

*Translate into French:*

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Professional writers realise that they cannot hope to affect their readers precisely as they wish without care and practice in the proper use of words. The need for the official to take pains is even greater, for if what the professional writer has written is wearisome and obscure the reader can toss ~~to~~ book aside and read no more, but only at his peril can he so treat what the official has tried to tell him. By proper use I do not mean grammatically proper. It is true that there are rules of grammar and syntax, just as in music there are rules of harmony and counterpoint. But one can no more write good English than one can compose good music merely by keeping the rules. On the whole they are aids to writing intelligibly, for they are in the main no more than the distillation of successful experiments made by writers of English through the centuries in how best to handle words so as to make a writer's meaning plain. Some, it is true, are arbitrary. One or two actually increase the difficulty of clear expression, but these too should nevertheless be respected, because lapses from what for the time being is regarded as correct irritate the educated reader, and distract his attention, and so make him the less likely to be affected precisely as you wish. But I shall not have much to say about text-book rules because they are mostly well known and well observed in official writing.

The golden rule is not a rule of grammar or syntax. It concerns less the arrangement of words than the choice of them. "After all," said Lord Macaulay, "the first law of writing, that law to which all other laws are subordinate, is this: that the words employed should be such as to convey to the reader the meaning of the writer." The golden rule is to pick those words and to use them and them only.

Sir Ernest Gowers: *The Complete Plain Words*

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Note:

This prose was set as the examination piece in November 1984 for students enrolled in French IIB.