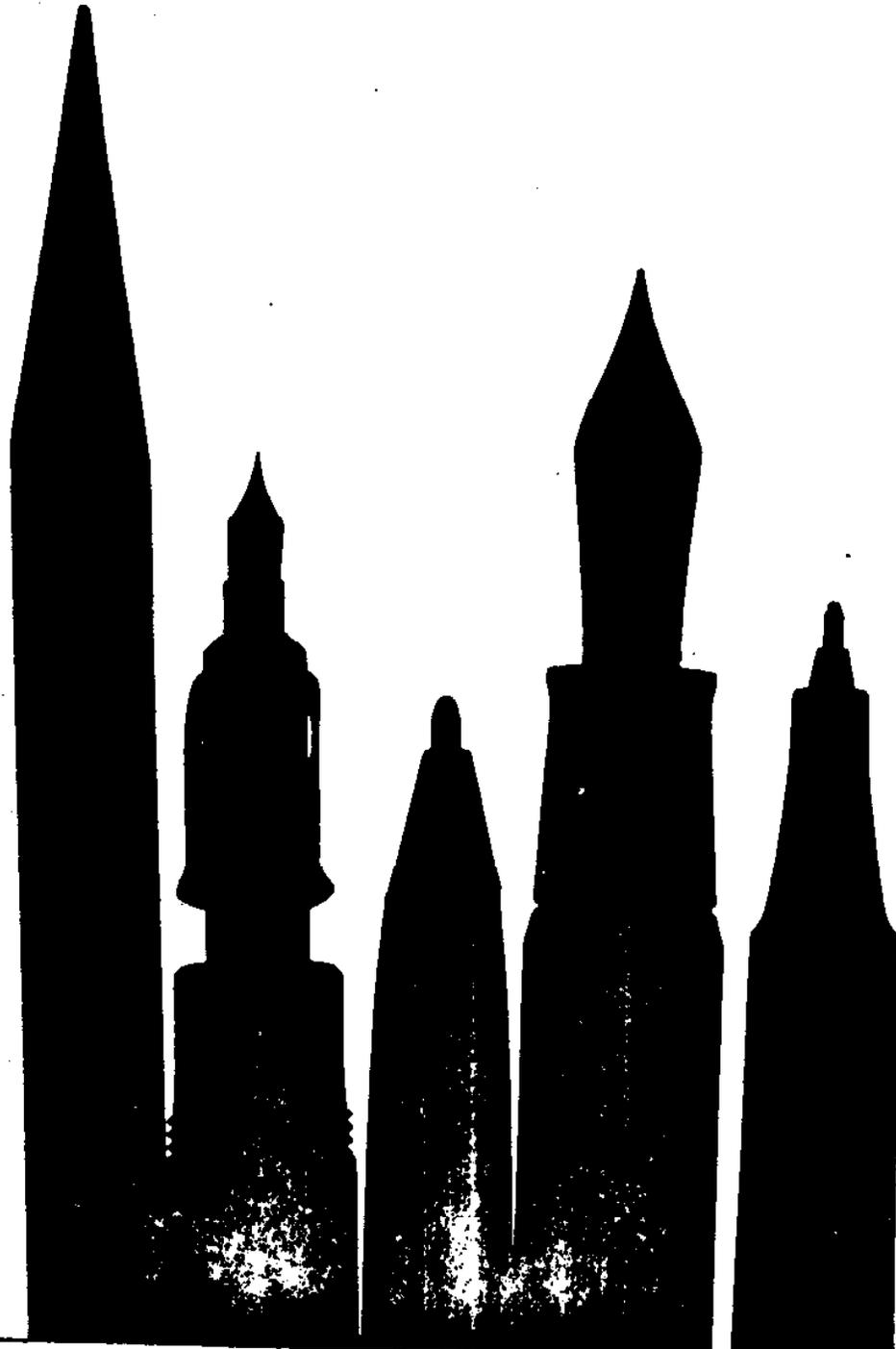


united states air force academy
EXECUTIVE WRITING
COURSE



WRITING AND REVIEWING STAFF WORK

If you're the writer,

Talk a project over with your reviewer at the start. Learn what points and emphasis he wants.

