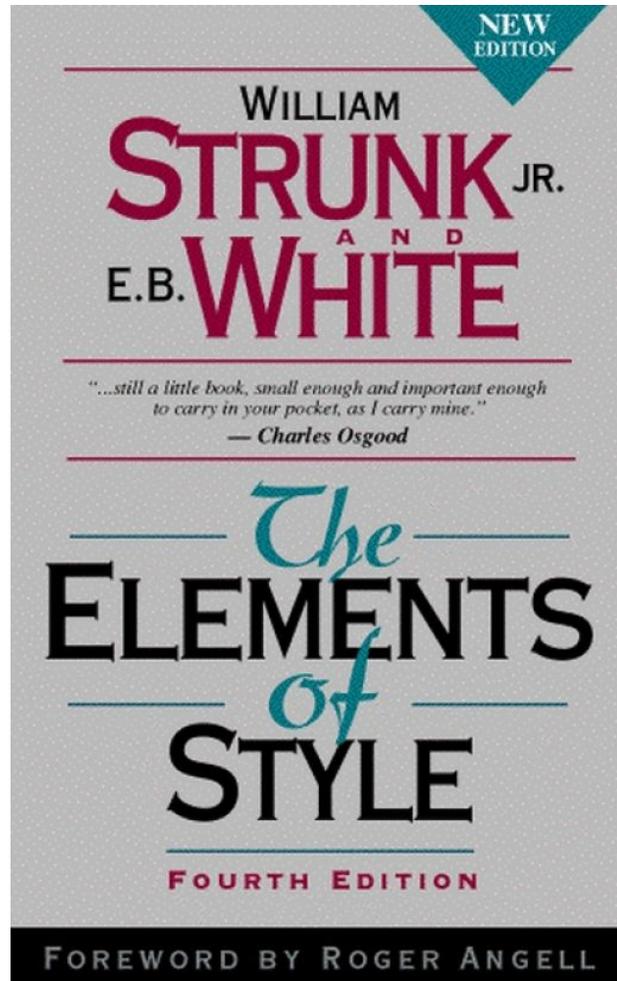


The History of *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*

By Noah Kerr



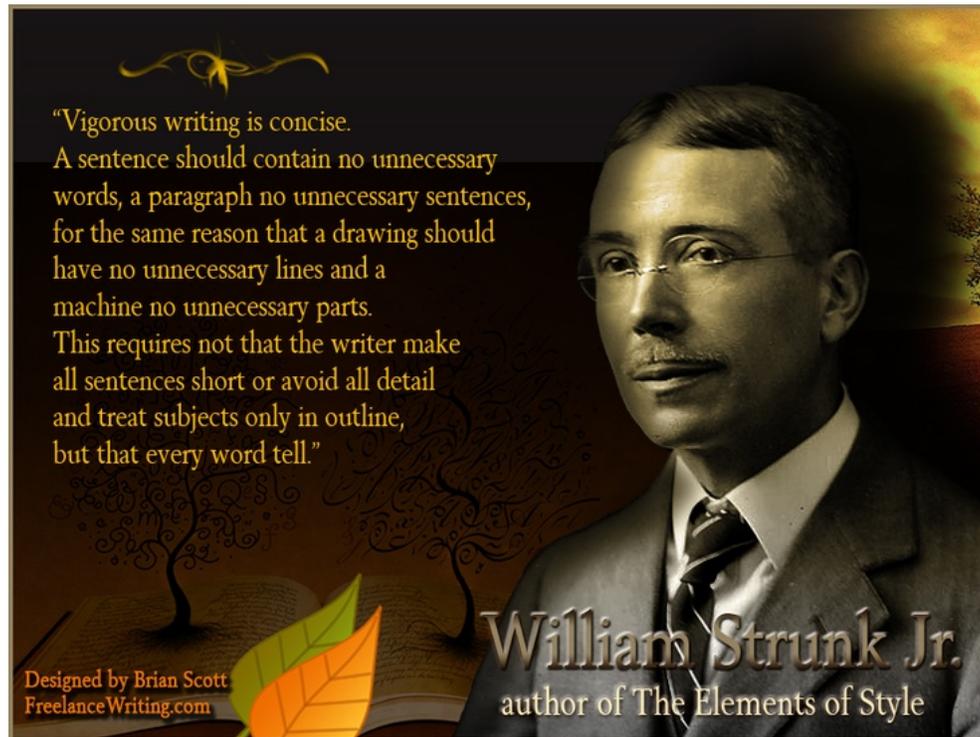
We are learning about *The Elements of Style* in our journalism class.

Dorothy Parker wrote: "If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second greatest favor you can do them is to present them with copies of *The Elements of Style*."

According to Wikipedia, "Dorothy Parker (née Rothschild; August 22, 1893 – June 7, 1967) was an American poet, writer, critic, and satirist based in New York; she was best known for her wit, wisecracks, and eye for 20th-century urban foibles."

Satire has a funny definition: "The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity."

*In 1918, William Strunk privately published *The Elements of Style* for the use of his Cornell students, who gave it its nickname, the little book. Strunk intended the guide "to lighten the task of instructor and student by concentrating attention on a few essentials, the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated." In 1935, Strunk and Edward A. Tenney revised and published the guide as *The Elements and Practice of Composition* (1935).*



E. B. White praised the little book's "forty-three-page summation of the case for cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity" in the use of English in his New Yorker column of July 27, 1957. Macmillan and Company then commissioned White to revise the (1935) edition for republication under Strunk's original title. After his expansion and modernization, the book sold more than two million copies. Since 1959, total sales of three editions in four decades have exceeded ten million copies.

In 1945, after retiring from Cornell in 1937, William Strunk suffered a mental breakdown, diagnosed as "senile psychosis," and died less than a year later at the Hudson River Psychiatric Institute in Poughkeepsie, New York. Strunk's Cornell obituary noted that his friends and former students remembered "his kindness, his helpfulness as a teacher and colleague, [and] his boyish lack of envy and guile."

Joseph McBride, an associate cinema professor at San Francisco State University, said: "I concede that "The Elements of Style," by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, is not in vogue. Its

first version was published 100 years ago. But no other guide to writing is as compelling. It is impossible to shake the effect it has on devotees.