

It was the *best* of sentences, it was the *worst* of sentences  
Subtitle: a writer's guide to crafting killer sentences  
By June Casagrande  
Ten Speed Press (2010)  
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**New Book May (Should!) Replace Your Stunk and White!**

**Grammar Guru Offers Advice  
Like None You've Ever Seen—All in One Place!**

**Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, award-winning author of *This Is the Place* and *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered, Tracings*, a chapbook of poetry and the *How To Do It Frugally* Series of book for authors**

Rules. Rules. Rules. I didn't realize how tired I was of the same old writing advice until this little black book landed in my mailbox. I promised to review it fast, but this *It was the best of sentences, it was the worst of sentences* book by June Casagrande isn't a book a serious writer wants to flip through fast.

I could see from the subhead in the first chapter that this book would include something better than most. It read, "Thy Reader, Thy God." What a concept that is! The Reader and not The Rule Book! Ahem! And it got better and better as Casagrande explored all the subjects I knew everything about. Or thought I did. She uses examples so a writer can see the differences between OK writing and acrylic-clear writing.

By the time I got to "Are Your Relatives Essential?" I was really sold. This is a Wow-Chapter, even for accomplished editors. The writing tips she gives in Chapter Twelve for using tenses effectively are just what I need to convince my students that I'm not the only editor/teacher in the world who believes that tenses needn't match all the way through a story (or even a paragraph, for that matter!). That chapter is called "You Will Have Been Conjugating."

I could go on and on, chapter by chapter. What isn't new to a writer or what doesn't elucidate will remind and amuse Casagrande's God, The Reader. For those who know Casagrande's work, this book isn't as funny as her first one, *Grammar Snobs Are Great Big Meanies* ([www.budurl.com/GrammarSnobs](http://www.budurl.com/GrammarSnobs)). Nevertheless, the reader will still occasionally get a good laugh. For chuckles read Chapter Nine, "Antique Desk Suitable for Lady with Thick Legs and Large Drawers."

For Casagrande, the lesson is always that grammar needn't be dreary. Why should it be when we love writing? How could it be when grammar is the nails and tacks, the color and structure of what we love? Writing.

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Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This is the Place*, has won eight awards. Her book of creative nonfiction *Harkening*, won three. A UCLA Writers' Program instructor, she also is the author of another book essential for writers, USA Book News' Best Professional Book of 2004, *The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't*. ([www.budurl.com/FrugalBkPromo](http://www.budurl.com/FrugalBkPromo)). The second in the HowToDoItFrugally series, *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success* ([www.budurl.com/TheFrugalEditor](http://www.budurl.com/TheFrugalEditor)) covers writing successful query letters and includes helpful hints from twenty of the nation's top agents. Her book *Great Little Last-Minute Editing Tips for Writers: The Ultimate Frugal Booklet for Avoiding Word Trippers and Crafting Gatekeeper-Perfect Copy* ([www.budurl.com/WordTrippersPB](http://www.budurl.com/WordTrippersPB)) will appeal to the same crowd that falls in love with Casagrande's books. Learn more about Howard-Johnson at her new site <http://HowToDoItFrugally.com>.