You use "which" for nonrestrictive clauses ("The bike, which she rode yesterday, has a flat"). Sometimes it's unavoidable, but whenever possible, how about *that*? ("The bike that she rode yesterday has a flat." How about *that*?)
4. It's "I." Not "this author" or "one" or "we." You said it—take responsibility.
5. Try isolating a concluding phrase with a dash, like I did in #4.
6. Quotes rock. Unless you're quoting something really dry and need to paraphrase, you can usually find some dynamic quotes to use. Also, if the situation calls for it (such as in a personal statement), you can even use dialogue to spice things up.
7. Abstract arguments need concrete images. Use "word pictures" like "illustrations, analogies, vivid quotations, metaphors, similes" (76). This helps your reader both understand and remember your argument.
8. Murder your adjectives, at least when you can use strong nouns and verbs instead.
9. Adverbs, too, if you can. Especially empty intensifiers like extremely, definitely, very, and the whole nasty crew. Trimble unscientifically demonstrates them as having a "90% failure rate."
10. Usually, you can use the fewest and simplest words possible.
11. Connect each sentence to the ones that came before and after it. Aspire to a clean narrative line.
12. In long essays or reports, feel free to summarize your argument every once in a while, maybe in the form of a brief transitional paragraph. *Signpost* your argument. Your reader is falling off a bridge.
13. If you ask a question in your paper, don't forget to answer it.
14. If your prose is choppy, try semicolons; they make your sentences more fluid, especially ones with parallel structures.
15. Read your prose aloud. Make sure it flows naturally.
16. If your professor allows it, vary your "first, second, finally" with numerals: (1) and (2), to start.
17. Find out the rules for numeralizing vs. spelling out numbers. They come in and out of favor faster than American Idol contestants. Each style guide recommends a different technique, so find out which one you should use.
18. Don't put commas after sentence-initial Ands or Buts (or Ors or Nors or Soss or Yets). They slow you down. But, if you're using a parenthetical phrase like this one, you have to put a comma there.
19. Try starting sentences, incidentally, with Soss and Yets.
20. Try but instead of however. See the pretense levels plummet.
21. Have fun with your prose! Share your wit! For more on this, see the "freshness" section in the "Diction and Conciseness" handout.
22. Vary your paragraph length. Have you ever written a one-sentence paragraph? Just like sentence length, paragraph length helps you control your style.
23. Don't tantalize with titles. Don't worry about cuteness; be accurately descriptive. Add the zing later, if you can. Trimble sez: "A pedestrian title is about as welcoming as a burnt-out motel sign."
24. If you've written a paragraph that sounds labored, ask yourself how you might explain it to a friend. Talk it out loud. Then write down what you said.
25. Take a break to read a writer you really like. Looking at a masterful prose style will give you ideas of your own. There's nothing quite like reading the greats for inspiration.