

# Edit Sober:

79 tips for on-your-feet editing

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Look it up

A close-up photograph of a cake. The cake has a dark, moist-looking top layer. A dollop of white frosting is piped onto the surface. A cinnamon stick is placed diagonally across the frosting. Several slices of orange are scattered around the cake, some resting on the frosting and others on the dark cake top. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the frosting, the wood of the cinnamon stick, and the segments of the orange.

**PEAK-A-BOO CAKE** 

Peek-a-boo

Peek-aboo

Peekaboo

Peekaboo



Never  
ignore  
that little  
voice

# mnemonize

## Definitions

*from The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*

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To associate (in memory) with a system of mnemonics; remember by means of mnemonics.



Wide fEEt

Quite a feat to eat



The correct spelling of **feet** has a shoe size in it.

If you were to win a Chicago-style hot-dog eating contest, that would be quite a **feat**.

Edit on *your* feet.



Palate

Palette

Pallet



TELEphone charging on a manTEL

Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,  
Teach us something please,  
Whether we be old and bald  
Or young with scabby knees,  
Our heads could do with filling  
With some interesting stuff,  
For now they're bare and full of air,  
Dead flies and bits of fluff,  
So teach us things worth knowing,  
Bring back what we've forgot,  
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,  
And learn until our brains all rot.

*– Hogwarts School Song*

Learn  
until  
our  
brains  
all rot.

– JK Rowling



Embrace your ignorance

# Slow down



Always reread the  
first and last paragraphs.

Think like a reader,  
not like an editor.

Step away: You'll see different things when you come back

Change your viewpoint: bigger  
type, change the typestyle,  
print it out

If what you're editing takes  
forever to get to a point, look at  
the conclusion.

Check the facts.

“If your mother says she loves  
you, check it out.”

Don't take William Strunk and  
E.B. White too seriously.  
Advice is not edict.

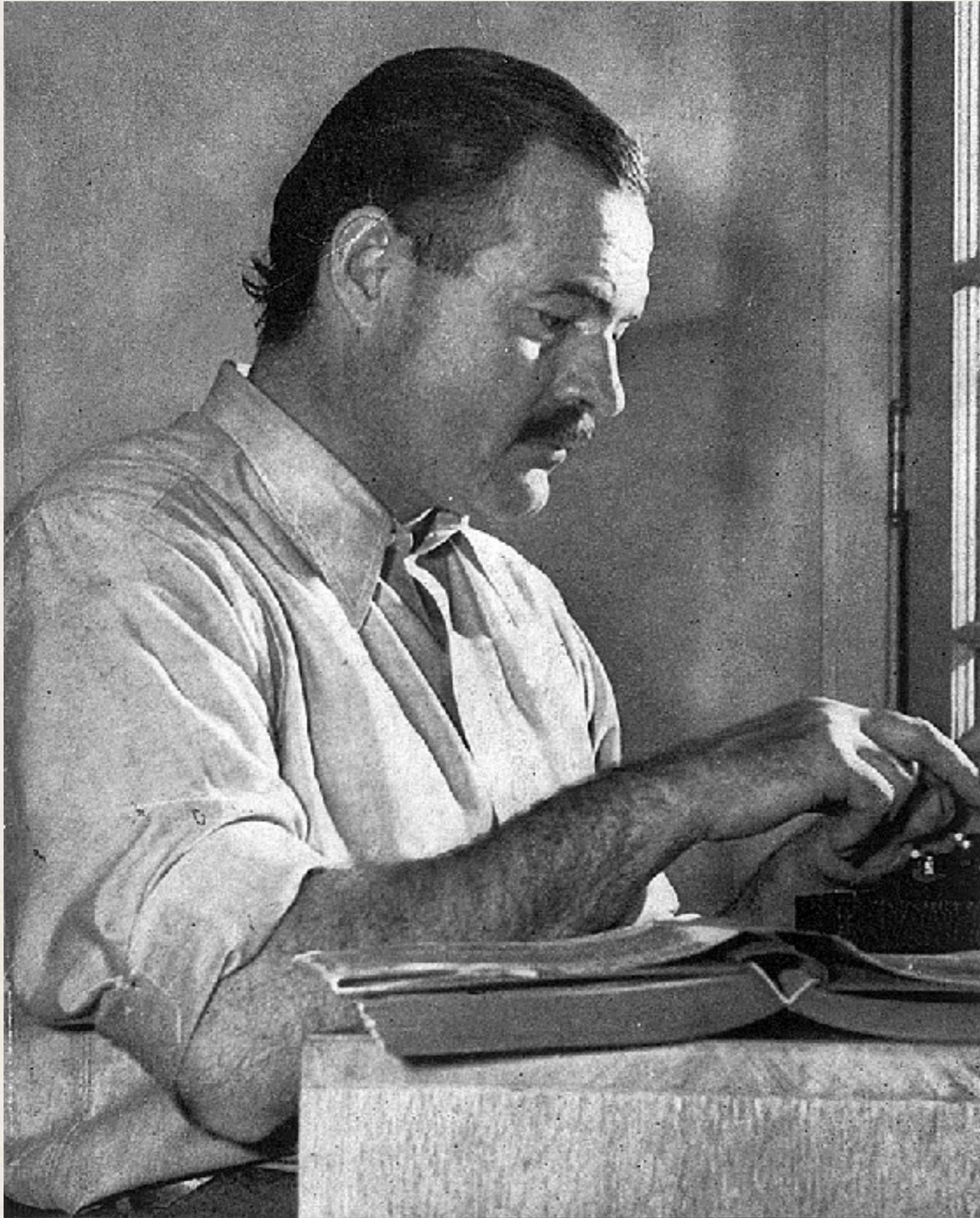
Omit needless words.

