14

STYLE AND FORMAT

Style is character.

—Joan Didion

To me style is just the outside of content, and content the inside of style, like the outside and the inside of the human body—both go together, they can't be separated.

—Jean-Luc Goddard

Some writers confuse authenticity, which they ought always to aim at, with originality, which they should never bother about.

—W. H. Auden

Neatness counts.

—Every teacher you have ever had

PRINCIPLES OF STYLE

Writing is hard work (Lewis Carroll's school in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* taught reeling and writhing), and there is no point fooling ourselves into believing that it is all a matter of inspiration. Evidence abounds that many of the poems, stories, plays, and essays that seem to flow so effortlessly as we read them were in fact the product of innumerable revisions. "Hard labor for life" was Joseph Conrad's view of his career as a writer. This labor for the most part is directed not to prettifying language but to improving one's thoughts and then getting the words that communicate these thoughts exactly.

Hard work is not guaranteed to pay off, but failure to work hard is sure to result in writing that will strike the reader as confused. It won't do to comfort yourself with the thought that you have been misunderstood. You may know what you *meant to say*, but your reader is the judge of what you *have said*.

Big books have been written on the elements of good writing, but the best way to learn to write is to generate ideas by such methods as annotating the text, listing, brainstorming, free writing, and making entries in a journal. Then, with some ideas at hand, you can write a first draft, which you will revise—perhaps in light of comments by your peers—and later will revise yet again, and again. After you hand your essay in, your instructor will annotate it. Study the annotations an experienced reader puts on your essay. In revising the annotated passages, you will learn what your weaknesses are. After drafting your next essay, put it aside for a day or so; when you reread it, preferably aloud, you may find much that bothers you. If the argument does not flow, check to see whether your organization is reasonable and whether you have made adequate transitions. Do not hesitate to delete interesting but irrelevant material that obscures the argument. Make the necessary revisions again and again if time permits. Revision is indispensable if you wish to avoid (in W. Somerset Maugham's words) "the impression of writing with the stub of a blunt pencil."

Still, a few principles can be briefly set forth here. On Samuel Johnson's belief that we do not so much need to be taught as to be reminded, these principles are brief imperatives rather than detailed instructions. They will not suppress your particular voice. Rather, they will get rid of static, enabling your voice to come through effectively. You have something to say, but you can say it only after your throat is cleared of "Well, what I meant was," and "It's sort of, well, you know." Your readers do *not* know; they are reading in order *to* know. The paragraphs that follow are attempts to help you let your individuality speak clearly.

Get the Right Word

Denotation

Be sure the word you choose has the right explicit meaning, or **denotation.** Don't say "tragic" when you mean "pathetic," "sarcastic" when you mean "ironic," "free verse" when you mean "blank verse," "disinterested" when you mean "uninterested."

Connotation

Be sure the word you choose has the right association or implication—that is, the right **connotation.** Here are three examples of words with the wrong connotations for their contexts: "The heroic spirit is not dead. It still *lurks* in the hearts of men." (Lurks suggests a furtiveness inappropriate to the heroic spirit. Something like *lives* or *dwells* is needed.)

"Close study will *expose* the strength of Woolf's style." (*Reveal* would be better than *expose* here; *expose* suggests that some weakness will be brought to light, as in "Close study will expose the flimsiness of the motivation.") "Although Creon suffers, his suffering is not great enough to *relegate* him to the role of tragic hero." (In place of *relegate*, we need something like *elevate* or *exalt*.)

Concreteness

Catch the richness, complexity, and uniqueness of things. Do not write "Here one sees his lack of emotion" if you really mean, "Here one sees his indifference" or "his iciness" or "his impartiality" or whatever the exact condition is. Instead of "The clown's part in *Othello* is very small," write, "The clown appears in only two scenes in *Othello*" or "The clown in *Othello* speaks only thirty lines." (*Very*, as in *very small* or *very big*, is almost never the right word. A role is rarely "very big"; it "dominates" or "overshadows" or "is second only to. . . .")

In addition to using the concrete word and the appropriate detail, use illustrative **examples.** Northrop Frye, writing about the perception of rhythm, illustrates his point:

> Ideally, our literary education should begin, not with prose, but with such things as "this little pig went to market"—with verse rhythm reinforced by physical assault. The infant who gets bounced on somebody's knee to the rhythm of "Ride a cock horse" does not need a footnote telling him that Banbury Cross is twenty miles northeast of Oxford. He does not need the information that "cross" and "horse" make (at least in the pronunciation he is most likely to hear) not a rhyme but an assonance. . . . All he needs is to get bounced.
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> —*The Well-Tempered Critic* (Bloomington, Ind., 1963), 25

Frye does not say our literary education should begin with "simple rhymes" or with "verse popular with children." He says "with such things as 'this little pig went to market,'" and then he goes on to add "Ride a cock horse." We know exactly what he means. Notice, too, that we do not need a third example. Be detailed, but know when to stop.

