

# Writing Classic Prose

# The Principles of Style

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*Why?*      The Motive

*Where?*      The Scene

*Who?*      The Roles

*How?*      The Method

# Classic Style

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*Why?* The Motive is Truth

*Where?* The Scene is a Conversation

*Who?* The Roles are an *equal* Reader and Writer

*How?* The Method is Direct Presentation  
Clear and Simple

# Classic Style

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Madame de Chevreuse had sparkling intelligence, ambition, and beauty in plenty; she was flirtatious, lively, bold, enterprising; she used all her charms to push her projects to success, and she almost always brought disaster to those she encountered on her way.

— François de La Rochefoucauld, *Mémoires*

# Practical Style

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*Why?*      The Motive is the Job or Problem

*Where?*      The Scene is a Workplace

*Who?*      The Roles are Boss and Worker

*How?*      The Method is Report or Memo  
                 Predictable and Easy to Skim

# Practical Style

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We found that the Department of Energy collects no data on how other Federal offices allocate energy resources to the states. Because the Department needs these data to decide how to redirect resources when conditions change, we recommend that the Secretary of Energy establish a system for gathering such information on a regular basis.

# School Style

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<i>Why?</i>	The Motive is Fear
<i>Where?</i>	The Scene is a Classroom
<i>Who?</i>	The Roles are Teacher and Student
<i>How?</i>	The Method is Protection Pad and Hedge

# School Style

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Let us first examine part of what is, in my opinion, the correct interpretation of the Parable of the Vineyard. In the exegesis of any passage of the Bible, it is fundamental that one must understand the context of the passage as well as the content.

The context in which the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard is found most likely indicates that the subject being dealt with is the different degrees of eternal reward in heaven.



# Classical Origins

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Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (410 BC)

Plato, *Apology* (399 BC)

Euclid, *Elements of Geometry* (300 BC)

# French Enlightenment

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René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method* (1637)

Blaise Pascal, *Provincial Letters* (1656)

François de La Rochefoucauld, *Mémoires* (1662)

# American Classic Prose

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Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (1776)

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883)

A. J. Liebling, *The New Yorker* (1935–1963)

# *The Importance of Being Earnest*

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The truth is rarely plain, and never simple. — Oscar Wilde

# *Life on the Mississippi*

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When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient. When a circus came and went, it left us all burning to become clowns; the first negro minstrel show that came to our section left us all suffering to try that kind of life; now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn; but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained. — Mark Twain

# *Audubon Field Guide*

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## *Tufted Titmouse*

Titmice are social birds and, especially in winter, join with small mixed flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, creepers, and the smaller woodpeckers. Although a frequent visitor at feeders, it is not as tame or confiding as the chickadees. It often clings to the bark of trees and turns upside down to pick spiders and insects from the underside of a twig or leaf. The “Black-crested Titmouse” of Texas was until recently considered a separate species.

# *Audubon Field Guide*

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## *Northern Shrike*

Unusual among songbirds, shrikes prey on small birds and rodents, catching them with the bill and sometimes impaling them on thorns or barbed wire for storage. Like other northern birds that depend on rodent populations, the Northern Shrike movements are cyclical, becoming more abundant in the South when northern rodent populations are low. At times they hunt from an open perch, where they sit motionless until prey appears; at other times they hover in the air ready to pounce on anything that moves.

The End