

# Tiny Acts of Elegance

*Editing Like a Writer*

**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

ACES  
2012  
NOLA



# Tiny Acts of Elegance

*Editing Like a Writer*  
*The Best Fixes Are Seamless*

**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

ACES  
2012  
NOLA



# Tiny Acts of Elegance

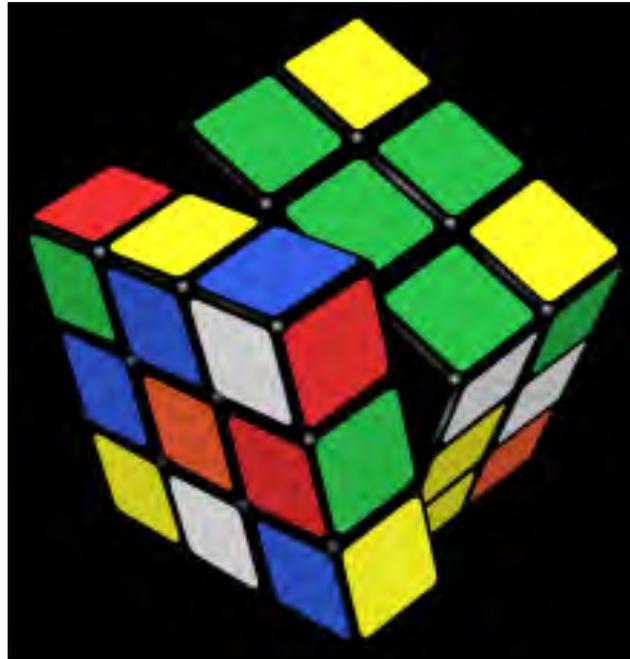
*Editing Like a Writer*  
*The Best Fixes Are Seamless*  
*The Invisible Editor*

**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

ACES  
2012  
NOLA





**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*



# Tiny Acts of Elegance

*Editing Like a Writer*  
*The Best Fixes Are Seamless*  
*The Invisible Editor*  
*Editing Like a Ninja*

**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

ACES  
2012  
NOLA





**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

**ACES  
2012  
NOLA**



# Tiny Acts of Elegance

*Editing Like a Writer*  
*The Best Fixes Are Seamless*  
*The Invisible Editor*  
*Editing Like a Ninja*  
*The Little Things Add Up*

**Bill Walsh**

*The Washington Post*

ACES  
2012  
NOLA



1.

No way did  
a writer  
write that.

The Redskins last season had an average attendance of just more than 76,000 people, according to NFL attendance figures.

The Redskins last season had an average attendance of just more than 76,000 people, according to NFL attendance figures.

The Gators led by 11 with just more than eight minutes remaining in the second half.

The Redskins last season had an average attendance of just more than 76,000 people, according to NFL attendance figures.

The Gators led by 11 with just more than eight minutes remaining in the second half.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for just more than two years.

The Redskins last season had an average attendance of just more than 76,000 people, according to NFL attendance figures.

The Gators led by 11 with just more than eight minutes remaining in the second half.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for **just more than** two years.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for just more than two years.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for **slightly more than** two years.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for just more than two years.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for **slightly more than** two years.

The mobile-app car company Uber has been around for **just over** two years.

2.

El Marko  
editing vs.  
a finer point.

*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos High School, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos High School, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

### **THE CATCH**

It is a high school, but that's not its name. It's something long and unwieldy, like Los Cerritos Advanced Institution of Learning and Culture for All the Live-Long Day.



*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos High School, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

### **THE CATCH**

It is a high school, but that's not its name. It's something long and unwieldy, like Los Cerritos Advanced Institution of Learning and Culture for All the Live-Long Day.

### **THE EL MARKO FIX**

*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos high school, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*



*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos High School, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

### **THE CATCH**

It is a high school, but that's not its name. It's something long and unwieldy, like Los Cerritos Advanced Institution of Learning and Culture for All the Live-Long Day.