✍ A RULE FOR WRITERS:

Keep in mind Mark Twain's comment, "The difference between the *almost* right word and the *right* word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

Repetition and Variation

Although some repetitions—say, of words like *surely* or *it is noteworthy*—reveal a tic that ought to be cured by revision, don't be afraid to repeat a word if it is the best word. The following paragraph repeats *interesting, paradox, Salinger, what makes,* and *book;* notice also *feel* and *feeling:*

> The reception given to *Franny and Zooey* in America has illustrated again the interesting paradox of Salinger's reputation there; great public enthusiasm, of the *Time* magazine and Best Seller List kind, accompanied by a repressive coolness in the critical journals. What makes this a paradox is that the book's themes are among the most ambitiously highbrow, and its craftsmanship most uncompromisingly virtuoso. What makes it an interesting one is that those who are most patronising about the book are those who most resemble its characters; people whose ideas and language in their best moments resemble Zooey's. But they feel they ought not to enjoy the book. There is a very strong feeling in American literary circles that Salinger and love of Salinger must be discouraged.
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> —MARTIN GREEN, *Re-Appraisals* (New York, 1965), 197

Repetition, a device necessary for continuity and clarity, holds the paragraph together. Variations occur: "*Franny and Zooey*" becomes "the book," and then instead of "the book's" we get "its." Similarly, "those who" becomes "people," which in turn becomes "they." Such substitutions, which neither confuse nor distract, keep the paragraph from sounding like a broken phonograph record.

Pronouns are handy substitutes, and they ought to be used, but other substitutes need not always be sought. An ungrounded fear of repetition often produces a vice known as *elegant variation:* Having mentioned *Franny and Zooey* an essayist next speaks of "the previously mentioned work," then of "the tale," and finally of "this work of our author." This vice is far worse than repetition; it strikes the reader as silly.

Pointless variation of this sort, however, is not to be confused with a variation that communicates additional useful information, such as "these two stories about the Glass family"; this variation is entirely legitimate, indeed necessary, for it furthers the discussion. But elegant variation can be worse than silly; it can be confusing, as in "My first *theme* dealt with plot, but this *essay* deals with character." The reader wonders if the writer means to suggest that an essay is different from a theme.

Observe in these lucid sentences by Helen Gardner the effective repetition of *end* and *beginning:*

> *Othello* has this in common with the tragedy of fortune, that the end in no way blots out from the imagination the glory of the beginning. But the end here does not merely by its darkness throw up into relief the brightness that was. On the contrary, beginning and end chime against each other. In both the value of life and love is affirmed.
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> —*The Noble Moor* (Oxford, 1956), 203

The substitution of *conclusion* or *last scene* for the second *end* would be worse than pointless; it would destroy Gardner's claim that there is *identity,* or correspondence, between beginning and end.

Do not repeat a word if it is being used in a different sense. Get a different word. Here are two examples of the fault: "This theme deals with the theme of the novel." (The first *theme* means "essay"; the second means "underlying idea," "motif.") "Caesar's *character* is complex. The comic *characters,* too, have some complexity." (The first *character* means "personality"; the second means "persons," "figures in the play.")

✍ A RULE FOR WRITERS:

Do not repeat the same words in the same position in more than two consecutive sentences unless you are doing so for emphasis. Similarly, do not begin consecutive paragraphs with the same words ("This poem is. . . This poem is") unless you have a good reason.

The Sound of Sense

Avoid awkward repetitions of sound, as in "The story is marked by a remarkable mystery," "The reason the season is Spring . . . ," "Circe certainly . . . ," "This is seen in the scene in which. . . ." These irrelevant echoes call undue attention to the words and thus get in the way of the points you are making. But wordplay can be effective when it contributes to meaning. Gardner's statement that in the beginning and the end of *Othello* "the value of life and love is affirmed" makes effective use of the similarity in sound between *life* and *love.* Her implication is that these two things that sound alike are indeed closely related, an idea that reinforces her contention that the beginning and the end of the play are in a way identical.

Write Effective Sentences

Economy

Say everything relevant, but say it in the fewest words possible. The wordy sentence

> There are a few vague parts in the story that give it a mysterious quality.

may be written more economically as

> A few vague parts in the story give it a mysterious quality.

Nothing has been lost by deleting "There are" and "that." Even more economical is

> A few vague parts add mystery to the story.

The original version says nothing that the second version does not say, and says nothing that the third version—nine words versus fifteen—does not say. If you find the right nouns and verbs, you can often delete adjectives and adverbs. (Compare "a mysterious quality" with "mystery.") Another example of wordiness is "Sophocles' tragic play *Antigone* is mistitled because Creon is the tragic hero, and the play should be named for him." These twenty words can be reduced, with no loss of meaning, to nine words: "Sophocles' *Antigone* is mistitled; Creon is the tragic hero."