Favor the active voice.

Keep the good words.

Don't fear the passive voice.

Edit out loud.



Edit sober.

**“Sometimes I write drunk and revise sober,”** he had said, **“and sometimes I write sober and revise drunk.** But you have to have both elements in creation — the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or spontaneity and restraint, emotion and discipline.”

*– Peter DeVries, “Reuben, Reuben”*

*Always check the quotations.*

Give  
your  
eyes a  
rest.





Consider the pomodoro.

Be wary of absolutes (though  
I'd never say never say never).

Be a partner to your author.

You are superior, you don't  
have to prove it.



Use online resources, but only  
the good ones.



## Do I capitalize "German Shepherd" in a sentence?

For example, the sentence "We bought a German Shepherd puppy."  
Would I capitalize German Shepherd, or just German?

☆ Follow  8 answers

### Answers

Relevance 



 **Best Answer:** Every word in a proper noun requires an upper-case initial. That applies to titles and place names and so on. Exceptions are sometimes made for common connectives such as "in", "of", "the" and "at" inside titles such as "The Catcher in the Rye" and "The Dukes of Hazard". 

So your puppy requires \*3\* capitals, because the proper noun for its breed is German Shepherd Dog.

A German shepherd, on the other hand, is a person who tends sheep, and is either working in Germany or was born there. The word "shepherd" in that case is a common noun, but "German" remains a proper noun.

In "Dogue de Bordeaux", the "de" is French for "of", so need not have a capital letter.

Les P, owner of GSD\_Friendly: [http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/GSD\\_F...](http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/GSD_F...)

"In GSDs" as of 1967

[King Les The Lofty](#) · 7 years ago

Keep a style sheet and use it for  
yourself as well as your author.

Follow your cohorts.

“When I'm trying to be most productive, I try to avoid that 15-minute hole we all get into where we're trying to figure out what's wrong with a sentence in a paragraph. I'll highlight in teal and move on. When I come back to it, I'm more likely to know what's wrong.”

– Aleksandra Sandstrom

Resist, but accept  
that language changes.

There are no rules.

Rules are made to serve  
communication, not vice versa.

*– James Harbeck*

Follow your style guide.

Don't always follow  
your style guide.

