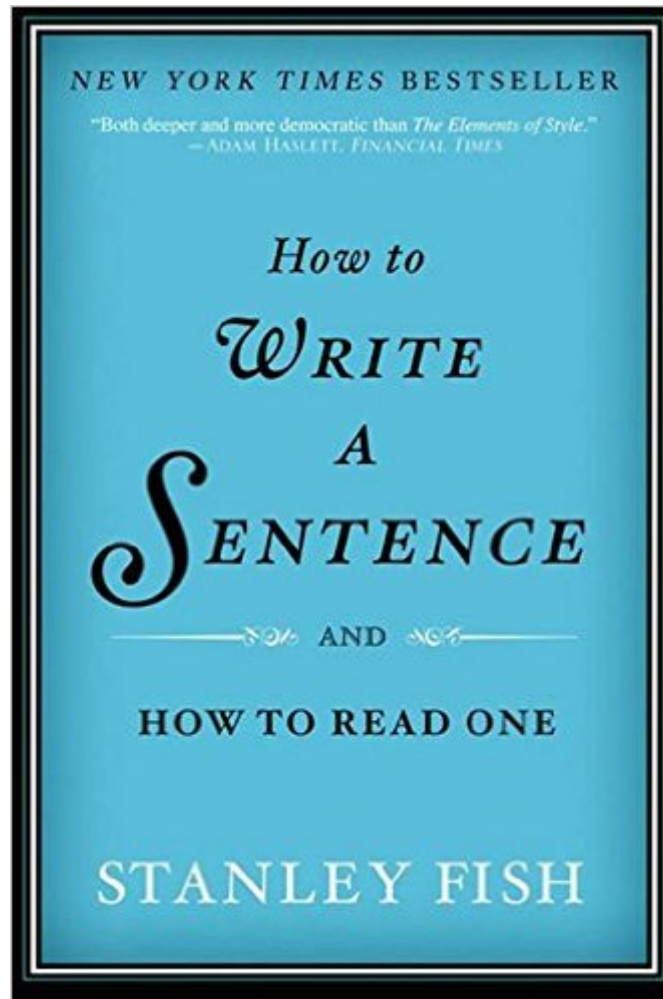


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# How To Write A Sentence: And How To Read One



## Synopsis

New York TimesÂ Bestsellerâ œBoth deeper and more democratic thanÂ The Elements of Styleâ •  
â “ Adam Haslett, Financial Timesâ œA guided tour through some of the most beautiful, arresting  
sentences in the English language.â • â “Â Slateâ œLike a long periodic sentence, this book  
rumbles along, gathers steam, shifts gears, and packs a wallop.â •Â â ”Roy Blount Jr. In this  
entertaining and erudite New York Times bestseller, beloved professor Stanley Fish offers both  
sentence craft and sentence pleasure. Drawing on a wide range ofÂ great writers, from Philip Roth  
to Antonin Scalia to Jane Austen,Â How to Write a SentenceÂ is much more than a writing  
manualâ ”it is a spirited love letter to the written word, and a key to understanding how great writing  
works.Â

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Author Annie Dillard ("The Writing Life," 1989) was asked by a student, "Do you think I could be a  
writer?" Dillard's response: "Do you like sentences?" According to Stanley Fish, author of "How to  
Write a Sentence," it's as important for writers to genuinely like sentences as it is for great painters  
to like paint. For those who enjoy an effective sentence and all that it involves, this short (160 page)  
book is insightful, interesting and entertaining. For those who consider reading or writing a chore,  
perhaps this book can help one's interest level and motivation regarding sentences, though the  
author's intended audience is clearly those with a genuine interest in writing. Fish would seem to be  
well qualified to write, having taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Johns Hopkins

University, Duke University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. However, as any student who has suffered with a highly qualified--yet thoroughly boring--professor knows, a significant part of the education/communication process involves instilling motivation. That's where Fish shines. If it might seem that a whole book on sentences has to be boring, Stanley Fish quickly overcomes this perception. His book is divided into 10 chapters: (1) Why Sentences?; (2) Why You Won't Find the Answer in Strunk and White [Strunk and White authored the classic, "The Elements of Style"]; (3) It's Not the Thought That Counts [nothing like a little provocation to get us interested]; (4) What Is a Good Sentence?; (5) The Subordinating Style; (6) The Additive Style; (7) The Satiric Style: The Return of Content; (8) First Sentences; (9) Last Sentences; and (10) Sentences That Are About Themselves (Aren't They All?).

What I like about this book, what I really like, is how Stanley Fish cares about good writing. Fish's love for sentences shines from the first page to the last; it could not be more pronounced. HOW TO WRITE A SENTENCE starts well enough, as Fish relays how a great piece of writing finds itself at the mercy of great sentences. In the first four chapters, the reader learns a few basic (somewhat technical) parts of a sentence, and how these little parts -- often taken for granted by inexperienced readers -- become building blocks to masterpieces (Stein, Hemingway, Fitzgerald). The next three chapters examine three different "styles" of sentences. The styles are Subordinating, Additive, Satiric, names chosen arbitrarily by Fish himself. These chapters give examples of each style from famous writers. The book rounds out with a chapter on "first sentences" (from famous books) and another on "last sentences." In my opinion, the book contains one serious flaw. Fish believes that good writing starts with sentence templates and ends when the writer fills in the templates with content. Fish backs his thesis with example after example of "great" sentences that adhere to his templates. Fish claims that there are a finite number of templates that can be filled with an infinite combination of words, the content. As an exercise, Fish asks the reader to "copy" the structure of simple sentences (John ate meat -- subject, verb, object) and then to fill in the template with more complex words and phrases, until the student's sentence becomes 100 words or more. In this way, Fish claims, the student may learn the craft of writing. Such advice is boloney. Content drives writing.

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