Something is wrong with a sentence if you can delete words and not sense the loss. A chapter in a recent book on contemporary theater begins:

> One of the principal and most persistent sources of error that tends to bedevil a considerable proportion of contemporary literary analysis is the assumption that the writer's creative process is a wholly conscious and purposive type of activity.

Well, there is something of interest here, but it comes along with a lot of hot air. Why that weaseling ("*tends* to bedevil," "a *considerable* proportion"), and why "type of activity" instead of "activity"? Those splutt:ering *p*'s ("principal and most persistent," "proportion," "process," "purposive") are a giveaway; the writer is letting off steam, not thinking. Pruned of the verbiage, what he says adds up to this:

> One of the chief errors bedeviling much contemporary criticism is the assumption that the writer's creative process is wholly conscious and purposive.

Or

> Contemporary critics often mistakenly assume the writers are in complete control of their efforts.

Or

> Too many critics wrongly assume that writers are fully conscious of their creative process and its aims.

Or

> Contemporary criticism tends to regard the writing process as wholly defined by the writer's conscious intentions.

If he were to complain that this revision deprives him of his style, might we not fairly reply that what he calls his style is a tangle of deadwood?

Cut out all the deadwood, but in cutting it out, do not cut out supporting detail. Supporting detail is wordiness only when the details are so numerous and obvious that they offend the reader's intelligence.

The **passive voice** (wherein the subject is the object of the action) is a common source of wordiness. Do not say, "This story was written by Melville"; instead, say, "Melville wrote this story." The revision is one-third shorter, and it says everything that the longer version says. Sometimes the passive voice, although less vigorous, may be preferable to the active voice. Changing "The novel was received in silence" to "Readers neglected the novel" makes the readers' response more active than it was. The passive catches the passivity of the response. Furthermore, the revision makes "readers" the subject, but the true subject is (as in the original) the novel.

✔ A Checklist for Revising for Conciseness

- ❑ Does every word count? Can any words or phrases be cut without loss of meaning?
- ❑ Are there any empty or pretentious words such as *situation*, *factor*, *virtually*, *significant*, and *utilize*?
- ❑ Do intensifiers such as *very*, *truly*, and *rather* weaken your sentences?
- ❑ Are there any roundabout or long-winded locutions? Do you say, for example, *at that point in time* when you mean *then*, or *for the simple reason that* when you mean *because*?
- ❑ Do sentences get off to a fast start? Can you cut any sentences that open with "it is . . . that"?
- ❑ Can you replace forms of the verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *to make* with precise and active verbs?

- ❑ Are there any redundancies or negative constructions?
- ❑ Can any sentences be combined using subordination?

Parallels

Use parallels to clarify relationships. Few of us are likely to compose such deathless parallels as "I came, I saw, I conquered" or "of the people, by the people, for the people," but we can see to it that coordinate expressions correspond in their grammatical form. A parallel such as "He liked to read and to write" (instead of "He liked reading and to write") makes its point neatly. No such neatness appears in "Virginia Woolf wrote novels, delightful letters, and penetrating stories." The reader is left wondering what value the novels have. If one of the items has a modifier, usually all should have modifiers. Notice how the omission of "the noble" in the following sentence would leave a distracting gap: "If the wicked Shylock cannot enter the fairy story world of Belmont, neither can the noble Antonio."

Other examples of parallels are "Mendoza longs to be an Englishman and to marry the girl he loves" (*not* "Mendoza longs to be an Englishman and for the girl he loves"); "He talkēd about metaphors, similes, and symbols" (*not* "He talked about metaphors, similes, and about symbols"). If one wishes to emphasize the leisureliness of the talk, one might put it thus: "He talked about metaphors, about similes, and about symbols." The repetition of *about* in this version is not wordiness; because it emphasizes the leisureliness, it does some work in the sentence. Notice in the next example how Helen Gardner's parallels ("in the," "in his," "in his," "in the") lend conviction:

> The significance of *Othello* is not to be found in the hero's nobility alone, in his capacity to know ecstasy, in his vision of the world, and in the terrible act to which he is driven by his anguish at the loss of that vision. It lies also in the fact that the vision was true.
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> —*The Noble Moor*, 205

Subordination

Make sure that the less important element is subordinate to the more important. In the following example the first clause, summarizing the writer's previous sentences, is a subordinate or dependent clause; the new material is made emphatic by being put into two independent clauses:

> As soon as the Irish Literary Theatre was assured of a nationalist backing, it started to dissociate itself from any political aim, and the long struggle with the public began.

The second and third clauses in this sentence, linked by *and*, are coordinate—that is, of equal importance.

