

ROLE OF REVISION

In ancient times, the focus of the rhetor was upon presentation of oral arguments in the form of speeches, and students trained to perform in pressured situations before a law court or assembly. Though a speaker might spend time in preparation, most speeches were one-time opportunities. If the words were not well-chosen and well-spoken the first time, there was no second chance to influence an audience.

With modern written documents, a composition does not have to be perfect when the words first appear on the page. A document is not truly finished until it is transmitted to an audience, and, even then, important documents are often circulated in draft stages to colleagues for comments before the process is complete, and it is presented to an audience.

Many writers claim that revising is the most rewarding step in writing, the time when they have words on a page to work with and can manipulate them to create a composition which communicates effectively. Yet, many students feel that their first drafts should stay exactly the way they've written them because these writings are truest to their feelings and experience.

They are sure they have made their point clearly, but the reader may be left scratching his or her head and wondering what it was the writer meant to say. To communicate effectively, a writer must learn to interact with his reader to ensure he has communicated his message clearly.

BEGIN REVISION BY REREADING

The first step of revising is rereading. This step can be simple, if you are reading something written by someone else, but when it is your own writing it becomes infinitely more difficult. After all, you know what you meant to say—you know the research behind the writing and why you chose certain words or phrases. You even know how every sentence is supposed to read—even though you left out a word or two or three—and your mind can trick you into seeing the missing words right where they belong. Unfortunately, the reader does not have your understanding, and communication can break down. You need to learn to read your own work critically, as if it were written by a stranger. One of the first aids in this process is to read your work aloud. You can often hear stumbling blocks, quicker than you can see them.

You can also learn to read your own work more objectively by reading and commenting on other writers' work. Look at the structure of essays, at the way the writers use transitions and topic sentences, and at the sentence structure and choice of words. As you learn to see how good writers put ideas and words together, you will begin to think about the readings in a more thorough manner—thinking of alternative, perhaps even better, ways to express the message of each essay. You will also learn to read your own work with a more critical eye.

QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING

Reading the work of some professional writers, you may have developed the idea that the best writing is writing that is difficult to understand, writing that sends the reader to the dictionary with every sentence, or writing that uses many technical or specialized terms. Often, we think something difficult to read must be well written. Although it is sometimes difficult to read about topics that are new to us because we're learning new vocabulary and struggling with complex ideas, it simply is not true that the best writing is hard to read. Indeed, the most effective writing, the kind of writing you want to produce in your classes, is simple, concise, and direct.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Simple means "unadorned" or "not ornate." *Writing simply* means saying something in common, concrete language without too much complication in the sentence structure. Writing simply doesn't mean you have to use only short or easy words. It doesn't mean that all your sentences will be simple sentences. It doesn't mean that you can't use figures of speech or intricate details. Simple writing means that you try to get your point across in a direct and interesting way. You aren't trying to hide your ideas. Instead, you are trying to amplify those ideas and begin an intelligible conversation with your reader.

RELY ON EVERYDAY WORDS

When writing about computers or other technical subjects, it's tempting to use *jargon* or specialized words you might use when talking to others with the same knowledge, interest, and background. When writing for a

limited audience whose members are familiar with technical terms, a bit of jargon might be acceptable. However, most of the writing you will do in college and later in the workplace will address a larger audience. You will want to avoid the use of highly technical terms, acronyms, and abbreviations.

If it seems that the writers in this text use many big words or technical terms, stop for a minute to consider the original audience for each of the essays. Consider how your vocabulary grows each year as you read, discuss, and consider new ideas. The everyday words of a tenth grade student will probably be fewer in number than the everyday words of a junior in college. Similarly, the everyday words of a college freshman will be different from the everyday words of a computer professional with three years of work experience. Use words that are comfortable and familiar to you and your readers when you write, and you will write clear, effective essays.

USE PRECISE WORDS

We sometimes assume that our reader will know what we mean when we use adjectives like “beautiful,” “quiet,” or “slow.” However, the reader has only his or her own ideas of those adjectives. You can make your writing more interesting and effective by adding the concrete details that will give the reader an image using at least two of the senses.

You can use details from all of the senses to make your writing more concrete, more precise. What are some of the sensual qualities of the experience or thing? Can you compare it to another thing that your readers may be familiar with to help them understand it better? Can you compare it to something totally unlike it? Can you compare it to a different sense to surprise the readers and help them understand the image you are trying to create?