### **THE EL MARKO FIX**

*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos high school, which offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

### **THE FINE-POINT VERSION**

*She is a teacher at Los Cerritos, a high school that offers classes in seven foreign languages.*

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

**THE CATCH**

He's the chief justice of the United States, not the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

### **THE CATCH**

He's the chief justice of the United States, not the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

### **THE EL MARKO FIX**

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

### **THE CATCH**

He's the chief justice of the United States, not the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

### **THE EL MARKO FIX**

*The group, which backed the confirmations of Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

### **THE FINE-POINT VERSION**

*The group, which backed the Supreme Court confirmations of Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., objected to the commentary.*

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky and Cleveland, Ohio.*

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky and Cleveland, Ohio.*

**THE CATCH**

Sandusky needs the “Ohio,” but Cleveland stands alone.

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky and Cleveland, Ohio.*

**THE CATCH**

Sandusky needs the “Ohio,” but Cleveland stands alone.

**THE EL MARKO FIX**

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky, Ohio, and Cleveland.*

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky and Cleveland, Ohio.*

**THE CATCH**

Sandusky needs the “Ohio,” but Cleveland stands alone.

**THE EL MARKO FIX**

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky, Ohio, and Cleveland.*

**THE FINE-POINT VERSION**

It's fine as is.

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky and Cleveland, Ohio.*

**THE CATCH**

Sandusky needs the “Ohio,” but Cleveland stands alone.

**THE EL MARKO FIX**

*His next campaign stops are in Sandusky, Ohio, and Cleveland.*

**THE FINE-POINT VERSION**

It’s fine as is. Maybe even better:

*His next campaign swing is through Ohio, with stops in Sandusky and Cleveland.*

3.

More on  
(moron?)  
that whole  
dateline-city thing.

She said the best part of her Pacific Northwest road trip was the three-hour drive from Portland, Ore., to Seattle.

She said the best part of her Pacific Northwest road trip was the three-hour drive from Portland, Ore., to Seattle.

CLEVELAND (AP) – From Columbus, Ohio, to Cincinnati, commuters are praising recent improvements to Interstate 71. Next week, work is scheduled to begin on the next stretch, north to Cleveland.

She said the best part of her Pacific Northwest road trip was the three-hour drive from Portland, Ore., to Seattle.

CLEVELAND (AP) – From Columbus, Ohio, to Cincinnati, commuters are praising recent improvements to Interstate 71. Next week, work is scheduled to begin on the next stretch, north to Cleveland.

She said the best part of her Pacific Northwest road trip was the three-hour drive from Portland, Ore., to Seattle.

CLEVELAND (AP) – From Columbus, Ohio, to Cincinnati, commuters are praising recent improvements to Interstate 71. Next week, work is scheduled to begin on the next stretch, north to Cleveland.

4.

Quote,  
unquote.

COLUMBUS, Ga. (AP) – A campaign rally for Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich turned raucous Friday when the former House speaker opened to floor to questions and comments.

“(President Barack) Obama is a Muslim socialist who wasn’t even born in America,” one audience member shouted.

COLUMBUS, Ga. (AP) – A campaign rally for Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich turned raucous Friday when the former House speaker opened to floor to questions and comments.

“(President Barack) Obama is a Muslim socialist who wasn’t even born in America,” one audience member shouted.

COLUMBUS, Ga. (AP) – A campaign rally for Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich turned raucous Friday when the former House speaker opened to floor to questions and comments.

“[President Barack] Obama is a Muslim socialist who wasn’t even born in America,” one audience member shouted.

5.

Headlines and cutlines  
(or, on being a better  
display-typist).

**Fifteen years after discovering taekwondo at a mall kiosk, Alexandria's Jennings is bound for London**

**Fifteen years after discovering taekwondo at a mall kiosk, Alexandria's Jennings is bound for London**

**N.Y. banker contributed money, time to cancer group for young people**

**Fifteen years after discovering taekwondo at a mall kiosk, Alexandria's Jennings is bound for London**

**N.Y. banker contributed money, time to cancer group for young people**

**Savage gives first crash course in sex on campus**

**Fifteen years after discovering taekwondo at a mall kiosk, Alexandria's Jennings is bound for London**

**N.Y. banker contributed money, time to cancer group for young people**

**Savage gives first crash course in sex on campus**

**Whistleblower sues IRS to get reward**  
*Claims disclosures showed how Dutch bank helped clients avoid paying taxes*

# Fifteen years after discovering taekwondo at a mall kiosk, Alexandria's Jennings is bound for London

**N.Y.**

**mon**

**grou**

**Sava**

**cour**

**Whi**

*Claims disclosures showed how Dutch bank helped clients avoid paying taxes*



**d**

# 2 lines

# 36 pt

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) – Why did the chicken cross the road?

