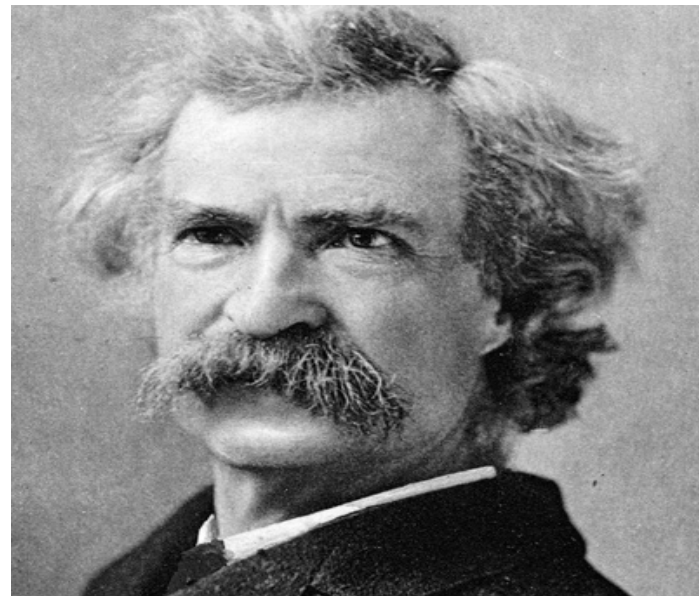
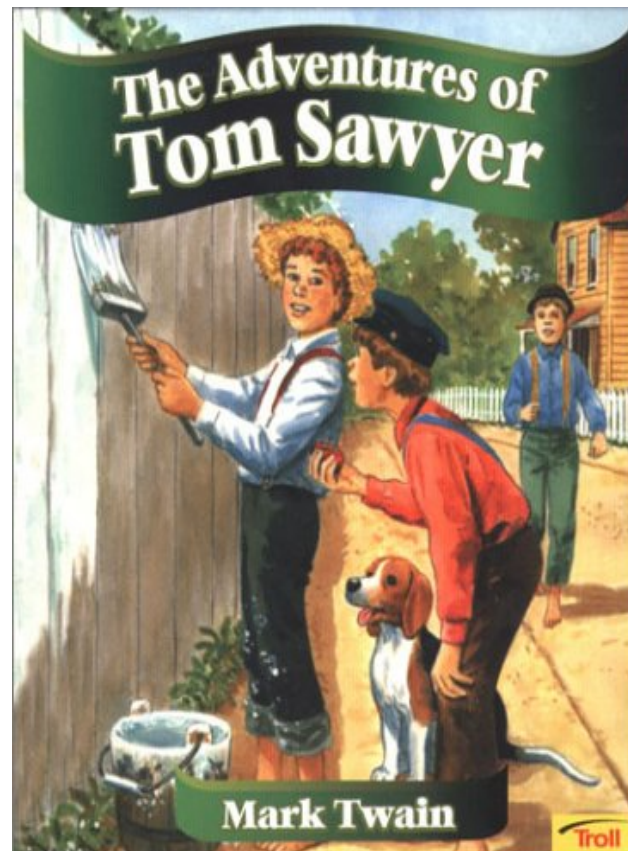


Looking backwards to look forward: Mark Twain and best practice for developing clear and effective content in our globalised, digitally-connected world