A good way to practice your ability to write original concrete images is to expand on a cliché. A *cliché* is an overused saying or expression. Often, clichés begin as similes that help make images more concrete. They become clichéd or overused because they lose their originality or they don't contain enough detail to give us the entire picture. Choose a cliché and write a sentence that expands the cliché and uses the senses to create a clear picture of the thing described. You might try some of the following clichés.

She is as pretty as a picture.
It smelled heavenly.
It was as soft as a baby's bottom.
His heart is as hard as stone.
It tastes as sour as a pickle.
We stared at the roaring campfire.
We listened to the babbling brook.

Precise details allow us to experience the world of the writer. We leave our own views and perceptions and learn how someone else sees the world. What "quiet" is like for one writer. What "beautiful" means to another. Fill in the gaps between your words and ideas with vivid images and your writing becomes more interesting and more effective.

BE CONCISE

Rid your writing of excess words and leave only that which makes your meaning clear and concrete. Becoming aware of several common problems can help you make your writing more concise. When you begin a sentence with either "it is" or "there is," you transfer all the meaning of the sentence to the end of the sentence. This is known as a *delayed construction*. You have delayed the meaning. The reader must read on to find out what "it" or "there" refer to. They don't get anything important from the beginning of the sentence.

Examine the following sentences:

It is important to change the oil in older gasoline engines.
There is an apple on the table.
There isn't anything we need to fear except our own fear.

We can rewrite these sentences, making them more concise, by deleting the "there is" or the "it is" and restructuring the sentence.

Changing the oil in older gasoline engines is important.
An apple is on the table.
We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

Notice that the second group of sentences is shorter and the important information is no longer buried in the middle. Revising this type of sentence can make your writing more concise and get information to the reader more effectively.

If you're afraid you use "it is" and "there is" (or "it's" and "there's") too often, you can use most word processing programs to seek these constructions out. Use the "search" or "find and replace" tool that's found in the Edit portion of your pull down menu. Type "it is" and ask your computer to find every place you use this construction in your document. When you find a sentence that begins with "it is," revise the sentence to make it more concise. Do the same with "there is," "it's," and "there's." After you become more aware of these errors by correcting them, you'll find that you notice the errors before or as you make them. You will begin to write more concisely, and you'll have fewer delayed constructions to revise.

You can also make your writing more concise by avoiding common wordy expressions. Sometimes when we're nervous about writing or insecure about our knowledge of a topic, we try to hide that insecurity behind a wall of meaningless words, such as does the following sentence:

At this point in time, you may not have the ability to create a web page due to the fact that you've avoided using computers for anything other than playing Solitaire.

This sentence is full of deadwood phrases that add no meaning to the sentence. If we take out the unneeded words, we have this sentence:

You may not be able to create a web page because you've only used your computer to play Solitaire.

Your computer may have a grammar checker that will identify some commonly used wordy expressions. If your computer doesn't have a grammar checker, or if your instructor has asked you not to use the grammar checker in your computer, you can still learn to revise the wordiness out of your paragraphs. Use the computer to separate a paragraph of your writing into sentences. As you scroll through the paragraph, hit the "hard return" or "enter" key on your keyboard twice every time you find a period. Once you have separated the sentences, look at each sentence. What is the important idea in the sentence? What words are used to convey that idea? What words

don't add any meaning to the sentence? Delete words that don't convey meaning, and revise the sentence to make it more concise.

USE ACTION VERBS

Action verbs are words that convey the action of a sentence. They carry much of our language's nuance and meaning. Many inexperienced writers use only "to be" verbs: *am, is, are, was, were, be, been, and being*. If you use too many of these verbs, you risk losing much of the power of language. If I say someone is coming through the door, I've created a picture of a body and a doorway. If I say someone marches or slinks through the door, I've added not only the information about movement but also about the qualities of that movement. I've given my subject the attitude of a soldier or a cat. For example, consider this sentence written by Howard Rheingold:

Thirty thousand years ago, outside a deceptively small hole in a limestone formation in the area now known as southern France, several adolescents shivered in the dark, awaiting initiation into the cult of toolmakers.

By using the verb "shivered," especially when accompanied by the words "in the dark," Rheingold paints a word picture much more vivid than he would have conveyed with the use of a "to be" verb. Using interesting verbs can enliven your writing.

