

WRITING PRINCIPLES (THE G AND O CRITERIA)

META-PRINCIPLES

1. Offer new information in a manner and at a time that the reader is prepared to receive it.
2. Make the points you wish to convey salient to the reader.
3. Every component of a written work should support your overall objective.

THE SENTENCE

1. Use specific verbs to express the crucial actions, and make the subjects of your verbs the characters involved in those actions.
2. Put at the beginning of the sentence (the *topic* position) familiar/less important/simpler information.
3. Put at the end of the sentence (the *stress* position) new/more important/more complex information.

THE PARAGRAPH

1. Among groups of related sentences, maintain a consistent and coherent sequence of *topic strings*, if you can. The topic strings need not be identical, but they should present a sequence of ideas the your reader sees as focused and supporting your point.
2. Choose your topic strings to control your reader's perception of agency, action, and viewpoint.
3. A cohesive paragraph has a consistent set of *thematic strings* running through it.
4. Introduce new topic and thematic strings at a predictable location: at the ends of sentences, especially the end of the sentences that introduce the paragraph (the *issue*).
5. A coherent paragraph clearly articulates its point, usually in a single sentence.
6. A coherent paragraph usually locates that point in one of two places, at the end of the *issue* and sometimes at the end of the *discussion* (the rest of the paragraph).

THE DOCUMENT

1. Among groups of related paragraphs (e.g., within a section), maintain a coherent sequence of points and themes.
2. Present new points and themes at a predictable location: at the ends of the paragraphs that introduce a section of the document.
3. A coherent document clearly articulates its point, often in a single sentence. Ask yourself what are the main points you wish to convey to the reader and make sure that they are clearly stated.
4. Present the main point and major themes of the document at a predictable location, usually at the end of the paragraph(s) that introduces the document.

STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Concision, balance, parallelism, rhythm, depth, and voice.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What are my main points? Do I clearly state those points? Where? Do I emphasize them sufficiently?
2. What is my objective? Does the sentence/paragraph/document contain any parts that do not support that objective?
3. Underline the first 5–8 words of each sentence (or clause). Do you get past the subject to the verb? Do the subjects name the characters?
4. What are the topic strings in this paragraph? Are they consistent and coherent? Do they support or obscure my point?
5. What are the thematic strings in this paragraph? Are they coherent? Do they illustrate concepts relevant to my point? If not, is it my point or the concepts that need to change?
6. What are the points I am making in each section of the document? Does this sequence of points support or obscure my main points? Does this sequence of points make a good argument?

Adapted from *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* by Joseph M. Williams (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990). See also *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* and *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* also by Williams and *Garner's Modern American Usage* by Bryan Garner.