



How to Write Right

A White Paper from Exploring the Arts Foundation

Do you wish you could learn how to improve the style, accuracy, effectiveness, and impact of your writing? Do you need to be able to write good English prose, English that conforms to accepted standards? At last there is an easy, inexpensive writing aid that can help you accomplish these goals. It's name is *Writing Right*®.

Writing Right is a personal writing assistant in ebook form developed by the Exploring the Arts Foundation® (ETAF®). It runs on your desktop personal computer, laptop, portable computer, ebook reader, PDA or other hand-held portable electronic device, or other micro-mobile device—any type or brand that supports Adobe Reader®.

With the help of *Writing Right* you will catch and correct all sorts of writing mistakes you might otherwise overlook and at the same time improve your writing style. You will do all this efficiently—almost effortlessly—while you write or edit with your word processor or other computer-based writing application, electronic device—even typewriter, pen, or pencil.

Here, in a nutshell, is the complete *Writing Right* story. Once you understand these fundamentals, you will be in a position to decide whether *Writing Write* is a writing aid you should own. You'll understand why we call *Writing Right* your personal writing assistant.

As you read, here are some of the topics you'll cover:

- The nature of prose writing and what it's good for.
- Why the ability to write correct, well-styled English prose is important for everyone but hard for most people to achieve.
- Who benefits from *Writing Right* and how.
- The nature of good writing and how it has influenced *Writing Right*'s design.
- How you use *Writing Right* to improve your writing and why *Writing Right* works.
- How and why *Writing Right* is different from other writing aids and how it teams up with them.
- How to learn more about *Writing Right* or purchase a copy at ETAF's web site.

Terms Defined

There are five important terms that will come up often in this white paper. Keep the following definitions in mind as you read:

Prose – The ordinary form of written or spoken language, without rhyme or meter; nonfiction writing (excluding poetry).

Exposition – A setting forth of meaning or intent; a statement or rhetorical discourse intended to give information about or an explanation of difficult material.

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Formal – Following or being in accord with accepted forms, conventions, or regulations; executed, carried out, or done in proper or regular form; characterized by strict or meticulous observation of forms.

Informal – Not formal or ceremonious; casual; not being in accord with prescribed regulations or forms; unofficial; being more appropriate for use in the spoken language than in the written language.

Slang – A kind of language occurring chiefly in casual and playful speech, made up typically of short-lived coinages and figures of speech that are deliberately used in place of standard terms for added raciness, humor, irreverence, or other effect; language peculiar to a group; argot or jargon.

What is Expository Prose?

Writing Right is aimed at helping you write better formal expository English prose. Formal expository English prose is any writing in the English language that serves to expose, expound, set forth, or explain something.

Expository prose writing is typically found in published works such as essays, news writing, magazine articles, travel books, cook books, how-to books, and in many other kinds of published works. Works like these, whose main purpose is to inform, are usually written entirely in this style because all the material they contain calls for perfect clarity.

Expository prose is the kind of writing most professional writers do for a living. Much of what we read on the internet is written in the formal expository prose style. But expository prose writing is not just for electronic networks, printed publications, or professional writers. Most of us write or read some kind of formal expository prose every day of our lives.



You write formal expository prose when you prepare school work such as an English paper, autobiography, history report, trip report, essay, or lab experiment. You use it when you send a letter-to-the-editor to a magazine or newspaper or when you place an ad. You are likely to include expository prose passages when you write a short story or even a love letter.

Despite the word *formal*, formal prose writing doesn't mean stuffy writing. Most of us write expository prose in everyday, casual, relaxed situations. We naturally prefer to use the formal expository prose style when we write a personal note to a friend or loved one, a business letter, a church newsletter, or a garage sale circular. For most of us, formal expository prose writing is the most common kind of writing we do. We write it without giving it a second thought.

Here are some of the different kinds of publications in which formal expository prose writing is likely to appear:

- Newspapers
- Magazine Articles
- Technical Reports
- Business Literature
- Advertising
- Scientific Papers
- Text Books
- White Papers
- Pamphlets
- How-To Books
- Self-Help Books
- Warrantees and Guarantees
- Book Reviews
- Editorials
- Brochures
- Use and Care Books
- Business Letters
- Announcements
- School Reports
- Introductions and prefaces
- Email

- Proposals
- Catalogs
- Diaries
- Memos
- School Work
- Personal Letters Intended To Inform
- Speeches
- User Manuals
- Product Assembly Instructions

There's almost no end to the different kinds of formal and informal expository prose documents. They come in all stylistic shades and serve endless purposes. It's easy to tell if a written work or passage is expository. If its fundamental purpose is to inform and its writing style is factual, it's probably an example of expository prose writing.

Writing Right and Writing Well

A writer should choose to write expository prose whenever he or she wants to expose, expound, set forth, or explain facts or ideas effectively. In the English language, the formal expository English prose style was created to do just this; there is no other style available for this purpose.

Of course, not everyone needs to write perfect prose all of the time. But writing effective prose is something almost all of us must do some of the time, and it's something many of us choose to do most of the time.

What is effective prose writing? Effective expository prose writing is writing that is clear and economical. It conveys the maximum amount of information (facts and ideas) in the fewest possible words. Where formal expository English prose is concerned, you write effectively when you 1) write right, and 2) write well:

Writing right consists of writing by the rules. The writing rules we speak of here are the rules for writing correct expository prose.

