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# REFERENCES: LESSONS IN WRITING

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*"Display of superior knowledge is as great a vulgarity as display of superior wealth - greater indeed, inasmuch as knowledge should tend more definitely than wealth towards discretion and good manners."*

— Fowler on 'French Words'

## 1. SUMMARY

I list below a few essential references for writing: dictionaries, thesauri, and usage guides. I also mention a (biased) selection of well-written books and papers.

## 2. DICTIONARIES

1. *The Oxford English Dictionary* ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)): The ultimate, authoritative source. Can be intimidating; the historical ordering of definitions and examples can hinder rapid lookup. Nevertheless, for remote meanings and fine points it is indisputable.
2. *The American Heritage Dictionary*: A large dictionary, with good and simple definitions. Perhaps too bulky for daily use.
3. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*: good for daily use.
4. *Concise Oxford English*: A basic dictionary, good for quick lookup, can be inadequate.
5. [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) - a good online source.

Other dictionaries are mentioned in Appendix A.

### BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES

1. *Duden-Oxford*: Bilingual English-German dictionary. A favorite of mine, owing to its excellent choice of examples to illustrate usage.

## 3. THESAURI

Most major dictionary publishers also publish thesauruses. For ordinary day-to-day usage, I find [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com) to be sufficient.

## 4. WRITING GUIDES

### 4.1. STYLE AND USAGE GUIDES

1. *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage* (Revised, 3rd Edition) by R. W. Burchfield (1998). A pleasure to read, but perhaps frequently too detailed for the average scientist. But if you love the English language, you will enjoy (and learn from) this book.
2. *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and E. B. White. Too well-known for me to extol here. Cogent, concise, crisp—indispensable. Consult it regularly, and re-read it every few months.

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3. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* by J. M. Williams. Though dense, and perchance occasionally self-contradictory, this book delivers solid principles that teach how to write clearly, and emphatically.

If you do not have immediate access to this book, you could begin by reading (accessible via the Internet) *The Science of Scientific Writing* by G. D. Gopen and J. A. Swan. The fundamental thesis of the paper is: Writing to meet the reader's expectation.

#### 4.2. PUNCTUATION, TYPESETTING, TEDIUM

1. *The Chicago Manual of Style*: This tome has long been the definitive source of the nitty-gritty of book writing and publishing. It contains daunting coverage of punctuation—not for the feeble hearted.
2. *Mind the Stop*: A witty guide to all things punctuation.

#### 4.3. SCIENTIFIC WRITING GUIDES

1. *Handbook of Writing for the Mathematical Sciences* by N. J. Higham. This handbook is a detailed guide to writing itself; highly recommended.
2. *A Primer of Mathematical Writing* by S. G. Kranz contains some general useful advice.

COMMENT: The reader might also benefit from advice on mathematical typesetting offered by Knuth in *The T<sub>E</sub>Xbook*. The book might seem daunting to those addicted to  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , and many of the difficulties of mathematical typesetting are already handled either by  $\text{\LaTeX}$  or by the `amsmath` package. Nevertheless, the reader will definitely benefit from Knuth's insights into the T<sub>E</sub>X system as well as mathematical typesetting.

### 5. BOOKS AND PAPERS

I have listed below some well-written scientific books and papers.

———— THE END ————

#### A. ADDITIONAL SOURCES

In this appendix I have smashed together a list of more guides, manuals, and their ilk; I excluded these references from the main list to avoid overwhelming (and thereby losing) the reader. Higham provides a much more detailed guide, and I recommend that you have a look!

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