

Beginning.

There is an adage that says the first sentence should tell you who, where, when and what. It is often a good idea, but it is only an idea, a good piece of writing does not have to start that way. That is one of my major themes, there are no hard and fast rules, every writer is different, every piece of writing is different, writers use words in unique combinations.

That does not mean that a writer will succeed if their mind set is,

“I am a unique and different writer who must follow my path and destiny, I am the source, I do not require further understanding, my communications are a bounty, it is up to the reader to make the effort and follow me.”

To my mind arrogance is unbecoming, it improves the performance of soldiers sometimes, but not writers.

I assume one of the aims of writing is to be read, it seems a reasonable assumption. However, writing that doesn't contain the qualities that make readers think it worth reading abounds. It is a much more likely explanation for something remaining unread than prejudice or ignorance, whatever the author may think.

Writing is like music, duelling, painting, carving, or any other art, partly an expression of the intuitive artistic impulse, partly the application of learning. Because we learned to write early on we think it easy, but that was about the same time we made our first drawings, and I don't know about you but my drawing ability hasn't changed much. Before Picasso started on his personal and original path he went to art school and learned to draw in the traditional way.'

As I was writing that last sentence it struck me as a nice example, there is often an ambiguity in the written form which is not there in the spoken form, 'Learned to draw in the traditional way' could mean the product, representational line drawings, or the method, sitting at desks in rows, was traditional. In speech the nuances make meaning clear; the accents, the tones, the emphasis; the little things of speech that make things say what isn't in the actual words.

For the written word you have to find other ways of doing that; tautology can be a little clunky, but rhetorical figures have their place.

I chose not to change that sentence about Picasso to avoid the ambiguity; rhythm, tone and 'voice' have to be taken into account as well as clarity of meaning. The relative importance of the elements, the form of their statement, and the order of presentation is the choice of the writer, generally the more informed he is, and considered the choice is, the better the writing.

Word order is one solution, there are others, consider,

“Houses were built for the fairies from moss and twigs.”

'for' and 'from' make clear what goes with what.

“Moss and twig fairy houses were built.” is far less definite.

As I said at the start, there are no hard and fast rules, we are all different, and writing different things for different reasons. Nothing is definitive, but understanding and consideration are likely to increase effectiveness, and a start which tells you who, where, what and when, combined with a good hook, usually makes a good start.