We have already discussed parallels ("I came, I saw, I conquered") and pointed out that parallel or coordinate elements should appear so in the sentence. The following line gives time and eternity equal treatment: "Time was against him; eternity was for him." The quotation about the Irish Literary Theatre is a **compound sentence**—composed of two or more clauses that can stand as independent sentences but that are connected with a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but, for, nor, yet,* and *if;* or with a correlative conjunction such as *not only . . . but also;* or with a conjunctive adverb such as *also* or *however;* or with a colon, a semicolon, or (rarely) a comma. But a **complex sentence** (an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses) does not give equal treatment to each clause; whatever is outside the independent clause is subordinate, less important. Consider this sentence:

> Aided by Miss Horniman's money, Yeats dreamed of a poetic drama.

The writer puts Yeats's dream in the independent clause, subordinating the relatively unimportant Miss Annie Horniman. (Notice that emphasis by subordination often works along with emphasis by position. Here the independent clause comes *after* the subordinate clause; the writer appropriately put the more important material in the more emphatic position.)

Had the writer wished to give Miss Horniman more prominence, the passage might have run:

> Yeats dreamed of a poetic drama, and Miss Horniman subsidized that dream.

Here Miss Horniman at least stands in an independent clause, linked to the previous independent clause by *and*. The two clauses, and the two people, are now of approximately equal importance.

If the writer had wanted to emphasize Miss Horniman and to deemphasize Yeats, he might have written:

> While Yeats dreamed of a poetic drama, Miss Horniman provided the money.

Here Yeats is reduced to the subordinate clause, and Miss Horniman is given the dignity of the only independent clause. Again notice that the important point is also in the emphatic position, near the end of the sentence. A sentence is likely to sprawl if an independent clause comes first, followed by a long subordinate clause of less importance, such as the sentence you are now reading.

In short, although simple sentences and compound sentences have their place, they make everything of equal importance. Because everything is not of equal importance, you must often write complex and compound-complex sentences, subordinating some things to other things.

A RULE FOR WRITERS:

Gain emphasis not by using italics and exclamation marks but by putting the right words into the right clauses.

Write Unified and Coherent Paragraphs

Unity

A unified paragraph is a group of sentences (rarely a single sentence) on a single idea. The idea may have several twists or subdivisions, but all the parts—the sentences—should form a whole that can be summarized in one sentence. A paragraph is, to put the matter a little differently, one of the major points supporting your thesis. If your essay is some 500 words long—about two double-spaced typewritten pages—you probably will not break it down into more than four or five parts or paragraphs. (But you *should* break your essay down into paragraphs, that is, coherent blocks that give the reader a rest between them. One page of typing is about as long as you can go before the reader needs a slight break.) A paper of 500 words with a dozen paragraphs is probably faulty not because it has too many ideas but because it has too few *developed* ideas. A short paragraph—especially one consisting of a single sentence—is usually anemic; such a paragraph may be acceptable when it summarizes a highly detailed previous paragraph or group of paragraphs, or when it serves as a transition between two complicated paragraphs, but usually summaries and transitions can begin the next paragraph.

Each paragraph has a unifying idea, which may appear as a **topic sentence.** Most commonly, the topic sentence is the first sentence, forecasting what is to come in the rest of the paragraph; or it may be the second sentence, following a transitional sentence. Less commonly, it is the last sentence, summarizing the points that the paragraph's earlier sentences have made. Least commonly—but thoroughly acceptable—the topic sentence may appear nowhere in the paragraph, in which case the paragraph has a **topic idea**—an idea that holds the sentences together although it has not been explicitly stated. Whether explicit or implicit, an idea must unite the sentences of the paragraph. If your paragraph has only one or two sentences, the chances are that you have not adequately developed its idea. You probably have not provided sufficient details—perhaps including brief quotations—to support your topic sentence or your topic idea.

A paragraph can make several points, but the points must be related, and the nature of the relationship must be indicated so that the paragraph has a single unifying point. Here is a brief paragraph that may seem to make two points but that, in fact, holds them together with a topic idea. The author is the critic Edmund Wilson:

> James Joyce's *Ulysses* was an attempt to present directly the thoughts and feelings of a group of Dubliners through the whole course of a summer day. *Finnegans Wake* is a complementary attempt to render the dream fantasies and the half-unconscious sensations experienced by a single person in the course of a night's sleep.
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> —*The Wound and the Bow* (New York, 1947), 243

Wilson's topic idea is that *Finnegans Wake* complements *Ulysses*. Notice that the sentence about *Finnegans Wake* concludes the paragraph. Not surprisingly, Wilson's essay is about this book, and the structure of the paragraph allows him to get into his subject.

