Ron’s Rules for Good Writing
Rule #1: Avoid the Word it

- *it* is vague.

- Vague writing is bad writing.

- Both the writer and the reader are confused by vagueness.

- Usually *it* stands for some noun. Use the noun; avoid *it*.

- Examples

  Bad: *We hold it to be self-evident...*

  Good: *We hold these truths to be self-evident...*
Rule #2: Avoid Dangling Articles

- The words *this* and *these* are dangling articles.
- Like the word *it*, dangling articles are vague.
- Always include the noun that the article modifies.
- Examples

  **Bad:** *That to secure these, governments are instituted among Men.*

  **Good:** *That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men.*
Rule #3: Use Strong Verbs

- In English, verbs are the key words.
- Use strong verbs.
- Try to avoid: to be, to have, to get, to obtain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Verbs</th>
<th>Weak Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>create</td>
<td>is, are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build</td>
<td>has, have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generate</td>
<td>get, obtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prove</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rule #3: Use Strong Verbs (continued)

Examples

Weak:  All men are equal.

Strong:  All men are created equal.

Weak:  That they obtain from their creator...

Strong:  That they are endowed by their creator...
Rule #4: Use the Verb NOT the Noun

In English, many words have two forms: a verb form and a noun form. Often a noun can be generated from a verb by adding a suffix such as *ion*. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>create</td>
<td>creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construct</td>
<td>construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derive</td>
<td>derivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solve</td>
<td>solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbs are the strong words in English. Whenever you have a choice between a verb and a noun, *use the verb not the noun*. 
Rule #4: Use the Verb NOT the Noun (continued)

Examples

Weak: All men are equal by creation.
Strong: All men are created equal.

Weak: That they have an endowment from their creator...
Strong: That they are endowed by their creator...
Rule #5: One Idea Per Sentence

- Do not cram all your ideas into one sentence.
- Each sentence should contain one main idea.
- If you have two good ideas, use two sentences.
- Examples

  Bad: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and excessive bail shall not be required nor excessive fines imposed.

  Good: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Excessive bail shall not be required nor excessive fines imposed.
Rule #6: Write in the Present Tense

Examples

Bad:  All men were created equal.

Good: All men are created equal.
Rule #7: Avoid Quotation Marks

- *Never Never Never Never Never use quotation marks,* unless you are quoting a person or a book.

- Putting quotation marks around a word does not alter the meaning of a word.

- Do not be lazy. Find an appropriate word or phrase to express your thoughts.
Rule #8: Good Writing is Mostly Rewriting

• Do not hand in your first draft.
• Proofread all your work, at least twice.
• Use a thesaurus.
  -- Repeating the same word over and over again is boring.
• Use spell check.
• Correct all grammatical mistakes.
  *Bad grammar is difficult to read and understand. You appreciate reading a clearly written text; you dislike trying to understand vague, ambiguous, obscure, and incoherent writing. Do not inflict these impediments on your fellow students, teachers, or colleagues.*
Rule #9: Organize Your Thoughts

• Write an outline.

• A collection of good ideas connected haphazardly is difficult to understand.

• Try to make your ideas flow together naturally.