- The rules of expository prose tell you how to write grammatically correct, properly- used expressions—words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, idioms, and the like. They also tell you how to spell and to preserve the meanings of things (semantics).
- These rules amount to common linguistic conventions for how to write correct expository prose in English. They are accepted by writers and readers alike and are established by social and cultural customs. They're set forth by grammarians, scholars, and other linguistic experts. They're found in text books and language guides, and they're taught by English teachers in high schools, colleges, and writing classes.
- People use language rules to communicate with each other. Clear, precise communication would be impossible if both didn't use the same rules. Without them, writers and readers wouldn't be writing, reading, or speaking the same language.
- When you break a writing rule, you make a writing mistake that's likely to result in misunderstanding or confusion on the part of a reader.

Writing well consists of writing effective, well-styled expository English prose.

- The writing style of a document or prose passage is the manner in which it expresses the facts and ideas it contains.
- Where style is concerned, it's not the grammatical or semantic correctness of the words, phrases, and other expressions that counts; it's the manner in which they are used. Writing style is a matter of aesthetic taste and judgment.

- Notice that it is possible to write prose that is grammatically or semantically correct (prose that has no grammar mistakes) but lacks effectiveness because its logic is crabbed, its words run on, it is boring, or because of other stylistic considerations.
- Well-styled prose helps make your writing effective by making it relevant to your subject or topic and interesting to your audience. When the words and ideas flow smoothly from one to the next, your prose has a beauty and linguistic appeal all its own.

About the Ability to Write Well

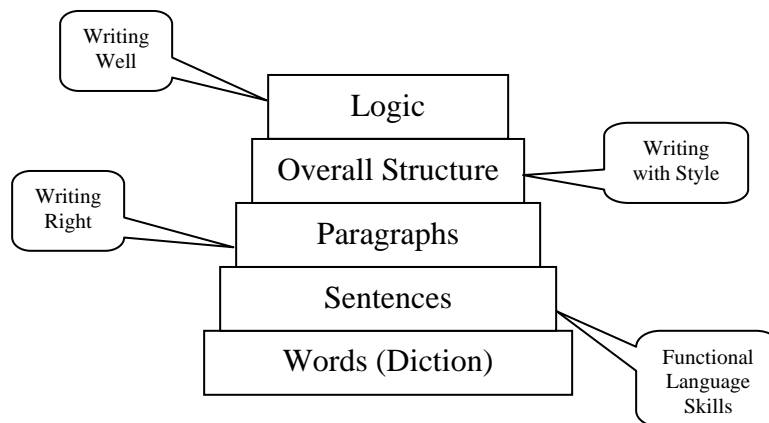
As already pointed out, the objective of formal expository English prose is to expose, expound, set forth, or explain something. The challenge you face when you write a piece of expository prose is to write in a way that will effectively expose and convey your meaning or intent.

Writing effectively isn't easy and doesn't happen automatically. To write well you must have the skills you need to write correct, well-styled prose; and these skills must be learned and developed.

It is a scientifically established fact that once you reach high school age, it is at least twice as difficult to learn a language as it was when you were younger. Once you reach adulthood, your brain's in-born ability to learn language all but shuts down. That's why it's best to start language learning at home, as an infant, and to continue primary or secondary language learning in high school. It's not too late to learn a new language when you reach college age, but it's much more difficult.

Learning to write well is a process similar to learning your first, primary language or to learning a new, secondary language. It's best to learn basic writing skills and to perfect them in elementary and high school, as a pre-teenager, teenager, or young adult. Past that time, the best that most people can hope for is to remediate imperfectly learned writing skills or to perfect and polish basic writing skills through formal training.

Let's take a closer look at the learning problems people face when they come into the world and start on the road to becoming an adult writer. If an adult writer's language skills were to be arranged in a series of steps, levels, or stairs, with the skill at each lower level more fundamental than the one above it, the skills might form a pyramid that looks like this.



In this very simplified scheme, we can associate writing skills with levels:

- The overall skill of writing well might be associated with the top of the pyramid.
- The ability to write with style might be associated with the top mid-point.
- The ability to write right might be located somewhere below the mid-point.
- Foundational language skills, such as the ability to form basic words into full English sentences, would properly be placed on a step nearer the bottom.

Composing effective expository prose requires a writer to do many things right. In addition to fundamental tasks such as setting down sensible words, sentences, and paragraphs, writers must introduce information in a well-reasoned, step-by-step order, each step laying the groundwork for the next. They must express themselves clearly and pose logical arguments and conclusions in clear, effective, well-styled prose. Facts and ideas must be introduced at the right places and times. These are just a few of the things that must be done right if a piece of written prose is to make sense and achieve its objectives of effectively informing readers.

It's not easy to develop all the writing skills that are prerequisites for successful prose writing. Writing is a discipline characterized by strict and meticulous observation of form, convention, and language rules. Good writing is not slang learned on the streets, argot, or dialect. It's not whatever comes into a writer's head. It's not something you write down on paper and hope for the best.

Good expository prose writing is usually learned in school and perfected by practice over a period of years. The ability to perform well at each level of the language pyramid—to ascend to the top—depends on mastering skills at all preceding levels.

The school curriculum is designed to progressively teach more about language and to develop more complicated and sophisticated language skills as an individual student matures and is able to absorb them. Language know-how and skills must be learned and developed in the right order; language mastery achieved later in school depends on the student having knowledge and skills taught earlier. Failure to learn language facts and perfect language skills at the right time and in the right order can hobble a person for life.

For reasons like these, most grown adults who missed their chance for a decent education when they were young—who never learned to speak, read, or write well—have a really hard time of it later in life. Teaching themselves to learn to write well—even to learn to write at all, in some cases—is well nigh impossible. Either they go through life embarrassed, handicapped, and crippled, or they grapple with adult remedial education courses.

And let's not forget those who struggle to overcome language learning handicaps, those unfortunates who suffer in-born or acquired physical, mental, or environmentally-induced challenges that call for special forms of language education or reeducation. Whatever the reasons, a conventional education, even one bolstered by special or supplementary remedial education, may not be enough for many who seek to write right and write well.

