

COMMENDATIONS

In college I became an English major because I enjoyed reading and analyzing texts and writing about them. My professor of composition said that my writing was well-organized and clear, and that encouraged me to persevere in English. As a senior in college, I was pressed into service by a professor to help grade freshman compositions. I was appalled at what I had to examine and grade. Though purportedly a higher-than-average college in rank, the students it admitted that I graded were woefully poor in English grammar and composition. I was sometimes amazed that this or that student ever graduated from high school with such poor writing abilities. Upon graduation I worked for a decade with students and was again and again disappointed at the poor quality of their spoken and written English.

Years later, in teaching Introductory Biblical Greek to college graduates, I had to have them use an elementary English grammar book written for foreign language students learning Greek in an English-speaking environment. To learn Greek, they had to relearn (or learn for the first time) basic English grammar. All my students noted how helpful the English grammar pamphlet was for their learning English!

For a half century I have remained disappointed at how weak students' command of English grammar, composition, and speech has become. And I am daily reminded how contemporary English is deteriorating both in written and spoken forms. Clear command of the language is necessary for stable communication and powerful persuasion.

Dr. Philip Craig has written what I believe to be a profoundly helpful primer on English usage and grammar which can be of immense help to communicators, whether they are authors or public speakers. To command the language of discourse is to control the narrative. Alarminglly the American usage of English is now terribly discordant and deteriorating before our eyes. You can have the most sublime ideas in the world (the gospel of Jesus Christ or representative democracy, for example) but if you cannot communicate them with clarity, their power and authority fade. Clear writing is foundational for clear thinking. And both clear thinking and clear writing are necessary for clear speaking. For a student or adult layman to read the New Testament or the Declaration of Independence with minimal understanding is a tragedy. To write or speak about these two examples with a poor foundation in English may be a wasted exercise. Our culture and the institutions that make up this culture need the remedy Dr. Craig's *Saving English* provides.

Saving English is the book I wish that I had in college to properly learn English grammar and usage, and the book to give to my students in courses on spoken and written English communications. This book is an amazing help to students and those who teach them.

Steve Martin

Retired Dean of Students

IRBS Theological Seminary in Texas

We are living in a day and age where casual attire has become the norm and the donning of suits and ties is relegated to only the most formal of affairs. This may be fine when it comes to clothing—the Bible does not mandate a particular dress code. However, speech is another matter altogether. Grammar, diction, and punctuation play critical roles in the understanding of God’s Word. We ignore the rules of language at our peril.

In *Saving English*, Dr. Craig challenges the reader to master basic grammar. He has done an excellent job of presenting the problem—a diminished understanding of the English language leading to an impoverished ability to communicate—and the solution: a recovery of the basics of English syntax and grammar. It’s fine to say rules are made to be broken, but we’re on the cusp of losing the rules altogether.

Whether you are a teacher preparing your students to survive in the world or a pastor preaching week in and week out, *Saving English* is a must-read resource, a tool that will not only improve diction but, in so doing, improve communication and understanding.

I've taught at the middle-school, high-school, and seminary levels. The ability of the next generation to communicate clearly is, simply put, not on the rise. Dr. Craig's comprehensive work is the medicine we need. It is a simple, easy-to-use guide to grammar. Whether for a classroom setting or simply as a tool for personal study, *Saving English* will equip the next generation to communicate clearly, concisely, and with purpose. The title of the book is not melodramatic—English needs saving, and this book needs to be read.

Aaron Menikoff

Sr. Pastor, Mount Vernon Baptist Church
Sandy Springs (Atlanta), Georgia

If you want your students to not only learn English grammar and become better writers, but to also look forward to the lessons and be entertained by them, then *Saving English* will not disappoint. Professor Craig has decades of English-teaching experience and a track record of turning mediocre students into stellar ones who win awards. He has written down his method, and now using *Saving English* in your class can do the same thing for your students. Professor Craig loves teaching English to high

school, college, and graduate students, and it shows. He genuinely cares that students don't just memorize concepts, but understand them and be able to use them in their writing. Textbooks can rarely be described as warm and personable to read, but this one is.

One of the best parts of the book is the astute, wonderful, fun, and sometimes whimsical teaching examples. Teachers and their students will enjoy them alike! The examples are often quotes from classic movies or books or from famous or historical figures. Obviously great care and knowledge of keeping a student's interest were used in selecting them. Teachers will have fun explaining where the quote originated, and students will learn a little interesting bonus lesson to help them remember the concept. One of the best ways to learn and remember is to evoke an image or to tell a story, and Professor Craig alludes to many stories from history and otherwise in his important and delightful book.

Elizabeth Christian

Instructor of Advanced Legal Writing and Research
MacMillan Law Library, Emory University,
Atlanta, Georgia

Many thanks to Phil Craig for this primer on composition. It's sad but true: very few of even the best graduate students, let alone the members of the general population, write well anymore. This is due in part to changes in the way we teach children, but is also due, of course, to the

flourishing of media that disincentivize close attention to grammar, syntax, and style. Inasmuch as good writing enables and extends good thinking and speaking, the stakes here are high. Please read this book, *Saving English*, and help us save the English language and the cultures of the Anglophone universe as well.