Write a draft. Keep in mind your reader's knowledge and interest. Do your homework and anticipate questions.

Revise ruthlessly. After letting the writing rest for a day, revise again. Try to find fault with your work.

Try to see the reviewer's changes from his point of view. Be grateful for the times he saved you from blundering.

If you're the reviewer,

You must *show* your people that you want plain English. Circulate and post the Executive Writing handouts, give them to newcomers, include copies in local writing guides.

Discuss a project with the writer before he starts it. Plan it together. If you're a middleman, know what the boss wants.

Don't make changes just so you can feel you've left your mark. Tinker only to prevent real damage.

Don't make the writer parrot your pet expressions. They can keep him from developing his own style and perpetuate worn-out language.

Whenever possible, suggest changes and let the writer make them. Give reasons for major changes.

* * *

--The mission of the Air Force is to fly
and *write*, and don't you forget it!

EFFICIENT WRITING

This list won't solve all your writing problems. No list can. Instead, it highlights common weaknesses you can fix easily. By avoiding them, you'll make your writing less wordy and more lively.

* * * *

Big Words

To get a laugh from readers sensitive to language, use pompous substitutes for small words. Don't *start* things; *initiate* them. Don't *end* things; *terminate* them. Think of the city fellow in those old Westerns who overdressed to impress the folks at the ranch. Overdressed writing fails just as foolishly. Readers may know *utilize* means *use* and *optimism* means *best*, but why force them to translate? You sell yourself in your writing. Come across as a sensible person, someone who knows that good English is plain English.

Doublings

Why write about a project's "importance and significance" when "importance" will do? Why write about someone's "function and role" when "role" will do? Pairs of words with similar meanings add needless bulk to writing. Whatever the differences between, say, "theories and concepts," they aren't worth calling attention to if you just want to give a general idea.

Hut-2-3-4 Phrases

Don't build hut-2-3-4 phrases: long strings of nouns and modifiers. You may have to use official hut-2-3-4 phrases like "Air Traffic Control Radar Beacon System," but you can avoid creating unofficial ones. "Increased high-cost-area allowances," for example, can become "increased allowances for high-cost areas." And you needn't write something like "computer programs advance information." Instead, write "advance information on computer programs." By increasing the number of words a little, you increase reading speed a lot.

Specialized Terms

Try to avoid specialized terms with outsiders and use them no more than you must with insiders. A notice in a recent base bulletin used five specialized terms, some several times, just to tell people to bring their latest Leave and Earnings Statement when they visit the finance office. Though abbreviations were spelled out when they first appeared, readers had to pause to decode them when they reappeared. You can avoid overusing your job's shorthand by testing everything you write as though you were the reader.

"that" and "which"

More often than not, *that* and *which* don't help meaning or flow, so use them as little as possible. Sometimes you can just leave out these words; sometimes you'll have to rewrite slightly. Go by the feel. The next sentence reads clearly without *that* and *which*. "We think (*that*) the change (*which*) they want will cost too much." A little juggling will get rid of *which* in "an engine *which* is unreliable;" we can just say "an unreliable engine." Look for *thats* and *whiches* to cut from your writing.

"the _____ion of"

Shorten this ponderous *-ion* construction whenever the context permits. Instead of saying "I recommend *the adoption of* the plan," say "I recommend *adopting* the plan." And instead of saying "We want *the participation of* the base," say "We want the base *to participate*." Words ending in *-ion* are verbs turned into nouns. You add vigor to writing by favoring the verb (action) form over the noun (static) form.

Wordy Expressions

Wordy expressions don't give writing impressive bulk; they litter it by getting in the way of the words that carry the meaning. So simplify these sentence stretchers. The longer you take to say something, the weaker you come across. In parentheses are the simpler forms of four common wordy expressions: *in order to (to)*, *for the purpose of (to)*, *in the near future (soon)*, *in the event that (if)*. You'll find these wordy expressions and others on the handout SIMPLER WORDS AND PHRASES.