Never Fear, Help Is Here

The writing competence described in the preceding section is a great deal to expect of most of us. No wonder writers who climb every stair in the writing pyramid are few and far between.

Having failed to climb the pedestal of language learning as we might have liked in school, as students or adults we might understandably cast around for some form of help.

One answer to our writing problems might be a reference work for writing right and writing well that we could consult whenever we're in doubt about what to write next. That's not so far-fetched an idea, is it? After all, we often consult dictionaries, style guides, and encyclopedias when we write, don't we? Perhaps a simple and easy-to-use short-list of writing dos and don'ts might suffice to compensate for our shortcomings today. The dos and don'ts would specify how to handle any given writing situation that's causing a problem.

The list might resemble a pocket dictionary. It would cite every possible expression in the English language and would explain every circumstance in which it is valid or invalid. When faced with a writing challenge—a question about how to write a fact or idea and write it right and with style—we would only have to look through the list and pick an expression that fills the bill.

Unfortunately, such a short-list is just a dream. English is a so-called *natural language*. It has been scientifically demonstrated that natural languages can



potentially express literally a limitless number of meaningful or meaningless combinations of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, idioms, and other kinds of expressions. In a natural language, there are literally an infinite number of ways to correctly or incorrectly state any single fact or concept. That would be a long, long, short-list indeed, so long it couldn't be created.

Given that English is a natural language, no wonder it's so difficult to master. Speaking, reading, or writing a natural language like English seems to be one of those amazing, miraculous things that only human beings can do. Computers can't do it and probably never will.

So, if we have to give up the idea of a short list—a kind of pocket dictionary for prose writing—is there something else people might use to resolve the dilemma of not being able to write right without help?

If we turn to traditional methods, there is no shortage of sources of help. There are an abundance of self-help writing resources and remedial education courses we can fall back on, all aimed at teaching us how to speak, read, or write accepted English. Indeed, their very numbers and overwhelming complexity are part of the language learning problem:

There are figuratively (and literally) tons of grammar books, text books, style guides, work books, spelling aids, word lists, writing primers, writing manuals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other references that you can buy, beg, borrow, or steal.

There is no shortage of self-study courses, syllabuses, classroom lectures, seminars, Internet courses, write-by-mail courses, and other kinds of instruction you can take. There are plenty of software-based writing aids in the form of computer programs and CD-ROMs you can buy for your computer.

All of these methods are legitimate sources of help for writers and have their proper place. The trouble is, you must be willing and able to go the extra mile (...or two...or three) to take advantage of them. They require time, energy, money, and focus that most people out of school haven't got or can't afford, or they aren't focused directly on helping you write formal expository English prose while you write it.

Enter Writing Right

Is there anything we can do that will allow you to write right and write well and that will unburden you from the shortcomings of these traditional methods? The answer is yes. The answer is *Writing Right*.

Writing Right is a new and different kind of software-based writing aid designed especially to help you write formal expository prose English. It supplements and overcomes many of the limitations and problems associated with traditional writing education and with other writing aids.

Although it's ideal for formal written material such as school reports, magazine or news articles, essays, or business, scientific, and technical documentation, it can help with other kinds of prose writing too, from letters to party invitations—anywhere that correct, well-styled English prose makes a difference.

Best of all, with *Writing Right* on your computer or micro-electronic device you don't have to be a professional writer or an English teacher to write like one; you don't have to take writing courses or become a grammarian; and you don't have to be a computer expert. There are no text books to read and no courses to take. You only have to have the ability to write basic English sentences.

Writing Right is designed to help almost anyone write better formal expository English prose without poring over text books or taking English lessons. It's a simple, fast, easy-to-use source of writing knowledge that you use while you write. It looks and *feels* like the pages of a book, so it's natural to use for a reference, but there the resemblance ends. It's a different kind of writing aid, not just another dictionary, spell checker, grammar text, style guide, or other writing reference you'll stick on a shelf or place on your computer desktop and forget.

Writing Right isn't simply an ebook version of a traditional printed or computerized reference work. It's a partner in helping you find and integrate all the different kinds of information you need to be able to check and correct your work while you write. That's why we call it your personal writing assistant.

Here's Why Writing Right Works

Writing Right is designed around a few, simple ideas about writing and language:

- There is a best way to write expository English prose for an American audience, even though there is no official standard language that has been handed down from above.
- Formal expository American English prose is a de facto standard that has been established by grammarians, linguists, scholars, and writers over the years. It is a time-tested social and cultural heritage that has become a standard writing style because it has proven itself to be the best way to communicate objective facts and ideas. Right and wrong ways to write are defined by the de facto standard. The definition of what's right and wrong changes with social custom, time, and other factors.
- In an absolute sense, there's no such thing as a correct way to express any fact or idea. In theory, any expression will do. However, there are right ways. Right ways are



those that are accepted as the current de facto standard for writing formal expository American English prose.

