

## I.

Darcy said that he had been spoiled as a child, having been brought up to believe that there was nothing which he could not get either by his rank or by his money.

## II.

Darcy said that he had been raised, and spoiled as a child, to believe that there was nothing which he could not get, either by his rank, or his money.

In this sentence as originally written, "spoiled as a child" is so placed as to obscure the meaning. We may properly speak of "raising" wheat for the market, but not of raising persons to believe.

*In the CHOICE, in the NUMBER, and in the ORDER of words in a sentence, aim at CLEARNESS.*

## Chapter IV.

## FORCE

## SECTION I.

## IMPORTANCE OF FORCE

A WRITER who wishes not only to be understood by his readers, but also to produce an impression upon them, will not content himself with observing the rules of good use, or with making his meaning clear. He will (1) choose the word that drives home his meaning, will (2) omit every clause, word, or syllable that does not help to communicate his meaning, and will (3) so frame every sentence as to throw the emphasis upon what is really emphatic and thus to fix attention upon the main point. Sometimes his purpose may be furthered by a word that suggests an idea rather than by one that states it with precision, by a compact expression rather than by one that develops the thought at length, or by a form of sentence that is a little unusual rather than by one that is more readily understood because familiar, but that is on that very account less impressive.

These things ordinary writers may do, in order to give force to their work; but they have no right to take liberties with the language, as some men of genius have done,—Pope, Carlyle, and Browning, for example. A young writer should never forget that his first duty is to follow good use, and his second to be clear; and he should never sacrifice either correctness or clearness to force of expression. To an intelligent reader nothing is more offensive than feeble or obscure thought masquerading in strong language,—the ass in the lion's skin.



On the other hand, it is true that the most forcible word, though not the most exact, may be the clearest, because it stimulates the attention of the reader and thus enables him to get at the meaning at once. Even a word which taken by itself is less clear than another may in its context be clearer.

When, as often happens, two sentences are equally clear, but one is more forcible than the other, — either because the words used are more specific, or because they are fewer, or because they are arranged in a more effective order, — a writer who wishes to create or to keep up an interest in what he says will choose the more forcible form of expression. This rule is, however, not free from exceptions; and it must sometimes give way to considerations (to be discussed later) connected with the structure of the paragraph of which the sentence forms a part.

## SECTION II.

### FORCE AS AFFECTED BY CHOICE OF WORDS

We have seen that, as a rule, a writer who wishes to be forcible will prefer short to long words, specific and concrete words to general and abstract ones, words that flash an idea on the mind to those that communicate it slowly.<sup>1</sup>

He will also be careful to connect the several parts of each sentence in such a manner as to make that which is subordinate in thought subordinate in form, and that which is prominent in thought prominent in form.

One means of attaining this end is through a wise choice of words, and especially of those that serve as connectives.

**Weak Use of And.** — “And” is frequently, and other conjunctions are sometimes, so used as to weaken a sentence.

<sup>1</sup> See pages 174–196.

### I.

Wishing Daniel to become a minister, his father sent him to an academy.

### II.

His father felt that he would like for Daniel to become a minister and sent him to an academy.

The writer of the sentence under II., by making the two clauses co-ordinate, obscures the real relation between them. The offence against clearness is, however, much less serious than that against force. The main fact of the sentence is that Daniel's father “sent him to an academy.” In order to emphasize this fact, prominence must be given to the clause in which it is mentioned.

### I.

While taking a walk late yesterday afternoon, I felt, for some reason, extremely low-spirited.

### II.

I took a walk late yesterday afternoon and felt for some reason extremely low-spirited.

In this sentence as originally written, “and” connects “I took a walk” with “I felt low-spirited,” as if the two facts were of equal importance. The first fact is really subordinate to the second.

Other examples are —

### I.

Having a couple of leisure hours the other day, I devoted them to Keats's “Eve of St. Agnes.”

Turning her back upon him, she began a conversation with Mark Roberts.