"it is"

Few words do more damage than the innocent-looking *it is*. Those words stretch sentences, delay your point, encourage passives, and hide responsibility. Unless *it* refers to something definite mentioned earlier, try to write around *it is*. "*It is recommended* that you revise ruthlessly" becomes "*We recommend* that you revise ruthlessly." "*It is essential* that you revise ruthlessly" becomes "You *must* revise ruthlessly. Less common but no less wordy are cousins of *it is* like *it will be*, *it appears*, *there is*, and *there are*.

Legalese

Avoid legal-sounding language like *hereto* and *aforesaid*. Such pompous and wordy language doesn't give a writer added authority; it simply shows that his style, and perhaps his thinking, is outdated. Why say "Attached *herewith* is the report?" Say "Here's the report." And there's no need for "*It is incumbent upon* supervisors...." Just say "Supervisors *must*...." If your writing sounds like an insurance policy, it's probably poor.

Missing Hyphens

Two-word modifiers may need hyphens when the two words act as one. Don't hyphenate if the word ends in *-ly*: *fairly* recent change." Otherwise consider it. Three day trips" (three trips, each for a day) differs from "three-day trips" (trips, each for three days). Similarly, "additional rater comments" (additional comments by a rater) differs from "additional-rater comments" If you're sensitive to how hyphens make meaning exact, you'll see comic errors when they're left out: "They want a short tour officer."

Smothered Verbs

Express ideas involving action with specific verbs. Weak writing relies on general verbs, which take extra words to complete their meaning. When you write general verbs like *is*, *give*, and *hold*, see if you can replace them by turning nearby words into specific verbs. Don't *make a choice*. Don't *provide guidance*; *guide*. *Ma've* loaded the next sentences with other common smothered verbs. "The committee members *held* a meeting (*met*) to *give consideration to* (*consider*) the plan. They *made the decision* (*decided*) to *give their approval to* (*approve*) it." Get the idea? *Makes use of* () specific verbs!

Needless -ly words

Adverbs ending in *-ly* can add important emphasis or shadings to your writing: "I was *supposedly* in charge and she was *seemingly* innocent but then he smiled *horribly*, she fainted *delicately* and I *quietly* felt ill." But *surprisingly* often they *actually* don't *really* add *hardly* anything but *mostly* bulk and are *totally* and *completely* unnecessary. *Really* and *truly*.

SIMPLER WORDS AND PHRASES

Official writing does not demand big words or fancy phrases. Write naturally--in the words you speak with. Those words are usually small. The guts of English are in its small, often one-syllable, words. Not only do they save preparation and reading time, they improve the vigor of your writing and the clarity of your ideas.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
accompany.....	go with
accomplish.....	carry out, do
accomplish (a form)....	fill out
accordingly.....	so
accrue.....	add, gain
accurate.....	correct, exact, right
achieve.....	do, make
actual.....	real
*additional.....	added, more, other
adjacent to.....	next to
advantageous.....	helpful
*advise.....	recommend, tell
affix.....	put, stick
afford an opportunity..	allow, let
aircraft.....	plane
anticipate.....	expect
a number of.....	some
apparent.....	clear, plain
appear.....	seem
appreciable.....	many
appropriate.....	proper, right
approximately.....	about
as a means of.....	to
ascertain.....	find out, learn
as prescribed by.....	under
*assist, assistance....	aid, help
attached herewith is...	here's
attempt.....	try
at the present time....	now
benefit.....	help
by means of.....	by, with
cannot.....	can't
capability.....	ability
category.....	class, group
close proximity.....	near
combine.....	join
comply.....	follow
component.....	part
comprise.....	form, include, make up
concerning.....	about, on
conclude.....	close, end
concur.....	agree
confront.....	face, meet
consequently.....	so
consolidate.....	combine, join, merge
constitutes.....	is, forms, makes up
construct.....	build
contains.....	has
continue.....	keep on
contribute.....	give
cooperate.....	help
currently.....	(leave out)
deem.....	think
delete.....	cut, drop
demonstrate.....	prove, show
depart.....	leave
designate.....	appoint, choose, name, pick
desire.....	wish
determine.....	decide, figure, find
develop.....	grow, make, take place
disclose.....	show
discontinue.....	drop, stop
disseminate.....	issue, send out