To get to the other side.

Say what you will about corny old riddles and jokes, but they are certain to get laughs from the young and the old alike, experts say.

Those in between those groups, however, are aware enough to know

Turn to **CHICKEN**, Page A4

# Why did chicken cross road? To get to the other side.

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) – Why did the chicken cross the road?

To get to the other side.

Say what you will about corny old riddles and jokes, but they are certain to get laughs from the young and the old alike, experts say.

Those in between those groups, however, are aware enough to know

Turn to **CHICKEN**, Page A4

*2 lines*  
*36 pt italic*

**H**ave you noticed those commercials where the pretty brunette who's always wearing something pretty and magenta wants us to buy her brand of cell phone?

Well, I'm a sucker for pretty girls in magenta, which is why I had to explain to my wife of two decades why we now have 72 cell phones.

Turn to **HOME FRONT**, Page B6



**Side  
caption  
goes  
here  
XXXXX**

## *Columnist is in the pink*

**H**ave you noticed those commercials where the pretty brunette who's always wearing something pretty and magenta wants us to buy her brand of cell phone?

Well, I'm a sucker for pretty girls in magenta, which is why I had to explain to my wife of two decades why we now have 72 cell phones.

Turn to **HOME FRONT**, Page B6



**A model  
tempted  
our writer.**

## *Her pink dress, my red face*

**H**ave you noticed those commercials where the pretty brunette who's always wearing something pretty and magenta wants us to buy her brand of cell phone?

Well, I'm a sucker for pretty girls in magenta, which is why I had to explain to my wife of two decades why we now have 72 cell phones.

Turn to **HOME FRONT**, Page B6



**Sorry,  
honey,  
but it's  
her  
fault.**



**The stars come out for FCC Chairman Michael Powell: Among them are singer Diana Ross, top, and the irrepressible SpongeBob SquarePants.**



**The stars come out for FCC  
Chairman Michael Powell:  
Among them are singer Diana  
Ross, **top**, and the irrepressible  
SpongeBob SquarePants.**

6.

The ups and  
downs of  
the downsyUpsy.



Los Angeles police Officer Bill Gannon.



Senate banking committee Chairman Tim Johnson.



Senate banking committee Chairman Tim Johnson.  
The chairman of the Senate banking committee, Tim Johnson.

First-term Rep. Renee Elmers.

First-term Rep. Renee Elmers.

Movie-star Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

First-term Rep. Renee Elmers.

Movie-star Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Penn State football Coach Joe Paterno.

First-term Rep. Renee Elmers.

Movie-star Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Penn State football Coach Joe Paterno.

University of Arizona philosophy Professor Richard Lytle.

First-term Rep. Renee Elmers.

Movie-star Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Penn State football Coach Joe Paterno.

University of Arizona philosophy Professor Richard Lytle.

**First-term congresswoman Renee Elmers.**

**Movie-star governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.**

**Penn State football coach Joe Paterno.**

**University of Arizona philosophy professor Richard Lytle.**

7.

But it's our style!  
*Style*, I tell you,  
*style!*

President Barack Obama's favorability rating fell from 79 percent to 47 percent – a 32- point drop. At the same point in their terms, former President George W. Bush had held steady, former President Bill Clinton had lost 14 points and former President George H.W. Bush had gained 15 points.

President Barack Obama's favorability rating fell from 79 percent to 47 percent – a 32- point drop. At the same point in their terms, former President George W. Bush had held steady, former President Bill Clinton had lost 14 points and former President George H.W. Bush had gained 15 points.

President Barack Obama's favorability rating fell from 79 percent to 47 percent – a 32- point drop. At the same point in their terms, former President George W. Bush had held steady, former President Bill Clinton had lost 14 points and former President George H.W. Bush had gained 15 points.