Harnessing his horse with his own hands, he took me through the town and township, and introduced me to the prominent Republicans.

### II.

The other day I had a couple of hours' leisure and devoted them to Keats's “Eve of St. Agnes.”

She had turned her back upon him, and began a conversation with Mark Roberts.

He harnessed his horse with his own hands and then took me through the town and township introducing me to the prominent Republicans.



In the last sentence as originally written, the least important of the three facts spoken of, — the fact that “he harnessed his horse with his own hands,” — is made as prominent as the fact that “he took me through the town,” and much more prominent than the most important of the three, the fact of his “introducing me to the prominent Republicans.”

Other examples are —

## I.

Maddened by the cut he had received, Hero threw himself with a terrific growl on the buzzing saw, as if he meant to hug it.

Driven almost to despair by the sale of her library, Romola started to leave Tito.

Frightened at my novel-reading propensities, I resolved not to look into a novel for a year.

Having succeeded in obtaining the living which Mr. Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, had offered him, the Rev. Mr. Collins was full of gratitude to his benefactress and admiration of her.

The weak construction with “and” is the most common form of a common fault, but it is not the only form.

## I.

Compelled by necessity, he allowed himself to be enrolled as a guardsman, — the very thing he had said he would not do.

In this sentence as originally written “but” is misused, as “and” was in the preceding examples.

<sup>1</sup> See page 214.

## II.

The cut he received angered him and with a terrific growl Hero threw himself upon the buzzing saw, as if to hug it.

Romola was driven almost to despair by the sale of her library, and started to leave Tito.

I was frightened at my novel-reading propensities and I resolved not to look into a novel for a year.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Collins had succeeded in obtaining the living which Mr. Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, had offered to her rector, and so the Rev. Mr. Collins was filled with gratitude to and admiration of his benefactress.

## II.

He was enrolled as a guard, the very thing he said he would not do, but now necessity compelled him.

## I.

As I was hurrying down School Street, an excited crowd attracted my attention.

## II.

I was hurrying down School Street when an excited crowd attracted my attention.

This sentence as originally written lays too much stress on the fact that “I was hurrying down School Street,” and not enough on the more important fact mentioned in the second clause.

**Dangling Participles.** — Weak writers often misuse participial phrases.

## I.

Turning down the shawl, she disclosed a baby's face.

## II.

She turned the shawl down revealing a baby's face.

In this sentence as originally written, “revealing a baby's face” hangs loose in the sentence. “Revealing” is — to borrow an apt expression — a “dangling participle.”

Other examples are —

## I.

The hero is a Scottish youth who has come to France to seek his fortune.

## II.

The hero is a Scottish youth, having come to France to seek his fortune.

On this land Elizabeth founded a town which she at first called Calumet, an Indian name, and afterwards Taunton.

On this land Elizabeth founded a town, calling it at first by the Indian name Calumet, and changing that name later to Taunton.<sup>1</sup>

**Active or Passive.** — It is sometimes a question whether to put the principal verb of a sentence in the active or the passive voice.

## I.

Now one could see that change which the features of a wood undergo at the ingress of the winter months.

## II.

Now could be beheld that change which the features of a wood undergo at the ingress of the winter months.

<sup>1</sup> See page 217.



## I.

This exhibition brought him before the public.

The husband of the deceased and her two sons survive her.

If the Corporation of Carlingford had not done all that they could have done to show their respect, they would have been sorry.

In these examples, the change from the passive to the active voice gives life to the sentence.

## I.

The newspapers will say that congratulations on your engagement are showering upon you.

"Showering" is more forcible than "being showered."  
Other examples are —

## I.

A fight is making against it.

A great many new houses are building in Newtown at present.

Accounts of what was going on kept coming in.

Passive forms like those given under II. have recently — perhaps within a century — come into common use. They have been stigmatized as bad English; but they are to be found in the works of good authors, and they are sometimes conducive to clearness. When, however, as in the examples given above, active forms can be used without

## II.

By this exhibition he was placed before the public.