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
do not.....	don't
due to the fact that.....	due to, since
echelons.....	levels
effect.....	make
elect.....	choose, pick
eliminate.....	cut, drop, end
employ.....	use
encounter.....	meet
encourage.....	urge
endeavor.....	try
ensure.....	make sure
enumerate.....	count
equitable.....	fair
equivalent.....	equal
establish.....	set up, prove, show
evaluate.....	check, rate, test
evidenced.....	showed
evident.....	clear
examine.....	check, look at
exhibit.....	show
expedite.....	hurry, rush, speed up
expeditious.....	fast, quick
expend.....	pay out, spend
expense.....	cost, fee, price
explain.....	show, tell
*facilitate.....	ease, help
factor.....	reason, cause
failed to.....	didn't
fatuous numbskull.....	jerk
feasible.....	can be done
females.....	women
final.....	last
*finalize.....	complete, finish
for example.....	such as
forfeit.....	give up, lose
*for the purpose of.....	for, to
forward.....	send
function.....	act, role, work
fundamental.....	basic
furnish.....	give, send
has the capability.....	can
herein.....	here
*however.....	but
identical.....	same
identify.....	find, name, show
immediately.....	at once
impacted.....	changed, hit
implement.....	carry out, do, follow
*in accordance with.....	by, under
in addition.....	also, besides, too
in an effort to.....	to
inasmuch as.....	since
inception.....	start
in conjunction with.....	with
incorporate.....	blend, join, merge
incumbent upon.....	must
indicate.....	show, write down
indication.....	sign
initial.....	first
initiate.....	start
in lieu of.....	instead of
in order that.....	for, so

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
*in order to	to
in regard to	about, concerning, on
interpose no objection	don't object
in the amount of	for
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
*in the near future	soon
in view of	since
in view of the above	so
*it is	(leave out)
it is essential	must
it is recommended	I/we recommend
it is requested	please
justify	prove
legislation	law
limited number	few
limitations	limits
locate	find
location	place, scene, site
magnitude	size
*maintain	keep, support
majority	most
maximum	greatest, longest, most
minimize	decrease, lessen, reduce
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
nebulous	vague
necessitate	cause, need
*notify	let know, tell
numerous	many, most
objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind, compel
observe	see
obtain	get
operate	run, work
operational	working
*optimum	best, greatest, most
option	choice, way
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let
personnel	people, staff
pertaining to	about, of, on
place	put
portion	part
position	place
possess	have, own
preclude	prevent
prepared	ready
*previous	earlier, past
previously	before
prioritize	rank
prior to	before
probability	chance
procedures	rules, ways
proceed	do, go on, try
proficiency	skill
programmed	planned
promulgate	announce, issue
*provide	give, say, supply
provided that	if
provides guidance for	guides
(the) provisions of	(leave out)
purchase	buy

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
reason for	why
recapitulate	sum up
reduce	cut
reflect	say, show
regarding	about, of, on
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remain	stay
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay
render	give, make
request	ask
require	must, need
requirement	need
*retain	keep
return	go back
review	check, go over
selection	choice
similar	like
solicit	ask for
state	say
*subject	the, this, your
subject to	may be
submit	give, send
subsequent	later, next
subsequently	after, later, then
substantial	large, real, strong
sufficient	enough
take appropriate measures	please
terminate	end, stop
that	(leave out)
*therefore	so
there are	(leave out)
there is	(leave out)
thereof	its, their
this office	us, we
time period	(either one)
transmit	send
transpire	happen, occur
-type	(leave out)
until such time as	until
(the) use of	(leave out)
*utilize, utilization	use
validate	confirm
value	cost, worth
verbatim	word for word, exact
via	in, on, through
viable	workable
warrant	call for, permit
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with the exception of	except for
witnessed	saw

*among the most overworked

SPEAK WHEN YOU WRITE

To get away from the outdated formal style, make your writing more like speaking. Now we aren't saying you should copy every quirk of speech down to grunts and ramblings. And we know a few people speak no better than they write. Still, the basic principle holds: because people "hear" writing, the most readable writing sounds like a person talking to a person. Begin by imagining your reader is in front of you, and then use the following tips--the best of speaking.