“Rules and regulations such as these  
... cannot be endowed with the fixity  
of rock-ribbed law. They are meant  
for the average case, and must be  
applied with a certain degree of  
elasticity.”

*– Manual of Style, preface to the first edition, 1906*

“I have been often  
obliged to sacrifice  
uniformity to custom.”

– *Samuel Johnson, Introduction to the  
Dictionary, 1755*

Make peace with words.

– *Karen Yin*

Be conscious of othering  
language.

Once English accepts a word,  
treat it as an English word.

“When teaching me how to drive, my dad said that the moment I feel comfortable behind the wheel is when I’ll be most dangerous. I think about that when editing—never stop paying attention and questioning.”

– *Tricia Callahan*

There is no such thing as  
multitasking.

Read backward.

Eschew obfuscation.

Don't sweat the Oxford  
comma.

If you are going to argue for the Oxford comma, at least use a real example:

“Among those interviewed [for a Merle Haggard documentary] were his two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall.”

Limit exclamation points to  
exclamations.



Errors, like deer  
crossing the road,  
often travel in  
pairs.

Check for parallelism.

“Know your peak productivity times. If you have a deadline tomorrow, are you more effective at staying up late to finish or getting up early?”

*– Melanie Padgett Powers*

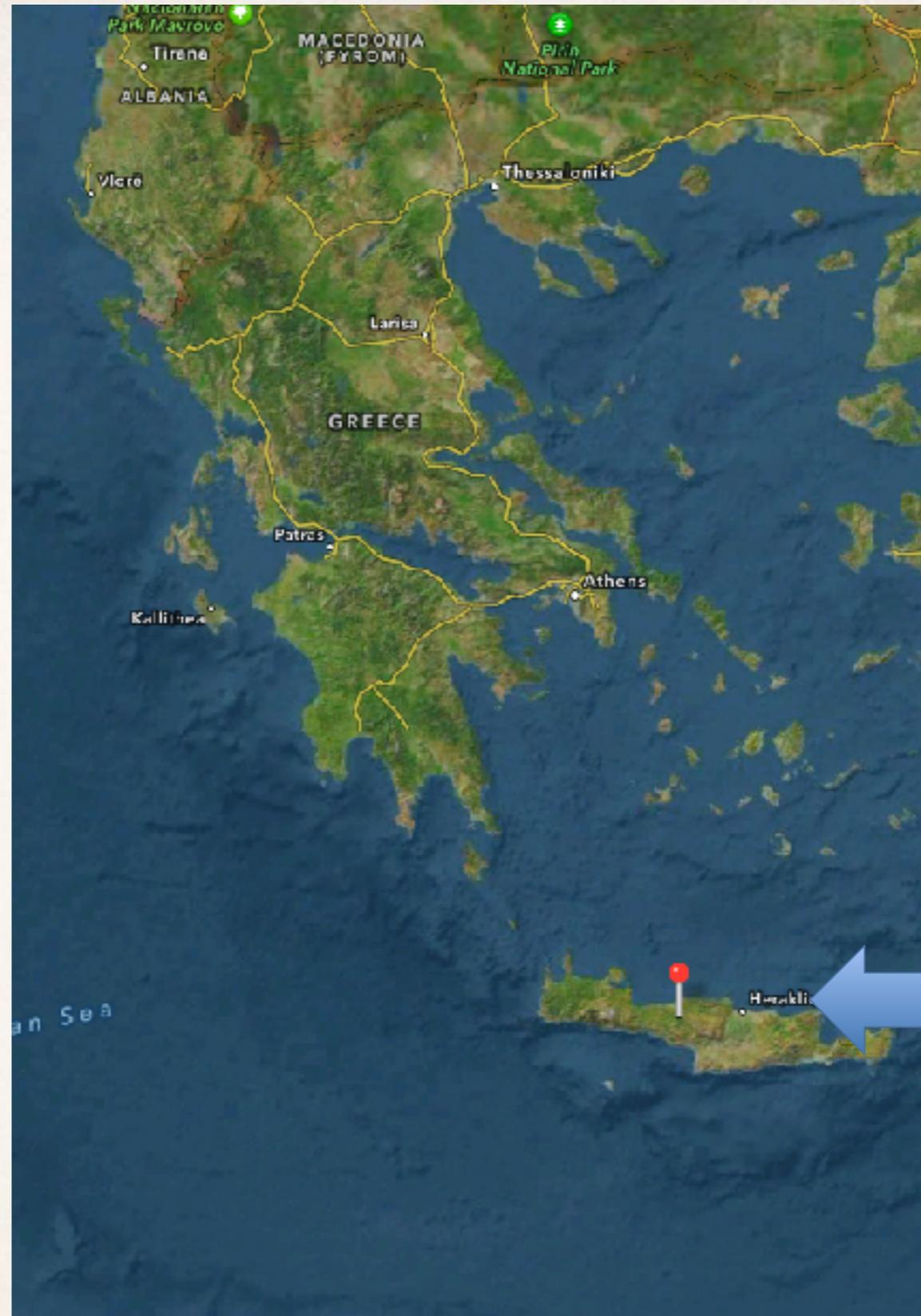
Favor hyphens for compound  
modifiers — they might not  
seem necessary, but they rarely  
confuse.

