



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

Academic Language

Autumn 2023 Thesis plan orientation
28.8.2023 Eeva Berglund

Today's session

- **Features of academic language**
 - A short exercise
- **BREAK**
- **Writing academic text**
 - How to be clear
 - Some technical tips
 - How to make it interesting
- **Questions and discussion**

Key features of all academic language

It should be clear

It should be rather formal

It should strive for neutrality and professionalism

It should not be (too) personal

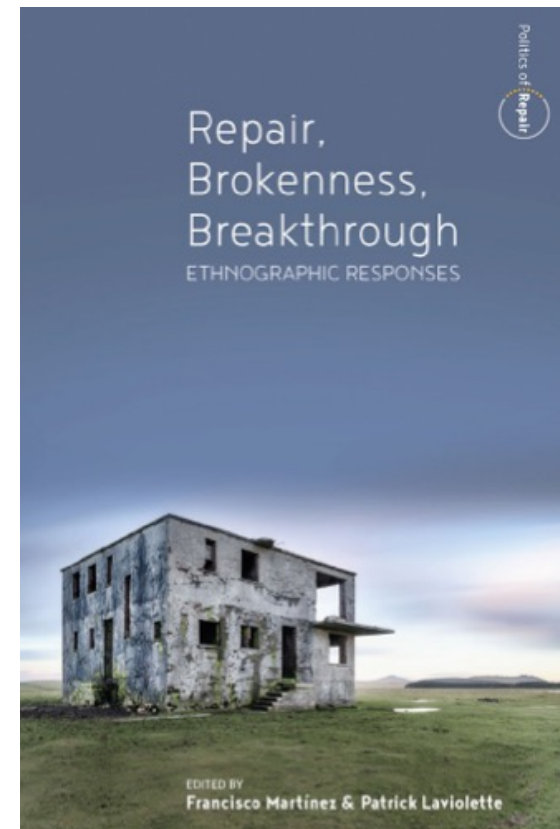
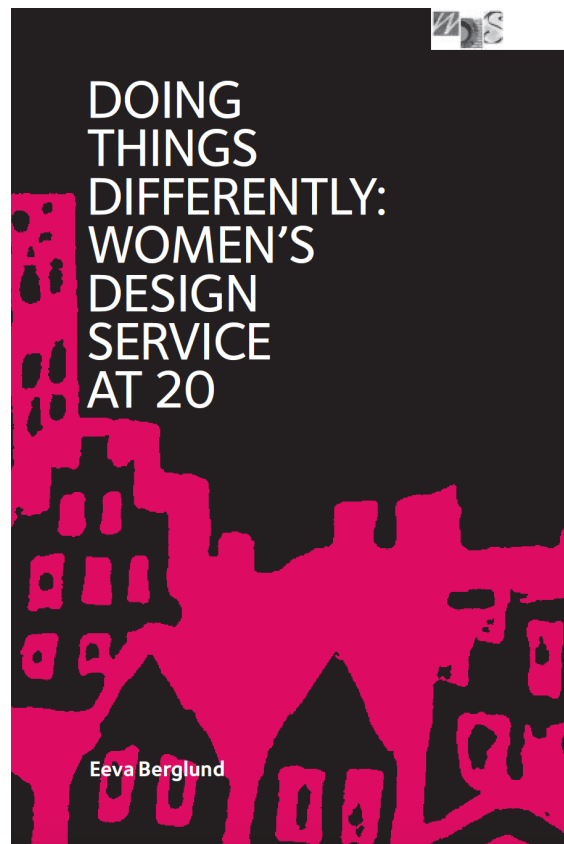
It should speak to the audience for which it is intended!

It is part of a CONVERSATION

On Academic Integrity

“... acknowledging sources is much more than an annoying convention with which you have to comply. It underpins the very nature of your discipline. The body of knowledge, the practices of the discipline and the people who engage in them *are* the discipline. Undermine any of them and you threaten the integrity of the discipline itself.”