* * * * *

1. Respect plain words, the words we speak with. Go out of your way to use short words instead of long ones. Don't add to word inflation, which means don't write letters like those in your IN basket.

Please follow the new sending
~~Request compliance with recently established policy by forwarding~~
another an additional copy of the report to PDA and ~~retaining~~ *keeping* the original.

2. Write with personal pronouns. Use *we, us, our* when speaking FOR THE COMMANDER. Use *I, me, my* when speaking for yourself. And either way, be generous with *you*. Avoiding these natural references to people is false modesty. Besides, the alternatives to personal pronouns are awkwardness (*Your support is appreciated* for *We appreciate your support*) and hedging (*It was decided* for *I decided*). We're asking you to help stamp out untouched-by-human-hands writing.

us when you complete
Notify ~~this office upon completion of~~ the course.

3. Use contractions. Write with the ones we speak with, like *I'm, we're, you'd, they've, can't, don't, let's*. If contractions come easily, you've mastered spoken writing. If contractions seem out of place, don't remove them; deflate the rest of what you say. (Don't overlook the advantages of negative contractions for instructions: they soften commands and keep readers from skipping over *not*.)

everyone's job save
It's ~~encumbent upon personnel at all echelons to conserve~~ energy.

4. Reach out to your reader occasionally by asking questions. A request gains emphasis when it ends with ?. In a long report, a question can be a welcome change. Hear how spoken a question is?

~~Request this office be advised whether~~^{is} the conference ~~is~~ still scheduled for 29 February?

5. Prefer short, spoken transitions over long, bookish ones. Use *but* more than *however*, also more than *in addition*, *still* more than *nevertheless*, so more than *consequently* or *therefore*. Use formal transitions only for variety. (And, yes, you can start sentences with words like *but*, *so*, *yet*, *and*, *or*.)

We don't have any surplus file cabinets now; ~~however~~^{but} we expect some by June. ~~Therefore~~^{So} please check with us later.

6. A preposition is a word you can end a sentence with. Don't rework a sentence just to shift a preposition from the end. You'll only lengthen, tangle, and stiffen the sentence. These words are common prepositions: *after*, *at*, *by*, *from*, *of*, *to*, *up*, *with*.

Here's the report ~~for which~~^{for} you asked. Does it include the figures ~~to which~~^{to} you referred?

7. Keep sentences short, about twenty words on the average. Use some longer and shorter sentences for variety. Short ones won't guarantee clarity, but they will prevent many of the confusions common to long ones. Try the eye test: average about two typed lines a sentence. Or try the ear test: read your writing aloud and break apart any sentence you can't finish in one breath.

* * * * *

Captains tell us they'd write informally if only the majors would let them. Colonels tell us they'd write informally if only the generals would let them. No doubt some supervisors do insist on obsolete formal writing. But some people blame the boss for their own overcautiousness. Take the plunge to plain English. The water's fine.

HOW TO TURN PASSIVE VERBS INTO ACTIVE ONES

Use as few passive verbs as possible. They aren't gramatically wrong, but they are overworked in Air Force writing. To write actively, remember this simple rule: *put the doer before the verb.* By leading with the doer, you'll automatically avoid a passive verb.

Passive: *The toad was eaten by Igor* (receiver before verb and doer after)

Active: *Igor ate the toad.* (doer before verb and receiver after)

You can spot passive sentences by checking for these characteristics:

1. The receiver of the verb's action comes before the verb. In the passive example above, *toad* is the receiver.
2. The verb has these two parts: any form of *to be*, either simple (such as *are, was*) or compound (such as *is being, have been, will be, must be*), plus the past participle of a main verb (most end in *-en* or *-ed*). In the passive example above, *was eaten* is the verb.
3. The doer, if one appears at all, follows the verb and usually has *by* just before it. But unlike active sentences, passive ones are complete without doers: *The toad was eaten.*

A passive sentence is useful if you don't want to name the person or thing that does the action. This situation may occur if the doer is obvious, unknown, unimportant, or better left unsaid.

