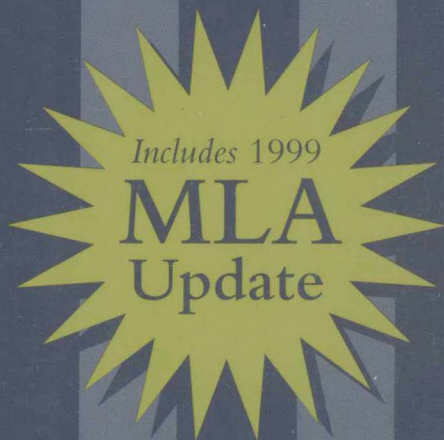
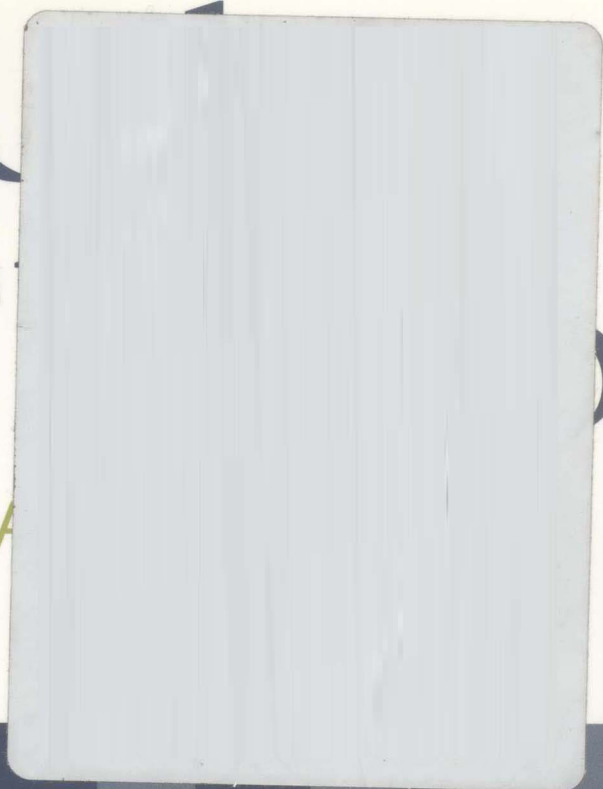


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RULES OF THUMB

A GUIDE FOR WRITERS

Fourth Edition

JAY SILVERMAN

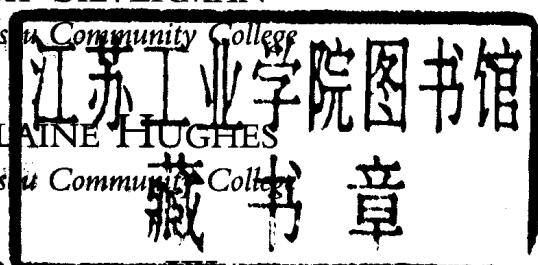
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RULES OF THUMB: A Guide for Writers

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This book would not have existed but for our students—both as the audience we had in mind and as perceptive readers and critics.

Jay Silverman
Elaine Hughes
Diana Roberts Wienbroer

HOW TO USE *RULES OF THUMB*

This book is for you if you love to write, but it's also for you if you *have* to write. *Rules of Thumb* is a quick guide that reduces each writing problem to a few practical points. You can use it easily, on your own, and feel confident in your writing.

We suggest that you read *Rules of Thumb* in small doses, out of order, when you need it. It's not like a novel that keeps you up late into the night. You'll need to read a few lines and then pause to see if you understand. After ten minutes, set the book aside. From time to time, look at the same points again as a reminder.

Part 1, "Correctness," covers the most common mistakes. We put these rules first because they are what most students worry about and will want to have handy. However, when you are writing your ideas, don't get distracted with correctness; afterwards, take the time to look up the rules you need.

Part 2, "Putting a Paper Together," takes you through the stages of writing an essay—from coming up with ideas to proofreading.

Part 3, "Meeting Specific Assignments," offers help with writing under time pressure, as well as with writing literature papers and term papers.

Part 4, "Writing with Elegance," offers ways to grow as a writer.

You won't necessarily use these parts in order because the process of writing does not follow a set sequence. Generating ideas, organizing, revising, and correcting all happen at several points along the way.

Rules of Thumb doesn't attempt to cover every little detail of grammar and usage, but it does cover the most common problems we've seen as teachers of writing over the past twenty-five years. We chose the phrase "rules of thumb" because it means a quick guide. The top part of your thumb is roughly an inch long. Sometimes you need a ruler, marked in millimeters, but sometimes you can do fine by measuring with just your thumb. Your thumb takes only a second to use, and it's always with you. We hope you'll find *Rules of Thumb* just as easy and comfortable to use.