- In most writing situations, there will be more than one valid way to correctly and effectively express a thought, set down a phrase or sentence, or assemble words into an accepted grammatical construction. Equally, there will be more than one dubious or invalid way to do these things. Writing well and writing right involve finding right and wrong constructions and selecting the ones that best suit you and what you are writing.
- Writing should be a natural and instinctive process, like playing a piano or riding a bike. It should be as effortless as possible. The time you spend writing is not the best time to stop and study grammar, debate or dawdle over the meaning of a word in a dictionary, or check things like spelling that are best left to a computer or a traditional writing aid like a dictionary or style guide. Writing is best accomplished easily and quickly, without self-conscious attention to writing technique, or the mind will bog down and lose itself in detail.
- There's an adage to the effect that the best bridge players are the ones who have mastered the rules and stick to them most of the time, but know when and how to break them. Since there's nothing holy about the rules of writing, a writer should have the power to accept or reject any writing rule that is not right for the writing situation at hand. The decision should be based on knowledge of the subject, the audience, the effect to be achieved, personal tastes and judgment, and writing skills. Good prose writing shouldn't betray the writer's identity but should fit the situation as the writer sees and understands it.
- The more you know about the rules of writing and the more your mastery of style, the better you will be able to write. Insofar as practicable, a writer should study, learn, and follow writing rules and become comfortable with using them, but only if and when he or she has time, energy, and inclination. In other words, if you feel that you need a course in expository prose writing, grammar, punctuation, spelling, or English composition, by all means take it, but not while you're writing; when you feel a need to consult a dictionary, style guide, or other reference, do so.
 - The best writing references tend to be the ones that are least distracting. They give you fast and easy ways to check for writing problems and look up answers to questions at the moment you are about to write something, just before you write it, or just after you have written it and before you write anything else.
 - Writing aids for expository prose should help you find valid expressions and other constructions that will correctly and stylistically express the facts and ideas you are trying to write. They should provide the linguistic information you need to decide how to write right.
 - To save you time, energy, and mistakes when you write expository prose, you should use a writing aid designed expressly for expository prose.
 - A writing aid designed expressly for expository prose should help you avoid invalid expressions you might use by accident; it should supply cautionary information about expressions you should avoid. Expressions that are not relevant to the fact or idea you are trying to express should be excluded from consideration.

Writing Right works because it automates the writing concepts and principles enunciated above.

Writing Right contains a writing knowledgebase that contains a large number of valid English expressions; it also includes entries for many of the most common writing mistakes people make. Entries contain information about language to help you decide which expressions to use or stay clear of when you are trying to find the right way to state a particular fact or idea. To make writing fast and easy, *Writing Right* automates the process of finding and displaying these entries.

Your computer or electronic device excels at storing vast amounts of information and handling it rapidly. *Writing Right* isn't perfect—it's not the pocket dictionary for prose writing described earlier. But *Writing Right* on your computer or micro-electronic device is the only automated writing aid we know that takes a practical step in that direction.

Who Benefits?

Writing Right is right for anyone who wants help with producing good, sound, clear, effective prose writing.

Are you:

- A business, scientific, or technical professional expected to write polished prose?
- Working to qualify for a new or better job?
- Worried about keeping the job you have?
- A first-time language learner in grammar or high school?
- A college undergrad needing writing remediation?
- A grad student majoring in science or engineering?
- An academic or professional scientist or engineer who publishes research papers or submits proposals or reports?
- A parent distressed about a child's lack of progress?
- A parent coaching a child?
- Facing SATs, GREs, or National Merits looming ahead?
- A student who wants to improve his or her grades?
- Struggling in a remedial English course?
- A recent arrival in the U.S. for whom English is a second language (ESL)?
- A high school dropout going for a GED?
- An adult embarrassed about your writing?
- A teacher or writer who does lots of editing?
- An English or teacher or writing instructor?



Writing Right is right for almost every level of writing skill and almost every reason to write well. The only prerequisite for using *Writing Right* is an ability to write basic English sentences. Try it and you'll soon wonder how you ever got along without it.

It's never too soon or too late to start improving your writing. No matter what your goals, experience, or skill level, *Writing Right* will help you write better, more effective English expository prose.

Writing Right is right for anyone who wants to avoid writing mistakes of almost every kind and to improve writing style:

- Adult writers—those with a reasonably good command of speaking and writing everyday English and who grasp the fundamentals of how to write a good English sentence. This roughly corresponds to the ability to speak and write at or above the high school level or, in some cases, at a level associated with one of the higher elementary school grades.

Such people can write well enough to get on in life and meet the challenges of a job, family, or friends but want to improve their use of English and boost the speed and quality of their writing performance. Perhaps they are embarrassed about their writing or want to qualify for a better job.

- Professionals in all walks of life—academic, business, technical, scientific and other professionals whose writing is on track but who want to maintain or achieve a higher degree of writing quality to be more effective in their jobs or to advance their careers.

These are people for whom conformance to accepted English usage, polished style, faster written production, and precision writing skills are hallmarks of success.

- First-time language learners—elementary and high school students still learning their writing ABCs and still perfecting their writing skills.

There's almost nothing that pleases English teachers more than handing out A's in English composition. There's almost nothing that pleases parents more than seeing those A's on report cards. Reports that sparkle because of good writing say much about the kind of student one is, no matter what the subject.

- Parents—give *Writing Right* to your child as you would a back-to-school item such as a backpack, textbook, composition tablet, 3-ring binder, or pencil. Make it a regular part of doing homework; it's that basic. If you're coaching a child, use it to improve your own writing so you can set an example; then show him how to use it for himself.

- The college-bound high-school student—juniors or seniors in high school and other college-bound students nearing graduation.

SATs, GREs, or National Merits probably lie in the future for such students. They can choose to hit the books and cram for tests at the last minute or they can take another road to success. They can learn to perfect their writing skills and polish their writing beginning in their freshman year.

- Advanced students—undergraduate and graduate college students.

Once in college, help with writing can be especially critical for anyone whose writing needed remediation when they entered. Students majoring in engineering or scientific disciplines may need help to write competently if their college preparation did not focus on the Liberal Arts.

- Remedial students—individuals struggling to catch up with the rest of the class and make a passing grade, high school dropouts going for a GED, and adults returning to school to obtain a high school degree after a long absence.

These are tough roads to trod. People who fit this description need all the help they can get. They need a no-nonsense approach to that helps them write well enough to pass their exams.



