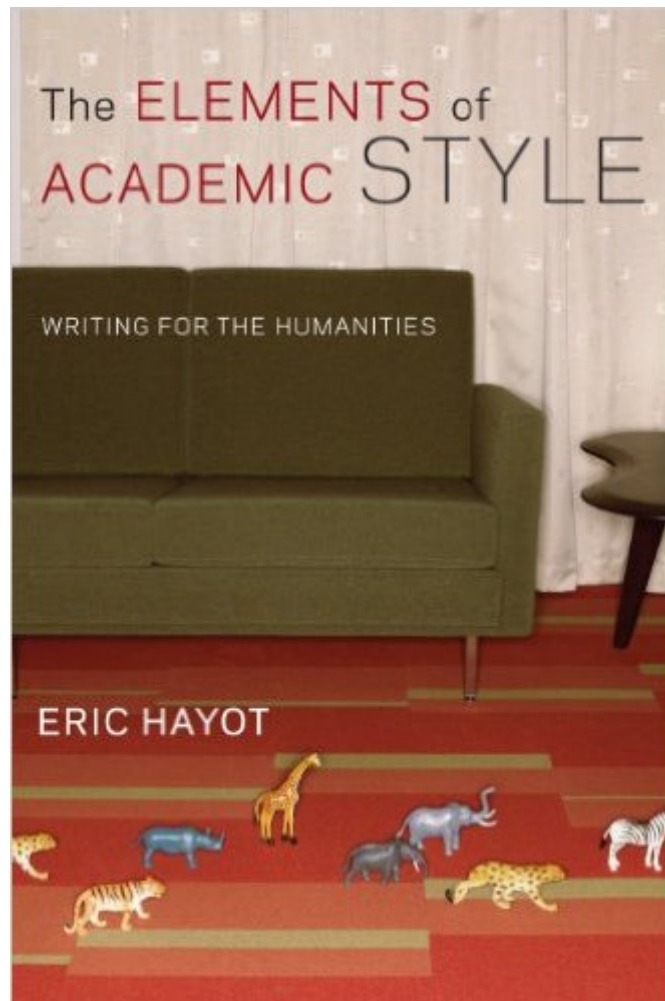


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The Elements Of Academic Style: Writing For The Humanities



Synopsis

Eric Hayot teaches graduate students and faculty in literary and cultural studies how to think and write like a professional scholar. From granular concerns, such as sentence structure and grammar, to big-picture issues, such as adhering to genre patterns for successful research and publishing and developing productive and rewarding writing habits, Hayot helps ambitious students, newly minted Ph.D.'s, and established professors shape their work and develop their voices. Hayot does more than explain the techniques of academic writing. He aims to adjust the writer's perspective, encouraging scholars to think of themselves as makers and doers of important work. Scholarly writing can be frustrating and exhausting, yet also satisfying and crucial, and Hayot weaves these experiences, including his own trials and tribulations, into an ethos for scholars to draw on as they write. Combining psychological support with practical suggestions for composing introductions and conclusions, developing a schedule for writing, using notes and citations, and structuring paragraphs and essays, this guide to the elements of academic style does its part to rejuvenate scholarship and writing in the humanities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an urgently-needed work for the small group of people insane enough to go to grad school for literature/cultural studies; it addresses a very specific set of writing tasks, and does so elegantly, comprehensibly, and delightfully. This book makes explicit and manageable the very *implicit* norms of professional academic literary scholarship. I wish it had been available when I began my dissertation--SIX YEARS AGO. The first section of the book covers the practice of writing--the

rhythms and habits of professional academic writers. Some of this material can be gleaned from other work on academic writing (Silva, Boice), but its inclusion in this book makes it a one-stop shop. (And it's comforting to know that others, too — people who have succeeded in this profession — feel the same fears and insecurities around their writing as I do!) The second section, "Strategy," looks at the structure of the most common genres in literary studies — it covers the larger structures (introductions, conclusions, rhythms, etc.) that make the work "go." This section helps the writer develop the mechanics of the work — the structures that drive the argument along and make it make sense. (In my experience, this level of writing is rarely explicitly addressed, except in the work of George Gopen and Joe Williams, but Gopen and Williams are necessarily aiming at a far broader audience. Hayot's book focuses on the structural patterns specific to literary studies.) The third section, "Tactics," addressed the lower-level elements of scholarly writing: footnotes and citation practices, language norms, rhetorically-effective patterns for paragraphs, etc. Dr. Hayot is correct that "no other book...

Above all, this is a refreshing book—Hayot actually believes that academic writing is something other than a cesspool of bad-faith, jargony obfuscation, that it might somehow be governed by generic rules different from those of a New Yorker article, and that it, just maybe, deserves to be celebrated (see his related 2014 *Critical Inquiry* article, "Academic Writing, I Love You. Really, I Do" [vol. 41, pp. 53-77], for more along these lines). Even if (like me) you don't necessarily share Hayot's enthusiasm for Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha, this is a great attitude to have so openly represented. Second, this is an extremely enjoyable book to read (if you are a reasonably self-aware academic in the humanities, at least). For that reason alone I would recommend graduate students to just go get it; this is the real thing. But if you want to learn more... well, keep reading. Hayot offers advice in four basic domains: psychological self-help, developing writing habits, understanding the world of academic writing as something like a spiritual system, and concrete writing advice (from broad structural issues to footnoting practice). There aren't any other books that offer this mixture of help with academic writing. Hayot's big, original (as far as I know) concept is what he calls the "Uneven U": paragraphs should start at a modest level of abstraction, descend to concrete details and evidence, and then finish up at the high end again (from 4 down to 1-2 and up to 5, on his scale where 5 is the topmost level of abstraction and 1 is unmediated evidence). This structure generates a forward, propulsive motion; it applies to broader sections within an essay as well as to paragraphs. Once you start looking, something like this structure can be detected in at least some kinds of academic writing.

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