Think before cutting emphasis  
and intensifiers.

It is good to consider rephrasing  
to avoid expletives.

Consider rephrasing to avoid  
expletives.

All of  
this is  
Greece:



and dis  
is Crete

Avoid the use of qualifiers.

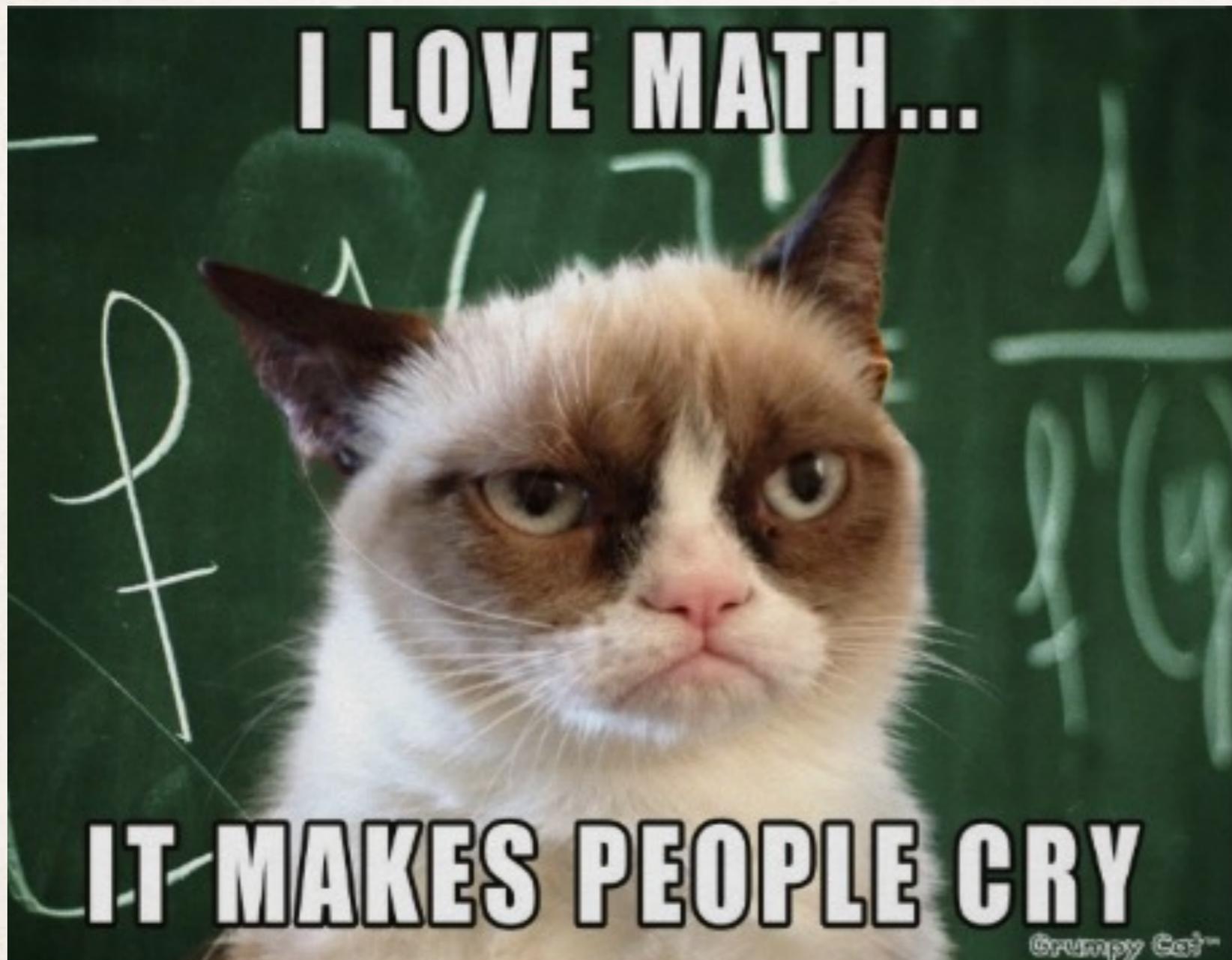
– *EB White, Rule No. 8*

*Rather, very, little, pretty* — these are the leeches that infest of the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words. . . . We should all try to do a little better, we should all be very watchful of this rule, for it is a rather important one and we are pretty sure to violate it now and then.

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Always  
check  
the math

# RASMUSSEN REPORTS POLL

Did scientists falsify research to support their own theories on Global Warming?

59%

35%

26%

**SOMEWHAT LIKELY**

**VERY LIKELY**

**NOT VERY LIKELY**



LIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH / FOX NEWS \ GOP S NHL TOR 6 COB 3

Always check the math

# Always check the math



You can't have a multiple of a  
thing less than that thing and  
still have that thing.

"Amused" and "bemused" are not synonyms; "bemused" means confused. Or:  $A \neq B$ ,  $B = C$ , where  $A$  is amused,  $B$  is bemused and  $C$  is confused.

People have always used  
“bemused” incorrectly.

-\\_(\ツ)\\_/-

“Use programs to up efficiency  
and watch your back.”

*– Heather Saunders*

Don't fear the semicolon.

If a thought is parenthetical,  