- Those learning English as a Second Language (ESL)—those who, for whatever reason, took up English late in life.

Simple writing tasks that native speakers and writers take for granted are often beyond the scope of the foreign-born. Even the foreign-born who speak English well enough to get along in everyday life may panic when something has to be committed to writing.

- Teachers—high school or college teachers.

Teachers may want to recommend a writing aid to their students as an adjunct to coursework. They may also want an aid that will assist them with editing student papers.

- Writing professionals—people who write or edit for a living.



Even writing professionals whose command of written English is good or excellent may not always be at the top of their writing form. They may have outstanding creative or explanatory skills but their language memory banks may occasionally fail them when it comes to elements of grammar or writing style. If there is room for systematic improvement or if there are incidental gaps or lapses, a writing aid can help them achieve consistently high levels of accuracy and quality while maintaining or increasing production volumes.

- Speakers—anyone who presents material before an audience.

Practically everybody who writes English speaks formal English at one time or another before an audience or in less-formal situations. By *formal speaking*, we mean ordinary, everyday speech aimed at communicating information effectively, not schmoozing, gossiping, slang, dialect, and the like.

Speaking formally places different demands on an individual than does writing formally; but many language rules apply equally to both. Elements of good writing also found in good speaking include vocabulary, usage, logic, grammar, style, and more.

What defines correct and effective speaking does not always define correct and effective writing, but much that applies to one applies to the other. An aid like *Writing Right* that is focused on improving writing contains a wealth of information that automatically applies to formal speaking. Commonsense is your guide to which ones apply.

Alternate Writing and Equipment Configurations

Writing Right is ebook software developed by ETAF to help you improve your writing. It runs on your desktop personal computer, laptop, portable computer, ebook reader, PDA or other hand-held portable electronic device, or other micro-mobile device—any type or brand that supports Adobe Reader.

There is only one *Writing Right* ebook software configuration and it works equally well with any Adobe-compatible equipment configuration you choose. However, several different equipment configurations are possible.

Here is a rundown of the different kinds of equipment configurations you can use to write with *Writing Right* and how to write with each of them:

- Writing with computer applications and *Writing Right* on your computer.
Open *Writing Right* in a window on your computer's monitor screen, side-by-side with the word processor or any other application you normally write with.
Start writing in your writing application window. When you have a writing problem, check with *Writing Right* by switching from your writing application window to your *Writing Right* window. When you have the writing information you need to solve your writing problem, return to your writing window.
Work back-and-forth between your writing application and *Writing Right* as you encounter and solve new writing problems. To switch, tab back-and-forth between your writing application window and your *Writing Right* window; or cascade, stack, or show your writing application window and your *Writing Right* windows side-by-side on your screen.
NOTE: Writing applications aren't limited to word processors. They can be any kind of application that allows you to enter text—word processors; document processors; typesetter programs; internet forms; editors for text, graphics, and video; software for development or debugging—you name it.
- Writing with electronic or micro-electronic devices (like a PDA); writing with manual devices (like a pen, pencil, or typewriter)
Run *Writing Right* on your computer or electronic device. Write with your writing application on your electronic or manual device.
NOTE: Electronic devices typically have very small screens. If you choose to run both *Writing Right* and your writing application on an electronic device, it's usually best (but not mandatory) to run *Writing Right* on one electronic device and your writing application on another.

Editing with Writing Right

You may want to check your work after you finish writing part or all of your document, or you may want to check someone else's work. Edit with *Writing Right* using the editing equipment of your choice. You must run the document you are editing on equipment that supports the file format in which it is written.

Writing Right On Paper

Print any *Writing Right* page or pages (printer required).

Reading Writing Right

Writing Right is loaded with information about how to write well. Because *Writing Right* is an ebook, you can read this information the way you would read a book.

When you're not writing or editing and have some free time, try reading entries in the *Writing Right* knowledgebase on your screen or print a version to read later. You may learn much that will stand you in good stead. The more you learn about right writing, the fewer writing problems you will need to resolve while you're writing.

Sections

Writing Right is designed to function as an ebook. The ebook is divided into sections (chapters) and subsections that are composed of pages.

As a result of this organization, *Writing Right* has the look and feel of a book or catalog. Pages can be *turned*, and sections or chapters can be opened or skipped.

One of the most important sections is the *knowledgebase*. The knowledgebase is the place where *Writing Right* keeps the writing information that helps you write right and with style.

Other sections help you understand how to use the knowledgebase and the *Writing Right* program; they also provide ancillary information, such as bibliographic references and links to the internet.

The Knowledgebase

The *knowledgebase* is a collection of valid and invalid English expressions. Each of these expressions is an English word, phrase, clause, sentence, idiom, or other kind of expression you might rightly or wrongly use to convey a fact or idea you are trying to express in your writing.

Many of the expressions in the knowledgebase follow the rules of English grammar and provide guidelines for how to write effective, well-styled formal expository English prose. Others show incorrect or bad English that might be used by mistake.

The knowledgebase also stores other kinds of to-the-point linguistic information you need to help you decide which expression to use and what to write. Expressions, rules, proper and improper usage, and other language facts are explained in an easy-to-understand, common sense, practical fashion, not in the complex, abstruse, and obscure manner you might expect from a grammar text book or style guide.

Entries

A *writing problem* is specific problem you are having with your writing that you want to solve in order to write right or write well. It might be a word whose definition you want to confirm, an awkward expression you want to smooth out, a redundancy you want to eliminate, or an ambiguous passage you want to clarify. It's a problem because you want help to make sure that you've got it right or to change it.

Each chapter in the knowledgebase is designed to solve a different kind of writing problem. When you search for a solution to a writing problem, you first decide on the nature of the problem; then you decide on the chapter or chapters that contain the entries you need to solve it.