Doer obvious: *President Carter was elected in 1976.*

Doer perhaps unimportant: *The parts were shipped on 1 Jun.*

But if you use passive sentences when you should use active ones, your writing will be wordy, roundabout, and (as *passive* implies) sluggish. Worse, because passive sentences don't always show doers, you may cause confusion.

Request must be approved. By whom? *The commander must approve requests.*

The deadline was missed. By whom? *We missed the deadline.*

You can fix passive sentences at least three ways:

1. Interchange the receiver and doer: *The toad was eaten by Igor* becomes *Igor ate the toad.*
2. Supply the missing doer: *The deadline was missed* becomes *We missed the deadline.*
3. Change the verb: *These orders are forwarded for your signature* becomes *These orders need your signature.*

Studies show that active verbs save words: from 10 to 30% in a typical one-page document. That's less writing, less typing, less comm costs, less reading, and -- less confusion.

HOW TO WRITE DIRECT INSTRUCTIONS

Whenever you write instructions--in letters, operating procedures, regulations, or bulletin notices--*talk directly to your audience*. If your instructions go to many different people, write to a typical group or, better, to one typical person. Talk as though someone has just walked up to you and asked what to do.

1. Use the pronoun *you*, stated or implied. Avoid the indirect approach of this bulletin notice: *Personnel who are moving this summer are advised to contact the housing office early*. Instead, say this: *If you are moving this summer, contact the housing office early*.

2. Don't bury instructions in the middle of a long paragraph; they get lost, visually and mentally. For a list of instructions, make each step a separate subparagraph, labeled 1, 2, 3,...or a, b, c,....

3. Start each step with an active verb in the present tense (like *use, don't, start*). Don't rely on the *must be, wills, and will be* of passive and future verbs. These instructions to duty officers are weak: *All safes must be checked. Duty officers will spin each safe's dial as part of the inspection*. The *you* approach makes the instructions direct: *You must check all safes. Spin each safe's dial as part of your inspection*.

4. Keep lists parallel. The rhythm of parallelism sets up expectations that make reading easy. Common violations of parallelism include switching from active instructions to passive ones and inserting a "thing" into a list of actions. The sentences that begin 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this series would lose their parallelism if, for example, *Keep lists parallel* appeared as a passive (*Parallelism in lists will be kept*) or as a thing (*Parallelism: Keep it in lists*).

You guessed it: this is a set of instructions. Read it again to see how we used the four rules.

TO MAKE YOUR BOTTOM LINE THE TOP LINE

Open with your main point, the one sentence you'd keep if you could keep only one.

You can often put that sentence in its own paragraph for added clarity, the way we just did. Give commands before reasons, requests before justifications, answers before explanations, conclusions before details, and solutions before problems.

A poorly organized letter reads like a mystery story. Clue by clue, it unfolds details that make sense only toward the end. We encourage the approach used in newspaper articles. They start with the most important information and taper off to the least important.

You might delay the main point to soften bad news or to remind your reader of an old conversation, for example, but avoid delaying long. Readers, like listeners, are put off by people who take forever to get to the point. They need to know the main point at the start so they can appreciate the relevance of whatever else you say.

If no single sentence stands out, you probably need to create one to keep from drifting aimlessly. Occasionally, as in a set of instructions or a reply to a series of questions, all your points may be equally important. In this case, create a starting sentence that tells your readers what to expect: "Here's the missing information you asked for."

To end most letters, just stop. When writing to persuade rather than to routinely inform, you may want to end strongly--perhaps with a forecast, appeal, or implication. When feelings are involved, you may want to exit gracefully--with some expression of good will. When in doubt, offer your help or the project officer's.

These next tips will help you polish your organization:

--Write Specific Subjects. "Request for Two Parking Spaces" is more helpful than "Parking Spaces." And to avoid cluttering the start of a letter, cite a controlling regulation or piece of correspondence in parentheses at the end of the subject block: "(AFR 35-5)" or "(Your ltr, 6 Aug 79)."

--Keep Paragraphs Short. Average roughly four or five sentences. For lists and instructions, use subparagraphs. You make reading easier by adding white space.

--Use More Headings. Use headings when topics vary widely to let readers follow at a glance. Use them in recurring reports, histories, and even short letters when you need to catch a reader's eye.

