Chapter 1
Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*, U. Chicago Press, 1990.

1. "Telling me to 'Be clear' is like telling me to 'Hit the ball squarely.' I know that. What I don't know is how to do it."

2. "A Very Short History of Bad Writing." After the Norman Conquest in 1066, scholars and leaders wrote in Latin and Norman French. After a few centuries, more writers began to use English again in state and commercial affairs. But since the native vocabulary for these matters had was not available, words needed to be borrowed from Latin and French. This borrowing continued in the Renaissance, when many texts were translated from Latin and Greek. The result was a two-tiered vocabulary: one for daily life, and another for special applications.

The legacy of this is both good and bad. English is very flexible – *bravery, mettle, valor, courage* from French; *tenacity, fortitude* from Latin; and English, *fearlessness, guts*. But the language of political, cultural, scientific, and economic affairs is based on a different vocabulary from that learned in the first five or ten years of life.

3. But there is more. "As societies become intellectually mature…their writers seem increasingly to replace specific verbs with abstract nouns." Example:

> 1a. The Committee **proposal** would provide for biogenetic industry **certification** of the **safety** to human health for new substances requested for **exemption** from Federal rules.
>
> 1b. The Committee **proposes** that when the biogenetic industry **requests** the Agency to **exempt** new substances from Federal rules, the industry will **certify** that the substances are **safe**.

"Once a writer expresses actions in nouns, she can then eliminate whatever (usually concrete) agents perform those actions along with those whom the actions effect:

> 1c. The proposal would provide for certification of the safety of new substances in requests for exemption.

4. "Some of us feel compelled to use pretentious language to make ideas that we think are too simple seem more impressive." (Micheal Crichton).

"As a novice in a field reads its professional prose, he will predictably try to imitate those features of style that seem most prominently to bespeak membership, professional authority."