Entries in the knowledgebase contain the information you need to solve writing problems. All the pages in a specific knowledgebase section contain expressions that solve the specific kind of writing problem the chapter is designed to solve.

Each entry in a specific knowledgebase section is a linguistic unit designed to treat a single English expression or to solve a specific instance of the kind of writing problem the chapter is designed for.

Entries contain the valid or invalid expressions and other kinds of language information that help you write right and with style. A specific entry contains just the linguistic information you need to detect and correct individual instances of the mistakes you might make with this expression or to improve the style of the specific words that are causing you a problem. You see only the information you need to solve your specific writing problem and nothing else.

Here are some of the different kinds of information you will find in different kinds of entries:

- A statement of the expression or writing problem.

- Alternate forms of the expression.
- Other expressions related to the expression.
- A simple explanation of why correct forms of an expression are valid and incorrect forms are invalid.
- Guidelines showing when an expression is right or wrong depending on how it's used.
- Sample correct and incorrect English sentences.
- Generalizations that help you apply an entry to a variety of writing situations.
- Applicable writing rules.
- Tips offering clarifying information, suggestions for remembering what you've learned, advice on the best places to use or avoid an expression, and more.
- Notes that offer guidelines and pointers on what to notice or watch out for when you write.

You locate the language information you need to solve a specific writing problem by locating the specific entries in the specific chapters that can solve your problem. As a result of this organization, entries in the knowledgebase can be directly read by a person as well as searched for by a computer.

Organizing *Writing Right* this way makes it easier for a writer to find all the entries that will help with the particular expression or writing problem at hand. Notice that a *Writing Right* entry is analogous to an entry in a dictionary but differs in several respects:

- One of the most important differences is that a *Writing Right* entry not only contains information about what you should write; it also contains information about writing mistakes and how to correct them.
- An entry in a dictionary, grammar manual, style guide, thesaurus, or other writing aid provides only one kind of language information. A *Writing Right* entry consolidates in one place all the different kinds of information you normally would get from these multiple sources.

Sections and Entries—Examples

Four knowledgebase sections are shown below to illustrate how the *Writing Right* knowledgebase looks to a writer. One entry is selected from each section and each entry is typical of the section it represents. (There are more than four sections, all told.)

The sections are:

Good Choice—When there are two or more optional words or expressions that might express the fact or idea you want to convey, entries in the *Good Choice* section help you decide which option is right for the situation at hand.

Stop Repeating Yourself—The section called *Stop Repeating Yourself* shows you how to avoid redundant expressions and when to use expressions that are not redundant even though they may seem to be.

Incorrect expressions—The section called *Incorrect Expressions*, found in the chapter called *Oops!*, contains expressions that are just plain bad English, but many writers insist on using them anyway.

General Writing Rules—The section called *General Writing Rules*, found in the chapter called *Writing with Style*, suggests writing practices that are likely to improve a prose writer's style.

The entries are:

Good Choice

amount, number

amount (noun) refers to an indefinite count; a quantity of things not measured as individual items.

They used a large *amount* of flour making cakes for the bake sale.

The *amount* of money in our bank account was not enough to cover our bills.

number (noun) refers to a specific count of items.

A *number* of cars were parked in their driveway.

The *number* of pennies we collected weighed three pounds.

Tip: Use *amount* when referring to a mass or substance like sand or air use; *number* when referring to individual items like people or houses.

Stop Repeating Yourself—Redundancies

add together

The word *together* is not needed because *add* means to put things together or to unite or join to increase the number or size of things.

INSTEAD OF:

To have enough money to buy a new CD, my sister and I had to *add* our allowances *together*.

WRITE:

To have enough money to buy a new CD, my sister and I had to *add* our allowances.

Oops!—Incorrect Expressions

alot

There is no such word or phrase as *alot* (one word) or *a lot* (two words); they are not in the dictionary.

Both of these expressions sometimes appear in informal English meaning a large amount. Avoid using either version.

INSTEAD OF:

I like ice cream *alot*.

WRITE:

I really like ice cream.

Tip: *Allot* is a legitimate English word that sounds the same as *alot* or *a lot*. *Allot* means to distribute proportionally. Even though it sounds the same, don't confuse the word *allot* with *alot* or *a lot*. Be careful to spell it correctly.

Style—General Writing Rules

Form plurals of acronyms by adding an s; do not use an apostrophe.

INSTEAD OF:

We bought three new IBM's for the office.

WRITE:

We bought three new IBMs for the office.

How to Write with Writing Right

The key to using *Writing Right* is finding the entry you need for the expression you are trying to correct or the writing problem you are trying to solve. Imagine that you're writing a prose piece with your word processor; perhaps it's a homework assignment, a business letter, a memo, a talk, a speech, or a report. A word, phrase, clause, sentence, idiom or other expression pops into your head and you're on the verge of setting it down in writing. Perhaps you've written it down and added a few additional phrases.

Suddenly a thought occurs to you. "Was that really what I wanted to say?" you wonder. "Did I say what I meant to say, or can what I wrote be misinterpreted? Is what I've just written good English?"

Now you're ready for a quick check with the *Writing Right* knowledgebase.

Finding the writing information you need in the knowledgebase is a snap because it is constructed in a way that anticipates the general and specific kinds of writing questions you might ask.

Here are some of the automatic tools *Writing Right* places at your disposal for finding entries:

- Automated FIND and SEARCH commands provide keyword searching. You swiftly search through any section to all find the expressions and linguistic information you need to make your writing decision. At the same time, you avoid finding expressions that won't be of use because they're irrelevant to your writing question.
- If you find more than one entry to look at during a search, Previous/Next links let you navigate back and forth between the entries you visited while searching.
- Bookmarks let you open and enter a section or subsection directly. They let you jump between sections and subsections.
- Sections that are alphabetically organized are divided by letters that are hyperlinks. Click a letter and jump directly to the subsection or entry you want.
- The table of contents is hot. Click on the name of a section or its page number to visit that page.
- The index is hot. Click on the page number of any entry in the index and jump to the entry.

