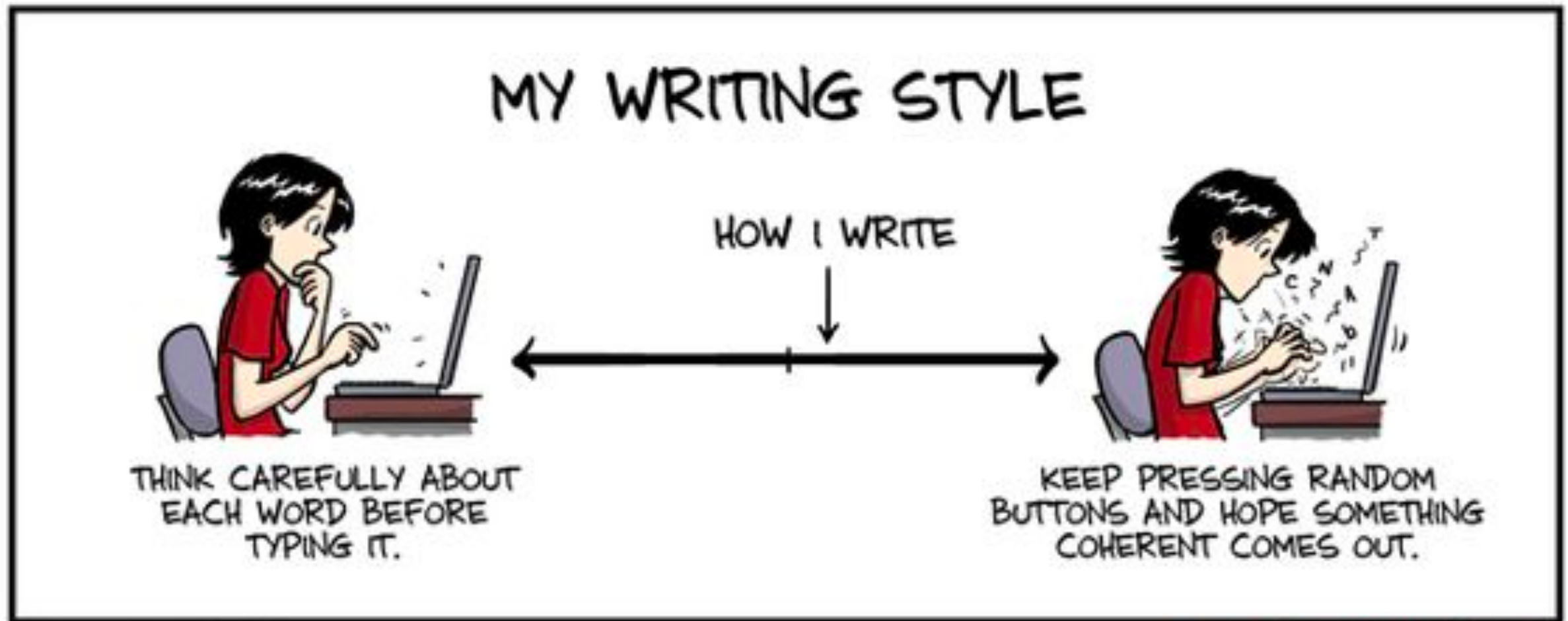# Style & Revision

Style

The goal in any type of writing is to "sell someone else your ideas"

Style in writing is about how this is done effectively and involves making decisions about balance, emphasis, and tone

There is no such thing as the "correct" style

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Paragraphs -> sentences -> words

Paragraphs are one unified idea

- A paragraph introduces and treats a single idea (more or less)
- Marked by indentation and/or blank line between

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That idea is announced by the *topic sentence(s)*

Power positions: first (topic) and last (often key point or summary)

Paragraphs are coherent

Sentences work together to develop the paragraph's idea

Coherence depends on *paragraph organization* and on *relational devices*

Organization: signaled by topic sentence <u>or</u> standard/logical scheme

    e.g., "Carbon-oxygen conds occur in ketones, carboxylic acids, and esters, but these classes differ in the groups bonded to the carbony carbon. In ketones… In carboxylic acids … In esters …"

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Organization: signaled by topic sentence <u>or</u> standard/logical scheme
- spatial or temporal
- general to specific; or specific to general
- least to most important
- familiar to unfamiliar
- simple to complex (e.g., rules then exceptions)
- certain to uncertain

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¶We measured enzyme activity in presence of inhibitor with an in vitro assay. We first purified the enzyme in a sucrose gradient. We then added 0.1 μmol of purified enzyme to each well of a 96-well plate, and added 0.1 μmol of inhibitor to half the wells. We incubated the plates at 37° for 30 min, and then added 0.1 or 1 μmol of substrate to each well. Finally, we assayed enzyme activity spectrophotometrically.

