

THE PRINCETON REVIEW

WRITING SMART

YOUR GUIDE TO
GREAT WRITING

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CONTENTS



Introduction	1
Glossary	5
Chapter 1 The Briefest Grammar Review	
in the World	11
Chapter 2 Getting Ready to Write	17
Chapter 3 Words, Punctuation, Sentences,	
and Paragraphs	21
Chapter 4 Editing	43
Chapter 5 Personal Essays	69
Chapter 6 Reviews, Articles, and Essay Tests	99
Chapter 7 Research Papers	111
Chapter 8 Professional Letters	163
Chapter 9 Lab Reports	187
Chapter 10 Project Proposals	203
Some Final Words	229
About the Author	
231	

INTRODUCTION

“Most people won’t realize that writing is a craft. You have to take your apprenticeship in it like anything else.”

—Katherine Ann Porter

The written word is one of the most effective tools available; it can convince, sell, and express emotion more eloquently than many of us can in person. This book is designed to help make your writing capable of all this, and more.

Many people feel uncomfortable writing anything they know will be read by someone else, whether it is a research paper, a letter requesting employment, or a project proposal. Good writers are not only the privileged few who read nothing but Tolstoy and sit on specially designed chairs in front of rolltop desks with pigeon holes and inkwells. Good writing is a product of hard work and organization, both of which are easily accomplished by anyone with a pencil and a piece of paper.

The key components of good writing, the ones to remind yourself of whenever your writing goes off track, are clarity and honesty. Clarity is for your reader. Unless you write clearly and coherently, your reader will wander from sentence to sentence, never fully grasping your point. Hon-

esty is for you. You will write better when you understand what you are writing. If you pretend you know something about a subject of which you are ignorant, you will be exposed. If you pretend you believe something when you don't, your writing will betray you.

This book does not focus extensively on grammar or usage, so most of our comments will address these only indirectly. For excellent grammar advice see *Grammar Smart*; for excellent usage and writing advice read Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

On pages 5—10 you'll find a glossary of useful terms. You should be familiar with these terms, so you don't run across any words that surprise you.

Chapter one is an extremely brief review of basic grammar. This is not intended to provide you with an understanding or knowledge of grammar, it is there to remind you of grammar you may have once known, and to familiarize you with terms that may come up in later chapters.

Chapters two through four cover the building blocks of writing blords and how to put them together well.

The final six chapters focus on six particular types of writing. Each chapter outlines a step-by-step process, provides you with editing drills, and gives a written example. At the end of each chapter is specific formatting information that you can use for your own writing projects, and a list of recommended reading. These books include examples of the type of writing covered in the chapter, additional information on the subject, or odd writings we thought you might like.

Fiction writing will not be covered in this book, as it is an entirely different ball game (look, our first metaphor!). If you are interested in

writing fiction put this book down and go find *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner.

Writing means getting words on paper, and good writing means getting words on paper clearly. Understand that, and work hard, and you are on your way to better prose. Working through this book will improve your writing, but your instruction should not end there. The other sure way to improve your writing is to improve your reading. By providing yourself with good role models, your writing can only get better.

And that's it; you're ready to go. Read, write, and enjoy.

Glossary



The following terms appear throughout this book; you should be familiar with all of them. If you find other words in the book that you do not understand, haul out your dictionary and look them up. Using the dictionary and building vocabulary will only improve your writing. Many of the following words have more than one meaning, but the definitions provided refer only to the way they are used in this book, and should allow you to proceed easily.

ADJECTIVE: A word modifying a noun.

“*tall* tree” or “*silly* rabbit”

The words in italics are adjectives.

ADVERB: A word modifying a verb or an adjective.

“She ran *quickly*.”

“The *extremely* happy clam.”

The words in italics are adverbs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: A list of reference sources, usually books.

CLAUSE: A group of words that contains a subject and a verb and can act as a modifier or a noun.

“*Anyone who likes balloons* should stay away from me.”

The words in italics form a clause that is used here as a noun, and the subject of the sentence.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING: Writing done with more than one person, everyone (you hope) working together.

COLON: A punctuation mark used to indicate the amplification of a

point, or a following list.

“These are the important things: food, shelter, and television.”

↑
colon

COMMA: A punctuation mark indicating a pause.

“She walked to the door, but she did not open it.”

↑
comma

DOUBLE SPACE: To place the typed lines of writing an extra space apart.

ENDNOTE: A note at the end of a paper indicating the origin of a



quote or idea, giving the author of the quote or idea and where it was originally published.

ESSAY: A written piece about one topic, usually fairly short.

FOOTNOTE: A note at the bottom of a page (makes sense, right?) indicating the origin of a quote or idea, giving the author of the quote or idea and where it was originally published.

INDENT: To move in the first word of a paragraph, usually five spaces.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE: A clause that can stand by itself as a sentence.

“Rachel laughed at the landlord, and walked away.”

The words in italics could be a whole separate sentence, they form an independent clause.

MODIFIER: A word or group of words that describes.

“red apple”

“Singing on the stage, Kelly found her true calling.”

The words in italics are modifiers, or modifying phrases.

NOUN: A word that names something.

“Trees are often pleasant.”

The word in italics is a noun.



OUTLINE: An organizational plan for a piece of writing.

See pages 94-95 for an example.

PARAGRAPH: A subsection of a written work, made of one or more sentences, focused on a particular idea.

