

ADVICE & MISCELLANEOUSLY CRITICAL TIPS FOR WRITING THE WORD

1. Do not hesitate to use misspellings (e.g., “miscellaneously”) or violate grammar rules to make your point (as long as your reader/listener knows you know what’s correct).

Grammar, spelling and punctuation errors rarely affect your comprehension, but they always affect, if not also effect your credibility.⁵ You do not want people to reject ideas because you ignored and/or abused the “king’s English.”

Grammar matters: Would you buy this book?

2. Edit, Edit, Edit. Michener once said I am a lousy writer, but I am a great editor. Your first draft is never your best. Work it. Work it. Work it. Here are some examples—

- ✓ What is the difference between “His name is Jesus Christ” and “His name is Jesus the Christ?”
- ✓ What is the difference between “The church failed its mission...” and “The church failed their mission...” Or, “Myrtle Lake, the church that cares...” and “Myrtle Lake, the church who cares...”
- ✓ Difference? “Don't have another set of eyes handy?” and “Do not have another set of eyes handy?”

3. Proofread, Proofread, Proofread. You always need another set of eyes; even an uninformed reader will detect problems you do not detect. Don't have another set of eyes handy? Read your writing out loud; it is amazing what you will hear you did not see.

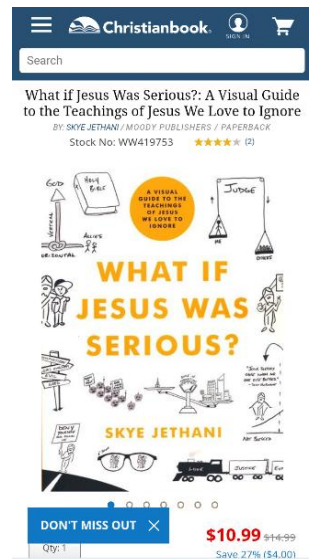
4. How do you know you are a successful communicator? People use your ideas. They borrow them. They steal them.

- ✓ And, yes you have also done it, whether you know it or not.
- ✓ Hubris is rarely found among ethical communicators. Nor is hubris ever found among effective communicators.

5. **Effective communication is neither agreement nor comprehension.**

- a) People may agree because they like you, not your ideas. People may agree because they already think or feel “that way.”

- b) People may comprehend because they know more about the topic than you. People may comprehend simply because the ideas being shared are easy to understand.



⁵Word choice matters—sometimes critically. In this case, for example, using *affect* rather than *effect* argues the factors in question are related to each other. If *effect* is used, then it means one factor *causes* the other. Failing to use the correct idea may create chaos between you and your reader/listener. For example, do good works affect salvation, or do good works effect salvation?

Effective communication is:

- ✓ Knowing about what your reader/listener disagrees.
- ✓ Knowing what your reader/listener does not know.

Understanding what is misunderstood is the true gauge of “effective” communication.

6. Formal communication does **not** use contractions; informal communication **does** use contractions, intentionally. Why? For example...
 - a) What is the difference between "Do not." and "Don't."? [*sic*] Also, the difference between “Jesus is God’s Son” and “Jesus is the Son of God.”
 - b) Formal and informal communication also differ dramatically—
 - ✓ Consider the difference between "Yes." and "Yeah."
 - ✓ Consider “That is likely...” versus “That is probable...”
7. Written pauses? Comma, short pause. Dash, serious stop.
8. Oral pauses? Silence, period (3 or 6 rule). Not "like..." or "uh..." or "and..."⁶
9. Unless you're a professionally trained actor, your “speech” should not be read. Talk talk. Don't talk writing.
 - ✓ Similarly, written communication is not “talked;” oral communication is intentionally more informal, less structured, and affected more by nonverbal behavior.
 - ✓ Written communication is rarely pleasant to the ears—when it is, we call it poetry.
10. Make no mistake about it, written communication also has nonverbal elements. [bullet choices?] Font, spacing, font size, font emphases [e.g., bold, uppercase, italics, underline, superscript] lines, boxes, illustrations, color choices, margin choices, vertical white space between paragraphs, deploying bullets or enumeration, etc. Consider these examples...
 - ✓ Font: Jesus is the Christ versus **Jesus is the Christ**.
 - ✓ White space matters. Does it not?
 - ✓ Font—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **The Lord God Almighty is here.**
 - ✓ Capitals—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY IS HERE.**
 - ✓ Meaning Shift—The Lord God Almighty is here. versus **The LORD God Almighty is here.**

⁶Ironically, if one’s *written* text for an oral sharing of same, intentional inclusion of an “uh” or “and” makes the written text sound more human, more personable. Very important when reciting conversations or hyper-formal writing.

