Academic writing

Dr Aleydis Nissen | 13 March 2024

Universiteit Leiden
Law

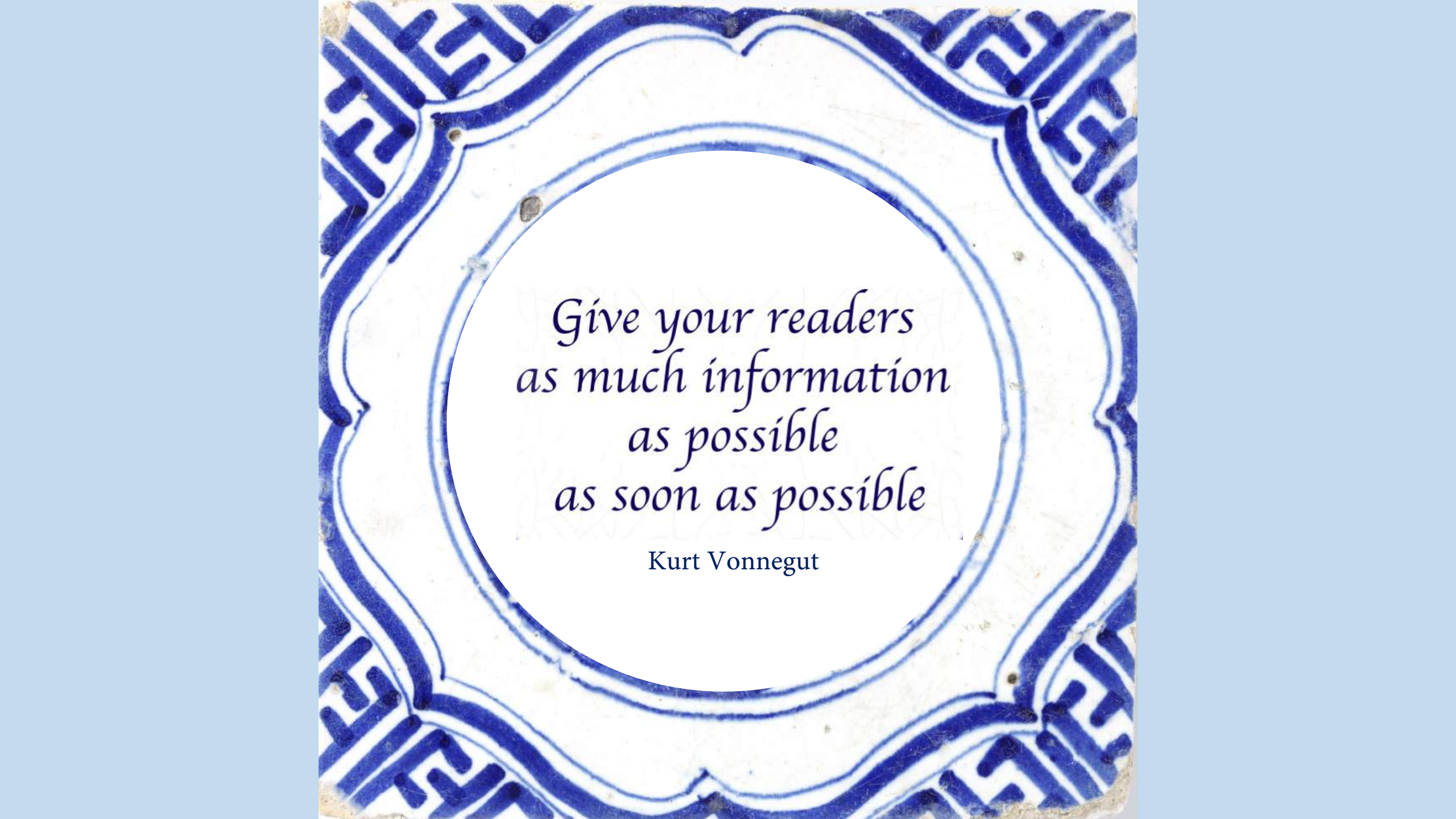Today, we will have a group discussion on academic