Jay Silverman

Elaine Hughes

Diana Roberts Wienbroer

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	v
How to Use <i>Rules of Thumb</i>	vii

PART 1: CORRECTNESS

A Word About Correctness	2
Confusing Words [<i>to</i> and <i>too</i> , <i>their</i> and <i>there</i>]	3
One Word or Two? [<i>a lot</i>]	8
Spelling [<i>ie</i> or <i>ei</i> ? One <i>p</i> or two?]	11
Capitalization	14
Abbreviations and Numbers	16
Apostrophes ['s]	18
Consistent Pronouns [<i>he</i> or <i>she</i> , <i>they</i> , <i>one</i>]	19
Correct Pronouns [<i>I</i> vs. <i>me</i>]	22
Vague Pronouns [<i>which</i> , <i>it</i> , <i>this</i> , <i>that</i> , and <i>who</i>]	24
Recognizing Complete Sentences	26
Sentence Fragments and Run-on Sentences	29
Commas [,]	35
Semicolons [;]	37
Colons [:]	38
Dashes and Parentheses [—()]	39
Quotation Marks [" "']	41
Underlining or Quoting Titles	45
Verb Tenses	46
Shifting Verb Tenses [<i>moved</i> , <i>had moved</i>]	51
Verb Agreement	53
Word Endings: <i>s</i> and <i>ed</i>	54
Tangled Sentences [Parallel Structure, Dangers]	56

PART 2: PUTTING A PAPER TOGETHER

What to Do When You're Stuck	61
Finding an Organization for Your Essay	65
How to Work on a Second Draft	68
How to Make a Paper Longer (and When to Make It Shorter)	70
Introductions and Conclusions	72

Paragraphs—Long and Short	75
Transitions	78
Proofreading Tips	80

PART 3: MEETING SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENTS

Format of College Papers	85
Writing in Class	88
Writing About Literature	91
How to Quote From Your Sources	95
Using the College Library and the Internet	97
Writing Research Papers	104
Plagiarism (Cheating)	111
Documentation	112

PART 4: WRITING WITH ELEGANCE

Keeping a Journal	129
Finding Your Voice	132
Adding Details	133
Recognizing Clichés	135
Eliminating Biased Language	137
Trimming Wordiness	139
Varying Your Sentences	142
Postscript	147
About the Authors	148
Index	149

PART

1

CORRECTNESS

A Word About Correctness
Confusing Words
One Word or Two?
Spelling
Capitalization
Abbreviations and Numbers
Apostrophes
Consistent Pronouns
Correct Pronouns
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Dashes and Parentheses
Quotation Marks
Underlining or Quoting Titles
Verb Tenses
Shifting Verb Tenses
Verb Agreement
Word Endings: *s* and *ed*
Tangled Sentences

A WORD ABOUT CORRECTNESS

Too much concern about correctness can inhibit your writing; too little concern can come between you and your readers. Don't let the fear of errors dominate the experience of writing for you. On the other hand, we would be misleading you if we told you that correctness doesn't matter. Basic errors in writing will distract and turn off even the most determined readers. We encourage you to master the few rules presented here as quickly as possible so that you can feel secure about your writing. Once that happens, you'll be free to concentrate on what you want to say.

CONFUSING WORDS

These words are used all the time, so you need to know them. Find the ones that give you trouble and learn those.

a	Use before words starting with consonant sounds or long <i>u</i> (<i>a</i> bat, <i>a</i> coat, <i>a</i> union).
an	Use before words starting with vowels or pronounced as if they did (<i>an</i> age, <i>an</i> egg, <i>an</i> hour, <i>an</i> M&M).
accept	To take, to receive This office does not accept collect phone calls.
except	Not including Everybody except the piano player stopped playing.
affect	To change or influence Even nonprescription drugs can affect us in significant ways.
effect	The result, the consequence <i>Effect</i> is usually a noun, so you'll find <i>the</i> or <i>an</i> in front. Scientists have studied the effects of aspirin on heart disease.
conscience	The sense of right and wrong His conscience was clear.
conscious	Aware Flora became conscious of someone else in the room.
etc.	Abbreviation of <i>et cetera</i> (Latin for "and so forth"). The <i>c</i> is at the end, followed by a period. Don't write <i>and etc.</i> We bought beads, confetti, serpentine, fireworks, etc., for Mardi Gras.