- ✓ Word Emphasis— “The LORD God Almighty is here.”⁷
 - The** LORD God Almighty is here.
 - The **LORD** God Almighty is here.
 - The LORD **God** Almighty is here.
 - The LORD God **Almighty** is here.
 - The LORD God Almighty **is** here.
 - The LORD God Almighty is **here**.
- ✓ Even Bullet Choice— Compare...
 - The LORD God Almighty is here ... versus
 - § The LORD God Almighty is here ... versus
 - ✓ The LORD God Almighty is here ...

11. Nonverbal elements not only affect your audience, their manifestation affects **you**. For example, when you speak louder, even intentionally and experimentally, it changes you. Try it. Talk too loud intentionally, even to yourself. What changes in you did you notice, even though you were being loud artificially?

- ✓ Remember how you felt when you had to speak louder because your listener was hard of hearing?
- ✓ When you are closer, or farther away, from your audience, you change— whether you want to or not. Getting closer may be good; e.g., you become more personable.
- ✓ Other changes are bad; e.g., how do you feel when “over” dressed? “Under” dressed?
- ✓ Remember how you feel when someone “invades” your personal space?



Invasions of personal space can affect us primordially, or show our best humanity. Handle space carefully.

⁷This is especially true orally; note how bland, how sterile the sentence when *none* of the words are emphasized.

Good Writing is Read Writing!

—FUNDAMENTAL GUIDEPOSTS—

1. Clarify in one simple sentence what you want to accomplish in your essay/article/paper.
 - a) Be as behavioral as possible—e.g., I want people to affirm they believe that x is true and that y is the basis on which one should believe x is true. This is a two part objective—what is true and how one ascertains it is true.
 - b) Another example: I want people to know what I feel about x and that I will understand what they know about what I know about x because they will ask questions related to my understanding of x, not theirs, not others, but my understanding.
2. Use short sentences. They are more readable. Readable writing is read writing; short sentences contribute to readability.
3. Use familiar words whenever possible—they are more readable. Readable writing is read writing. Familiar words create less confusion and facilitate more attention to the ideas you are trying to share. Assimilating esoteric etymological linguistic symbols with erudite echelons is neither pragmatically functional nor linguistically viable. (Big words don't mean squat.)
4. Readable writing is read writing; familiar words contribute to readability. Yet...

Sometimes *unfamiliar* words must be used:

 - a) For example, there are no familiar synonyms for “hypostatic union.” Ergo, you will need to provide a definition using familiar words to demonstrate (1) you know what it means, and facilitate (2) your reader knowing what it means.
 - b) Technical terms have their place, but NOT when a familiar word could serve as a substitute. For example, using “teleological cessation” might “impress” your reader, but what you really want them to understand is the end of time. Use end, not cessation. Use time, not teleological. Your goal is to communicate, not to impress. Great ideas impress; grand vocabulary does not.
5. Vary the length of your sentences. Long sentences bore if not confuse readers.⁸ Short sentences sometimes fail to communicate the complexity of the ideas you’re sharing. Varying sentence length using familiar words whenever possible and shorter sentences whenever possible contributes to readable writing. Readable writing is read writing.
6. And yes, redundancy contributes to readability. Readable writing is read writing. Readable writing is understood writing. Readable writing is persuasive writing. Write readable. Good writing? Read writing.

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⁸Rule of thumb: When your writing exceeds more than three typed lines, see if you can reduce the sentence length by eliminating unnecessary words and/or dividing the sentence into two or more sentences.

RED FLAGS FOR EDITING

As noted earlier, the master writer James Michener stressed readable, persuasive, and informative writing is characterized by *dedicated* editing. Dedication desire is one thing; actually being dedicated is something else. And so it is with editing. Searching and finding just what should be “edited” is an art in and of itself. Consider these tips—