If you want to focus upon using more action verbs, skim through your essay and circle all the "to be" verbs. Read the sentences with circled "to be" verbs more closely, and choose several to rewrite using active verbs in place of the "to be" verbs. You won't be able to do this for every sentence, but replace them where you can and your writing will become more lively, more concise, and more effective.

FILL IN THE GAPS

When we write, we sometimes forget that we are writing to an audience other than ourselves. We expect that our readers are people just like us, with our experiences, memories, and tastes. Because they're so much like us, we think, we sometimes expect readers to be able to read more than what we've written on the page. We expect them to read our minds. We may leave

large gaps in our essays, hoping the reader will fill in with exactly the information we would have included.

If I'm writing an essay about my childhood in the South and I say it was always so hot in the summer that I hated to go outside, I might think my reader knows what I mean by hot. However, there are many different ways to be "hot." In east Texas where I grew up, the hot was a sticky hot. Eighty degrees made me long for a big glass of sweetened iced tea with lots of ice. The heat made my clothes cling. Sweating didn't help because the sweat didn't dry. I spent the day feeling as if I'd never dried after my morning shower. In New Mexico, I never really felt hot unless the temperature got above 110 degrees. At that point, the heat would rush at me, making it difficult to breathe. I would open the door to leave the house, and it felt as if I had opened the oven door to check on a cake. If I say I was hot in the summer without describing how heat felt to me, my reader may not get the message I'm trying to convey. Don't expect your reader to know what you mean by "hot" or by any other general description. Instead, take a minute to add details that will fill in the gaps for the reader.

SPEAK DIRECTLY

To speak directly is to say, up front, who is doing what. Sometimes we don't tell the reader who is completing the action or we tell them too late. Let's look at the following sentences.

The steak was stolen from the grill.

The decisive battle was fought between the Confederate and the Union armies in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The red truck has been driven into the side of the green car.

Although we might be able to guess who the actors are in each of the sentences, the first and last sentences don't tell us directly. Even if the reader can guess that it was a dog who stole the steak from the grill or my neighbor who drove the red truck into the side of the green car, the reader has to stop and figure out who is doing what before he or she can read on. This slows the reader down and diminishes the effectiveness of your writing.

Language professionals call this *passive voice*. The action comes before the actor. Note that sometimes, as in the first and last sentences above, the writer doesn't mention the actor at all. These are tests for passive verbs:

- Look for verbs coupled with another action word that ends in “-ed” or “-en” such as “was stolen” or “was forgotten.”
- Find the action and the actor in the sentence to make sure that they are in the most effective order. The most effective sentence order is actor first, then action. If the sentence does not specify the actor but leaves it implied, chances are that it is a passive sentence. For example, read this sentence: “The red truck was driven into the green car.” It does not say who was the driver, and, thus is a passive sentence.

Rewriting some of your sentences with passive voice will make your writing stronger and more interesting.

REMEMBER TO PROOFREAD

It is understandably difficult to find the errors in an essay you have been working on for days. A few tricks used by professional writers might help you see errors in your essay more clearly.

1. With pencil in hand, read the essay aloud, slowly, preferably to an audience. When you are reading aloud, it is more difficult to add or change words, so you tend to catch errors you would not see reading silently to yourself. Plus the reactions of your audience may point out areas where future readers may become confused or lose interest.
2. Another trick is to read the essay backwards, sentence by sentence. This forces you to look at sentence structure and not at the overall content of the essay. If you are working on a computer, another way to accomplish this is to create a final edit file in which you hit the hard return twice at the end of every question or statement. You might even go so far as to number the sentences so they look more like grammar exercises. Then look at each sentence individually.

GAIN FEEDBACK BY PEER EDITING

Your instructor may schedule class periods for peer workshops. These workshops are opportunities for you to get responses from your readers. Often, you will be divided into groups of three or four students and you will be given a list of questions to answer about your peers’ essays. Your peers will get copies of your essay, and they will give you comments as well. The first

peer workshop can be a difficult experience. It is never easy to take criticism, constructive or not. Taking criticism in a small group is even more difficult. There are several things you can do to make your peer groups more productive.