8.

Can  
we  
agree?

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A group of doctors is playing golf.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A group of doctors is playing golf.

A bunch of us is going to the mall.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A group of doctors is playing golf.

A bunch of us is going to the mall.

A lot of people likes that beer.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A group of doctors is playing golf.

A bunch of us **are** going to the mall.

A lot of people **like** that beer.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions was felt in the city center.

A group of doctors **are** playing golf.

A bunch of us **are** going to the mall.

A lot of people **like** that beer.

A slew of recent advances has made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions **were** felt in the city center.

A group of doctors **are** playing golf.

A bunch of us **are** going to the mall.

A lot of people **like** that beer.

A slew of recent advances **have** made microbiology a hot topic.

A series of explosions **were** felt in the city center.

A group of doctors **are** playing golf.

A bunch of us **are** going to the mall.

A lot of people **like** that beer.

A group of doctors **are** playing golf.

A group of doctors **is** announcing a new policy on transplants.

9.

A peacemaker  
in the  
hyphen wars?

He is a political science professor.

He is a political science professor.



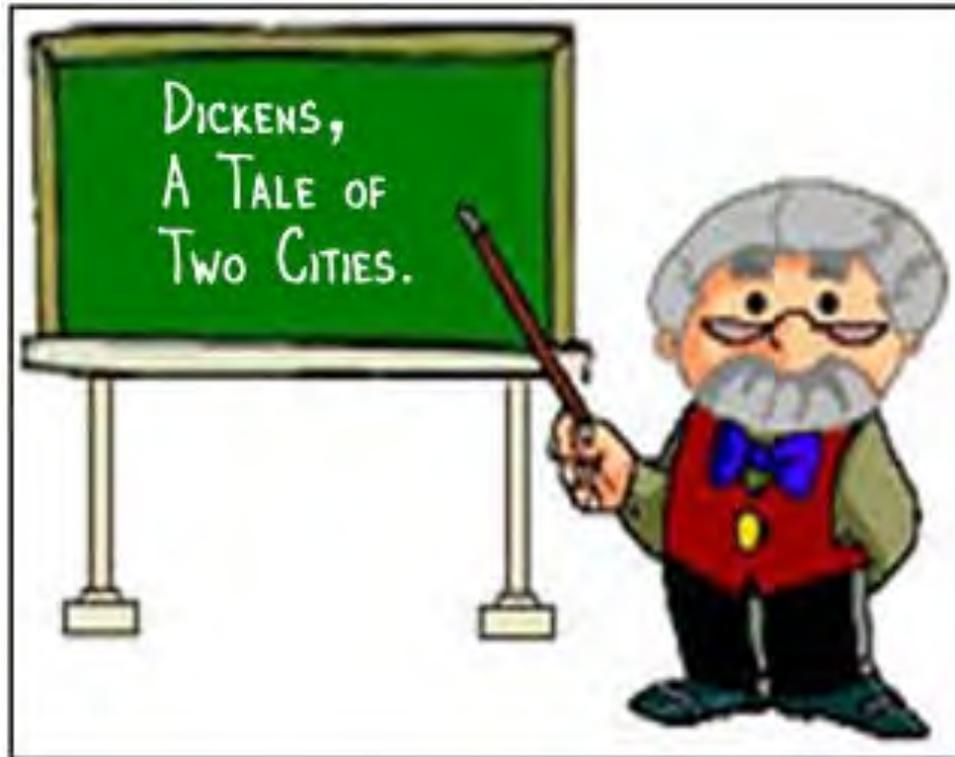
He is a political science professor.  
He is a political-science professor.

He is a political science professor.

He is a political-science professor.

He is a professor of political science.

