

HOW TO
WRITE

A

Sentence

AND HOW TO READ ONE

STANLEY FISH

HOW TO
WRITE
A
SENTENCE

and

HOW TO READ ONE

STANLEY FISH



HARPER

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

www.harpercollins.com

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint excerpts from the following:

“Permanently” from *The Collected Poems of Kenneth Koch* by Kenneth Koch. Copyright © 2005 by The Kenneth Koch Literary Estate. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

“Too Marvelous for Words” by Johnny Mercer. Copyright © 1937 Sony/ATV Harmony LLC. All rights by Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 8 Music Sq. W., Nashville, TN 37203. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

HOW TO WRITE A SENTENCE. Copyright © 2011 by Stanley Fish. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Emily Cavett Taff

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fish, Stanley Eugene.

How to write a sentence : and how to read one / by Stanley Fish. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-06-184054-8

1. English language—Sentences. 2. English language—Grammar—Problems, exercises, etc. 3. English language—Rhetoric. I. Title.

PE1441.F57 2011

808'.042—dc22

2010033166

11 12 13 14 15 OV/RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<u>ONE</u>	<i>Why Sentences?</i>	I
TWO	<i>Why You Won't Find the Answer in Strunk and White</i>	13
THREE	<i>It's Not the Thought That Counts</i>	25
FOUR	<i>What Is a Good Sentence?</i>	35
FIVE	<i>The Subordinating Style</i>	45
SIX	<i>The Additive Style</i>	61
SEVEN	<i>The Satiric Style: The Return of Content</i>	89
EIGHT	<i>First Sentences</i>	99
NINE	<i>Last Sentences</i>	119
TEN	<i>Sentences That Are About Themselves (Aren't They All?)</i>	133
	<i>Epilogue</i>	159
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	161
	<i>Index</i>	163

CHAPTER I

WHY SENTENCES?

IN HER BOOK *The Writing Life* (1989), Annie Dillard tells the story of a fellow writer who was asked by a student, “Do you think I could be a writer?” “‘Well,’ the writer said, ‘do you like sentences?’” The student is surprised by the question, but Dillard knows exactly what was meant. He was being told, she explains, that “if he liked sentences he could begin,” and she remembers a similar conversation with a painter friend. “I asked him how he came to be a painter. He said, ‘I like the smell of paint.’” The point, made implicitly (Dillard does not belabor it), is that you don’t begin with a grand conception, either of the great American novel or a masterpiece that will hang in the Louvre. You begin with a feel for the nitty-gritty material of the medium, paint in one case, sentences in the other.