writing guided by 12 statements from accomplished writers. They are not academics, but then again, they do not need to be.
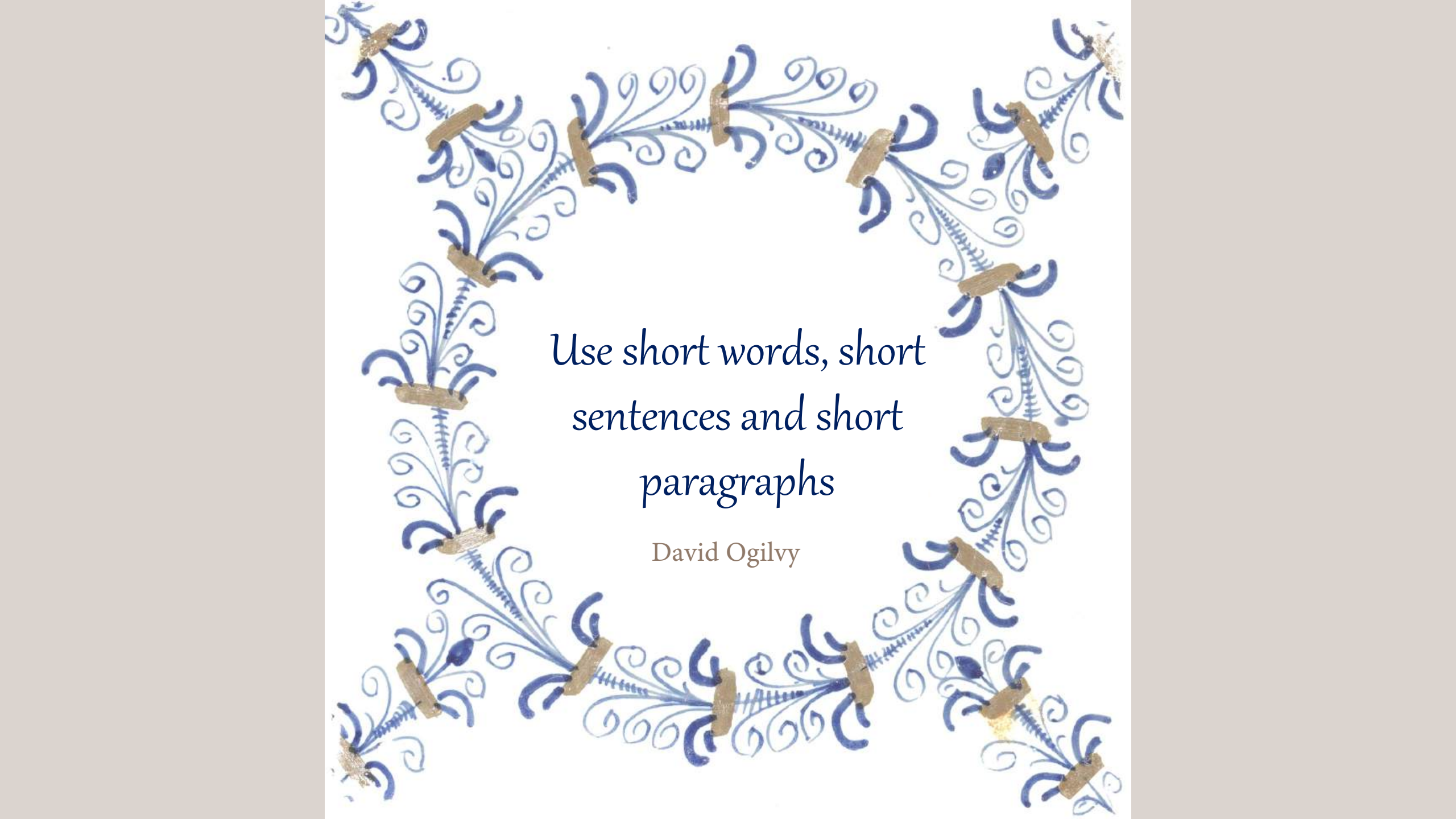