Trevor Day *Success in Academic Writing*



Academic language in design

Some features of design writing that I have noticed

- The field is not weighed down by a long academic legacy.
- Design writing tends to be normative, particularly geared to making the world a better place.
- Design researchers write about social and cultural trends that are of concern far beyond just designers and design scholars.
- Research and practice merge into each other.

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- Research and practice merge into each other.

These together mean that

- Texts can feel preachy or proselytising. **Try to avoid it.**
- There is more freedom than in some disciplines, but sometimes less confidence. This can lead to **fancy or pompous language. Try to avoid this.**
- Good design research is grounded in concrete reality and thus **often includes vivid descriptions. These can be very helpful.**

We can only work with the work of others => CITING

Citations are concepts, evidence, definitions, data and other contents from another source

Academia is a process of constant acknowledgement of the work of hundreds and thousands of others, and of giving credit to them.

A citation is the acknowledgement of that work done by others.

Why cite? Adapted from Trevor Day

So that your reader can:

- **Appreciate where your work is positioned (in the discipline)**
- **Check the credibility of the sources you have used.**
- **Confirm that you have interpreted them correctly.**
- **Examine how you have assembled sources – For balance? Selectively to promote a viewpoint?**
- **Assess the strength of the evidence and reasoning in support of your argument**

Yet your argument will always be

‘partial’

With thanks to Marilyn Strathern.

Also see the debate on feminist standpoint theory for discussion on types of objectivity.

Haraway D (1988) ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.

Daston, L. (1992). Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective. *Social studies of science*, 22(4), 597-618.

MAX LIBOIRON



In 1956, Lloyd Stouffer, the editor of the US magazine *Modern Packaging*, addressed attendees at the Society of the Plastics Industry meeting in New York City: “The future of plastics is in the trash can. . . . It [is] time for the plastics industry to stop thinking about ‘reuse’ packages and concentrate on single use. For the package that is used once and thrown away, like a tin can or a paper carton, represents not a one-shot market for a few thousand units, but an everyday recurring market measured by the billions of units.”¹ Stouffer was speaking at a time when reuse, making do, and thrift were key practices reinforced by two US wars. Consumer markets were saturating. Disposability was one tactic within a suite of efforts to move goods *through*, rather than merely *into*, consumer households.² Today, packaging is the single largest category of plastic production, ac-

- 1 Hello, Reader! Thank you for being here. These footnotes are a place of nuance and politics, where the protocols of gratitude and recognition play out (sometimes also called citation), where warnings and care work are carried out (including calling certain readers aside for a chat or a joke), and where I contextualize, expand, and emplace work. The footnotes support the text above, representing the shoulders on which I stand and the relations I want to build. They are part of doing good relations within a text, through a text. Since a main goal of *Pollution Is Colonialism* is to show how methodology is a way of being in the world and that ways of being are tied up in obligation, these footnotes are one way to enact that argument. Thank you to Duke University Press for these footnotes.

For this first footnote of the introduction, we have a simple citation: Stouffer, “Plastics Packaging,” 1–3. Don’t worry. They’ll get better.

- 2 Packard, *Waste Makers*; Strasser, *Waste and Want*; M. Liboiron, “Modern Waste as Strategy.”

Exercise: taking responsibility for one part of a bigger conversation

About 25 minutes

Get into groups of four (we will divide you into breakout rooms)

- 1) Introduce yourselves briefly to each other.**
- 2) In silence, read the passages of text provided. Be aware that they are missing citations. Look up unfamiliar words.**
- 3) When you have all finished reading, work together to decide where you think citations should or could be added.**
- 4) Within your breakout room, share your thoughts about the writing. Bear in mind that they are snippets of texts with which you are otherwise not familiar. At least 5 minutes.**
- 5) Nominate one person to briefly share your reactions, about where citations should go and about the writing generally.**

