Ten Rules for Good Writing
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*...
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.*
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>
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...*
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*. 
Use the Verb NOT the Noun (continued)

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...
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.*
Write in the Present Tense

Examples

Bad:  *All men were created equal.*

Good:  *All men are created equal.*
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.
**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.*
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.
Avoid Proofs by Surprise

• A proper proof is like a good murder mystery: you must prepare your reader with all the necessary clues.

• Bringing in new suspects or fresh evidence in the final paragraph is forbidden.

• Proofs with a surprise ending are impossible for readers to follow because the readers will have no idea where they are headed.

• If you need to invoke a result from somewhere else to complete the proof, mention this result before you start your proof.