- Hyperlinks take you back and forth between each knowledgebase section and a corresponding *What You'll Find* subsection which explains how to use it.

NOTE: If you already know how to use Adobe Reader, you already know how to find knowledgebase entries you want to see. If you don't, once you learn Adobe Reader, finding knowledgebase entries will soon become second nature to you.

Let's illustrate the process of finding information with a hypothetical example. We'll chose a simple one in order to keep this uncomplicated.

The English rules for when to use apostrophes to indicate possession or contraction can be confusing. For example:

- Apostrophes indicate possession in most English words—words like *school's* (the singular possessive of school) or *schools'* (the plural possessive of school).
- Apostrophes don't indicate possession in possessive pronouns like *theirs*.
- Apostrophes indicate contraction in words like *there's* (*there is*).

Forming the Question

The rules for when to use apostrophes are one of those grammar conventions many adults find confusing; they're dinosaur bugaboos left over from high school English classes that they just can't seem to shake.

When it comes to the word *it*, the going gets really tough. Is the possessive form *its* or *it's* or *its'*? Is the contraction *its* or *it's* or *its'*? Do all three of these words exist in the English language? Which of these words is good English and which bad? When or under what circumstances should one be used or avoided?

Finding the Answer

Suppose you want to convey the idea that something you're writing about is in the right place. You've chosen to write "its in the right place," but you want to be sure this is correct.

You've always had trouble keeping track of the difference between the possessive form of *it* (*its*) and the contraction (*it's*), which is short for *it is*. In high school, you were taught that the apostrophe is only used with *it* in one way—but you're not sure which way; you don't remember. Does the apostrophe only appear in the possessive form or in the contraction? You're wondering whether you should write "it's in the right place" instead of "its in the right place."

You know that if *Writing Right* holds the answer to your writing question, you'll find the linguistic information you need in the knowledgebase. You decide to search *Writing Right*, looking for entries for expressions that are similar or identical to the ones you're thinking of including in your piece—*its* or *it's*.

To answer this writing question and solve this writing problem, you decide to look up the word *it* in the knowledgebase. (Equally, you could decide to look for the expressions *it's* or *its'*.)

What search technique should you use?

Writing Right offers many alternative ways to find what you need in the knowledgebase. In this case, there are three choices worth considering:

- Look for the word *it* in the index. The index contains over 1,700 entries. There's a good chance that it is among them.

- Click the Index bookmark. The index opens.
- The index is organized by letters of the alphabet. Click the letter *I*, the first letter in the word *it*. The subsection marked *I* opens.
- Expand the index and scroll down its pages until you find that entries for *its* and *it's* are both located on page 93.
- Click the page number on either the *its* or the *it's* entry to jump to the entry on page 93 titled *its, it's*.
- Look for the word *it* in one of the knowledgebase sections or subsections. Deciding whether to use *its* or *it's* is a matter of making a good choice—of choosing one option over another. The *Writing Right* section titled *Good Choice* is designed to help you make this kind of decision.
 - Expand the Good Choice bookmark by clicking the plus sign next to the Good Choice bookmark section.
 - Scroll down the Good Choice bookmark entries until you find the entry titled *its, it's*.
 - Click the entry to open the page where that entry is located.
- Do a keyword search for the word *it* using FIND or SEARCH
 - FIND—Type *it* in the FIND box. The cursor will move to the first occurrence of the word *it* in *Writing Right*. Select FIND again and the cursor will move to the next occurrence, and so on.
Keep going until you find *its, it's*. If convenient, navigate back and forth between successive occurrences of the word *it* using PREVIOUS/NEXT commands.
 - SEARCH—Type *it* in the SEARCH box. SEARCH will locate all occurrences of *it* in *Writing Right*.

NOTE: *It* is a very common word. To avoid finding many occurrences of *it* that don't answer your questions, open the index or Good Choice and then select FIND or SEARCH. You can also FIND or SEARCH for the unique keyword *its, it's*.

The index only contains the names of knowledgebase entries and links to entries. Knowledgebase sections contain both entry names and entry contents (language information like facts, ideas, and expressions). FIND and SEARCH can be very useful for locating uncommon entry names like *its, it's* and uncommon words in entry contents like *irritate* or *navigate*.

What Happens Next?

In this case, you decide that your best bet is to use the index. You don't find *it* in the index, but you do find *its* and *it's*.

You click either *its* or *it's* in the index and you jump to the entry on page 93 titled *its, it's*. There you learn that *its* is the possessive form of *it* and *it's* is a contraction—the contraction you want.

The tip explains that the confusion between *its* and *it's* arises because many words that contain apostrophes are possessive forms, for example, *Tom's* book, the *schools'* students. In the case of *its/it's*, however, the possessive form, *its*, does not use an apostrophe; instead, the subject/verb combination, *it is*, is elided with an apostrophe to produce *it's*. The only way to be sure you are using the correct form is to read the phrase you are writing with the words *it is* instead of *its* or *it's*. If the phrase makes sense with *it is*, write *it's*; otherwise, write *its*.

This information and advice in this tip helps clear any brain clouds that may be left over from high school. The tip also has the benefit of generalizing this entry so that it applies to other cases where apostrophes are an issue. It isn't necessary that you master this information in order to solve the writing problem you are now working on, but it helps.

