

The 100th Anniversary of *The Elements of Style*

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William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's book *The Elements of Style* has served as a guide for writers for 100 years. In 2011, *Time* named the book "one of the 100 best and most influential books written in English since 1923." Strunk wrote the first edition of the text and registered it with the Copyright Office in 1918. His book contained three main concepts: omit needless words, use active voice, and use parallel construction on concepts that are parallel.

Strunk self-published the first edition in 1919 and registered that version as well. Then in 1920, Harcourt published the text in a 52-page format and registered that version. Along with editor Edward A. Teeney, Strunk revised the text one more time in 1935 and registered it as *The Elements and Practice of Composition*.

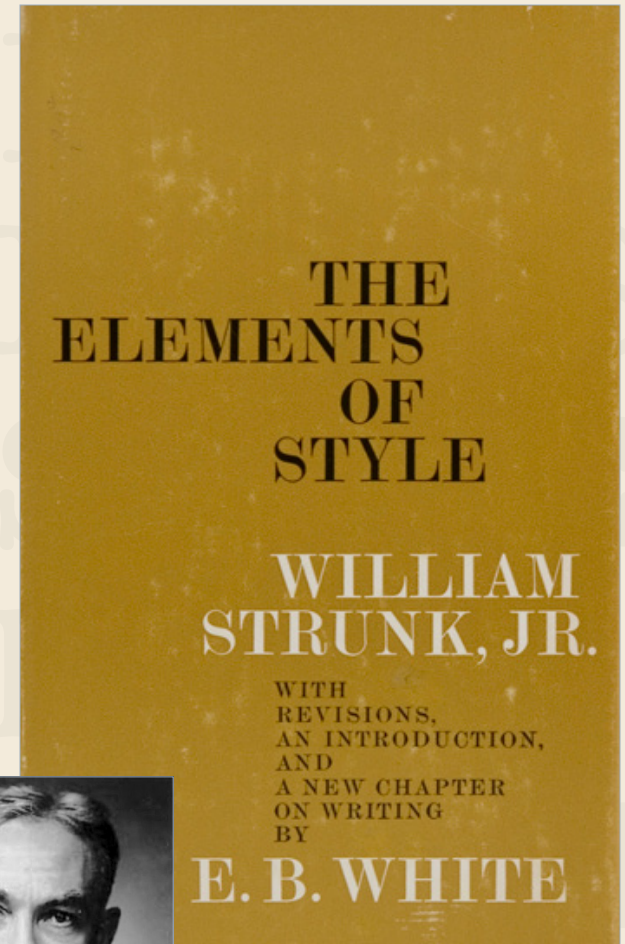
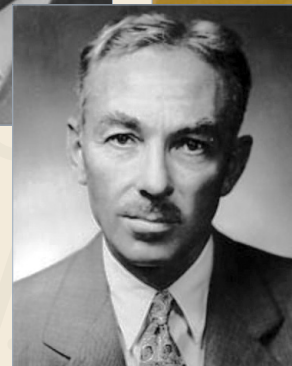
Author E. B. White, who was a student of Strunk's at Cornell University in 1919, wrote a feature for *The New Yorker* in 1957 about Strunk and his devotion to "lucid English prose." Strunk had passed away in 1946, but Macmillan and Company wanted to publish an updated version of his writing guide. They commissioned White to revise the 1935 edition, expanding and modernizing the text. This release, registered with the Office in 1959, became what still is informally known as "Strunk and White" in the writing world.

An official second edition of Strunk and White's version was not released until 1972. White produced it as well as a third edition in 1979, extending the book to 85 pages. The fourth edition, registered in 1999, was the first to be published after

White's death. In this edition, his stepson, *The New Yorker* writer and editor Roger Angell, wrote the foreword. The fiftieth-anniversary edition, published in 2009, contains a new foreword, written by television commentator Charles Osgood.

The text of the original 1918 edition is no longer under copyright protection, so publishers often reprint it. The text has led to other derivative works, including *The Elements of Style Illustrated*, containing illustrations by Maria Kalman. Penguin Publishing registered this title in 2005. Composer Nico Muhly premiered a short opera based on that book, which was performed at the New York Public Library in October of that year.

In 2009, writer and editor Mark Garvey wrote *Stylized: A Slightly Obsessive History of Strunk & White's The Elements of Style*. An enthusiastic fan of the book, he details the history of all these editions. Writers likely will continue to reference *The Elements of Style* for the next 100 years, and hopefully, more editions and derivatives will be registered with the Copyright Office. ©



First edition cover of the expanded book *The Elements of Style* published and registered in 1959.

Top left, William Strunk, Jr.
Bottom left, E.B. White