FIND THE PROVERB UNDER THE GOVERNMENTESE

1. As with the sire, so it is with the scion.
2. Prodigality is produced by precipitancy.
3. Pulchritude does not penetrate below the dermal plane.
4. It is not proper for mendicants to be indicative of preferences.
5. A period of preeminence is passed through by each and every canine.
6. It is fruitless to become lachrymose because of scattered lacteal fluid.
7. Aritcles which coruscate are not fashioned from aureate material, at least not necessarily.
8. Lithoidal fragments ought not to be hurled by tenents of vitreous abodes.
9. Cleave gramineous matter for fodder during the period when the orb of the day is refulgent.
10. A feathered creature clasped in the manual members is the equivalent value-wise of a brace in the bosky growth.

NO FAIR PEEKING - - -

1. Like father, like son.
2. Haste makes waste.
3. Beauty is only skin deep.
4. Beggars can't be choosers.
5. Every dog has his day.
6. Don't cry over spilled milk.
7. All that glitters is not gold.
8. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
9. Make hay while the sun shines.
10. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

A PUNCTUATION SAMPLER

Though periods and commas are the marks of punctuation anyone uses most, they needn't be the only ones. Used exclusively, they flatten writing. Now and then use a colon or dash to dramatize a sentence or use a semicolon to replace a period.

Use a COLON (it means as follows) after a complete sentence to announce a detailed explanation. This detailed explanation may come as a single word, a list, or another sentence.

An active verb moves this sentence naturally from left to right: doer, verb, all else. (sentence: list.)

This sentence is moved unnaturally by the passive verb: is moved puts the receiver of the action at the start and delays the doer till the end, which is bass ackwards. (sentence: sentence.)

Use a SINGLE DASH as a colon in reverse when you start with the detailed explanation. Write any dash as two hyphens with no space anywhere around them.

Your sentences should average two typed lines or twenty words--keep an eye out for excessively long ones. (sentence--sentence.)

Use a PAIR OF DASHES to replace parentheses when you want to stress an unessential interrupter. Just as you would use two parentheses, you must use two dashes.

Use the techniques of spoken English--active verbs, personal pronouns, and contractions--to make your writing conversational.

Use a SEMICOLON in place of a period to soften the break between two sentences whose meanings are closely related, often by contrast. Like the colon, the semicolon anticipates what follows; the semicolon is less dramatic, however, and what follows is less detailed.

You don't have to use a semicolon ever; you'll be flat but safe with periods. (sentence; sentence.)

A semicolon joins two sentences; unlike here. (sentence; fragment.)

To cope with COMMAS begin by writing sentences that are short and smooth enough to not need many, and then use only those you're sure of. Of course, the safe way to be consistent, unmistakable, and anxiety-free is to master the conventions. The four main ones are sketched here. For details, exceptions, and miscellaneous uses, you'll find help in AFP 13-2, a grammar handbook, or the back of a desk dictionary.

1. Use a SINGLE COMMA to clearly end an opener. An opener is any word or group of words preceding the part of a sentence that can stand by itself.

If your opener contains five words or more, put a comma after it.

With a short opener omit the comma when you decide it's too harsh a separator and clarity won't suffer without it.

2. Use a PAIR OF COMMAS to surround unessential interrupters. If you could use parentheses or dashes but you don't want to drop or raise your voice, then use two, that's two, commas.

An interrupter, that is essential, should not be set off like this.

Several students, report two officers, were sleeping.

If you'd put commas around something inserted in a sentence, then start it with a comma when you tack it on the end. The period absorbs the second comma, as you might expect.

When you use one of the following conjunctive adverbs as a transition, treat it as an unessential interrupter. Punctuate it somehow on both sides.

<i>accordingly</i>	<i>for example</i>	<i>in fact</i>	<i>nevertheless</i>	<i>that is</i>
<i>as a result</i>	<i>furthermore</i>	<i>instead</i>	<i>next</i>	<i>therefore</i>
<i>consequently</i>	<i>however</i>	<i>meanwhile</i>	<i>otherwise</i>	<i>thus</i>
<i>first</i>	<i>indeed</i>	<i>moreover</i>	<i>second</i>	<i>unfortunately</i>

Prefer the A pattern below, for it uses a conjunctive adverb as a helpful announcer. Never use the F pattern, for it's misleading. Accordingly, replace the left comma with a semicolon or period whenever a conjunctive adverb straddles two sentences.