1. **Contractions**—When you see a contraction, unless you are quoting someone else, remember formal communication does not use contractions. Informal communication, however, uses contractions and does so intentionally. Why? Consider...
 - 🚩 What is the difference between “Do not!” and “Don't!”? [sic]⁹
 - 🚩 Meaning of “should’ve” versus “should have.”
2. **Paragraph Length**—As noted earlier, shorter sentences improve readability; this principle also applies to paragraph length. When length is perceived, often visually, as too “long,” readers sometimes skip it out of frustration. Break up paragraphs by ideas—sometimes even one sentence paragraphs are best (check out a typical newspaper article).
3. **Punctuation**—Use a ...
 - 🚩 Comma. When you want the reader to **pause**, to think, to consider...
 - 🚩 Period. When an idea is completed, period.
 - 🚩 Ellipsis (...) When a series of ideas follow in no particular order, or indicating there are other ideas that could be added, but are not.
 - 🚩 Colon (:). When a series of ideas should/must follow in a specific order.
 - 🚩 Dash (—). When you want the reader to **stop**, think, and consider before reading more.
 - 🚩 Semicolon (;). When you want two ideas, each of which *could* stand on its own, considered **together**.
 - 🚩 Enumeration (1., 2., 3., ...) versus Bullets (√ • ♥ § →)? When you wish to formalize and/or emphasize a series of ideas, with a particular *order* of understanding, then enumeration is best.¹⁰ When a series of ideas could/should be considered as a whole, then a bullet list works best. Note: people are accustomed to bullet lists; in fact, some organizations make bullet lists a veritable requirement. Adjust your writing style accordingly.

⁹Almost always, punctuation is placed **within** quote marks, not beyond their perimeter. For example, “Jesus the Christ is the Son of Man”. is **incorrect**; “Jesus the Christ is the Son of Man.” is correct.

¹⁰Many readers will assume “No. 1” in a list of ideas is the most important; make sure enumeration reflects that understanding **if** that is indeed your intent. If not, clarify whether the enumerated “order” of ideas is chronological, perhaps, rather than “import.”

As stated earlier, bullet choice can matter; consider the added meaning of the second and third bullets compared to the first or fourth.

- The Lord God Almighty is here.
- ⌘ The Lord God Almighty is here.
- Ω The Lord God Almighty is here.
- ✓ The Lord God Almighty is here.

4. **Space?** Yes, space is used to delineate ideas—from everything indicating a new paragraph has begun (a new idea) to separating clusters of ideas. Even the decision to use full justification versus left justification can make a visual, if not readability difference. Consider these two passages:

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|---|---|
| Space? Yes, space is used to delineate ideas, from everything indicating a new paragraph has begun (a new idea) to separating clusters of ideas. Even the decision to use full justification versus left justification can make a difference. | Space? Yes, space is used to delineate ideas, from everything indicating a new paragraph has begun (a new idea) to separating clusters of ideas. Even the decision to use full justification versus left justification can make a difference. |
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5. **Font**—Type, size, and emphases?

Whether you are typing a manuscript for a printer or for reproduction as is (e.g., this document), you deploy different rules for font, font size and font emphasis. Generally speaking, FTS&CC research papers follow formal academic specs as if the paper in question were going to be typeset. Those rules are listed here:

- A. Words that normally would be in italics, are underlined, not actually typed in italics.
- B. Font selection is specified to be Times New Roman, no greater than 12 point, no less than 10 point. Your individual instructor may accept other fonts; e.g., Arial or Garamond; ask him or her.
- C. Double-spacing is required, and important. The space between lines is reserved for editing, comments, and suggested improvements.
- D. When a quotation from Scripture or elsewhere is three or more typed lines, it should be offset by 1 inch on either side of the quotation and *single*-spaced. For example...

John shared his declaration of “beginnings” and “eternities” by saying this to the Church:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. (1 John 1:1-2, NIV)

6. **FTS&CC Rules?** Follow FTS&CC specs for the cover sheet and bibliography; some instructors will return your paper, considering it a draft until said cover sheet specs and bibliographic rules are deployed. When using a web site as a source, remember to provide a date when downloaded in all references or footnotes or bibliography. For example, consider this footnote:

³²For more information see:

DThomasPorter.com/BibleStudies/SPM_Ethics/IdolatryfromCulturalInfluence.pdf (As downloaded 2/24/2024).

7. **Margins**—follow FTS&CC specs! If you use larger margins, it appears as if you are trying to “pad” the length of your research—not a good impression to make. Margin specs are currently 1” on the top, left, and right, and 1^{1/2}” at the bottom.
8. **Footnotes**, generally speaking, are better than endnotes as footnotes are easier to edit and modify as editing changes the text. Footnotes also assist the reader to “keep up,” instead of continually flipping pages to the end. Finally, footnotes are also an important tool to clarify your ideas without getting the reader “off track.” Professors love footnotes.