The next example may seem to have more than one subject (Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding were contemporaries; they were alike in some ways; they were different in others), but again the paragraph is unified by a topic idea (although Richardson and Fielding were contemporaries and were alike in some ways, they differed in important ways):

> The names of Richardson and Fielding are always coupled in any discussion of the novel, and with good reason. They were contemporaries, writing in the same cultural climate (*Tom Jones* was published in 1719, a year after *Clarissa*). Both had genius and both were widely recognized immediately. Yet they are utterly different in their tastes and temperaments, and therefore in their visions of city and country, of men and women, and even of good and evil.
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> —ELIZABETH DREW, *The Novel* (New York, 1963), 59

This paragraph, like Edmund Wilson's, closes in on its subject.

The beginning and especially the end of a paragraph are usually the most emphatic parts. A beginning may offer a generalization that the rest of the paragraph supports. Or the early part may offer details, preparing for the generalization in the later part. Or the paragraph may move from cause to effect. Although no rule can cover all paragraphs (except that all must make a point in an orderly way), one can hardly go wrong in making the first sentence either a transition from the previous paragraph or a statement of the paragraph's topic. Here is a sentence that makes a transition and states the topic: "Not only narrative poems but also meditative poems may have a kind of plot." This sentence gets the reader from plot in narrative poetry (which the writer has been talking about) to plot in meditative poetry (which the writer goes on to talk about).

Coherence

If a paragraph has not only unity but also a structure, then it has coherence; its parts fit together. Make sure that each sentence is properly related to the preceding and the following sentences. One way of gaining coherence is by means of transitions—words such as *furthermore, on the other hand,* and *but.* These words let the reader know how a sentence is related to the previous sentence.

Nothing is wrong with such obvious transitions as *moreover, however, but, for example, this tendency, in the next chapter,* and so on, but, of course, (1) these transitions should not start every sentence (they can be buried thus: "Zora Neale Hurston, moreover, . . . "), and (2) they need not appear anywhere in the sentence. The point is not that transitions must be explicit, but that the argument must proceed clearly. The gist of a paragraph might run thus: "Speaking broadly, there were in the Renaissance two comic traditions. . . . The first. . . . The second. . . . The chief difference. . . . But both traditions. . . ."

Introductory Paragraphs

Beginning one of his long poems, the Romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824) aptly wrote, "Nothing so difficult as a beginning." Almost all writers—professionals as well as amateurs—find that the beginning paragraphs in their drafts are false starts. Don't worry too much about the opening paragraphs of your draft; you'll almost surely want to revise your opening later anyway, and when writing a first draft you merely need something—almost anything may do—to get you going. Though on rereading you will probably find that the first paragraph or two should be replaced, those opening words at least helped you break the ice.

In your finished paper the opening cannot be mere throat clearing. It should be interesting and informative. Don't paraphrase your title ("Sex in *1984*") in your first sentence: "This theme will study the topic of sex in *1984.*" The sentence contains no information about the topic here, at least none beyond what the title already gave, and no information about you, either—that is, no sense of your response to the topic, such as might be present in, say, "In George Orwell's *1984* the rulers put a lot of energy into producing antisexual propaganda, but Orwell never convinces us of the plausibility of all of this activity."

Often you can make use of a quotation, either from the work or from a critic. After all, if a short passage from the work caught your attention and set you thinking and stimulated you to develop a thesis, it may well provide a good beginning for your essay.

Here is a nice opening from a chapter on Norman Mailer, in a book by Richard Poirier: "Mailer is an unusually repetitious writer. Nearly all writers of any lasting interest are repetitious." The first sentence, simple though it is, catches our attention; the second gives the first a richer meaning than we had attributed to it. Poirier then goes on to give examples of major writers who are obsessed with certain topics, and he concludes the paragraph with a list of Mailer's obsessions.

Such an opening paragraph is a slight variant on a surefire method: *You cannot go wrong in stating your thesis* in your opening paragraph, moving from a rather broad view to a narrower one. If you look at the sample essays in this book, you will see that most good opening paragraphs clearly indicate the writer's thesis. Here is an introductory paragraph, written by a student, on the ways in which Shakespeare manages in some degree to present Macbeth sympathetically:

> Near the end of Macbeth, Malcolm speaks of Macbeth as a "dead butcher" (5.8.69), and there is some—perhaps much—truth in this characterization. Macbeth is the hero of the play, but he is also the villain. And yet to call him a villain is too simple. Despite the fact that he murders his king, his friend Banquo, and even the utterly innocent Lady Macduff and her children, he engages our sympathy, largely because Shakespeare continually reminds us that Macbeth

never (despite appearances) becomes a cold-blooded murderer. Macbeth's violence is felt not only by his victims but by Macbeth himself; his deeds torture him, plaguing his mind. Despite all his villainy, he is a man with a conscience.