WHEN YOUR ESSAY IS BEING REVIEWED

1. Write down everything the reviewers say. You think you will remember it later, but often you will forget just that piece of advice you need. More importantly, writing while the reviewers speak is an effective way to keep the channels of communication open. It is hard to come up with a defense for your paper if you are busy writing.
2. Save your comments until all the reviewers are done. If you have specific questions, write them in the margins of your notes. If they ask you questions, make a note to answer them when everyone is done. If you allow yourself to speak, you will be tempted to start defending your essay. Once you start defending your essay, two things happen. First, you stop listening to the comments. Second, you offend your reviewers, making it less likely that they will give you honest criticism in the future.
3. The first comment you should make to your reviewers is “Thank You.” The second comment can be anything but a defense. Your readers are only telling you how they interpret your essay. They are giving you their opinions; you do not have to make the changes they suggest.
4. Save all the comments you get on your essay. Set them aside for a day or so. Then make the changes that you think will make your essay better.

WHEN YOU ARE THE REVIEWER

1. Read an essay through, at least one time, just to browse the content of the essay. Appreciate the essay for what it does well. Try to ignore any problems for now. You will get back to them the second time you read and begin your comments in the margins. Every essay will have at least one thing good about it.
2. Always begin your comments with a sincere discussion of what you like about the essay.
3. Be specific in your comments. Your peers will probably understand you better if you say, “The topic sentence in paragraph four really sets the reader up for what the essay accomplishes in paragraph four.”

But I can't really find a topic sentence for paragraph six, and the topic sentences in paragraphs two and three could be improved." Note how this statement gives a positive response and then identifies specific places where the author can improve the essay. This works much better than a generalized statement like, "Topic sentences need work."

4. Be descriptive in your comments. It is often helpful for students to hear how you are reading their essays. "Paragraph five seems to be telling me . . ." or "I got the feeling the essay's overall message is..." are good ways to start descriptive sentences.
5. Realize that you are analyzing a paper and not a person. Directing your comments toward the essay, "Paragraph nine doesn't really have anything new to add, does the paper need it?" sounds better to the listener than "You repeat yourself in paragraph nine. Do you really need it?"

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING

If your instructor does not require peer editing, you can ask someone to review your essay. Choose someone you trust to give you an honest opinion. It might not be effective to ask a parent, spouse, or girlfriend/boyfriend to give you a critique if you know they are going to like anything you write, just because you wrote it. It might be better to ask another student who has recently had an English class, or is enrolled in yours currently. In exchange, you might offer to look over their work. Remember, you learn to read your own essays better by reading other peoples' essays more critically. Have your reviewer answer the following questions about your essay.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PEER REVIEW

When you have revised your paper several times, have someone answer these questions for overall content, paragraph development, and word choice and sentence structure.

OVERALL CONTENT

1. What is the thesis or main point of the essay? Where does the writer state this main point? If the main point is implied rather than stated, express it in a sentence. Does the main point give a

subject and an opinion about the subject? How might the writer improve his/her thesis?

2. What is the purpose of this essay? What are the characteristics of the audience the writer seems to be addressing? (formal, fun-loving, serious, cynical, laid-back, etc.)

PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

1. Do each of the paragraphs in the essay work to support the main point of the essay? Which paragraphs seem to wander from that main point? What other information needs to be added to develop the main point?
2. List two places in the essay where the writer uses vivid sensory details. How effective are those details? Are they used to support the thesis of the essay? Identify two places in the essay where the writer needs more details that are effective. What kind of details might he or she include?
3. What grade would you give the introduction? How does it draw the reader into the essay? What specific things can the writer do to make the introduction more inviting?
4. Which paragraph do you like the best? Why? Which paragraph in the essay do you like the least? Why? What can the writer do to improve his/her paragraphs?
5. What grade would you give the conclusion? How does it provide closure for the essay? What specific things can the writer do to make the conclusion more effective?

WORD CHOICE AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE

1. Are adequate transitions used between the paragraphs? Find an effective paragraph transition and identify it. Why does it work? Find two places between paragraphs that need more or better transitions. What can the writer do to improve these transitions?
2. Is a variety of sentences used? Where might the writer vary the sentence structure for better effect? What two sentences in the essay did you find most effective? Why?
3. Are there any words that seem misused or out of place? What positive or negative trigger words are used? Do they enhance the message of the essay or detract from it?