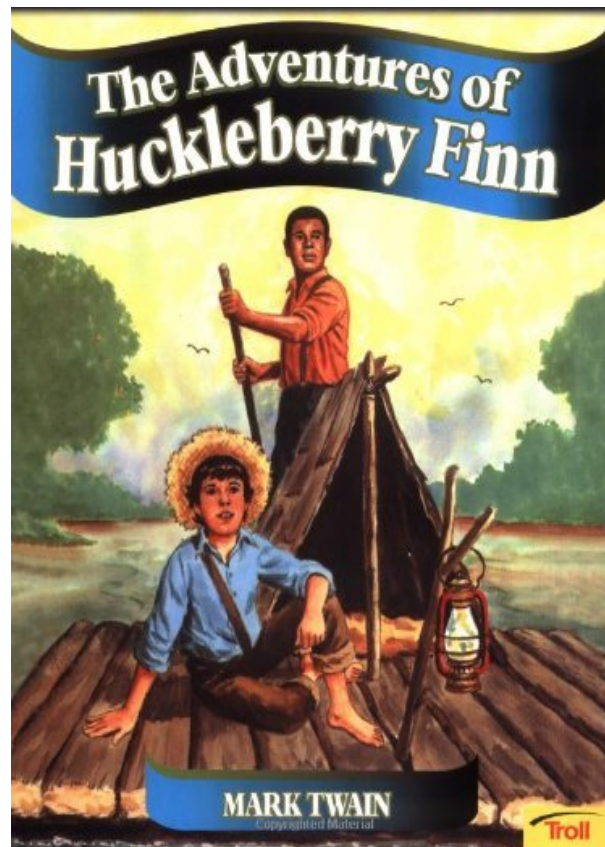
**Dr Stephen Crabbe
September 17th, 2014**



The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876)



Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)



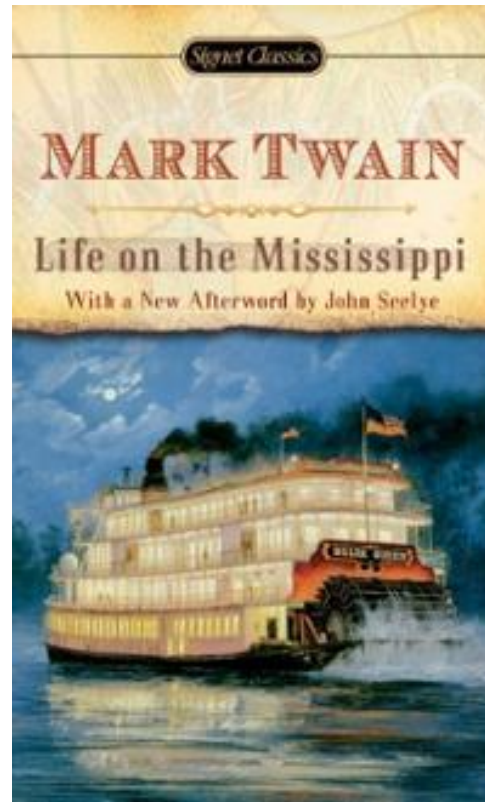
From the 'London Times' of 1904 (1898)

"The improved 'limitless-distance' telephone was presently introduced, and the daily doings of the globe made visible to everybody, and audibly discussible too, by witnesses separated by any number of leagues. [...] The connection was made with the international telephone-station, and day by day, and night by night, he called up one corner of the globe after another, and looked upon its life, and studied its strange sights, and spoke with its people, and realised that by the grace of this marvelous instrument he was almost as free as the birds of the air [...]."

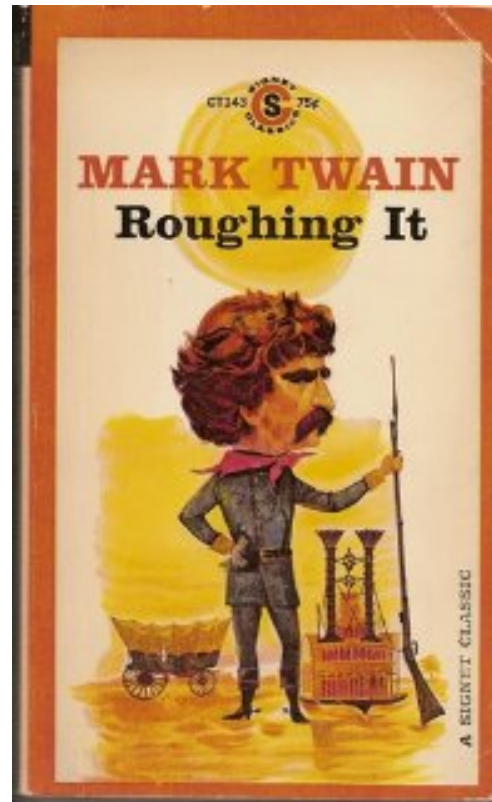
The First Writing Machines (1905)

“I have claimed that I was the first person in the world that ever had a telephone in his house for practical purposes; I will now claim – until dispossessed – that I was the first person in the world to apply the type-machine to literature. [...] That early machine was full of caprices, full of defects – devilish ones. It had as many immoralities as the machine of to-day has virtues.”