Well-delineated and frequent footnotes also protect you from unintentional plagiarism, again not a good impression to make. By noting precisely the source of ideas, you not only protect your credibility, you can more readily update when necessary. Professors love footnotes.

Footnotes are single-spaced and smaller in font (e.g., 12 point text documents would have 10 point footnotes).

9. **This and That**—One of the deadliest set of words to use in writing.

This. When you write “this,” the chances are good **you** know the referent. Your reader may not. In fact, they may consider something else quite different than what you intended. Make sure your reader knows about whom or what you are referring when using “this” or “that.”

That. “That” is a killer—it is designed, intentionally, to stop thought before proceeding. If you want the reader to stop, not just pause like with a comma, but stop, then use “that.” If not, excise “that.” But, how do you know when “that” is actually required? Say the sentence out loud; if it makes sense without “that,” excise. If not, leave “that” alone. For examples:

The way to success is comprised of all that nature has to provide.

The way to success is comprised of all nature has to provide.

Here are three reasons that we should obey the LORD's directions...

Here are three reasons we should obey the LORD's directions...

10. **That and Which**—Inaccurately using “that” when you mean “which,” or using “which” when you mean “that” may give you an F, or get your article rejected, or most importantly, cause your reader to misunderstand. Choosing “which” versus “that” often has monumental implications. As an ideational connector, “that” infers causality, whereas “which” infers correlation. For example,

- A. The LORD God Almighty saves all that believe.
- B. The LORD God Almighty saves all which believe.
- C. The LORD God Almighty saves all who believe.

As you can see, example A asserts salvation is caused by belief (make no mistake, Satan himself believes). Example B asserts salvation is related to belief (a reasonable assertion). But example C, while clarifying the one who is saved is not an “it” (which is derived by the use of “that” or “which”), it does not clarify the relationship between belief and salvation. Sometimes using “which” or “that” when referring to a person, can be theologically devastating.

Believers are indwelled by that which is holy.
Believers are indwelled by He who is holy.

A major challenge to orthodox theology is referring to Holy Spirit, or even the LORD God, as “it” rather than as a person. “That” and “which” can unintentionally support this heresy. Consider this translation of John 14:26 KJV — *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* What does the use of “which” say about the nature of Holy Spirit?

11. **Who and Whom**—Lots of people have lost hair over this choice. “Who” is used when you are saying who is doing; i.e., the subject. “Whom” is used when you are saying who is receiving the effects of the doing; i.e., the object.

John is the apostle whom Jesus loved.

[John received the love of Jesus.]

John is the apostle who was known by the high priest Caiaphas.

[Caiaphas did the “knowing.”]

12. **Scripture References**—Always note the version of the translation(s) you are using. Major differences between translations can create major misunderstandings of the Scripture evidence you provide. Avoid abbreviations; do not assume the reader will know “Rev” means “Revelation,” or whether “Phil” refers to Philipians or Philemon.

13. **For Example** and **That Is**—One can begin discussing an idea by asserting it is an “example” of the phenomenon in question. An example is *partial* representation, NOT complete. On the other hand, one may want to say the phenomenon in question is identical to another phenomenon; we communicate that by writing “that is” rather than “for example.” Logical precision is at the bannister. Consider these contrasts—

- ✓ Unicorns, for example, are mentioned in the Bible. (“e.g.,” equals “for example.”)
- ✓ Hippopotami, that is, are mentioned in the Bible. (“i.e.,” equals “that is.”)
- ✓ God loves us because, for example, He was sacrificed on the cross. (⊙ position 1)
- ✓ God loves us because, that is, He was sacrificed on the cross. (⊙ position 2)

14. Cardinal Rule: Never, Never, Never use more than two fonts within a given document, pamphlet, or brochure. Why? Consider these two examples—

- ✓ What does each say about the author?
- ✓ Which says “amateur” and which communicates “pro?”
- ✓ Why and when should one make a font change?



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—CARDINAL FONT RULE—

Never, Never, Never use more than two fonts within a given document, pamphlet, or brochure.
Why? Consider these two examples—

15. Another tip, a big tip...

REMEMBER, WRITING IS ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING BECAUSE YOU DO NOT EASILY KNOW WHAT YOUR READER MISUNDERSTANDS.
PRECISION, PRECISION, PRECISION.
PRECISION IS MORE THAN COMPULSION.