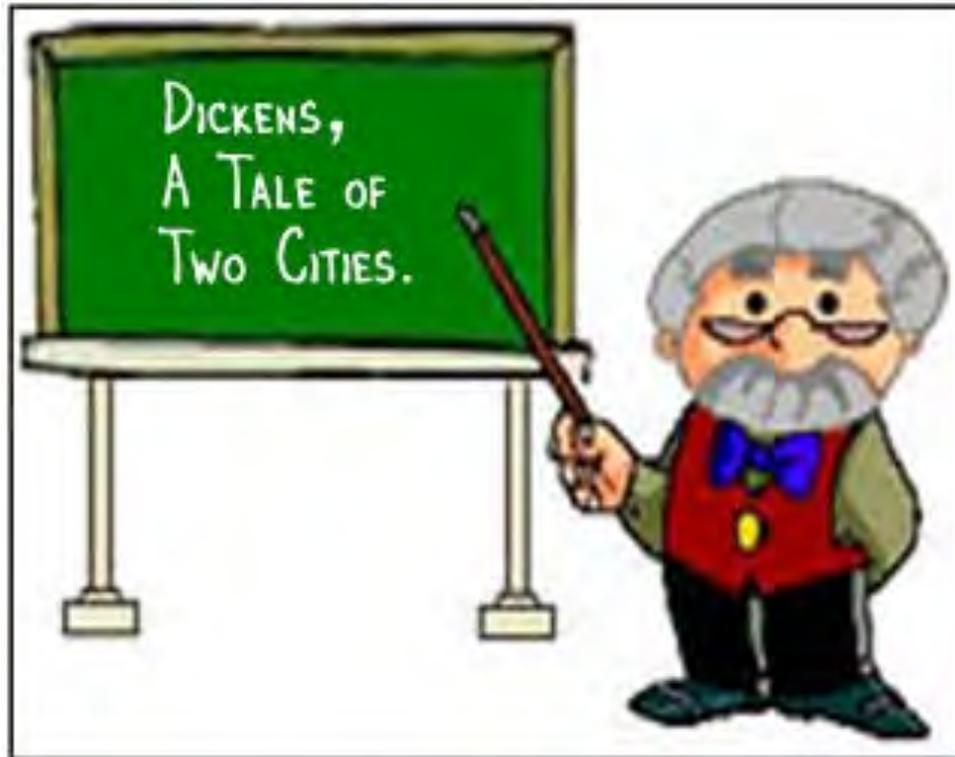
He is an English literature professor.



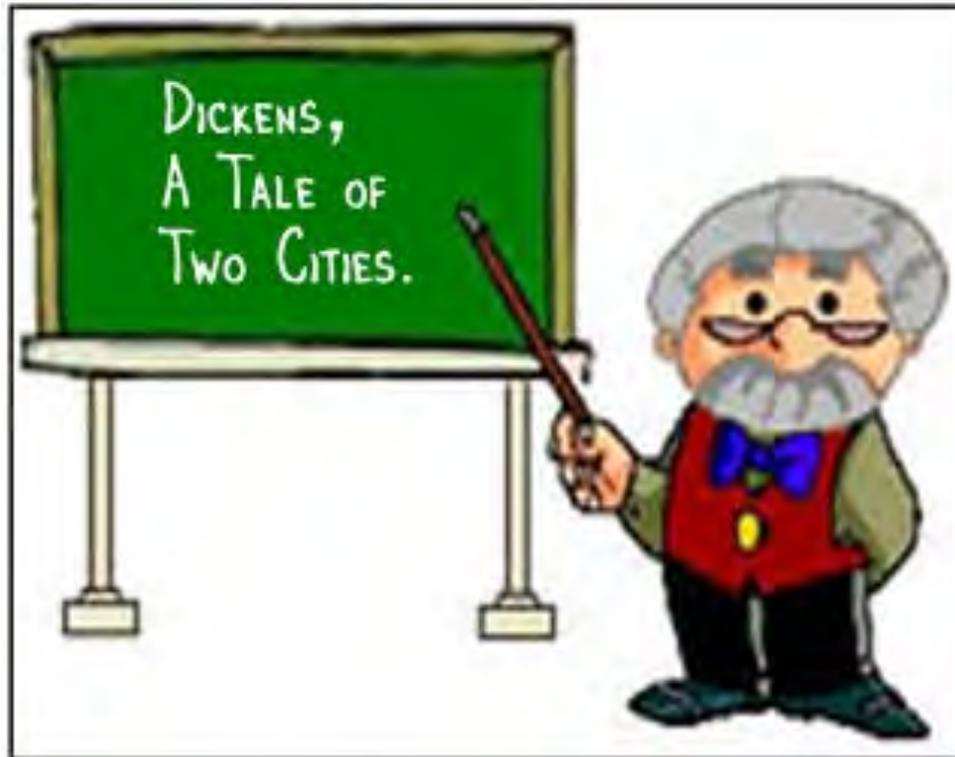
He is an English literature professor.