4 CONFUSING WORDS

good, well

Test by trying your sentence with both.
If *well* fits, use it.

Maybloom plays third base well.

Maybloom is a good third baseman.

But note these tricky cases:

Olivia looks good. (She's good-looking.)

Rivka looks well. (She's no longer sick.)

Clara sees well. (Her eyes work.)

it's

It is. Test by substituting *it is*.

It's finished. It's time to go.

its

Possessive

Every goat is attached to its own legs.

No apostrophe. *It is* cannot be substituted.

lay

To put something down

-ing: She is laying the cards on the table.

Past tense: He laid the cards on the table.

Once you *lay* something down, it *lies* there.

lie

To recline

Aunt Pauline likes to lie down every afternoon.

Past tense (here's the tricky part): *lay*

Yesterday Aunt Pauline lay down for half an hour.

Lied always means "told a lie."

lying	Reclining The baby was lying on a pillow. Telling a lie They were lying to the news media.
loose	Not tight After he lost thirty pounds, his jeans were all loose.
lose	To misplace I constantly lose my glasses. To be defeated I win; you lose.
no, new, now, know, knew	<i>No</i> is negative; <i>new</i> is not old; <i>now</i> is the present moment. <i>Know</i> and <i>knew</i> refer to knowledge.
of, have	Remember: <i>could have</i> , <i>should have</i> , <i>would have</i> —or <i>would've</i> —not <i>would of</i>
passed	A course, a car, a football; also <i>passed away</i> (<i>died</i>) Kirtley passed me on the street; he also passed English. Saturday he passed for two touchdowns. The coach passed away.
past	Yesterdays (the past; past events); also, <i>beyond</i> Rousseau could never forget his past romances. You can't rewrite the past. Go two miles past the railroad tracks.

quiet	Spike Jones rarely played quiet music.
quit	Mrs. Salvatore quit her job the day she won the lottery.
quite	Hippos are quite fast, considering their bulk.
than	Comparison I'd rather dance than eat.
then	Next She then added a drop of water.
their	Something is theirs. They never checked their facts. Wild dogs care for their young communally.
there	<i>A place:</i> Go over there. <i>There is . . . There are . . . There was . . . There were</i> There are several theories to explain Napoleon's retreat.
they're	They are. They're trying hard to be polite.
to	<i>Direction:</i> Give it to me. Go to New York. <i>A verb form:</i> To see, to run, to be (Note that you barely pronounce <i>to</i> .)
too	<i>More than enough:</i> Too hot, too bad, too late, too much. <i>Also:</i> Me, too! (Note that you pronounce <i>too</i> clearly.)
two	2

were	Past tense: You were, we were, they were.
we're	We are: We're a nation of immigrants.
where	A place: Where were you when the lights went out?
whether	If—not weather (rain or snow) Please let me know whether you will be going.
who's	Who is: Who's there? Who's coming with us?
whose	Possessive: Whose diamond is this?
woman	One person The Board hired a woman for the job.
women	Several of them . This woman is different from all other women.

Remember: *a woman; a man*

your	Belonging to you. Use only for your house, your car— <i>not</i> when you mean <i>you are</i> . That is your problem. Your socks should match.
you're	You are. You're going to question my logic. I'd like to know what you're thinking.

ONE WORD OR TWO?

If you can put another word between them, you'll know to keep them separate. Otherwise, you'll have to check them one by one.

a lot	I owe you a lot—a whole lot. (A <i>lot</i> is always written as two words.)
-------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

all ready	We were all ready for Grandpa's wedding.
-----------	------------------------------------------

already	Those crooks have already taken their percentage.
---------	---------------------------------------------------

all right	It's all right with me if you want to call after midnight.
-----------	------------------------------------------------------------

a long along	Childhood seems like a long time. They walked along the Navajo Trail.
-----------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------

a part apart	I want a part of the American pie. The twins were rarely apart.
-----------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------

at least	You'll need at least three disks for the computer.
----------	----------------------------------------------------

each other	Frankie and Johnny can't stand to be away from each other.
------------	------------------------------------------------------------

even though	Even though I hate to garden, I love the flowers.
-------------	---------------------------------------------------

everybody	Everybody in the room danced frantically.
-----------	-------------------------------------------

every day everyday	It rains every day, every single day. Fernando put on his everyday clothes.
-----------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

every one	Every one of the beavers survived the flood.
-----------	----------------------------------------------

everyone	Everyone likes pizza.
----------	-----------------------

in depth	Study the biology textbook in depth.
----------	--------------------------------------