Text one

As an established concept and part of the professional idiom, ecological design has a relatively brief history. Much of its basic principles were developed in the above-mentioned seminal period of the 1960s and 1970s, but only at the turn of the twenty-first century was it explicated and popularized as a distinct professional approach. However, as Lydia Kallipoliti has argued, it has a much longer pre-history – tracing a genealogy from naturalists like Carl Linneus and Ernst Haeckel (who coined the term ecology in 1866), via the evolutionist ideas of designers like Patrick Geddes and Frank Lloyd Wright and the biocentrism flourishing at the Bauhaus, to the comprehensive systems thinking of design theorists like Richard Buckminster Fuller, John McHale, and Ian McHarg on the one hand and the more pragmatic, activist approach promoted through counter cultural outlets like the *Whole Earth Catalog* on the other. Thus, as many of the contributions to this volume exemplify, there is a long and rich history of design's conversations with ecology. This book seeks to push at the nature of that relationship, proposing also that designing itself can be understood as ecology – as ecological systems, ideas, thinking, and practice. Such an extended understanding of design as ecology may also overcome the misconception common to much environmentalist discourse that ecological principles presuppose a 'static', unchanging nature as the ideal condition, recognizing instead that natural systems are open, dynamic, evolving. A notion of ecological design as 'an ideational and philosophical system of viewing the world of ideas, information and matter as flow, rather than as the accumulation of discrete objects' is in line also with a shift in focus from conservation and restoration to resilience, requiring a conceptualization which 'signals the migration of life through the conversion of one thing to another.'

Second text, first part.

ABSTRACT

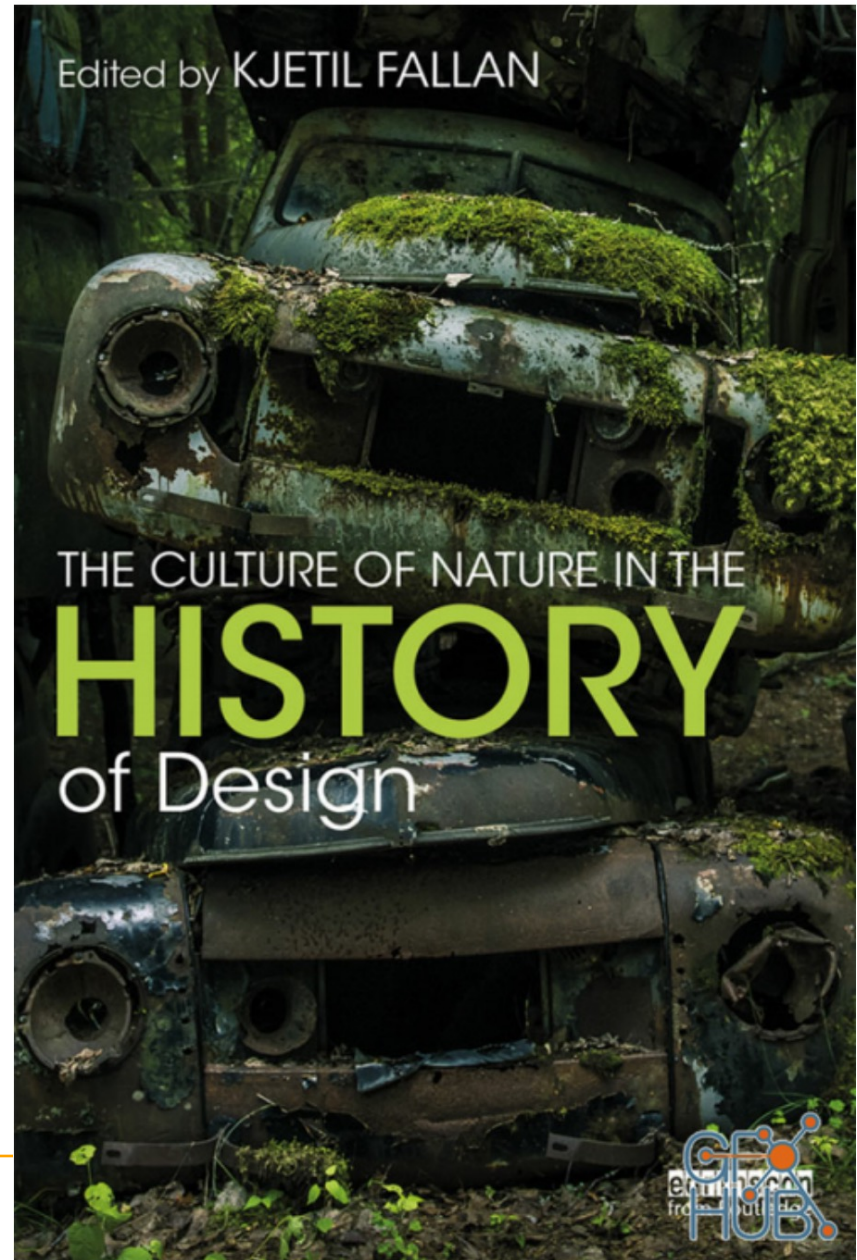
This paper takes as its starting point the fact that we live in the aftermath of previous making and design. For participatory design to adequately answer to this aftermath, we suggest building on a combination of participatory and speculative design approaches in everyday life settings and exploring the practice of un/making matters. The paper draws on two cases where participants have been invited to engage with recent scientific findings and practices - one where they explore the practice of un/making plastic waste through composting, and one on un/making polluted soil through plants that can accumulate metals. By not primarily aiming at feeding into new iterations of a design process, there is an openness for speculating beyond the given systems, and to bring into question imaginaries of constant progress, which have been part of generating these lingering matters.

