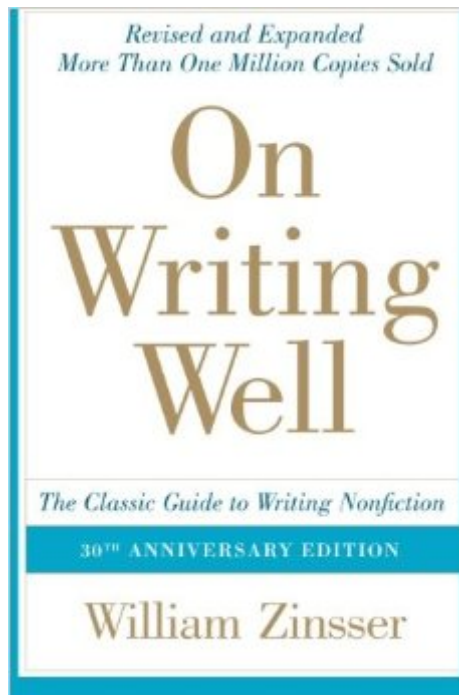


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# On Writing Well: The Classic Guide To Writing Nonfiction



## Synopsis

On Writing Well has been praised for its sound advice, its clarity and the warmth of its style. It is a book for everybody who wants to learn how to write or who needs to do some writing to get through the day, as almost everybody does in the age of e-mail and the Internet. Whether you want to write about people or places, science and technology, business, sports, the arts or about yourself in the increasingly popular memoir genre, On Writing Well offers you fundamental principles as well as the insights of a distinguished writer and teacher. With more than a million copies sold, this volume has stood the test of time and remains a valuable resource for writers and would-be writers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With three sentences, William Zinsser became my new hero: "Many of us were taught that no sentence should begin with "but." If that's what you learned, unlearn it - there's no stronger word at the start. It announces a total contrast with what has gone before, and the reader is thereby primed for the change." In my years as a freelance writer, no single word has been the cause of as many arguments with inexperienced editors and know-it-all clients as the tiny "but." Finally, I hold in my hands the opinion of a recognized authority (one who has served on the usage panel of "The American Heritage Dictionary") who can put an end to this quibbling. But this isn't all that recommends this book. "On Writing Well" is possibly the best-written, most-accessible coverage of effective nonfiction writing that I have ever seen. The shelves of most writers (including my own)

and many bookstores are filled with how-to books on writing. Most of these tend to be of the spiritual or advice-giving sort: helping writers overcome blocks, feeling good about a suspicious career choice, getting published and the like. At the opposite pole, many of the rest focus on the minutiae of arcane linguistic rules. Zinsser takes on writing. In 300 pages (which in themselves serve as an admirable example of effective prose) he tackles a broad range of subjects such as style, tone, word usage, structure, and unity, and applies these principles to various forms of nonfiction writing: the interview, the travel article, the memoir, etc. A breath of fresh air, this. The author finds the practical middle ground between the bubbly motivational and dry-as-dirt grammar books that so many of us find ourselves reading when we're not writing.

Before I read William Zinsser's book *On Writing Well*, I was not aware that any book that deals with such thorny issues as grammar and word choice could be fun and entertaining. But Zinsser's book destroys the stereotype—it teaches great writing while being humorous. The first of four parts, *Principles*, discusses matters such as word choice and style, especially simplicity. Part two is *Methods*. It cites examples of good writing, and discusses the various attributes of those pieces, including an invaluable short section on grammar. The third part, *Forms*, includes details on how to write for specific genres. And the final part, *Attitudes*, addresses what I consider the writer's most valuable thing: his view of his craft. In the first part, the author explains that the principles that make a great writer can be learned. He shows that revising does not become unnecessary, even as one progresses in the craft. The chapter includes two pages of a heavily written manuscript written by Zinsser himself. The author discourages the use of jargon, arguing that it cheapens your style. Instead, clearness and simplicity are what you should strive for. In part two, Zinsser discusses the various methods of good writing. He first emphasizes unity, and then moves to what I consider the most useful section of the book—a chapter titled "Bits and Pieces." As its name suggests, this chapter comprises all the miscellaneous writing errors noticed by the author. And instead of using "25 columns of type" as Fowler does in his *Modern English Usage*, Zinsser explains the difference between that and which in a single page. Each section in "Bits and Pieces" is short, but that makes the chapter more useful because it doesn't take too long to read.

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