



The Elements of Style: Updated and Annotated for Present-Day Use

By Mr. Stanford K. Pritchard



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ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE: UPDATED FOR PRESENT-DAY USE

“The ancients wrote at a time when the great art of writing badly had not yet been invented. In those days to write at all meant to write well.” – Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. I was originally born in Ohio.... Well, that's interesting, I thought, as I absentmindedly listened to the sports announcer on the radio. Wait! STOP! "I was ORIGINALLY BORN IN OHIO..."? Well, gosh. Where were you born after THAT? Then there are the baseball commentators who routinely say things like: "If he makes that play, the run may not have scored." Well, again, wait just a minute. "If he MAKES that play...." But the play is already over. Why is the sentence in the present tense? "...The run may not have scored." But it DID score, so in this case, the proper word is "might," "MIGHT not have scored." A baseball announcer with any feeling for elementary good grammar would have said: "If he had made that play, the run might not have scored." Oh, and then there are little niceties like this: "If I'm the Dallas Cowboys, I gotta believe...." But you AREN'T the Dallas Cowboys, and besides, how could one person be an entire football organization? Okay, okay, sports broadcasters are easy to pick on (though one wonders why sports announcers, who are paid to speak, can't speak clearly, grammatically, and well). The problem is -- and it's the problem squarely confronted in this book -- that such loose, breezy, and ungrammatical language is epidemic in print, too. Newspapers and magazines are full of clichés and buzzwords, and there's not one writer in ten who understands that difference between "lay" and "lie." If you have a friend who goes duck hunting, and s/he gives you a bunch of down, you might want to LAY the down on your mattress. Similarly, you LAY turf in the yard, or LAY bricks in the patio. But when you take to your bed for a nap, you LIE down. (The issue is clarified in this book.) Language, whether spoken or written, is like a game, and like all games, it has rules. Now, "rules" does not have to be a scary word, and we all know that in language, the rules are constantly changing. "Ain't" was once a fairly common, and unremarkable, word, but nowadays, the President cannot use "ain't" in a State of the Union address; that's just the way the game is currently played. Furthermore, we judge language, whether spoken or written, by how well it accomplishes its ends within the agreed-upon rules. (On the subject of games without rules, Robert Frost said, apropos free verse: "I would as soon play tennis with the net down.") There are many rules, formal and informal, and many little distinctions, to be learned, in language, and the author considers it fun, rather than a chore, to learn them. What is the difference between "loath" and "loathe"?

When do we use "who," and when do we use "whom"? What is a gerund, what is apposition? These, and many other niceties of language, are investigated and explained in this updating of William Strunk, Jr.'s classic work. The book is based on Strunk's original text of 1918, which he wrote for the use of his students at Cornell University; it proved to be a landmark. The book was revised and expanded by E.B. White, of New Yorker fame, in 1959, but it has had no significant update since 1979. And since that time, many little affronts (for some of us, insults) to the eye and ear have gotten into the language. So here is a new edition of Strunk's classic work, with many of his rules and pronouncements expanded and explained; with new sections on proper usage and correct spelling; and even a "Rogue's Gallery" comprised of samples of egregious writing culled from current newspapers and magazines. For anyone who will reflect on it, language is an ongoing, fascinating adventure. The author intends this book to make that adventure more rewarding, and more enjoyable. Oh. The difference between "dryer" and "drier"? That, like so much else, is in the book.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

...earned a B.A. in philosophy from Haverford College, and on a Rockefeller Fellowship studied at the University of Chicago. He worked as a freelance writer in Chicago, then worked or wrote for The New York Review of Books, Cavalier, and The New York Free Press. He has taught at the Breadloaf Young Writers Conference, and his work (which has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and received an Honorable Mention from the Vermont Council on the Arts) has appeared in the Kenyon, New England, and Wisconsin Reviews, The International Philosophical Quarterly, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, Tango News, and elsewhere. Pritchard has written five novels, "Restaurant," "Benny's Mission," "Three Sexes in Search of the Creddebones," "Symphony," and "The Thrift Shop Murders"; a novella, "Terminal Vibrato"; and a collection of short stories, "Just Tell What Happened." His "The Elements of Style: Updated and Annotated for Present-Day Use," an augmentation and explication of William Strunk, Jr.'s classic text, with a new Foreword, and new sections on spelling and proper usage, was published in 2011. As a poet, Pritchard has published three chapbooks, "Kindling," "Warming Up," and "Sparks in the Chimney," and a poetry collection, "Making Up for Lost Dreams." As a playwright, he has had nine productions of his plays, off-off, in New York City. He is a member of PEN and the Dramatists Guild. Pritchard, who plays and teaches jazz piano professionally, lives in Middlebury, Vermont, and New York City. Note: "Terminal Vibrato and Other Stories" was published by Beaufort Books, New York, in 2007. "Restaurant," "Benny's Mission," and "Three Sexes" are available from Amazon.com, from stanford@stanfordpritchard.com, and from stanfordpritchard@hotmail.com. (Please put "Order" or "Query" in the subject line.) The four titles will soon be available as downloadable Kindle books.

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From reader reviews:

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