PARENTHESES: Special punctuation marks used to set a phrase off from the rest of the text.

“Many people believe (more than they really should) that Santa Claus exists.”

↑
parenthesis

↑
parenthesis

PHRASE: A group of words that does not contain both a subject and verb, and acts as a noun or a modifier.

“Flying a kite is torture for some.”

In the preceding sentence, the words in italics are a noun phrase.

PRONOUN: A word that replaces a noun.

“Grace said she is supposed to receive the million dollars.”

The word in italics is a pronoun.

PROSE: Any writing that is not poetry.

REDUNDANCY: Unnecessary repetition of a word or phrase.

“She was completely entirely convinced.”

The words in italics have the same meaning.

RESEARCH PAPER: A paper based on research of a particular subject using a variety of outside sources.

SEMICOLON: A punctuation mark used to separate independent clauses.

“I went to the store; I hated everything there.”

↑
semicolon

SENTENCE: A word or group of words with a subject and a verb.

SINGLE SPACE: To place typed lines of writing without any extra spaces between them.

SUBJECT: The part of a sentence that performs the action.

“Joshua won the lottery.”

“Joshua” is the subject of the sentence.

TONE: The general quality of the atmosphere of writing, much like tone of voice.

Tone can be casual (“I’ going down to the cornerstore”) or formal (“I’ am proceeding to the emporium at the edge of the avenue.”)

TOPIC SENTENCE: A sentence, generally at the beginning of a paragraph, that explains the main point of that paragraph.

VERB: A word expressing action or a state of being.

“Keith plays the electric guitar.”

The word in italics is a verb.



The Briefest Grammar Review in the World



This review will help you brush up on some basic grammatical terms we will be using throughout this book. If you need a more thorough review, refer to the bibliography section at the end of chapter three for some suggested reading. You are not being asked to commit any of these terms to memory for their own sake. Remembering the terms for different points of grammar will help you on your journey toward a better understanding of clear expression.



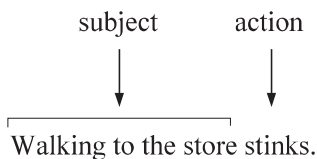
SENTENCES

A **sentence** is a grammatical construction, containing a **subject** and an **action**, expressing an idea.

subject	action
↓	↓
Joan	sang.

The subject of a sentence is the part that is responsible for the action, in this case “Joan.” The action in this case is “sang.”

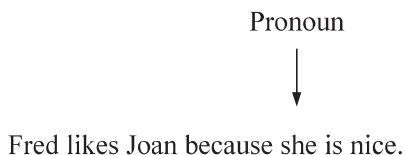
Subjects are **nouns**; nouns are words that name things, such as “tree,” “rock,” “fish.” Groups of words can act as nouns: “walking to the store” can be the subject, for instance, as in “Walking to the store stinks.”



Actions are usually **verbs**; verbs are words expressing an action or a state of being. Some examples are: “jump,” “be,” “laugh.”

PRONOUNS

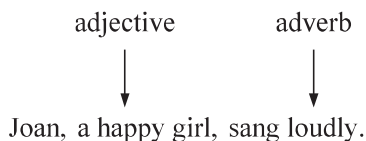
Pronouns are words that replace nouns. Some of our favorite pronouns are: I, he, she, and that.



“She” is a pronoun replacing “Joan.”

MODIFIERS

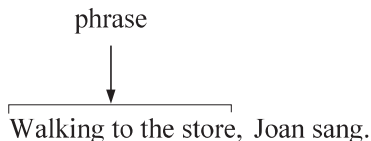
Modifiers are words that describe. Modifiers can be **adjectives** or **adverbs**. Adjectives describe nouns, adverbs describe either verbs or adjectives.



“Happy” is an adjective modifying “girl.” “Loudly” is an adverb modifying how Joan sang.

PHRASES

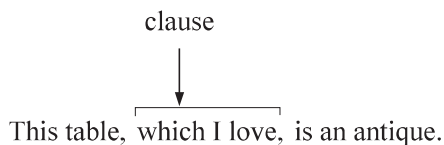
Phrases are groups of words that act as nouns or modifiers. “Walking to the store” is a phrase, and it can be a noun phrase as it was earlier, or a modifying phrase, in which it describes something else.



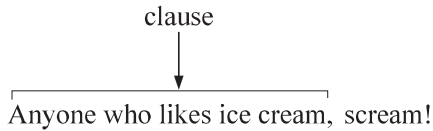
The phrase “Walking to the store” describes Joan, so it is a modifying phrase.

CLAUSES

Clauses are groups of words that can also act as nouns or modifiers. The only difference between a phrase and a clause is that a clause has a subject and a verb, while a phrase does not.



“Which I love” is the clause, and it modifies table.



“Anyone who likes ice cream” is the clause and the subject of the sentence, so it is a noun clause.

RULES

Now, some basic rules. There are many more grammatical rules than the ones given here, but most grammatical rules exist for the sake of clarity. If you are trying to figure out which route to take, follow the one that clarifies meaning. A thorough knowledge of grammar will only improve your writing, so you are encouraged to learn as much as you can beyond these basics. These are fine as a beginning. Try to remember that memorization of the rules or labels of grammar is not your goal, a greater facility with language is.

SUBJECTS MUST AGREE WITH VERBS

If you use a singular subject, use a singular verb.

“Joan *likes* hats.” Yes.

“Joan *like* hats.” No.