Second text, second part.

The practice of un/making will be explored through two projects, that are situated within an emerging body of work that combines participatory design with speculative design. While these two projects have slightly different set ups, they both invite to engage with new and still speculative proposals for how to engage with the aftermath of previous designs. More specifically, the projects engage with the possibility of un/making plastic waste through composting and un/making polluted soil through phytoremediation.¹ Rather than situating speculations in galleries, which often is the case with speculative design, the two projects invite actors to bring these still speculative practices of un/making into their own everyday lives. Through, for example, prototypes and guidelines the un/making of the aftermath is made doable, or at least almost doable. The aim here is not to gather knowledge and insight that can be fed into the next iteration of a design process. Rather than being an inquiry for design, these explorations of un/making can, in line with other attempts to combine speculative and participatory design processes, be seen as an inquiry through design, that might teach us something about the condition of design. Or, more specifically, that can teach us something about the condition of the aftermath of design.

First text

Fallan, K. (2019). Introduction: The culture of nature in the history of design. In *The Culture of Nature in the History of Design* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.



As an established concept and part of the professional idiom, ecological design has a relatively brief history. Much of its basic principles were developed in the above-mentioned seminal period of the 1960s and 1970s, but only at the turn of the twenty-first century was it explicated and popularized as a distinct professional approach (Van der Fyn and Cowen 1996; McDonough and Braungart 2002). However, as Lydia Kallipoliti (2018) has argued, it has a much longer pre-history – tracing a genealogy from naturalists like Carl Linneus and Ernst Haeckel (who coined the term ecology in 1866), via the evolutionist ideas of designers like Patrick Geddes and Frank Lloyd Wright and the biocentrism flourishing at the Bauhaus, to the comprehensive systems thinking of design theorists like Richard Buckminster Fuller, John McHale, and Ian McHarg on the one hand and the more pragmatic, activist approach promoted through counter cultural outlets like the *Whole Earth Catalog* on the other. Thus, as many of the contributions to this volume exemplify, there is a long and rich history of design’s conversations with ecology. This book seeks to push at the nature of that relationship, proposing also that designing itself can be understood as ecology – as ecological systems, ideas, thinking, and practice. Such an extended understanding of design as ecology may also overcome the misconception common to much environmentalist discourse that ecological principles presuppose a ‘static’, unchanging nature as the ideal condition, recognizing instead that natural systems are open, dynamic, evolving (Emmett and Nye 2017, 101; Phillips 2003). A notion of ecological design as ‘an ideational and philosophical system of viewing the world of ideas, information and matter as flow, rather than as the accumulation of discrete objects’ is in line also with a shift in focus from conservation and restoration to resilience, requiring a conceptualisation which ‘signals the migration of life through the conversion of one thing to another’ (Kallipoliti 2018, 43).