Concluding Paragraphs

With conclusions, as with introductions, say something interesting. It is not of the slightest interest to say "Thus we see . . . [here the writer echoes the title and the first paragraph]." Some justification may be made for a summary at the end of a long paper because the reader may have half forgotten some of the ideas presented thirty pages earlier, but a paper that can be held easily in the mind needs something different. In fact, if your paper is short—say two or three pages—you may not need to summarize or to draw a conclusion. Just make sure that your last sentence is a good one and that the reader does not expect anything further.

If you do feel that a concluding paragraph (as opposed to a final paragraph) is appropriate or necessary, make sure that you do not merely echo what you have already said. A good concluding paragraph may round out the previous discussion, normally with a few sentences that summarize (without the obviousness of "We may now summarize"), but it may also draw an inference that has not previously been expressed. To draw such an inference is not to introduce a new idea—a concluding paragraph is hardly the place for a new idea—but to see the previous material from a fresh perspective.

A good concluding paragraph closes the issue while enriching it. Notice how the two examples that follow wrap things up and, at the same time, open out by suggesting a larger frame of reference.

The first example is the conclusion to Norman Friedman's "Point of View in Fiction." In this discussion of the development of a critical concept, Friedman catalogs various points of view and then spends several pages arguing that the choice of a point of view is crucial if certain effects are to be attained. The omniscient narrator of a novel who comments on all that happens, Friedman suggests, is only one choice for fiction, and an author may willingly sacrifice this freedom for a narrower point of view if he or she wishes to make certain effects. Friedman concludes:

> All this is merely to say, in effect, that when an author surrenders in fiction, he does so in order to conquer; he gives up certain privileges and imposes certain limits in order the more effectively to render his story-illusion, which constitutes artistic truth in fiction. And it is in the service of this truth that he spends his creative life.
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> —*PMLA* 79 (1955): 1160–1184

Friedman devotes the early part of his paragraph to a summary of what has preceded, and then in the latter part he puts his argument in a new perspective.

A second example of a concluding paragraph that restates the old and looks toward the new comes from Richard B. Sewall's discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*.

> Henry James said that Hawthorne had "a cat-like faculty of seeing in the dark"; but he never saw through the dark to radiant light. What light his vision reveals is like the fitful sunshine of Hester's and Dimmesdale's meeting in the forest—the tragic opposite of Emerson's triumphant gleaming sun that "shines also today."
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> —*The Vision of Tragedy* (New Haven, 1959), 91

Again, don't feel that you must always offer a conclusion in your last paragraph. Especially if your paper is fairly short—let's say fewer than five pages—when you have finished your analysis or explication it may be enough to stop. If, for example, you have been demonstrating throughout your paper that in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare condensed the time (compared to his historical source) and thus gave the happenings in the play an added sense of urgency, you scarcely need to reaffirm this point in your last paragraph. Probably it will be conclusion enough if you just offer your final evidence in a well-written sentence and then stop.

✔ A Checklist: Revising Paragraphs

- ❑ Does the paragraph say anything? Does it have substance?
- ❑ Does the paragraph have a topic sentence? If so, is it in the best place? If the paragraph doesn't have a topic sentence, might one improve the paragraph? Or does it have a clear topic idea?
- ❑ If the paragraph is an opening paragraph, is it interesting enough to attract and to hold a reader's attention? If it is a later paragraph, does it easily evolve out of the previous paragraph, and lead into the next paragraph?
- ❑ Does the paragraph contain some principle of development, for instance, from cause to effect, or from general to particular?
- ❑ Does each sentence clearly follow from the preceding sentence? Have you provided transitional words or cues to guide your reader? Would it be useful to repeat certain key words, for clarity?

- ❑ What is the purpose of the paragraph? Do you want to summarize, or give an illustration, or concede a point, or what? Is your purpose clear to you, and does the paragraph fulfill your purpose?
- ❑ Is the closing paragraph effective, and not an unnecessary restatement of the obvious?

Write Emphatically

All that has been said about getting the right word, about effective sentences, and about paragraphs is related to the matter of **emphasis.** But we can add a few points here. The first rule (it will be modified in a moment) is: Be emphatic. But do not attempt to achieve emphasis, as Queen Victoria did, by a *style* consisting *chiefly of italics* and *exclamation* marks!!! Do not rely on such expressions as "very important," "definitely significant," and "really beautiful." The proper way to be emphatic is to find the right word, to use appropriate detail, to subordinate the lesser points, and to develop your ideas reasonably. The beginning and the end of a sentence (and of a paragraph) are emphatic positions; of these two positions, the end is usually the more emphatic. Here is a sentence that properly moves to an emphatic end:

> Having been ill treated by Hamlet and having lost her father, Ophelia goes mad.

If the halves are reversed, the sentence peters out:

> Ophelia goes mad because she has been ill treated by Hamlet and she has lost her father.