Douglas A. Sweeney

Dean, Beeson Divinity School
Samford University

After reveling in the beauty and comprehensive expressiveness of the English language, Charles Spurgeon sealed the significance of his observation with the quip, "Sadly it is seldom spoken today." Philip Craig is out to remedy that encroaching malady. *Saving English* deals with all the elements of English grammar in all the charming aspects of its uniformity, irregularity, and augmentation. He gives a sound as well as entertaining discussion of the subject. His use of illustrations for each kind of word and each grammatical structure provides another attractive feature.

Theological ideas, biblical interpretation, classical literature, and modern cultural references form the pool from which he draws examples of correct and incorrect grammar, poor and clear syntax, and cloudy and clear persuasive techniques. When explaining the notoriously difficult verbs lay and lie, he points to William Faulkner's correct use of the past tense of lie in the title, *As I Lay Dying*; then the obvious conclusion: "which just goes to

show that you need to learn good grammar to win the Nobel Prize in literature.”

Every preacher who has ever been confused by the relation between objective pronouns and subjective pronouns—that probably is all of them—should give themselves a personal course in English, its beauty and persuasive usefulness, by buying and memorizing this book.

Thomas J. Nettles

Senior Professor of Historical Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
and former Professor of Church History and Head of
Church History Department,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

SAVING ENGLISH

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Philip A. Craig



Saving English

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Saving English is dedicated to the cherished memory of my mother, Margaret Morrow Craig (1917–1980), who was excruciatingly deprived of the opportunity to complete her formal education beyond high school by family troubles during the Great Depression. Yet she somehow managed to instill her robust love of English language and literature in her five sons who were privileged to learn, as it were by osmosis, her immaculate command of English grammar and syntax and gracious wit and eloquence. She was thrilled when I at age twenty showed her a rough outline of this book, then entitled “A Constructionary of The English Language.”

I also remember fondly Drs. George B. Martin and Edward Stephenson at the University of Georgia, the former a Milton scholar who taught me advanced courses in rhetoric, and the latter an associate editor of *The Journal of American Speech* who instructed me in advanced English grammar and the history of the English language. Thanks also goes to my literary agent, Rev. Steve Martin, for his unflagging encouragement and to my eldest daughter, literary critic Dr. Lydia E. Craig, who expertly edited my earlier work, *The Bond of Grace and Duty in the Soteriology of John Owen*.

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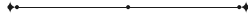
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WHY SAVING ENGLISH IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

The English language, possessing a far larger vocabulary than any other language, boasts the richest literary heritage in world literature. Masterpieces like the King James Bible, Shakespeare's plays, and Charles Dickens' novels readily come to mind.

My family hails from a regional culture (the American South) where the English language was savored in storytelling, as memorialized by African folk tales preserved by Joel Chandler Harris and literature like the novels of William Faulkner and Walker Percy. This love of language and literature has, unfortunately, been largely eclipsed by the cultural shift from a print medium to a more visual one (as foreseen by Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong), accompanied by a philosophical transition from modernism to postmodernism.

The influence of postmodernism, as illustrated by the pioneering Directed Studies Program in English at Yale, was captured by William Zinsser, author of *On Writing Well*. He recalled how his writing course, when 170

students signed up for a class limited to fifteen students, created a stir:

That came as an astonishment to the English department, which was then the high temple of 'deconstruction' and other faddish studies in the clinical analysis of texts. The great writers on the Yale faculty weren't the theory-obsessed English professors. They were the History professors—strong stylists ... who understood that their knowledge could only be handed down if they imposed on the past an act of storytelling, one that had a narrative pull and a robust cast of characters.¹

No less an authority than Harvard professor Steven Pinker has pointedly criticized the postmodern style of writing for two reasons. One is that "the writer's chief, if unstated, concern is to escape being convicted of philosophical naiveté about his own enterprise."² His second reason for criticism lies in the epistemological skepticism and relativism of postmodern style, which precludes "disinterested truth" from serving as the primary motive for writing.³

1. William Zinsser, "First, use plain English," Yale Alumni Magazine, March/April 2009, 38.

2. Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2014), 30.

3. Pinker, *The Sense of Style*, 29, 35.

Today, the art of composition is by and large a lost art, vanquished by the stunted attention span of a postmodern generation. Ours is a generation less used to reading printed words on a page than to viewing flitting images on a computer screen and more used to “cutting and pasting” the words of others than creating their own.

Postmodernism has entailed the devaluation of language and its power to communicate what theologian Francis Schaeffer called “true truth,” especially through meta-narrative, and has led to several other harmful consequences. Many students enter college, even graduate school, with woefully deficient writing skills, necessitating remedial instruction and tutoring, resorting to “group” papers or even plagiarism. Writing instructors now routinely use software designed to detect student plagiarism.

