

Basic Stylistic Advice

- Use strong and specific verbs, not just “be.”
- Choose a level of formality appropriate for the genre.
- End sentences strong.
- Structure sentences so that they move from old to new information—with climactic emphasis.
- Construct sentences in series that are cohesive and coherent, writing individual sentences that move from old to new (for cohesion) and that are consistent in focus (for coherence).
- Avoid the “little qualifiers,” e.g., “a bit,” “rather,” “quite,” “very.”
- Prefer active voice to passive.
- Use transitional words and phrases to help readers follow the direction of your thinking.
- Use rhythm and pattern, e.g., parallelism, symmetry, balance, emphasis.
- Avoid clichés; people tend to not visualize clichés.
- Balance generality and abstraction with specificity and concreteness.
- Observe disciplinary and generic conventions—unless you have good reason to do otherwise.
- Avoid nominalizations (a word that is normally not a noun, being used as a noun).
- Avoid the confusion that results from dangling or misplaced modifiers.
- Prefer brevity.
- Word choices: do you actually know what this word means and is it the best possible choice?

Sources: Pinker, *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*
Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*
Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*
Zinsser, *On Writing Well*