LONGING FOR BETTER DAYS

As she sits in her cramped room in Amman, Jordan, watching the recent news, Aysha Mustafa, 92, is saddened by the world she lives in today. As she places her wrinkled hands on her lap and begins to recall a time where things were pleasant, tears begin to flow down her cheeks. Those times are long gone she says. Aysha moved from Palestine to Jordan after the sudden death of her husband in 1995. Moving here was tough she says, "It was hard to leave my country." Aysha's story goes back 60 years ago, where she lived in her homeland Palestine. She recalls her childhood as being peaceful and joyous. She smiles as she describes memories of her and her brother riding in the back of her father's wagon. "Life was good," she says. Although her family had very little to live on, she was still happy.

Like many Palestinians, Aysha still dreams to one day return back and live in her homeland Palestine, where she longs to rekindle sweet memories there. "Jordan is fine she says but I rather live on the land that is mine." As we sit in the living room watching the crisis in Gaza in January 2009, Aysha begins to wipe the tears from her sad yet hopeful eyes, and reiterates with a sigh in her voice, "May God be with them." The appalling images of young children being killed by Israeli rockets leave 92 year old Aysha in distress. How many more men, women and children will die before both sides reach an agreement she questions? As her grandson flips through the channels, he crosses upon the Al-Jazeera news that announces that the number killed in Gaza has reached the disturbing number of 781. She suddenly lowers her head and gazes into space. "It kills me to see my people getting killed like this," she stutters trying to hold back tears. The Israeli and Palestinian conflict has been going on for more than 60 years now. Many innocent civilians of both sides have been killed due to this grotesque war.

Despite all of this, it is people like Aysha that still carry hope that one day they will return back to their homeland and live in peace and harmony. Aysha's wish like many others is for all Palestinians to live a life of security and freedom, freedom to make their own choices and decisions on their own land. Aysha struggles to explain how as a child she used to run around in the fields freely, fearing no one or anything. "The feeling of freedom is indescribable," she says. "I was free to walk and go as I pleased, with no blockades to hold me back."

Today however, boys and girls in Palestine do not share the same luxury that Aysha experienced before the occupation. It is heart breaking watching this old yet strong willed woman recalling her childhood memories. Suddenly, Aysha begins to hold her chest and breathe heavily; her grandson approaches her and gives her her heart medicine. He explains that talking about such a personal and stressful topic leaves his grandmother feeling tired and overwhelmed. She has a weak heart, "My days are getting shorter," she says. Aysha is an inspiration, throughout this interview she kept calm and never wavered or seemed weak. One would think she would be vulnerable to everything surrounding her, but on the contrary she was full of wisdom. When asked what she hoped for, she said with a confident tone, "My people will see better days than this; I know this for a fact. They will be happy again; mothers will no longer be forced to bury their children. The day of justice and freedom is near, I can feel it." As she said this, Aysha seemed certain that this war will not last very long. Many Palestinians have the same hopes as Aysha, they too are confident that the day will come when their people will be live in security again.

Aysha is one of many Palestinians who shares the same dream as millions, which is a liberated and a prosperous Palestine. As she stands up and leans on her cane she says, "We want our rights, we want justice, we want freedom on our land, and we want Palestine."

Aysha's final words were that she prays that once her soul rests, she hopes to be buried next to her husband's grave on the holy land of Palestine.

**SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAY FOR PEER EDITING, RHETORICAL ANALYSIS
ASSIGNMENT**

**RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN'S
"CHALLENGER SPEECH"**

FIVE, FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE, WE HAVE LIFT OFF! THE SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER HAS CLEARED THE LAUNCH PAD. This was supposed to be a glorious day in American history, a mile stone in the United States Space Program. Instead this day quickly turned into one of the most horrific scenes witnessed live by the American public, which included thousands of school children, who watched from the comfort and safety of their classrooms.

On January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger was scheduled for launch in Florida. It would mark the second flight by the United States Space program and it was the first educational launch program. On this particular flight there was to be a teacher on board, she was the first teacher on a space shuttle as a result of a special program from NASA. Although there were some clear concerns regarding whether the shuttle should launch, NASA officials gave the green light and the mission moved forward. Within seconds of lift off, the space shuttle Challenger burst into flames and disintegrated in mid flight, instantly killing all seven passengers aboard. The nation was shocked, especially thousands of young children who eagerly watched the live coverage on television. Within hours of the explosion President Ronald Reagan went on live television and addressed the nation from the White House. President Reagan was scheduled to address the nation on that particular day to report on the state of the Union, instead he went on television and

paid tribute to the Challenger Seven. President Reagan delivered one of the most inspirational, and motivational speeches of his tenure as the President of the United States. It is a speech, like all great speeches, that would outlive his presidency, and be regarded as one of the great speeches of our time.

