

“Write As You Would Talk”—Or Should You?

You may have heard this adage to writers with a stuffy style, who fill their documents with “please be advised,” “pursuant to our meeting,” and “enclosed herewith.”

Generally, “to write as you talk” is good advice. But misunderstood, that advice leads to rambling prose. Instead of a period, writers often succumb to a confusing habit of linking scrambled thoughts with “which”:

“I emailed my broker about the problem with the duplicate entries on my IRA account, which he said was fairly common when you make two years’ contribution with the same check, which I did this January, including a contribution for the previous year along with the contribution for the current year, which is, of course, expedient for my purposes but not for the broker. They’ve made several errors recently, which is why I had to re-send the last paycheck deposit twice, which is becoming a problem for our own payroll department, which is responsible for stopping payment on checks and reissuing them when there’s a problem, which is what I had to ask them to do this past payroll period.”

Speakers often punctuate with “which” and a breath. Writers should not.

By all means, on most occasions, write as you would talk. That is, use a conversational tone, informal word choice, and flowing sentence patterns--but without grammatical errors, repetition, and disjointed ideas.