**Kallipoliti, L. (2018). History of Ecological Design. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ACREFORE/9780199389414.013.144>**

The article's concluding paragraph:

“As well as a practice of minimizing the detrimental impact of buildings, ecological design is an ideational and philosophical system of viewing the world of ideas, information, and matter as flow, rather than as the accumulation of discrete objects. More than a material system, it **signals the migration of life through the conversion of one thing to another.”**

Second text

Un/Making in the Aftermath of Design

Kristina Lindström, Malmö University, kristina.lindstrom@mau.se

Åsa Ståhl, Linnaeus University, asa.stahl@lnu.se

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3385010.3385012>

PDC '20: [Proceedings of the 16th Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation\(s\) Otherwise - Vol 1](#), Manizales, Colombia, June 2020

This paper takes as its starting point the fact that we live in the aftermath of previous making and design. For participatory design to adequately answer to this aftermath, we suggest building on a combination of participatory and speculative design approaches in everyday life settings and exploring the practice of un/making matters. The paper draws on two cases where participants have been invited to engage with recent scientific findings and practices - one where they explore the practice of un/making plastic waste through composting, and one on un/making polluted soil through plants that can accumulate metals. By not primarily aiming at feeding into new iterations of a design process, there is an openness for speculating beyond the given systems, and to bring into question imaginaries of constant progress, which have been part of generating these lingering matters.

CCS Concepts: • Social and professional topics → Sustainability;

CCS Concepts: • Human-centered computing → Participatory design;

KEYWORDS: Unmaking, aftermath, speculative design, plastics, soil

ACM Reference Format:

Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl. 2020. Un/Making in the Aftermath of Design. In *Proceedings of Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation(s) Otherwise (PDC '20: Vol. 1)*, June 15-20, 2020, Manizales, Colombia. ACM, New York, NY, USA, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3385010.3385012>

1 INTRODUCTION

Design as a discipline is future oriented. More specifically design is concerned with “... changing existing situations into preferred ones” [35]. Within participatory design a central objective has been to allow those with things at stake to be part of the process of deciding what is preferred or not. Participatory design has in other words been concerned with democratizing design through enabling participation in the design process.

The practice of un/making will be explored through two projects, that are situated within an emerging body of work that combines participatory design with speculative design [3,15,17,32]. While these two projects have slightly different set ups, they both invite to engage with new and still speculative proposals for how to engage with the aftermath of previous designs. More specifically, the projects engage with the possibility of un/making plastic waste through composting and un/making polluted soil through phytoremediation¹. Rather than situating speculations in galleries, which often is the case with speculative design, the two projects invite actors to bring these still speculative practices of un/making into their own everyday lives. Through, for example, prototypes and guidelines the un/making of the aftermath is made doable, or at least almost doable. The aim here is not to gather knowledge and insight that can be fed into the next iteration of a design process. Rather than being an inquiry for design, these explorations of un/making can, in line with other attempts to combine speculative and participatory design processes [6,37], be seen as an inquiry through design, that might teach us something about the condition of design. Or, more specifically, that can teach us something about the condition of the aftermath of design.

Footnote: Phytoremediation is a way of using plants to extract metals from soil and thereby clean the soil. Some plants have the capacity to accumulate particular metals.

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Writing is hard,
even for authors
who do it all the
time.

From William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, Ed.4, 1979, 'Foreword' by Roger Angell



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How we write

Depends on who will be reading our text

Writing *academic* text is perhaps especially difficult – but also rewarding

Specialist and research-based – not supposed to be easy!