The nation stood still, not knowing what to make of the day's events. In such times of sorrow people tend to need support, guidance, and reassurance. The American people needed someone to follow, a shoulder to lean on, a vision of the future, a leader. President Reagan went on live television and paid tribute to the "Challenger Seven" in a speech from the White House. President Reagan sat alone behind a large desk surrounded in the background by family pictures. President Reagan used his *ethos* as a credible individual; he was the leader of the free Nation. He gave the speech from the White House, which is clearly recognized by the American public as a symbol of power and security. The image of him sitting behind a great desk flanked by pictures of family and loved ones borrowing once again from their *ethos*. This was not only the President of the United States delivering this speech, this was a husband, a father, and a son too.

The occasion for the speech was obvious: The Nation had just witnessed seven brave individuals perish before their very eyes. These brave souls were, husbands, sons, daughters, fathers, and they had paid the ultimate sacrifice for mankind. President Reagan portrayed all of these different roles played by each of the "Challenger Seven" from behind that desk. As the speech proceeded, President Reagan was careful to not downplay the Challenger incident, but he appealed to *logos*, or logic, by saying "But we have never lost an astronaut in flight. We've never had a tragedy like this one." Here he used *pathos* to emphasize the severity of the incident while at the same time letting the nation know that there have been other brave astronauts who have also paid the ultimate price for the visions and progress of mankind. President Reagan throughout his speech used his words very carefully

and with great insight. His words and the double meaning or relation to the events of the day made a huge impact on the delivery and acceptance of his speech by the American public. As he stated “Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that spirit that says, Give me a challenge, and I’ll meet it with joy.” As one can see, President Reagan is using the word challenge here, this is a direct reference to the space shuttle Challenger.

President Reagan goes on to address the thousands of children who also witnessed the event, addressing the emotion or *pathos* of the occasion. He states, “And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle’s take-off. I know it’s hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It’s all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It is all part of taking a chance and expanding man’s horizons. The future doesn’t belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we’ll continue to follow them.” Here President Reagan’s audience is the children, who in turn are the future of the nation. By saying that the Challenger was taking them towards the future, he is saying what everybody already knows. The children are the future of the nation and he is telling them that they must continue to move forward, for one day they will be the leaders of the country.

President Reagan’s message is very clear: This was a tragedy, yet we as a nation must continue to move forward in order to honor the memory of the “Challenger Seven.” President Reagan, utilizing *logos*, then mentions the NASA employees in his speech. Here he does not blame or degrade the space program or its employees. Instead he praises their hard work and dedication to the American people and the space program. He does not speculate on the cause of the explosion nor does he address any issues related to who is to blame. He completely omits any negative or accusatory comments in his

speech. This was a very tactful and extremely intelligent move by Reagan. He knew the American public had many questions regarding the explosion. He also knew that those questions needed to be answered and that it was his responsibility to provide those answers to the nation. Yet on this day, and in this speech, it was not the right time to do so.

President Reagan in closing his speech borrows from the *ethos* of the past when he stated “There’s a coincidence today. On this day three hundred and ninety years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama... a historian later said, He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it. Well, today, we can say of the Challenger crew: their dedication was, like Drake’s complete.”

President Reagan’s speech on the space shuttle Challenger served several purposes. First, it paid tribute to the seven astronauts who lost their lives in the explosion. Second, it provided the nation with a much needed reassurance that everything was going to be all right. And although this was terrible accident and set back for our country, he also left no doubt that the Nations commitment to NASA and the space program would not only survive, but continue to advance forward into the future.

SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAY FOR PEER EDITING, RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

This student research paper argues that marketing through blogging is not an effective technique for corporations. Notice the somewhat unusual narrative introduction and conclusion.

Marketing through Blogging: Good Strategy?

The personnel department at J&M Incorporated [a fictional multinational corporation] sent Alice Miller [also a fictitious name] to see the director of the marketing division for potential hiring because of her experience in using blogging for marketing products. During her interview, the marketing team director said, “Explain to me this revolutionary idea you have in your application—’Marketing through blogging’? Why would we want to use this strategy to market our products?”