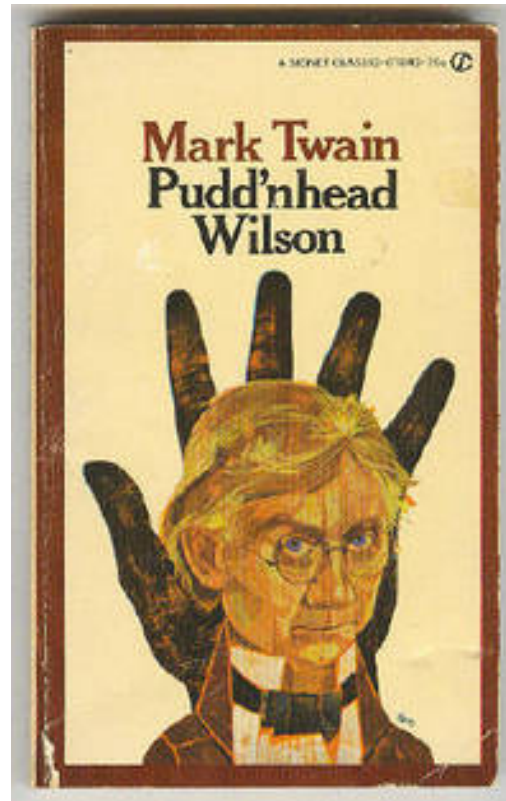
Life on the Mississippi (1883)




Roughing It (1872)



Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894)

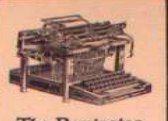


Magazine advertisement from 1905



The Remington
Typewriter
of
1875

**Thirty
Years Ago
To-morrow**



The Remington
Typewriter
of
1905

Mark Twain

wrote the following letter:

“E. REMINGTON & SONS.
“Gentlemen:—Please do not use my name in any way. Please do not even divulge the fact that I own a machine. I have entirely stopped using the Typewriter, for the reason that I never could write a letter with it to anybody without receiving a request by return mail that I would not only describe the machine, but state what progress I had made in the use of it, etc., etc. I don’t like to write letters, and so I don’t want people to know I own this curiosity-breeding little joker.
Yours truly,

“Hartford, March 19, 1875.
“SAMUEL L. CLEMENS.”

TO-DAY

Mark Twain says in his “Unpublished Autobiography.”

Replying to his publishers, who asked him whether this letter of thirty years ago was genuine, Mark Twain answered by sending an extract from his unpublished autobiography, of which this is part:
[From *Harper’s Weekly*, March 13, 1905]

“1904. Villa Quarto, Florence, January.
“Dictating autobiography to a typewriter is a new experience for me, but it goes very well, and is going to save time and ‘language’—the kind of language that soothes vexation.
“I have dictated to a typewriter before—but not autobiography. Between that experience and the present one there lies a mighty gap—more than thirty years! It is a sort of lifetime. In that wide interval much has happened—to the type-machine as well as to the rest of us. At the beginning of that interval a type-machine was a curiosity. The person who owned one was a curiosity, too. But now it is the other way about: the person who doesn’t own one is a curiosity.
“In a previous chapter of this Autobiography I have claimed that I was the first person in the world that ever had a telephone in his house for practical purposes; I will now claim—until dispossessed—that I was the first person in the world to apply the type-machine to literature. That book must have been *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. I wrote the first half of it in ’72, the rest of it in ’74. My machinist type-copied a book for me in ’74, so I concluded it was that one.
“That early machine was full of caprices, full of defects—devilish ones. It had as many immoralities as the machine of to-day has virtues.”
[Copyright, 1905, by Harper & Brothers—Courtesy of Harper’s Weekly.]

