



Friday @ the Center: May 18, 2007

Writing for Everyone: Part 12

GLOBAL TIP: Here's an activity that I used recently that has significantly reduced my grading time. When I made the assignment, I let students know that someone other than me would be reading their essays. The day the papers were due, students were put into groups of 3 and given an instruction sheet that stated: "Each person will read two essays. You will have 15 minutes for each essay. As you read, if you find any technical errors (grammar, spelling, etc.) circle the error. If you can't follow a point or understand a sentence, insert a question mark. At the end of the essay, write 1) your personal reaction to the essay, 2) what you think was the strongest point, 3) what you think was the weakest part of the essay. Then give it a letter grade and sign your name."

Now that I'm reading the papers myself, I find that a lot of the technical errors have already been noted and that student readers often identify the strengths and weaknesses quite accurately. At other times, I will note that I agree or disagree with a comment of one of the readers. Sometimes the readers disagree with each other, too, which is interesting to see play out. This exercise gives writers a sense of the complexity of audience responses, shortens the amount of time I spend grading, and demonstrates that others, beyond the instructor, can note errors or confusion.

FINISHING TIP: According to Lunsford's research, the twelfth most frequent punctuation error in college writing is an inappropriate use of **a sentence fragment**. While the sentence fragment may be occasionally used to create dramatic effect, most student writers include fragments due to grammatical incompetency. A sentence fragment is just what the term suggests: something that is written as a sentence, with a capital letter at the beginning and a period (or question mark, or exclamation point) at the end, but is grammatically only a part of sentence. Fragments can lack a subject or a verb, or they might occur when the writer begins a sentence with a subordinating word, which make the sentence depend on another sentence for its meaning: "Because I spent long hours at my computer keyboard."

Due to popular demand, a weekly update of all the "Writing for Everyone" tips will be available at <http://www.spu.edu/depts/csfd/documents/WritingforEveryone.pdf>.

To Wikipedia or not to Wikipedia?

Some SPU faculty responses:

"Wikipedia would not be considered an authoritative source for nursing information." *Barbara Cheyney, SHS*

"In many ways, Wikipedia works well for science. We tend to present data, and Wikipedia excels at that. The more nuanced debates that occur, for example, in history may not be suitable for this

venue. Wikipedia is also ideal for biological taxonomy. Experts on respective groups keep this updated quite nicely. There are holes to be sure: I've thought that one day in my copious spare time I'd write Wikipedia segments on algae near and dear to my heart but currently ignored.

However, and this is important, Wikipedia is still an encyclopedia. I wouldn't want Biology majors citing it as a primary literature source. On the other hand, I had a student writing a paper on whales who didn't know what the Ziphiidae were. Neither did I, so we turned to Wikipedia which told us this was the family including beaked whales. Being a botanist, I hadn't even heard that they had been pulled out of the family Odontidae (toothed whales), but I'm not surprised. The appropriate papers are cited and so forth, so I trust the source. Count me as a supporter of Wikipedia, but not one that allows students to cite it." *Tim Nelson, Biology*

"I agree with the idea of banning Wikipedia as a primary source from which students can quote, but one which they are able to use to gain preliminary information about a topic. I've had students come up with very erroneous material for research projects on figures like Wesley and Luther." *Kerry Dearborn, Theology*

"I prohibit Wikipedia from all my classes that require accurate science sources (like Genetics and Molecular etc.) I accept its use in Issues and values in Biology since they are looking for people's opinions. But they also have to have published sources and peer reviewed sources as well." *Cindy Fitch, Biology*

For a sample statement of a Wikipedia policy for students and brief bibliography about the controversies concerning this site, see <http://kairosnews.org/developing-a-wikipedia-research-policy>.

And don't forget . . .

- **TODAY**
Fifth Annual Undergraduate Erickson Research Conference
Otto Miller Hall
3:00 pm – 9:00 pm
- Thursday, May 24
File Building Workshop: for faculty contemplating 3rd year review, tenure, and promotion
Weter 202
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm

And since yesterday, May 17, was the Norwegian day of independence (and I do live in Ballard), let us reflect on the Norwegian national anthem, "Yes, We Love This Land" by a man named Bjornstjerne Bjornstein. Two notable lines are 1) "Even women stood up and fought as if they were men" (...Kvinner selv stod opp og strede som de vare menn) and 2) "but in the worst distress, blue-eyed freedom was born to us" (...men i verste noed blaaoyet frihet ble oss foedt). (With thanks to Becky Crook).

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