

# William Safire

## Quotes

*Writing, Long, Looks, Thinking, Needs, Government, Years, Use, Reading, War, People, President, Knowing, Mean, Giving, Politics, Color, Mind, Causes, Office*

Never assume the obvious is true.

~William Safire

Nobody stands taller than those willing to stand corrected.

~William Safire

To be accused of 'channeling' is to be dismissed as a ventriloquist's live dummy, derogated at not having a mind of one's own.

~William Safire

When articulation is impossible, gesticulation comes to the rescue.

~William Safire

As long as one American is hungry... then we have unfinished business in this country.

~William Safire

It is in the nature of tyranny to deride the will of the people as the voice of the mob, and to denounce the cry for freedom as the roar of anarchy.

~William Safire

The right to do something does not mean that doing it is right.

~William Safire

Only in grammar can you be more than perfect.

~William Safire

The Latin motto over Poindexter's new Pentagon office reads Scientia Est Potentia - "knowledge is power." Exactly: the government's infinite knowledge about you is its power over you.

~William Safire

Last, but not least, avoid cliches like the plague.

~William Safire

A man who lies, thinking it is the truth, is an honest man, and a man who tells the truth, believing it to be a lie, is a liar.

~William Safire

If you re-read your work, you can find on re-reading a great deal of repetition can be avoided by re-reading and editing.

~William Safire

Writers who used to show off their erudition no longer sing in the bare ruined choir of the media.

~William Safire

Sir Alec Douglas-Home, when he was British Foreign Secretary, said he received the following telegram from an irate citizen: "To hell with you. Offensive letter follows."

~William Safire

I think we have a need to know what we do not need to know.

~William Safire

When I need to know the meaning of a word, I look it up in a dictionary.

~William Safire

Create your own constituency of the infuriated.

~William Safire

You don't want lopsided government. You don't want one side running roughshod over the other.

~William Safire

Adjective salad is delicious, with each element contributing its individual and unique flavor; but a puree of adjective soup tastes yecchy.

~William Safire

I want my questions answered by an alert and experienced politician, prepared to be grilled and quoted -- not my hand held by an old smoothie.

~William Safire

The perfect Christmas gift for a sportscaster, as all fans of sports clichés know, is a scoreless tie.

~William Safire

Is sloppiness in speech caused by ignorance or apathy? I don't know and I don't care.

~William Safire

Knowing how things work is the basis for appreciation, and is thus a source of civilized delight.

~William Safire

Avoid overuse of 'quotation marks.'

~William Safire

Give your main clause a little space. Prose is not like boxing; the skilled writer deliberately telegraphs his punch, knowing that the reader wants to take the message directly on the chin.

~William Safire

No one flower can ever symbolize this nation. America is a bouquet.

~William Safire

A dependent clause is like a dependent child: incapable of standing on its own but able to cause a lot of trouble.

~William Safire

Gridlock is great. My motto is, 'Don't just do something. Stand there.'

~William Safire

It behooves us to avoid archaisms. Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do.

~William Safire

The first ladyship is the only federal office in which the holder can neither be fired nor impeached.

~William Safire

... it's Bush's baby, even if he shares its popularization with Gorbachev. Forget the Hitler 'new order' root; F.D.R. used the phrase earlier.

~William Safire

Have a definite opinion.

~William Safire

Adapt your style, if you wish, to admit the color of slang or freshness of neologism, but hang tough on clarity, precision, structure, grace.

~William Safire

Never put the story in the lead. Let 'em have a hot shot of ambiguity right between the eyes.

~William Safire

The most fun in breaking a rule is in knowing what rule you're breaking.

~William Safire

Dangling punch lines to forgotten stories remain in the language like the smile of the Cheshire cat.

~William Safire

I'm willing to zap conservatives when they do things that are not libertarian.

~William Safire

At a certain point, what people mean when they use a word becomes its meaning.

~William Safire

The remarkable legion of the unremarked, whose individual opinions are not colorful or different enough to make news, but whose collective opinion, when crystallized, can make history.

~William Safire

Decide on some imperfect Somebody and you will win, because the truest truism in politics is: You can't beat Somebody with Nobody.

~William Safire

To communicate, put your words in order; give them a purpose; use them to persuade, to instruct, to discover, to seduce.

~William Safire

When duty calls, that is when character counts.

~William Safire

Previously known for its six syllables of sweetness and light, reconciliation has become the political fighting word of the year.

~William Safire

I'm a right-wing pundit and have been for many years.

~William Safire

A book should have an intellectual shape and a heft that comes with dealing with a primary subject.

~William Safire

If America cannot win a war in a week, it begins negotiating with itself.

~William Safire

[Senators John Kerry & John Edwards] have risen high in Democratic polls with a brand of class resentment and soak-the-rich rhetoric rooted in the old-fashioned liberalism of Ted Kennedy.

~William Safire

Color and bite permeate a language designed to rally many men, to destroy some, and to change the minds of others.

~William Safire

The new, old, and constantly changing language of politics is a lexicon of conflict and drama?ridicule and reproach?pleading and persuasion.

~William Safire

When your government, employer, landlord, merchant, banker and local sports team gang up to picture, digitize and permanently record your every activity, you are placed under unprecedented control.

~William Safire

One challenge to the arts in America is the need to make the arts, especially the classic masterpieces, accessible and relevant to today's audience.

~William Safire

A reader should be able to identify a column without its byline or funny little picture on top purely by look or feel, or its turgidity ratio.

~William Safire

President Reagan is a rhetorical roundheels, as befits a politician seeking empathy with his audience.

~William Safire

Some handsome and ambitious men believe they are above all morality, and a woman's virtue becomes a mere challenge to them.

~William Safire

The wonderful thing about being a New York Times columnist is that it's like a Supreme Court appointment - they're stuck with you for a long time.

~William Safire

Of higher value than any one leader is the cause.

~William Safire

Better to be a jerk that knees than a knee that jerks.

~William Safire

By elevating your reading, you will improve your writing or at least tickle your thinking.

~William Safire

Never feel guilty about reading, it's what you do to do your job.

~William Safire

George Washington had a tough second term.

~William Safire

Carter is the best President the Soviet Union ever had.

~William Safire

The Republicans do not look on the Democrats as the evil empire.

~William Safire

You don't overturn a previous court's decisions lightly and I think most Americans are somewhere in the middle on abortion and there's not going to be a revolution here at all.

~William Safire

This is what it's all about. From what I could see, you could get a bunch of people together, whip up the press and have some impact.

~William Safire

Different regions may require different strategies, as President Bush has noted, but not different basic principles. It's either collective security or selective security.

~William Safire

A reader ought to be able to hold it and become familiar with its organized contents and make it a mind's manageable companion.

~William Safire

I welcome new words, or old words used in new ways, provided the result is more precision, added color or greater expressiveness.

~William Safire

English is a stretch language; one size fits all.

~William Safire

Cast aside any column about two subjects. It means the pundit chickened out on the hard decision about what to write about that day.

~William Safire

I could get a better education interviewing John Steinbeck than talking to an English professor about novels.

~William Safire

We are all environmentalists now, but we are not all planetists. An environmentalist realizes that nature has its pleasures and deserves respect. A planetist puts the earth ahead of the earthlings.

~William Safire

Why use a modifier to set straight a not-quite-right noun when the right noun is available?

~William Safire

Took me a while to get to the point today, but that is because I did not know what the point was when I started.

~William Safire

Don't expect others to do your work for you.

~William Safire

What a joy it is to see really professional media manipulation.

~William Safire

The most successful column is one that causes the reader to throw down the paper in a peak of fit.

~William Safire

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