maybe it ought not to be in the  
paper; if it's in the paper, maybe  
it ought not be parenthetical.

If a reader must double back to  
the beginning of a sentence  
because you've sent the reader  
down the wrong path, fix the  
sentence.

*– Benjamin Dryer*

As verbs, to "affect" is to influence, to "effect" is to bring about. "Effect" something and take the credit.

Don't stifle emphasis, but when  
“all” stands with “of,” one or  
both might be expendable: half of  
(all) the voters; all (of) my ducks.

Or “half the voters” and “my ducks.”

When figuring a percentage change, think chronologically.

Use an editing checklist.

It's "an" before a vowel sound.

Sound is key. Silent h: "an honor." Sounded h: "a historic."

It's aw, not awe when describing the cuteness of cats (as awe-inspiring as your cat may be).



Check all contractions, but  
double-check **it's** and **you're** —  
those are the easiest to mistype.



**“What if, and I know this sounds kooky,  
we communicated with the employees.”**

#76058172

**Work not  
for the  
person who  
signs your  
paycheck;  
work for  
the reader.**

Put your card out, literally and figuratively. You never know where you're going to make a connection, so never pass up an opportunity to tell people what you do.

“Be a good editor. The Universe  
needs more good editors, God  
knows.”

– *Kurt Vonnegut*

“Every time you edit well, you  
bolster the profession.”

– *Rob Reinalda, ACES 2018, Chicago*