Without hesitation, Alice began her explanation. “First and foremost, blogging is a form of communication on the Internet. It is very much like a diary or newsletter written in a very easygoing language that everyone can comprehend. This medium of information exchange has become extremely popular among the younger generations as well as fairly popular among older generations. We could use this form of communication to market J&M Inc. products in a word of mouth form. Creating a blog for J&M Inc. to market the products would bring the company down to the consumer level, allowing the consumers to feel like the J&M Inc. is just like one of them — not the overwhelming powerhouse it is.”

The term “blog” was coined by Jorn Barger in 1999. Barger defined a Weblog as “a webpage where a weblogger (sometimes called a blogger, or a pre-surfer) ‘logs’ all of the other webpages she finds interesting” (qtd. in Goodwin par. 3). Blogs have since then evolved into a myriad of other things. Kathleen Goodwin of ClickZ Network: Solutions for Marketers gives

today's definition of blogs as "a Web page that serves as a publicly-accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated daily, blogs often reflect the personality of the author" (par. 3). General bloggers believe that "a blog is often a mixture of what is happening in a person's life and what is happening on the web, a kind of hybrid diary/guide site" ("Blog" par. 1). There are many different types of blogs. There are personal blogs, political blogs, cooking blogs and cat owner blogs; the list goes on and on. There are as many types of blogs as there are different things in the world. One genre of blogs is called "Businessblogs," or "b-blogs," a term originated by Goodwin (par. 6). B-blogs were created when marketers for different companies saw the potential of the word-of-mouth advertising. Goodwin stated that b-blogs

offer organizations a platform where information, data, and opinion can be shared and traded among employees, customers, partners, and prospects in a way previously impossible: a two-way, open exchange. Companies can (and should) encourage self-publishing from all corners of the organization. (Goodwin par. 7)

However, not all companies present their blogs as b-blogs. There are b-blogs that serve as communications within the same company, with their competitors and with their customers. Those fit nicely into the definition of a blog. Unfortunately, there are some companies creating b-blogs that do not seem to comprehend that blogs are meant to be a bottom-up type of communication, not a top-down way of communication. These blogs are written by paid professionals posing as consumers. Blogs are supposed to start with the consumer and flow upward to the companies in a type of feedback form. Companies that are trying to market a product by way of posing as consumers when they write their blogs are ignoring the form of true blogging. They want the information they are paying to produce and spread to have the feel of a blog – honest and person-to-person style. However, it is impossible to

produce a blog with genuine qualities due to the undeniable fact that it is a company talking to a person, not a person talking to another person. Wade Roush, author of “Your Ad Here,” gave an example of how a company attempted to create a blog and make it appear as if it truly came from the consumer level. He cited this as being the origin of the controversy of whether blogs ought to be used for advertising. Roush says it all began in December of 2004 when a company called Marqui in Portland, Oregon, offered to pay 20 writers to blog about its software (21). After the term was up, the bloggers paid by Marqui had the same sentiment – being paid to blog was just not the same as blogging of their own free will, and there was no evidence that the blogging marketing campaign did anything to help Marqui gain anything other than controversy in the media (22).

Some bloggers, and blog readers find that the idea of paying bloggers to write about products or insert ads destroy the art of blogging as the public knows it. Because it destroys the concept of blogging as most have come to understand it, marketing through blogging is a terrible strategy. If the medium is destroyed and transformed into something else completely in the public’s eye, then there will be no more advertising through blogging as blogging itself will not exist in the same light. The demise of advertising through blogging is inevitable in that by doing it, the medium is destroyed.

Blogs are transformed into something else through commercialization. Matt Haughey, who has done work for Metafilter, a search engine company, believed that commercializing blogs taint the medium by “writing entries to please your readers and advertisers, not yourself, posting entries because you have to, to get paid, lazy fact-checking to push things in under deadlines, conflicts of interest, and lack of disclosure of who is paying you and why” (qtd. in Copeland par. 37). Haughey pointed out several known issues with making blogs commercial. He argues that using blogs in a commercial setting would not be a good strategy for several reasons: the inevi-

table factual inaccuracies, bias, and lack of disclosure. Molly Holzschlag, a blogger at www.molly.com, stated, “I could not tolerate the feeling of having to post my blog based on a contractual obligation. I realized my blog is something I want to be more spontaneous with; it’s the only way I can write to it properly” (qtd. in Roush 22). Holzschlag wanted to remain true to one of the basic foundations of blogging: spontaneity. Blogs cannot be planned out and feel genuine.