Still, even this version is better than the shapeless:

> Having been ill treated by Hamlet, Ophelia goes mad, partly, too, because she has lost her father.

The important point, that she goes mad, is dissipated by the lame addition of words about her father. In short, avoid anticlimaxes such as "Macbeth's deed is reprehensible and serious."

The usual advice, build to emphatic ends, needs modification. Don't write something that sounds like an advertisement for *The Blood of Dracula:* "In her eyes DESIRE! In her veins—the blood of a MONSTER!!!" Be emphatic but courteous and sensible; do not shout.

Notes on the Dash and the Hyphen

1. A **pair of dashes**—here is an example—is used to insert and set off additional information. A pair of dashes is, in effect, like a pair of commas or like a pair of parentheses (see the preceding commas, and the parentheses here), but the dashes are more emphatic—some people would say more breathless—and therefore they should be used sparingly.

2. **To indicate a dash,** type two hyphens without hitting the space-bar before, between, or after them.

3. **Hyphenate "century" when it is used as an adjective.** "Nineteenth-century authors often held that. . . ." But: "Eliot, born in the nineteenth century, often held that. . . ." The principle is: Use a hyphen to join words that are used as a single adjective, for example, a "six-volume work," "an out-of-date theory," and so "a nineteenth-century author." Notice that the hyphen is neither preceded nor followed by a space.

REMARKS ABOUT MANUSCRIPT FORM

Basic Manuscript Form

Much of what follows is nothing more than common sense.

- Use good-quality 8½-by-11-inch paper. Make a photocopy, or print out a second copy, in case the instructor's copy goes astray.
- If you write on a word processor, **double-space** and print on one side of the page only; use a reasonably fresh ribbon. If you submit handwritten copy, use lined paper and write on one side of the page only in black or dark blue ink, on every other line.
- Use **one-inch margins** on all sides.
- Within the top margin, put your last name and then (after hitting the space bar twice) the **page number** (in arabic numerals), so that the number is flush with the right-hand margin.
- On the first page, below the top margin and flush with the left-hand margin, put **your full name,** your **instructor's name,** the **course number** (including the section), and the **date,** one item per line, double-spaced.
- **Center the title** of your essay. Remember that the title is important—it gives the readers their first glimpse of your essay. **Create your own title**—one that reflects your topic or thesis.

For example, a paper on Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" should not be called "The Lottery" but might be called

Suspense in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

or

Is "The Lottery" Rigged?

or

Jackson's "The Lottery" and Scapegoat Rituals

These titles do at least a little in the way of arousing a reader's interest.

- **Capitalize the title thus:** Begin the first word of the title with a capital letter, and capitalize each subsequent word except articles (*a, an, the*), conjunctions (*and, but, if, when,* etc.), and prepositions (*in, on, with,* etc.):

A Word on Behalf of Mrs. Mitty

Notice that you do *not* enclose your title in quotation marks, and you do not underline it—though if it includes the title of a story, *that* is enclosed in quotation marks, or if it includes the title of a novel or play, *that* is underlined (to indicate italics), thus:

Jackson's "The Lottery" and the Scapegoat Tradition

and

Gender Stereotypes in *Macbeth*

- **After writing your title, double-space,** indent five spaces, and begin your first sentence.
- Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, **staple** the pages together. (Do not use a stiff binder; it will only add to the bulk of the instructor's stack of papers.)
- Extensive revisions should have been made in your drafts, but minor **last-minute revisions** may be made—neatly—on the finished copy. Proofreading may catch some typographical errors, and you may notice some small weaknesses. You can make corrections using the proofreader's symbols in the next section.

Corrections in the Final Copy

Changes in wording may be made by crossing through words and rewriting them:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne ~~have~~ has greatly diminished.

Additions should be made above the line, with a caret below the line at the appropriate place:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne has greatly diminished.

Transpositions of letters may be made thus:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne has greatly diminished.

Deletions are indicated by a horizontal line through the word or words to be deleted. Delete a single letter by drawing a vertical or diagonal line through it; then indicate whether the letters on either side are to be closed up by drawing a connecting arc:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne has greatly diminished.

Separation of words accidentally run together is indicated by a vertical line, **closure** by a curved line connecting the letters to be closed up:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne has great ly diminished.

Paragraphing may be indicated by the symbol ¶ before the word that is to begin the new paragraph:

The influence of Poe and Hawthorne has greatly diminished. The influence of Jorge Luis Borges has very largely replaced that of earlier writers of fantasy.

Quotations and Quotation Marks

First, a word about the *point* of using quotations. Don't use quotations to pad the length of a paper. Rather, give quotations from the work you are discussing so that

- your readers will see the material you are discussing and (especially in a research paper)
- your readers will know what some of the chief interpretations are and what your responses to them are.