Needs arguments and supporting evidence

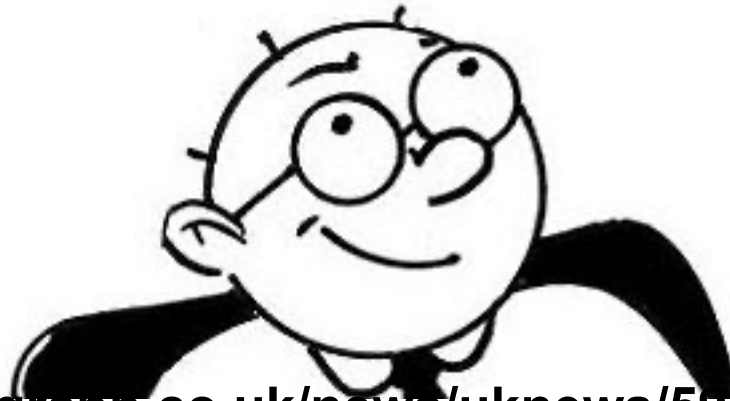
Needs to acknowledge others' work

Should not be trivial, ideally should surprise

Should be interesting

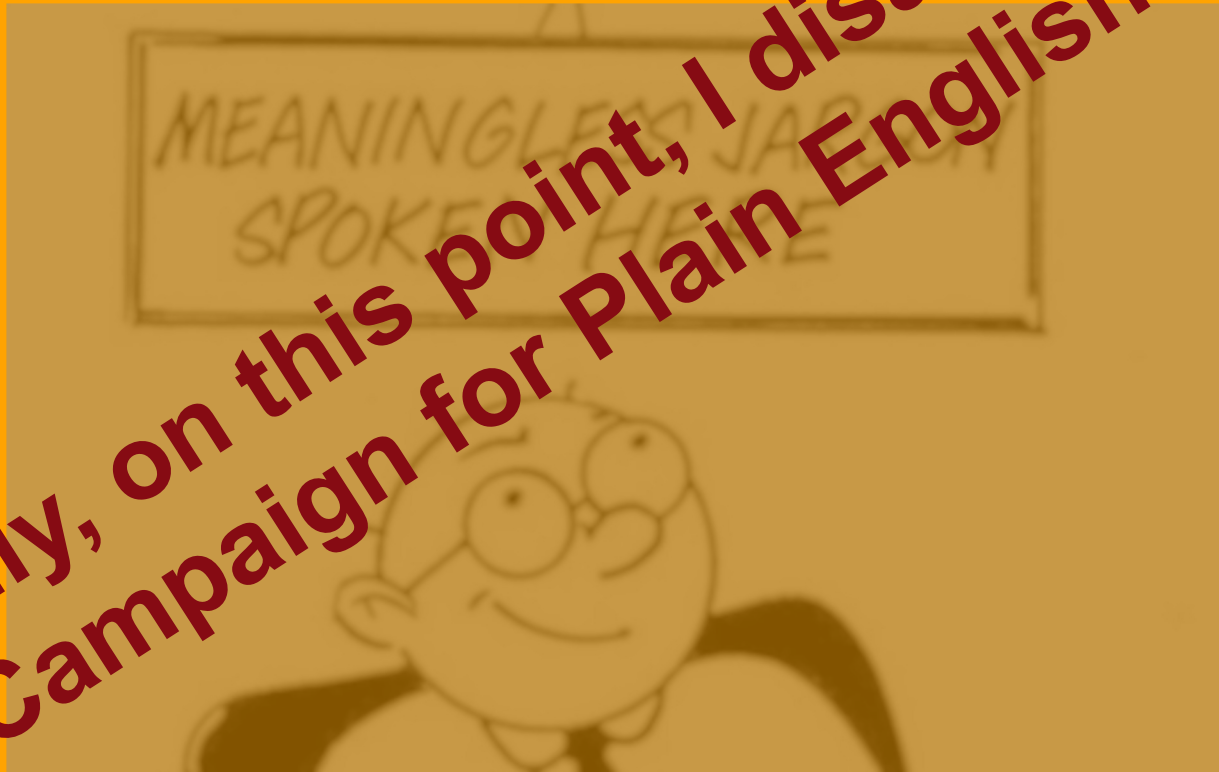
It is not about being pompous or pseudo-intellectual

Writing *academic* text is perhaps especially difficult – but also rewarding



<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5908061/Technical-jargon-poses-new-threat-to-plain-English-campaigners-say.html>

**Actually, on this point, I disagree with
The Campaign for Plain English**



Why? Because research publications can sometimes benefit from jargon

We have to learn some vocabulary and other elements of writing and communicating that are specific to our conversation partners.