REMINGTON

Typewriter Company

New York and Everywhere

“Employ a simple and straightforward style.” (1895)

On read rage

<http://david-crystal.blogspot.co.uk/2008/11/on-read-rage.html>

“[...] use plain, simple language, short words, and brief sentences.” (1880)

“Assemble the saw blade (C) to the saw arbor making sure the teeth of the blade point down at the front of the table, as shown in Fig. 12, and assemble the flange (D) and arbor nut (E) (turn counterclockwise) to the saw arbor and tighten arbor nut (E) as far as possible by hand, being sure that the saw blade is against the inner blade flange.”

*This sentence is taken from page 11 of the instruction manual for the Delta 10" Table Saw (Model 36-600).

Twain in fact advises that a writer “accustoms himself to writing short sentences as a rule” (1890).

“Eschew surplusage.” (1895)

**“[...] style – good style – [has] no
barnacles on it in the way of
unnecessary, retarding
words.” (1892)**

- A new bank account is in the process of being set up for you. → A new bank account is being set up for you.
- The refund that was received from the shop was received on 13 January. → The refund from the shop was received on 13 January.

“Use the right word, not its second cousin.” (1895)

Be particularly careful about using a thesaurus as they provide a list of **approximate, related** words.

classified → secret → mysterious → unidentified → unclassified
perfect → pure → unvarnished → unfinished → rough → imperfect

Twain advises that a writer should:

“Say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near to it” (1895).





Perkins



BULL

“Use good grammar.” (1895)

Budinski claims that “Most readers of technical documents are interested in the technical content of a document, and they may be tolerant of less-than-perfect grammar.” (2001)

Budinski, K. (2001). *Engineers’ Guide to Technical Writing*.
Novelty: ASM International.

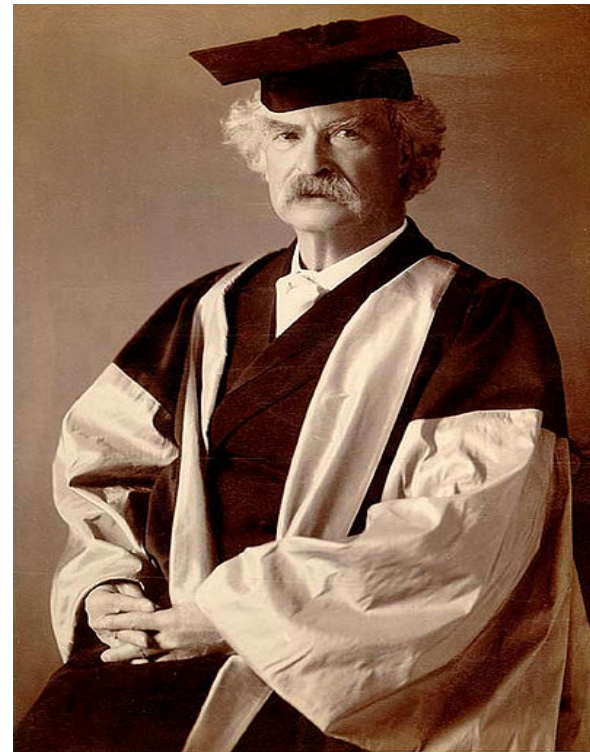
“[...] you need not expect to get your book right the first time. Go to work and revamp or rewrite it.” (1878)

In contrast with Twain, twenty-first century writers about science and technology have access to a wide range of revising and editing software to assist them.

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC.
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.
I've run this poem threw it,
I'm shore your pleased too no,
Its perfect inn it's weigh,
My checker tolled me sew.

To summarise Twain's advice in his own words...

“That is the way to write English – it is the modern way, and the best way. Stick to it.” (1880)



Suggested reading

- Twain, M. (1898). *From the 'London Times' of 1904.* www.readbookonline.net/readonLine/998
- Twain, M. (1917). *Mark Twain's Letters, Vol. 1 of 2.* New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.
- Twain, M. (1917). *Mark Twain's Letters, Vol. 2 of 2.* New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.
- Twain, M. (1994). *Mark Twain on Writing and Publishing.* New York: Book-of-the-Month Club.
- Twain, M. (2001). *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Twain, M. (2010). *Life As I Find It: A Treasury of Mark Twain Rarities.* New York: Cooper Square Press.

Any questions...

