

AFTERWORD

BECOMING A STYLISH WRITER

Disciplinary styles constantly shift and evolve: half a century from now, perhaps historians will have embraced personal pronouns and evolutionary biologists will have rejected them, rather than vice versa. Yet some principles of good writing remain timeless. In the preface, I note that all stylish academic writers hold three ideals in common: communication, craft, and creativity. *Communication* implies respect for one's audience; *craft*, respect for language; *creativity*, respect for academic endeavor. In closing, I would like to add three further Cs: concreteness, choice, and courage. *Concreteness* is a verbal technique; *choice*, an intellectual right; *courage*, a frame of mind. Together, these principles offer a flexible framework on which writers from different disciplines can drape a rich variety of words and texts.

Concrete language is the stylish writer's magic bullet, a verbal strategy so simple and powerful that I am amazed it is so seldom mentioned in academic writing handbooks. (Only 27 percent of the advanced guides in my one hundred-book sample even mention concrete language as a stylistic principle.) Whether in the title, summary statement, opening paragraph, or anywhere else in an academic article or book, just a few visual images or concrete examples—words that engage the senses and anchor your ideas in physical space—can combat the numbing sense of disorientation