The deceased is survived by her husband and two sons.

If anything more could have been done to show their respect which was not done, the corporation of Carlingford would have been sorry for it.

## II.

The newspapers will say that congratulations on your engagement are being showered upon you.

## II.

There is a fight being made against it.

A great many new houses are being built in Newtown just at present.

Accounts of what was being done kept coming in.

creating obscurity, they are preferable to passive forms because more forcible and less clumsy.

I am concerned to find myself obliged, at the opening of this Parliament, to acquaint you that a dangerous conspiracy has been for some time formed, and is still carrying on, against my person and government, in favour of a Popish pretender. — *From a Speech by GEORGE III.*

Tea was carrying round, and Mr. Weston, having said all that he wanted, soon took the opportunity of walking away. — JANE AUSTEN.

The sun . . . had passed his meridian by many hours, the service was performing in the choir, and a few persons entering by the door into that part of the Abbey Church which is so well known by the name of Poets' Corner, proceeded through the unseemly stockade which the chapter have erected, and took their seats. — LORD BEACONSFIELD.

Now, as it happened, at his sister's house  
— Duchess herself — indeed the very spouse  
Of the king's uncle, — while the deed of gift  
Whereby our duke should cut his rights adrift  
Was drawing, getting ripe to sign and seal —  
What does the frozen heart but uncongeal  
And, shaming his transcendent kin and kith,  
Whom do the duke's eyes make acquaintance with?

BROWNING.

"Carrying on," "carrying round," "performing," and "drawing," as used in these examples, though more forcible than "being carried on," etc., are now antiquated; but similar expressions — *e. g.*, "Money is coming in," "A flirtation is going on," "Tea is going round," "The book is still selling," "Violins were playing," "A very good business is doing now" — are still in good use.

## I.

I am now being tutored (or, working under a tutor) for my examinations.

## II.

I am tutoring now for my examinations.



In this sentence as originally written, "tutoring" is objectionable, not only because it is a piece of college slang, but also because it is ambiguous. The boy who says that he is "tutoring" is usually the boy who most needs to be tutored. "Being tutored," on the other hand, is clumsy.

## SECTION III.

## FORCE AS AFFECTED BY NUMBER OF WORDS

**Too Many Words.**—As has already been remarked, every word that does not help a reader to get at the meaning of a sentence hinders him by wasting his time and his strength. Wordiness is, then, indirectly an offence against clearness; but it is a still more serious offence against force. It weakens even more than it obscures. A style that is diffuse cannot have force.

## I.

On the other hand, we must admit his sanity.

The property remains intact.

He was a bright, sober, manly little fellow, and a universal favorite (or, a favorite with us all.)

We will hear him to the end (or, him out).

We enjoy the story until we come to the sad *dénouement*.

To permit two words to retain the same meaning is a waste.

The debate was not so unprofitable as such discussion generally is.

## II.

But, on the other hand, we must admit his sanity.

The property remains intact and uninjured.

He was a bright, sober, manly little fellow and a universal favorite with us all.

We will hear him out to the end.

We enjoy the story until we come to the sad denouement in the end.

To permit two words to retain precisely the same signification is a waste that cannot be afforded.

The debate was not so unprofitable as most of such discussion generally is.

## I.

To-night nobody was there.

Meantime, the horses had arrived at the hotel.

A shudder passed over his face.

It is only a step from a sincere man to a boor.

A bee stung his arm.

A conversation between Anna and Benjamin made them lifelong friends.

Jessica, although a Jewess, believed in Christianity.

He will go through the world doing whatever lies at hand.

This is a strong book, even apart from its literary excellence.

Only two or three rooms were habitable, and these were very poorly furnished.

In some courses of study, examinations are, I think, a necessary evil.

It seems to me that the study which is most agreeable to the student will be most beneficial to his mind.

Had we read the short essay before writing the long one, we should have known better how to go to work on the long one.