He is an English literature professor.  
He is an English-literature professor.



He is an English literature professor.  
He is an English-literature professor.  
He is a professor of English literature.



10.

A quick review  
of those rules  
that aren't.

It is not an error **to flagrantly split** an infinitive.

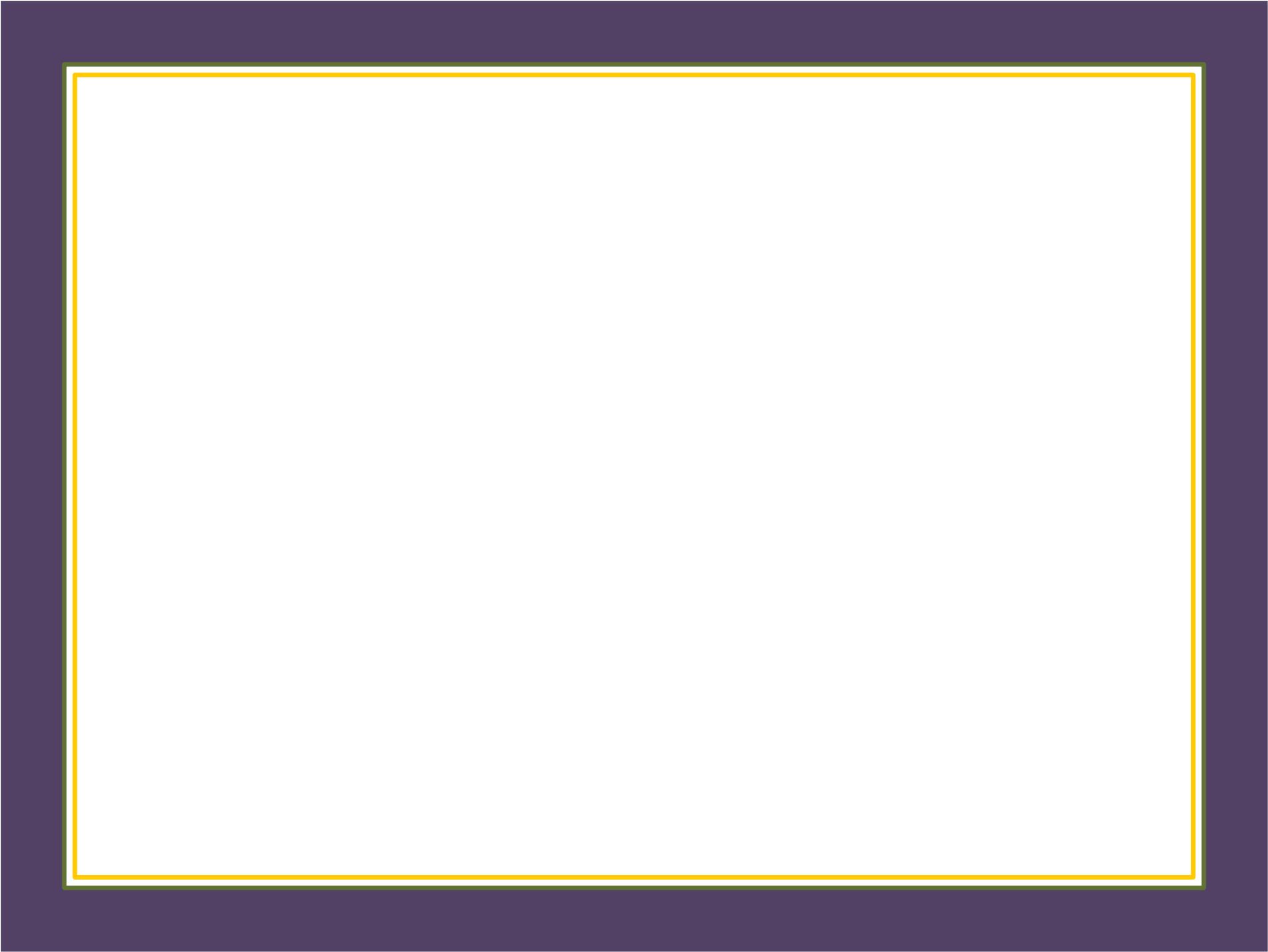
It is not an error **to flagrantly split** an infinitive.  
**Or** to begin a sentence with a conjunction – or  
occasionally throw in a sentence that's a **fragment**.