Holzschlag is not alone in her sentiment that being required to blog about a product is not what blogging is all about. Bloggers believe that blogging is a place to be spontaneous, opinionated and honest — not a place to be forced to write any specific thing. One blogger named Jason Calacanis argued, “To take money to blog about something—and disclose it or not—works against the public’s expectation that blogs are, first and foremost, up-front and honest” (qtd. in Roush 22).

One prime example, widely known in the blogging community, of a b-blog failing horribly due to the conflict with the meaning of blogging is that of the “Vichy” blog created by a division of L’Oreal by the name of Vichy. The blog was supposed to promote an anti-aging cream. The paid writers for the blog posed as a woman named Claire who was constantly complaining about not getting enough sleep and not having enough energy to party. The pictures they posted of Claire were of a flawless model, gazing into a mirror. Not many people could relate, much less believe, the story of Claire. Shel Israel and Robert Scoble, authors of *Naked Controversies* wrote,

It took only a few hours for the blogosphere to react strongly to the negative. Comments began pouring in, declaring that this was not a blog, that the site had severely limited blog features, that people did not believe Claire was a real person and that Vichy was foisting a fraud on the public. (par. 7)

Obviously, character blogs created by companies to pose as a common consumer cannot work as the everyday person sees right through them due to their conflicting definition of a true blog.

The second biggest argument against the marketing through blogging strategy lies within the accuracy of the material presented within the b-blogs. As the majority of blogs on the Internet are written at the blogger's leisure, extremely small amounts of blogs are actually reviewed before being posted to the web. Catherine Seipp echoed the problem of accuracy in blogs in one of her articles when she quoted *The American Prospect's* Natasha Berger as being "worried about 'the serious problem of quality control in the increasingly powerful blogging world,' which she also complained is 'editor-free,'" (Seipp par. 4). Seipp went on to provide information that "*The American Prospect* and *The Nation* seem to imagine that blogs, which are by definition creatures of the free market, ought to be pre-approved by some sort of official bureaucracy" (par. 4). The argument against marketing through blogging due to factual inaccuracies stems back to the definition that blogs typically are written by everyday people and not scholars or experts. Eric Alterman of the Neiman Reports on Harvard.edu writes: "Because blogging requires no credentials whatever – not even the judgment of an editor or personnel resources person – absolutely anybody with access to a computer can do it...[it is] swirling around out there, unedited, unchecked and largely untrue" (Alterman 87). There is no way to get the entire blogosphere, or even a small fraction of it, to begin having their blogs reviewed and checked for factual inaccuracies. Because of this, the medium will continue to be viewed suspiciously by blog readers.

Corporate bloggers ought to have their posts reviewed before posting as there may be legal ramifications if inaccurate information is allowed to be posted. However, in order to keep up with those blog readers that respond to posts and ask questions or leave comments that require addressing, the

corporate blogger posts will not have the time to be reviewed. The responses and new posts will have to be posted in real time in response to the consumers' inquiries in order to be taken seriously.

Robert Scobleizer wrote in his article, "The Corporate Weblog Manifesto" many different suggestions and warnings to those venturing into corporate blogging. He acknowledged that if posting on a corporate weblog, there will be factual inaccuracies and gave the advice to corporate bloggers to correct themselves as soon as possible (Scobleizer par. 9). He warns about the possibility of having to post things that may not be legally correct. "If it takes you two weeks to answer what's going on in the marketplace because you're scared of what your legal hit will be, then ...[y]our competitors will figure it out and outmaneuver you" (par. 18). By this, Scobleizer means to say that by blogging factual inaccuracies, the readers will figure it out – whether they are the company's competitors or the consumers. Once the readers figure it out, the company loses credibility. Scobleizer gives the advice to react quickly – though regardless of how quickly the corporate blogger attempts to correct posts that would have been caught by an editor in the first place – the public has still seen the mistake.

Returning to Alice Miller's interview, the director of the marketing program told her, "After careful consideration of your application, we have found your ideas to be incompatible with the marketing mission of J&M Inc. We will not be hiring you. We thank you for taking the time to come here and share with us today." With that, Alice smiled politely and went through the motions of a formal polite goodbye. She did not yet understand what the marketing director knew--that marketing through blogging is not a good strategy primarily because it is misleading, ineffective, and fraught with possibility of error.

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