Note: The next few paragraphs do not discuss how to include citations of pages, a topic discussed in the next chapter under the heading "How to Document: Footnotes, Internal Parenthetical Citations, and a List of Works Cited (MLA Format)."

The Golden Rule: If you quote, *comment* on the quotation. Let the reader know what you make of it and why you quote it.

Additional principles:

1. **Identify the speaker or writer of the quotation** so that the reader is not left with a sense of uncertainty. Usually, in accordance with the principle of letting readers know where they are going, this identification precedes the quoted material, but occasionally it may follow the quotation, especially if it will provide something of a pleasant surprise. For instance, in a discussion of Flannery O'Connor's stories, you might quote a disparaging comment on one of the stories and then reveal that O'Connor herself was the speaker.

2. If the quotation is part of your own sentence, **be sure to fit the quotation grammatically and logically into your sentence.**

Incorrect: Holden Caulfield tells us very little about "what my lousy childhood was like."

Correct: Holden Caulfield tells us very little about what his "lousy childhood was like."

3. **Indicate any omissions or additions.** The quotation must be exact. Any material that you add—even one or two words—must be enclosed within square brackets, thus:

> Hawthorne tells us that "owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot [in the forest], neither the travellers nor their steeds were visible."

If you wish to omit material from within a quotation, indicate the ellipsis by three spaced periods. If your sentence ends in an omission, add a closed-up period and then three spaced periods to indicate the omission. The following example is based on a quotation from the sentences immediately preceding this one:

> The instructions say, "If you . . . omit material from within a quotation, [you must] indicate the ellipsis. . . . If your sentence ends in an omission, add a closed-up period and then three spaced periods. . . .

Notice that although material preceded "If you," periods are not needed to indicate the omission because "If you" began a sentence in the original. Customarily, initial and terminal omissions are indicated only when they are part of the sentence you are quoting. Even such omissions need not be indicated when the quoted material is obviously incomplete—when, for instance, it is a word or phrase.

4. **Distinguish between short and long quotations,** and treat each appropriately. *Short quotations* (usually defined as fewer than five lines of typed prose or three lines of poetry) are enclosed within quotation marks and run into the text (rather than being set off, without quotation marks), as in the following example:

> Hawthorne begins the story by telling us that "Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village," thus at the outset connecting the village with daylight. A few paragraphs later, when Hawthorne tells us that the road Brown takes was "darkened by all of the gloomiest trees of the forest," he begins to associate the forest with darkness—and a very little later with evil.

If your short quotation is from a poem, be sure to follow the capitalization of the original, and use a slash mark (with a space before and after it) to indicate separate lines. Give the line numbers, if your source gives them, in parentheses, immediately after the closing quotation marks and before the closing punctuation, thus:

> In Adrienne Rich's "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," Rich says that "Uncle's wedding band / Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (7–8). The band evidently is a sign of her oppression.

To set off a *long quotation* (more than four typed lines of prose or more than two lines of poetry), indent the entire quotation ten spaces from the left margin. Usually, a long quotation is introduced by a clause

ending with a colon—for instance, "The following passage will make this point clear:" or "The closest we come to hearing an editorial voice is a long passage in the middle of the story:" or some such lead-in. After typing your lead-in, double-space, and then type the quotation, indented and double-spaced.

5. **Commas and periods go inside the quotation marks.**

> Chopin tells us in the first sentence that "Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble," and in the last sentence the doctors say that Mrs. Mallard "died of heart disease."

Exception: If the quotation is immediately followed by material in parentheses or in square brackets, close the quotation, then give the parenthetical or bracketed material, and then—after the closing parenthesis or bracket—put the comma or period.

> Chopin tells us in the first sentenee that "Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble" (26), and in the last sentence the doctors say that Mrs. Mallard "died of heart disease" (27).

Semicolons, colons, and dashes go outside the closing quotation marks.

Question marks and exclamation points go inside if they are part of the quotation, outside if they are your own.

In the following passage from a student's essay, notice the difference in the position of the question marks. The first is part of the quotation, so it is enclosed within the quotation marks. The second question mark, however, is the student's, so it comes after the closing quotation mark.

> The older man says to Goodman Brown, "Sayest thou so?" Doesn't a reader become uneasy when the man immediately adds, "We are but a little way in the forest yet"?

Quotation Marks or Underlining?

Use quotation marks around titles of short stories and other short works—that is, titles of chapters in books, essays, and poems that might not be published by themselves. Underline (to indicate italics) titles of books, periodicals, collections of essays, plays, and long poems such as Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Word-processing software will let you use italic type (instead of underlining) if you wish.

A Note on the Possessive

It is awkward to use the possessive case for titles of literary works and secondary sources. Rather than "*The Great Gatsby*'s final chapter," write instead "the final chapter of *The Great Gatsby*," not "*The Oxford Companion to American Literature*'s entry on Emerson," but "the entry on Emerson in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*."