With the help of the tip and some simple examples, you're all but ready to conclude that you should write "it's in the right place." However, you're not done yet. The definition for *it's* points out that *it's* is a contraction. Contractions are only acceptable in informal speech or writing, not in formal prose.

You now have a judgment call to make. Is the prose piece you are writing aimed at a formal audience or meant to treat a formal subject? That's a decision only you can make.

(By the way, *its'* doesn't appear in *Good Choice* because *its'* is not a word.)

Other Writing Aids

By now you realize that *Writing Right* is not a grammar text book, a grammar course, or an orientation to the principles of good writing. It's not a grammar or spell checker. It's not crammed full of information you don't need in order to write. It's not a thick, dusty reference book full of complicated, hard-to-understand linguistic explanations that may or may not clear your linguistic brain clouds.

Neither is *Writing Right* an inspirational-style writer's guide or a writing course. It's down-to-earth; it's like nothing you may have experienced at the book store or in school. There's nothing to study, no theory, no teachers at the blackboard diagramming sentences, no pop quizzes.

But, with all these benefits, don't expect *Writing Right* to replace your traditional writing aids or to render them obsolescent. Most of the traditional reference works published by reputable companies are landmark linguistic achievements that make powerful contributions to our English language. They have the same vital role to play in helping writers write today as they have always had.



Writing Right is not intended to replace your traditional writing aids, so don't toss them out just yet. *Writing Right* is meant to work with them. Here are a few suggestions for making *Writing Right* synergic with your other writing aids:

- Make *Writing Right* your first line of defense for avoiding mistakes. It's fast, convenient, and focused.
- When you begin a writing session on your computer, open *Writing Right* and consider which of your other paper-based or software-based writing aids you may want to open later, if and when research is called for. Have them at hand.
- When you have a specific writing problem to solve, what you learn by looking into the *Writing Right* knowledgebase may help you decide whether you need to consult a specialized writing aid such as a dictionary, style guide, spell checker, or grammar text, and which one to consult.
- Work back and forth between *Writing Right* and your other writing aids as the need arises.

Something New and Different

Writing Right is a simple and economical addition to your library of traditional printed reference works, computerized reference works, or electronic writing aids. It will help you write better, more correct, more effective formal expository English prose. But it is unlike other writing aids you may have seen or used.

Writing Right is an innovation in personal writing aids, a new kind of electronic writing assistant aimed at helping you catch and correct all sorts of writing mistakes. Try it and soon you'll learn to depend on it.

Dictionaries, style guides, grammar texts, spelling dictionaries, thesauri, and other traditional, printed writing aids have been around for a long time. Software-based writing aids like spell checkers, grammar checkers, dictionaries, and encyclopedias are relatively new but are in widespread use. *Writing Right* is different from all of them.

- None of these other writing aids are aimed specifically at helping a writer avoid mistakes and write better expository prose; their focus lies elsewhere.
- They treat speaking, reading, and writing as if they were the same, yet they are actually different kinds of communication, each with its own rules.
- They break language help into pieces—a spell checker for spelling, a grammar text book for structure or usage or theory, a dictionary for word definitions, a style guide for style conventions.
- The language information they contain is often presented in a complicated manner that can be confusing and difficult to understand.
- For the most part they show how to use language correctly; they do not also present mistakes and show how to avoid them.

Writing Right takes a different approach. It combines the functions of several other types of writing aids into one knowledgebase that contains only the information needed to write right. It places emphasis where it belongs: on the writer and writing.

About Writing Better

ETAF knows that writers who use *Writing Right* care about their writing; they're motivated to become better writers.

Because of that, no matter:

- What writing tools you employ...
- What type of writing you do...
- Where you were born...
- What your writing skill...
- What your formal education...
- What your writing objectives...
- Where you seek the help you need to grow...

...ETAF wishes you good luck, best wishes, and good writing.

Learn more

This white paper has covered a great deal of ground, yet there's still more to know.

If you believe that *Writing Right* may be right for you and you want to explore further, this section contains links to resources that will help you make up your mind.

How to Obtain Your copy of Writing Right

To purchase a copy of *Writing Right* or to learn more about how *Writing Right* can help you improve your writing, visit the *Writing Right* Product Description page at ETAF's web site.



[Visit the Writing Right Product Description Page at ETAF's web site now](#)

The Writing Right Users Page

The *Writing Right* Users Page is the place at ETAF's web site dedicated to serving those who use *Writing Right* as their personal writing assistant. If you're a *Writing Right* user or are thinking about becoming one, the *Writing Right* Users Page is your page.

ETAF has created this page especially with you in mind. It's aimed at helping you help yourself become a better writer with the help of *Writing Right*. As a *Writing Right* owner and user, you will always have automatic access to it. Just click a link in your *Writing Right* ebook and the Users Page will open.

Writing Right and the *Writing Right* Users page at Electricika's web are synergistic; they work hand-in-hand to bring you the latest and the greatest, not only about *Writing Right* but about the world of writing and writers. They put you in touch with ETAF and with writers of all backgrounds and abilities.

The Users Page gives you links to other writing web sites and other sources of writing know-how. You can explore and exploit the features of The *Writing Right* Users Page while you write with *Writing Right* on your computer.

The *Writing Right* Users Page expands your writing horizons. You can go there whenever you seek writing help from other writers and from The Muses. The page keeps you in touch with new writing techniques and with events as they happen.

There are lots of other things happening at the *Writing Right* Users Page. It's time you visit and see for yourself—[Visit the Writing Right Users Page for a preview now](#)

Writing Right Users Discussion Group

The *Writing Right* Users Discussion Group is a forum at ETAF's web site. If you are a *Writing Right* user, you'll want to investigate this discussion group, see the discussions underway, and join in. [Visit the Writing Right Users Discussion Group forum now](#)



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