For me, Eeva, this has meant gradually learning vocabularies and styles of writing and arguing from

- **anthropology, geography, environmental studies, political sciences, feminist and activist research, design research, material culture studies, history ...**
- **To learn to write for them I must READ**

**There's no
substitute for
practice: so read
and write without
fear**



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Think about your readers



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Ask yourself: How easy is this to understand?

Even learning to write for the reader in your area takes time. It can feel difficult when we are involved in multiple conversations, as we often are in the design world.

Checking that key sections are comprehensible to anyone who reads English (or other language you might write in) is always a good idea.

IS IT CLEAR?



*Circumlocution or going around things rather than getting to the point
(From Charles Dickens' book, Little Dorrit)*

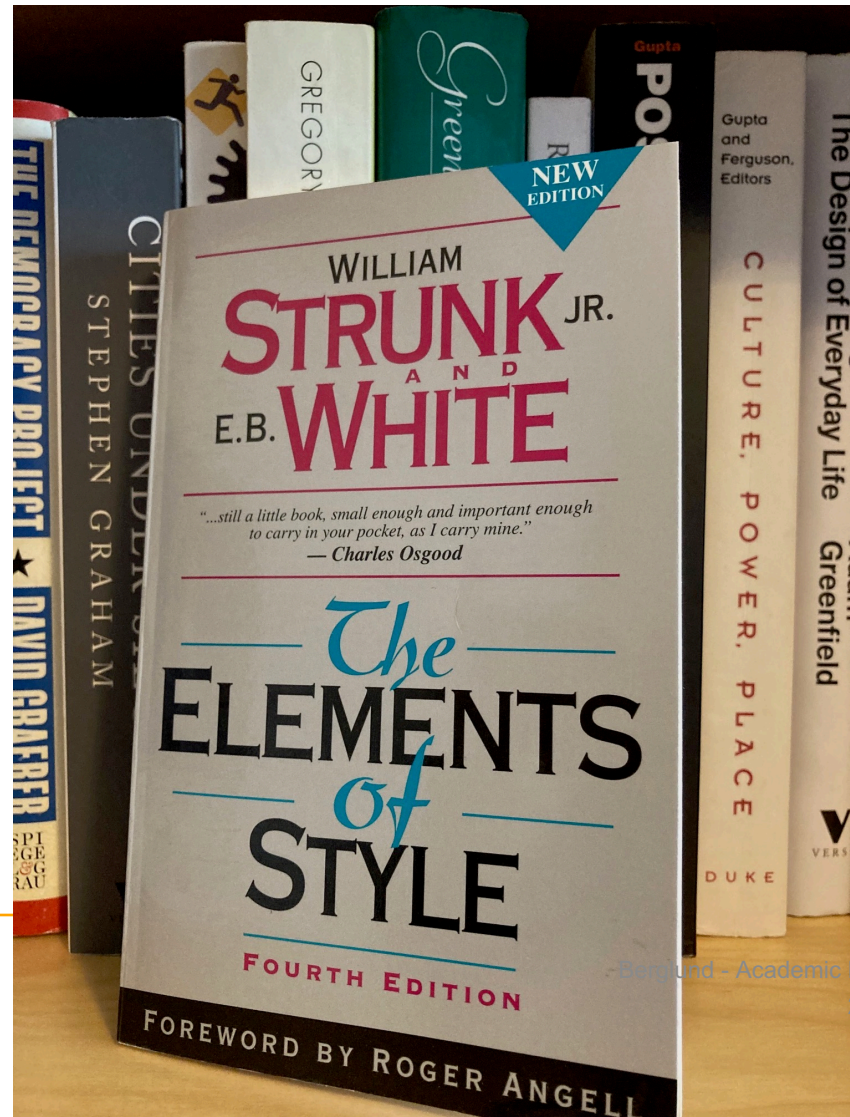
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**There are many
writing guides out
there**

William Strunk Jr. & E.B. White *The Elements of Style*, 1979

A book for our times of
volubility – *New York Times*
endorsement on the back
cover



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Keep sentences short

Telling stories involves rules of usage (syntax, grammar, etc.)