## II.

To-night there was nobody there.

In the meantime the horses had arrived at the hotel.

A sort of shudder passed over his face.

There is only the shortest sort of a step between a sincere man and a boor.

A bee stung him upon his arm.

A conversation which took place between Anna & Benjamin made them lifelong friends.

Jessica, although she was a Jewess, yet she believed in Christianity.

He will go through the world doing whatever lies at his hand to be done.

This is a strong book, even apart from whatever literary excellence it may possess.

There were but two or three rooms that were habitable and these were very poorly furnished.<sup>1</sup>

As for examinations I think in some courses they are a necessary evil.

It seems to me that no study can be so beneficial to the mind as the one which is the most agreeable to the student.

We did not, however, read the short essay before writing the long one; but had we done this I think we should have been wiser, as we should have known precisely how to go to work.

<sup>1</sup> See page 223.



## I.

Boys who begin life by hiring other men to do their thinking might as well forego the expense of an education.

However dull an anecdote may be, it is sure to succeed if it has a good point.

No doubt Darcy's long silence upon that subject came from his pride.

Darcy's peculiar characteristic prevented him from appreciating Elizabeth's worth.

After some man — Darwin, for instance — (or, After some man like Darwin) has made a great discovery, it always turns out that other leading men of science were on the verge of finding the same truth.

The effort of explaining why Princeton did not score made me so slow in eating my breakfast<sup>1</sup> (or, kept me at my breakfast so long) that it was quite half-past nine when I rose from the table.

In my room last night, we discussed the question whether when Matthew Arnold called a class that he despised "average men" he misused the word "average."

## II.

If boys start out in life by hiring other men to do their thinking for them, they might as well give up the expense of an education.

An anecdote may be as dull as you please and yet, if you have a good point to it, it is sure to succeed.

There can be no doubt that the reason for Darcy's long silence upon that subject came from his own pride.

Darcy was surrounded by his peculiar characteristic which prevented him from forming other than a poor estimate of Elizabeth's worth.

After some man like Darwin, for instance, has made a great discovery, it is always the case that many of the other leading scientists have been on the verge of finding the same truth, but without finding it.

The effort of explaining why Princeton did not score, so delayed the rapidity of my execution in regard to the breakfast<sup>1</sup> that it was fully half-past nine when I arose from the table.

In my room last night we discussed the question as to whether or no Matthew Arnold when he applied to a class of men that he looked on with contempt the name "average men" misused a good word of the English language.

<sup>1</sup> See pages 176-180.

## I.

Darcy has never in his life done anything without first carefully weighing it in his mind.

Miss Austen begins the book by showing that Catherine, unlike the pattern heroine, is neither enchantingly beautiful, nor captivating, nor insipidly sentimental.

In New York I feel an overpowering sense of my insignificance; in Philadelphia I feel as if I owned the place.

## II.

Darcy is a man, who has never in his life done anything, without previously having weighed it carefully in his own mind first.

Miss Austen commences the book by showing how unlike the pattern heroine Catherine is, — that she is not so enchantingly beautiful, or captivating, nor insipidly sentimental, nor has she any of the characteristics of the ordinary heroine.

In New York I feel a shocking, overpowering sense of my own utter littleness and insignificance. In Philadelphia I feel a patronizing sense of superiority as if I owned the place.

A glance at these examples will show what various forms redundancy takes, and how much is gained in space, as well as in force, by the excision of useless words. Of all the faults of weak writers, none is more common or more serious than the fault of redundancy. Of all the merits of strong writers, none is more conspicuous than the merit of making every word tell, — a merit which Daniel Webster, whose style is a model of force, secured, it is said, by striking out of his writings every syllable that could possibly be spared.

## SECTION IV.

## FORCE AS AFFECTED BY ORDER.

To secure force in a sentence, it is necessary not only to choose the strongest words and to be as concise as is consistent with clearness, but also to arrange words, phrases,