Elements of Style

UNITY: A quality of writing present if the writer develops one idea at a time, making it easier for the reader to follow his thought. An essay has unity if one thesis has been developed; a paragraph has unity if one topic sentence has been developed.

TEXTURE: A quality of writing present if the writer develops her ideas (thesis or topic sentence). “To develop” means to add “flesh” to the “bones”, to add the specific to the general. The reader understands best through specific examples, illustrations, reasons, etc.

COHERENCE: A quality of writing present if the writer links sentence with sentence or paragraph with paragraph. The writer links sentences or paragraphs by using words that show the relationship between them (“because,” “therefore,” “as a result,” “for example”) by repeating ideas expressed in the previous sentence, or by repeating words used in the previous sentence or paragraph.

EMPHASIS: A quality of writing present if the writer places the sentences or paragraphs in the order that most effectively carries his idea to the reader.

CLARITY: A quality of writing present if the writer communicates to the reader precisely the idea she intends and only the idea she intends. If readers say, “I think she meant this. Oh, no. I think she meant that,” the writer does not have clarity, and the writer has lost control of her message.

BREVITY: A quality of writing present if “every word tells,” if every word contributes meaning. If a reader can cross out any word and not change the meaning, such writing does not have brevity. Brevity, therefore, does not mean “short”—one can write long sentences and still have brevity.