A novelist, then, is someone who takes you on a journey. Through space. Through time. A novelist leads the reader over a gap
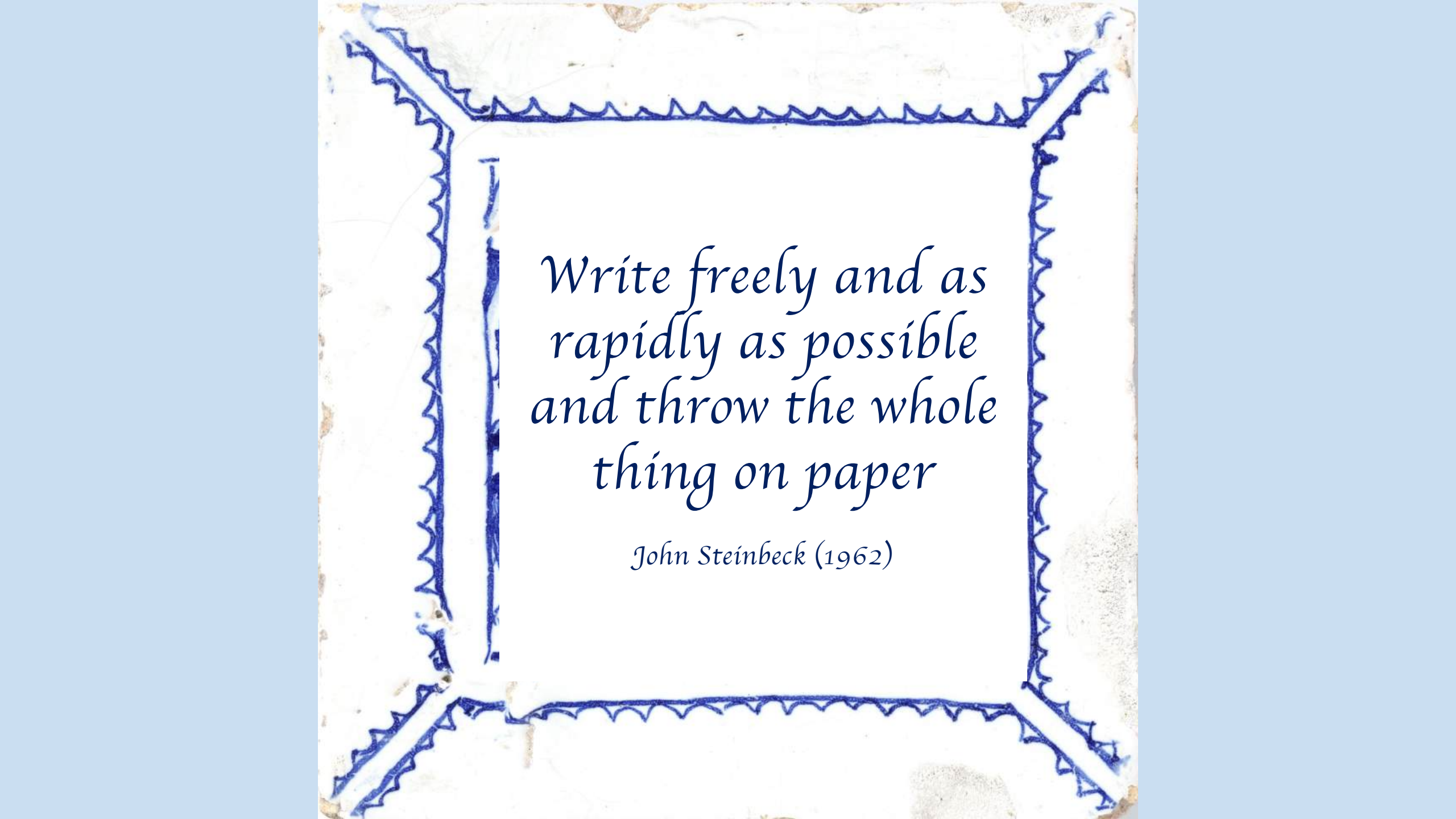
- Susan Sontag -

