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When you've written everything you can think of, take a day or two to read over the manuscript quickly and to test it for the obvious major points that would first strike a stranger's eye. Is the mathematics good, is the exposition interesting, is the language clear, is the format pleasant and easy to read? Then proofread and check the computations; that's an obvious piece of advice, and no one needs to be told how to do it. "Ripening" is easy to explain but not always easy to do: it means to put the manuscript out of sight and try to forget it for a few months. When you have done all that, and then re-read the whole work from a rested point of view, you have done all you can. Don't wait and hope for one more result, and don't keep on polishing. Even if you do get that result or do remove that sharp corner, you'll only discover another mirage just ahead.

To sum it all up: begin at the beginning, go on till you come to the end, and then, with no further ado, stop.

20 THE LAST WORD

I have come to the end of all the advice on mathematical writing that I can compress into one essay. The recommendations I have been making are based partly on what I do, more on what I regret not having done, and most on what I wish others had done for me. You may criticize what I've said on many grounds, but I ask that a comparison of my present advice with my past action not be one of them. Do, please, as I say, and not as I do, and you'll do better. Then rewrite this essay and tell the next generation how to do better still.

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