It is not an error **to flagrantly split** an infinitive.  
**Or** to begin a sentence with a conjunction – or  
occasionally throw in a sentence that's a **fragment**.  
Passive voice and sentence-ending prepositions  
**can often be accounted for**.

It is not an error **to flagrantly split** an infinitive.  
**Or** to begin a sentence with a conjunction – or  
occasionally throw in a sentence that's a **fragment**.  
Passive voice and sentence-ending prepositions  
**can often be accounted for**. Blanket prohibitions  
on “due to” and “impact” are often **due to** ignorance  
and sometimes have a negative **impact** on prose.

It is not an error **to flagrantly split** an infinitive.  
**Or** to begin a sentence with a conjunction – or  
occasionally throw in a sentence that's a **fragment**.  
Passive voice and sentence-ending prepositions  
**can often be accounted for**. Blanket prohibitions  
on “due to” and “impact” are often **due to** ignorance  
and sometimes have a negative **impact** on prose.

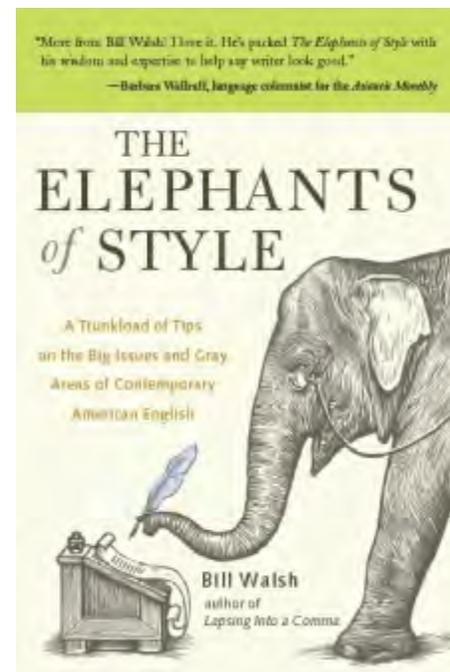
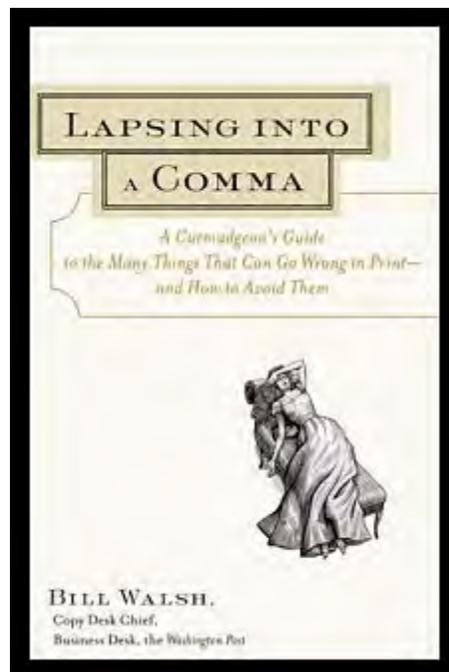
Oh, and cut it out with the “10 items or fewer”  
crusade. There's nothing wrong with “**10 items or  
less.**”



?

[www.theslot.com](http://www.theslot.com)

@theslot



YES,  
I COULD  
CARE  
LESS

How to be a language snob  
without being a jerk

by BILL WALSH

Author of LAPSING INTO A COMMA  
and THE ELEPHANTS OF STYLE