Give your readers
as much information
as possible
as soon as possible

Kurt Vonnegut
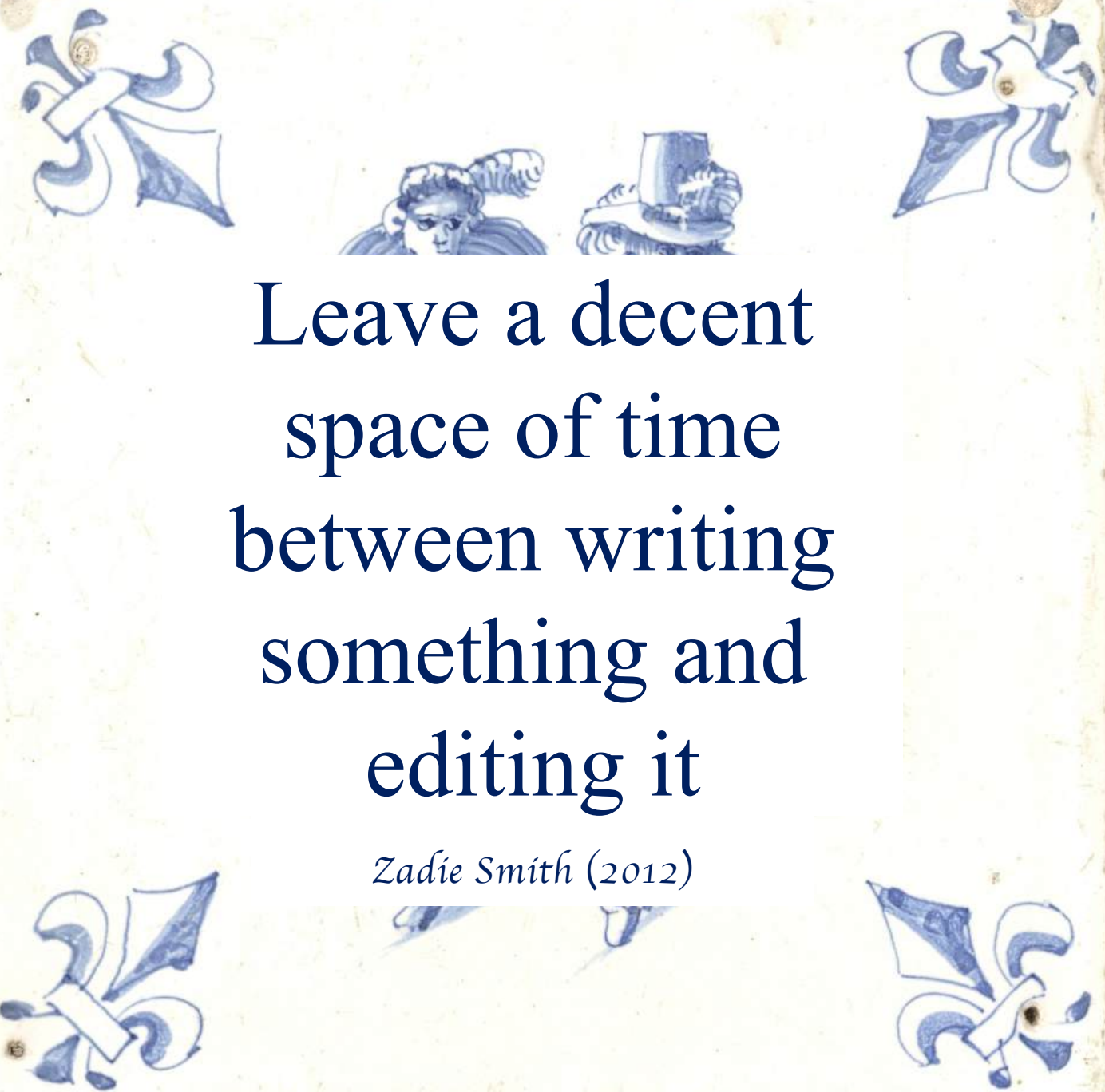
Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs

David Ogilvy

Write freely and as rapidly as possible and throw the whole thing on paper

John Steinbeck (1962)

Leave a decent space of time between writing something and editing it

Zadie Smith (2012)

schrijven

is

schrappen

GODFRIED BOMANS

don't worry about the bad drafts

Miranda July (2018)

If it sounds like writing… rewrite it

Elmore Leonard (2001)

la riuscita ... di regola
vuol dire una paziente
ricerca del "mot juste",
della frase in cui ogni
parola è insostituibile

Italo Calvino (1985)

Making lists of words,
to thicken my active vocabulary.

To have puny, not just little,
hoax, not just trick,
mortifying, not just embarrassing,
bogus, not just fake.

Susan Sontag

πολὺ δὲ μέγιστον τὸ μεταφορικὸν εἶναι.
Μόνον γὰρ τοῦτο οὔτε παρ᾽ ἄλλου ἔστι
λαβεῖν εὐφυΐας τε σημεῖόν ἐστι
τὸ γὰρ εὖ μεταφέρειν τὸ τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν ἐστιν

_____

It is far better to use metaphors, not just any image,
but those that reveal similarities,
demonstrating a witty mind

- Aristoteles -

Break any of
these rules
sooner than
say anything
outright
barbarous

George Orwell (1946)

For further reading on academic writing, consult
The Craft of Research by Wayne Booth et al. (2016)

References

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Zadie Smith, 'Ten Rules for Writing Fiction' (The Guardian 2010)

Godfried Bomans, 'Schrijven is Schrappen' (1969)

Miranda July, 'Buy a Cat, Stay Up Late, Don't Drink: Top 10 Writers' Tips on Writing' (quoted by Travis Elborough, The Guardian 2018)

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various references sourced via Maria Popova from The Marginalian; design from rijksmuseum.nl

Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, Joseph Williams et al., 'The Craft of Research' (4th ed, 2016)