Furthermore, even highly educated adults persistently flout elementary principles of English grammar and usage including:

- Rampant confusion between the subjective and objective cases in pronoun usage, especially in
 - prepositional phrases (*between you and me – not I*),
 - compound subjects (*The King and I – not Me*), and

- compound direct objects (*The National Academy of Science inducted **him and me** – not **he and I** – as members*).
- Widespread misuse of irregular verbs, most notably by cramming the past-tense form into a perfect tense: *I have **gone** fishing – not I have **went** fishing*.
- Burgeoning ignorance of prepositional idioms, something Richard Lanham in *Revising Prose* (1979) recognized, with (just to use one small example) *different **from*** replaced by *different **than***.⁴

Finally, two gaping holes in reading and writing instruction have been acknowledged. Recent research demonstrates how badly students need to learn how to recognize rhetorical structures, not only for reading comprehension but also for composition of the persuasive essay:

Any story or prose passage can be organized into an outline in which some material is at the highest level, some at the next level, and so on. For example, research on rhetorical structures (Chambliss & Calfree, 1998; Cook & Mayer, 1988) shows that prose passages may be organized into structures such as compare/contrast (comparing two or more

4. Richard Lanham, *Revising Prose* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), 82.

items across several dimensions in a matrix), classification (relating concepts to each other with subset relations as in hierarchy), sequence (presenting a cause-and-effect chain in correspondence with a flowchart), enumeration (presenting a list), or generalization (presenting a main point and supporting points). Interestingly, most students, even students entering college, are not aware of rhetorical structures, and therefore have difficulty judging what is important in a textbook passage (Cook & Mayer, 1988). In short, research in the science of learning pinpoints a specific kind of knowledge—knowledge of prose structure—that is crucial for reading comprehension but lacking in many students.⁵

Secondly, and more importantly, students must develop facility in writing the persuasive essay. Classic writing instruction focuses on the *mechanics of writing*—*legibility, spelling, grammar, and paragraph structure*—which, of course, are important skills. However, Hayes and Flower (1980) found that writers need to engage in three intertwined cognitive processes—*planning (generating, evaluating,*

5. Richard E. Mayer, “Applying the Science of Learning to Instruction in School Subjects” in *On Excellence in Teaching*, ed. Robert J. Marzano (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2010), 103.

and organizing information), translating (generating written text), and reviewing (detecting and correcting errors).

(Gould, 1980) found that most students spend almost no time engaged in global planning—that is, developing a writing plan before they start writing.... Instead, they engage in local planning—pausing at the end of a sentence or clause to plan out the next five or six words ... (Scandamalia, Bereiter and Goelman,1982). When high school students are asked to write a persuasive essay, they do not engage in much planning and they produce an essay that is rated mediocre (about 6 out of 10 on a ten-point scale) by writing experts. However, when high school students are required to produce an outline before they begin writing—thus forcing them to generate, evaluate, and organize information—they write higher-quality essays rated between 9 and 10 on a ten-point scale). (Kellogg, 1994)⁶

The overriding purpose of this book is to unleash the power of the English language for Christian writers and speakers to defend the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) by presenting the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and with fitly chosen words (Prov. 25:11). *Saving English* will point out vastly underappreciated structural resources of

6. Mayer, “Applying the Science of Learning,” 104–105.

the English language with the ultimate aim of honing the skills of Christians seeking to speak and write well and winsomely, as an essential element of their service to the Lord and witness to others.

Saving English follows from three premises.

1. The first is that writing is an art, like acting or sculpting, that can indeed be taught. Although native ability plays an undeniable part, no one can claim to be a born writer. It is a well-known fact that many writers improve their skills by reading accomplished writers. This improvement will not happen readily, however, unless a writer gains a basic working knowledge of English grammar and parts of speech, as presented here in chapter 2.
2. The second—and generally overlooked—premise is that verb selection plays a critical part in molding the shape and determining the effectiveness of any given sentence. Chapter 3 identifies the sentence types used for characterization, identification, and narration and lists the verbs usually used to anchor each sentence type. Even the simple subject-verb-adjective sentence is discovered to possess rich possibilities: it can utilize not merely linking verbs of being, duration, and sense perception but also, surprisingly, more dynamic verbs of

position (*stand tall*), process (*grow unruly*), activity (*burn bright*), and motion (*fall short*).

3. The third is that accomplished writing requires the knowledge and shrewd use of key connective words. Prepositions, conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs do not only limit or expand the meaning of a clause or sentence; these parts of speech also tie together interrelated clauses and sentences. Sixteen categories of discourse markers, which not only control the direction of flow of an argument in persuasive writing but also create better reading comprehension, are identified together with contemporary examples in chapter 4.

Saving English will also:

- clarify English verb tenses and conjugation of both regular and irregular verbs;
- give guidelines for choosing the right word (diction);
- identify the semantics (meanings) added to sentences and clauses by prepositions, conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs;
- include exercises to test understanding of parts of speech, prepositional cases, verb-subject agreement (concord), and punctuation of discourse markers;

WHY SAVING ENGLISH IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

- provide charts listing irregular verbs by pattern and illustrating sentence patterns and discourse markers; and
- list and evaluate in the Reference Books section the most worthwhile English dictionaries, thesaurus, and guides to composition, usage, and grammar.