

## Tools Not Rules

Now I don't want you to think of each tactic I give you as a rule that you need to follow all of the time. Think of them as tools, tools that give you the maximum choice over how you communicate through your writing. All of these principles must be weighed in the context, of course, of what you're writing. And above all, they're tools that allow you to write in a conscious way, rather than defaulting to old habits that don't serve you well.

Now most of the time these tools will serve you brilliantly, and you would do well to use them as often as possible, but there will be occasions when you wouldn't, for very good reasons. Here's an example. In the simplicity section, I may give you a tactic like, use plain language to express your ideas rather than official sounding words and phrases.

Now that's a great tactic. It makes your writing more punchy and more easily comprehensible to others. But does it mean that you should never use official sounding words at all in your writing. Well, no. There may be times when official language is necessary or appropriate. Say you're sending out an invite to a funeral. You wouldn't say, "Martin Braithwaite has died. Please come over for a sit down and a brief sendoff." You need to be more diplomatic than that, right? You'd probably say something more along the lines of, "It is with great sadness, we regret to inform you of the passing away of Martin Braithwaite."

Still, in most contexts, your writing will be more engaging when written in plain language than when it's littered with heavy and formal words. So just don't be dogmatic with these tactics is all I'm trying to say. Most of the time, every principle will create a certain refinement in your writing, but please don't view them as eternal truths.

Another thing to look for is a clash of principles or tactics, which can often happen. One tactic to boost elegance, for instance, may clash with another tactic that's used to enhance the clarity of your writing. In that case, you have to choose between the two conflicting principles. You can weigh them up and decide which one is more important to you in that particular case.

In the elegant section, for example, I tell you to avoid repeating the same word in a sentence because that can be inelegant. But you may find that however much you try to eliminate the duplicated word, you can't do. So without making your point less clear somehow. So the principles of elegance and clarity clash in that case.

And in such cases, you are justified in sacrificing some elegance for some clarity if clarity is the most important thing to you in that instance. But you won't just be defaulting to unconscious choices that don't serve you best. And that will be the difference after you learn these principles. So there will occasionally be exceptions, and there will be some grey areas with these principles. You must understand however that being in this position of weighing principles is preferable to that of the amateur writer who doesn't even know what principles they should be considering.