Activity

Identify the following elements in the 2nd, 4th and 6th paragraphs:
  (1) topic sentence(s)
  (2) end-paragraph power position
  (3) incidences of parallelism and repetition
  (4) transitional expressions *within* the paragraph
  (5) transitional expressions *connect* paragraphs
  (6) if any, sentences or phrases that don't fit the declared topic
  (7) if any, phrasing that creates overstrong dependency on material outside
        the paragraph.

• Identify the within-paragraph organizational scheme: temporal, spatial,
general to specific, etc.

Brevity

Good writers choose each ~~and~~ ~~every~~ word with care and revise for clarity, flow~~,~~ ~~conciseness~~ and brevity.

Brevity

(1) Reduce content

- Stick to your story!
- Before, while, and after you write

(2) Use fewer and shorter words

- After you write (self-revision)
- Make every character of text justify its existence!
- Make it a game. Can you cut 20%? Chocolate for cutting 25%?

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Can you be *too* brief?
• Yes, although it's an uncommon problem.
• What matters most is brevity of reading: if cutting more words makes the reader's job harder, then don't.

Avoid redundancy

- Keep each paragraph to its topic
- Don't repeat Methods in Results, Results in Discussion, etc.
  (reminders are good; wholesale repetition is not)

- Don't present the same material in text, table, and figure
  (text should summarize pattern, not repeat it)

Common Text Bulgers

- Passive voice
- Nominalizations ("*achieve a reduction in* length" vs. "*reduce* length")
- Long words ("*utilize*" vs. "*use*")
- Roundabout phrases ("*the majority of*" vs. "*most*")
- Tautologous modifiers ("*blue in colour*" vs. "blue")
- Empty modifiers ("*quite strong*" vs. "*strong*")
- Padding phrases ("*in this study we*" vs. "*we*")
  - *"needless to say"*
  - *"for all intents and purposes"*
  - *"a number of"*
  - *"relatively"*
  - *"in those instances when"*
  - *"basically"*

Common Text Bulgers

- Excessive hedging

"(Observation) could reasonably be assumed to possibly occur by chance"

- Excessive metadiscourse

"We believe that our results establish that…"

"As we established in the previous paragraph…"

"The objective of my study was to…"

"Consider the following examples…"

- Excessive parentheticals: phrases that interrupts otherwise complete sentence (or sentence interrupting an otherwise complete paragraph); may be in parentheses, set off by commas or dashes, in a footnote, etc.

> "Studies like ours (which are common in the literature) generally establish that…."

https://law.marquette.edu/facultyblog/2015/06/the-necessity-of-revising/

"… most of the time writing and thinking go hand in hand; your writing in the early phases is often just a way for you to work out your thinking on a topic. And our early thinking on an issue often results in us fumbling for the best words and the clearest way to say what we want to say. If we stopped after that first attempt, we're likely to end up with imprecise and convoluted writing that will more than likely frustrate a reader."

Self-Revision

When **not** to do it

• While you're writing your first draft
• Right after you finish your first draft

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Take it seriously!

• Be open to major changes
• Was it hard to write? Doesn't matter. Delete (or change) it anyway!

Reader simulation

Effective revision means forgetting what **you** know but your reader doesn't.

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How can you achieve reader simulation?
• Change place/time between writing and revising
• Change to an unfamiliar font or medium
• Read the draft out loud
• Revise when you're thinking least clearly

Self-revision in steps

It's hard to do effective revision all at once

So try separate rounds of revision, each targeting a specific issue.
• Content: what isn't needed for your story?
• Writer familiarity (last slide)
• Brevity
• Citations
• Your personal bad habits (whatever they may be!)

Style, brevity and revision principles:

1. Omit needless words
2. Prefer simple words
3. Use simple subjects
4. Use adjectives frugally

Activity

The best way to learn something is to practice.

Revise each sentence for clarity. If the time remaining permits, share with your group members after editing each sentence.

https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=lesson3