10 Rules for Good Writing

1. Prefer the simple description to the elegant:
   —She was fussy with diminutive and colorless hands.
   *—She was chubby with small and pale hands.

2. Prefer the familiar word to the exotic:
   —He held the ampula carelessly.
   *—He held the wine flask carelessly.

3. Prefer the ordinary writing style to the romantic:
   —His lips gently brushed her pouting mouth.
   *—His kiss was tender.

4. Prefer nouns and verbs to adjectives and adverbs:
   —Hanging the picturesque painting high above the red lacquered desk, she held heart-swelling and passionate thoughts of Walter.
   *—As she hangs the picture over the desk she feels tender thoughts of Walter.

5. Use picture nouns and action verbs:
   —It was a hot summer day, but under the umbrella Jonathan Adams could deal with the heat.
   *—Jonathan Adams expected that August in Portland would be hot, but sitting under a blue and white striped table umbrella, he found the heat tolerable.

6. Never use a long word when a short one will do as well:
   —"It was a serendipitous revelation to me, Watson."
   *—"It was news to me, Watson."

7. Master the simple metaphor:
   *—She was built as flat as Kansas.
   *—He was as tough as a year in jail.

8. Prefer the simple sentence to the complicated:
   —The way to increase the world's production of food from existing acreage is through the application of relatively inexpensive chemicals that can be mass-produced in factories.
   *—The existing world's food production can be increased with the use of common chemicals.

9. Vary your sentence length:
   —The President called in his advisor. They talked about the foreign options. The options were bleak and risky.
   *—The President called in his advisor to discuss options for resolving the foreign crisis. The options were risky.

10. Prefer the active voice to the passive:
    —Budgetary limits were set by Congress, and the new contract was fought.
    *—Congress set budgetary limits, and the government workers’ union fought the new contract.

* preferred 😊