

**The  
Workplace Writing  
Workbook:  
Tips Designed to Stick**

*by*

**Ken Bresler**

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# INTRODUCTION: YOU'RE IN CHARGE



*“Be not the slave of Words.”* So said Thomas Carlyle. The Ken Bresler Corollary to Carlyle’s advice is: Don’t be a slave to the rules of grammar or the principles of writing—even the principles that I propound here.

The following passage, from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, is instructive and fairly well known.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Lewis Carroll and Thomas Carlyle in effect were saying the same thing: You’re the master of words; you’re in charge. Don’t work for words; make them work for you.

What does it mean not to be the slave of grammatical rules and writing principles? Well, one example is an outdated rule of English that prohibits ending a sentence with a preposition. And a “preposition” is what exactly? Some common prepositions are: at, about, by, for, into, off, on, over, to, under, up, with.

In her book *Woe is I*, Patricia T. O’Conner called this supposed rule “a bugaboo that English teachers used to get worked up over. . . .” O’Conner subtly poked fun at this supposed rule by violating it. Her phrase sounds just fine even though it ends with a preposition. Winston Churchill was less subtle. He said (or supposedly said), “This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.” So go ahead and end a sentence with a preposition. Make words work for you.

Here are some major principles of writing. Learn them, so you can violate them when necessary.