- A. *Today's writing is informal (; or .) unfortunately, old habits die slowly.*
- B. *" " " " (; or .) old habits, unfortunately, die slowly.*
- C. *" " " " (; or .) old habits die slowly, unfortunately.*
- F. *Today's writing is informal, unfortunately, old habits die slowly.*

3. Use a SINGLE COMMA before a conjunction (*and, but, for, or, so, nor, yet*) separating a pair of sentences, but don't use a comma before a conjunction separating incomplete pairs (like *ham and eggs* or *Mary or Festus*).

4. Use COMMAS between all parts in a series of three, four, or more.

Footnote to 3 and 4: To be safe when separating two sentences or completing a series, think of the comma and conjunction as a single mark of punctuation. Drop the comma only if your meaning will be unmistakable on first reading.

SOME HELPFUL BOOKS ON WRITING

**The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White. Macmillan, 1972. (\$1.25) A popular compendium of tips on style.

Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go by John O'Hayre, 1966. (\$2.20) The examples come from the Bureau of Land Management, but the problems are those of the Air Force. Send a check to Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

Guide for Air Force Writing, AF Pamphlet 13-2, 1973. This handbook covers some general principles and applies them to a few types of Air Force writing. Send AF Form 764a to your base Publications Distribution Office.

**Harbrace College Handbook* by John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. (\$6.95) In its eighth edition, this reference text on grammar and punctuation is among the best.

**Rudolph Flesch on Business Communications* by, you guessed it, Rudolph Flesch. Barnes and Noble, 1974. (\$1.95) The best of many fine books by the leading advocate of spoken writing. "Must" reading.

The Tongue and Quill by Major H. A. Staley, Air Command and Staff College, 1976. Imaginatively designed and genuinely helpful, this guide for staff officers gives detailed advice on preparing everything from staff briefings and talking papers to staff summary sheets and trip reports. Send a self-addressed mailing label to 3825 ASG/EDAP Maxwell AFB, AL 36112.

*Order through a bookstore. Most will take your phone request and, for a small charge, mail books to you.

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QUOTABLE QUOTES

Want to see a general cry? Stop by when I'm reading some of your writing.
--a major general introducing the Executive Writing Course

I am convinced that our effectiveness in dealing with the Office of the Secretary of Defense has suffered by the poor impression we have made in our papers. . . . At best, Air Force writing must be described as mediocre.
--Eugene M. Zuckert as Secretary of the Air Force

Those who review and approve the writing of others are often barriers to effective communications since they often insist on the obsolete formal style.
--AFR 13-1, p. 1

Informal writing is now the Air Force writing style.
--AFP 13-2, p. 34

Language not only affects the way we communicate, it also affects the way we think. Obscure, pretentious, wordy, indirect language obscures thought and fact. Use plain ordinary English. Be economical with words. Use active voice.
--General William G. Moore, Jr. as CINC Military Airlift Command

I am not looking for phrases that are turned to perfection. . . . The goal is clean, simple, organized, disciplined communication.
--Howard H. Calloway as Secretary of the Army

Please try very hard to write in straightforward, quasi-conversational human prose--as though you are talking to or communicating with real people.
--Alfred K. Kahn as Chairman, Civil Aeronautics Board

OLD: Maker(s) acknowledge receipt of a completely filled-in copy of this note, and disclosure statement prior to execution hereof.

NEW: I received a completely filled-in copy of this note.
--from old and new loan forms, National Bank of Washington

I write to my boss as though he were an idiot. My work is technical, but still my boss says I'm the only admiral he can understand.
--a rear admiral on his success

Tell the staff to write simply, so their grandparents can understand them.
--General W. L. Creech as Commander, Tactical Air Command

Be selective. Be concise. Don't tell someone what you know; tell them what they need to know, what it means, and why it matters.
--General David C. Jones as Air Force Chief of Staff