Clear sentences have a:

subject – who is acting or
doing?

verb – what is the action?

object – who/what is affected?

Telling stories involves rules of usage (syntax, grammar, etc.)

Clear sentences have a:

subject – who is acting or doing?

‘**Ecological design** **has** a relatively brief **history**.’

verb – what is the action?

object – who/what is affected?

‘**the projects** **engage** with the **possibility** of un/making plastic waste through composting and un/making polluted soil’

Telling stories involves rules of usage (syntax, grammar, etc.)

Interesting and precise prose has appropriate adjectives and adverbs

TIP: use a Thesaurus or dictionary to avoid repeating the same words

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Use paragraphs,
one idea per
paragraph

Arguments and evidence

To be persuasive you need to lead your reader through your thinking.

You need reasoned and logically consistent arguments:

Provide relevant facts and demonstrate awareness of other points of view.

Supporting evidence:

Illustrative examples, case studies, research findings from others.

Authoritative sources:

Clarity about who is saying what. Use academic references to give credit to predecessors and to show you have done the work.

**You do not need
fancy words or
pseudo-intellectual
waffle**



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**Is it interesting?
How can I make it
so?**

Write about concrete things and be specific

“In Finland, children start formal schooling at the age of seven. Before that, children mainly attend play-based education in kindergartens.”

“In brief, the riddle is about the thunderstorm spirit Ukko losing control of the weather.”

C.C. Wong 2018



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**Is it persuasive?
How can I make it
so?**

Say it clearly and back it up

With references:

In qualitative research, researchers achieve understanding through proximity to the reality of the case (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

With your own competencies:

I have been studying the connection between play design and education for sustainability for at least seven years.

“Use the active voice” and “put statements in positive form”

“This thesis examines fashion...” is better than “In this thesis fashion is examined...”

“I will argue that design activism can be both conservative and politically radical.”

... is usually preferable to:

“The argument will be made that there are both conservative and politically radical aspects to design activism.”

“Use definite, specific, concrete language”

“German foresters of the later eighteenth century ... replaced diverse woodlands with militarily aligned columns of a single tree species.” (from Charles Tilly, 1999)

is more vivid and memorable than something I might have written, such as:

“Modern resource management meant the simplification of previously diverse ecosystems.”

Although this has its uses too. Should we discuss them?

Other good tips from Strunk and White

“Avoid a succession of loose sentences”

“Omit needless words”

“In summaries, keep to one tense”

About the process

“Revise and rewrite”

“Do not overstate”

“Make sure the reader knows who is speaking”

“Avoid fancy words”

EB adds: avoid repeating the same words

Eeva's essay-writing tips

Essay writing is a skill, and it takes practice to do it well.

Do what you have been asked to do. Usually this means answering a question. As you write, stop from time to time to think about whether you are still on topic.

A good essay/thesis will present a well-organized argument.

Even if you are not making a grand theoretical point, your text should have a message, and it should be made clear to the reader.

- Think about your reader. Be clear, and do not leave the reader to guess at what you mean.
- You can use subheadings to give structure to the essay and guidance to the reader.
- Do not over-generalise or exaggerate and do not use moralising language.
- List sources as you would in an academic journal or book. Usually you do not need more than a few references. Format your references systematically.
- **Do not copy text from electronic sources without attributing it! Websites and other media sources must be fully acknowledged and quoted text placed inside quotation marks (“...”). Include the date they were accessed in the references.**

**There are plenty of
rules for academic
writing...**



... but there's no
substitute for
practice: so read
and write without
fear



**ENJOY, AND
THANK YOU!**



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