

Business Ethics

Writing Well

1. Have a point and make it by means of the best word. Weed out the jargon.
2. Look for *all* fancy wordings and get rid of them.
3. Make sure you know not only the meaning but also the *bearing* of the words you use.
4. Consult your second thoughts about slang, euphemisms, and “what qeverybody says,” so as to make your dictionary entirely your own choice.
5. Respect the integrity of set phrases, partitives, clichés, and complex modifiers.
6. Ideas connected in reality require words similarly linked, by nearness or by suitable linking words.
7. For a plain style, avoid everything that can be called roundabout in idea, in linking, or in expression.
8. Agreement is as pleasant in prose as it is in personal relations, and no more difficult to work for.
9. Cling to your meaning. The tense or mood of a verb in a linked air can destroy it.
10. Don’t borrow plumes.
11. To be plain and straightforward, resist equally the appeal of old finery and the temptation of smart novelties.
12. The mark of a plain tone is combined lucidity and force.
13. Trifles matter in two ways: magnified, they lead to pedantry; overlooked, they generate nonsense.
14. Make fewer words do more work by proper balance, matching parts, and tight construction.
15. Worship no images and question the validity of all.
16. In each portion of the work, begin from a point clear to you and the reader and move forward without wobble or meander.
17. The writing of a sentence is finished only when the order of the words cannot be changed without damage to the thought or its visibility.
18. In whatever paragraphs or essays you write, verify the sequence of ideas and take out or transpose everything that interrupts the march of thought and feeling.
19. Read and revise, reread and revise, keep reading and revising until your text seems adequate to your thought.

Jacques Barzun

Simple and direct: a rhetoric for writers

NY: Harper & Row, 1976.

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