

Tips for Young Writers
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These are the years when you acquire your basic tastes as a writer, which will guide your development in the years to come. Please allow me, as your teacher, to guide you with some timely advice.

A good writer handles well the precious and divine gift of words. Take seriously the calling to speak gracefully, to write clearly. This calling is binding on everyone who uses words; it is not peculiar to the English professor or the novelist.

Hone your architectural skills. Please give your reader the gift of a roadmap before setting out with him on your explorations. That is, write out the plan, purpose, and point of your essay in a thesis paragraph at the beginning, and then stick to your plan. It is easy to do this, if you write your thesis paragraph last, before finally reorganizing your paper to match the structure you have discovered. You will then win your reader's trust, carry him on a smooth journey, and in the end set him down safely and happily.

Listen carefully to what you are writing. Be your own critic. Learn the deep meanings of each word you use, then rejoice in them and be responsible for using them correctly. If you catch yourself before you issue a malapropism, or a lame platitude, or a misfit metaphor, or a cliché, then your reader will never know it existed. Why commit a half-baked phrase to print, when you can so easily get rid of every evidence of it? One warning: When listening to yourself, beware of inflating your language into a false grandeur. Love of one's own flabbiness is the worst narcissism! Favor words of one or two syllables; require a larger word to justify its presence.

Every young writer will benefit from an openhearted and careful reading of Strunk and White's elementary rules of composition, now on-line at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk5.html> . My favorites have always been "omit needless words" (#13) and "sharpen the end" (#18, my formulation). You will greatly strengthen your insight into the nature of language and the proper place of metaphor by reading George Orwell's timeless essay on "Politics and the English Language," at <http://www.resort.com/~prime8/Orwell/patee.html> . Both of these works are in the permanent foundation of my skills as a writer, and I promise they will serve you as well.

God has given each of us a share in His literary being, his divine Word (see John 1:1). May your share be blessed.