

Let Me Help You

Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write
What You Think*

Lesson 4

**HUMOROUS POLITICAL
ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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We had my elderly mother assign me her power of attorney and the first 450 words were all one sentence. I suppose this is all we can expect of legal language. But many would-be writers do the same in ordinary prose. They hang on to an idea, and they're afraid to let go.

One of the arts of writing that communicates is the simple sentence—simple not in content (although we do want readable, understandable prose) but in structure. A simple sentence has a variety of forms, but each form holds to a principle:

All of the subject does all of the verb.

If the subject is one person, place or thing, it does everything mentioned in the verb. If Jack and Jill people the sentence and both run, skip, hop up the hill, doing the one thing or the ten things that are mentioned in the verb word(s), you still have a simple sentence.

If ten folk are listed as the subject and all ten do together whatever the verb words say they do, you still have a simple sentence.

A compound sentence is merely two simple sentences connected by a conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, whereas, yet). Both sentences are balanced like two kids on a see-saw. Each side is as important as the other.

In a complex sentence (here again we're not talking about content) we will have a noun clause or an adjective clause or an adverb clause that is de-

pendent on some other word.

It cannot stand alone as a sentence.

It is subordinate to the word it modifies or in the work it does.

Writers need to remember never to put the important statement of a sentence in a dependent clause.

Case in point:

Before they slew the monster, they struggled with it.

After they struggled with the monster, they slew it.

The important fact of the sentence goes in the main clause not in the dependent clauses.

Or:

Since they know they're going to lose business anyway, they don't clean up their act.

They're going to lose business if they don't clean up their act.

Some sentences just don't sing because the more important statement is put in the less important position.

Writers also have a problem when they fall prey to the nounese that's common.

Today, people talk about "prioritized evaluative procedures" and "enhanced positive learning environments."

It's so much easier to say, "Let's find a way to put first things first."

Or "let's make sure the room lends itself to learning."

We clutter what we mean with how we say it, and this is deadly in the

writer who wishes to write what he thinks.

We've got to write clear, simple, readable, understandable, enjoyable prose. If we don't, we won't have readers.

One principal sent this note home from school:

Dear Parent:

We have established a special phone communication system to provide additional opportunities for parent input. During this year we will give added emphasis to the goal of communications and utilize a variety of means to accomplish those goals. Your inputs, from the unique position as a parent, will help us plan and implement an educational plan that meets the needs of your child. An open dialog, feedback and sharing of information between parents and teachers will enable us to work with your child in the most effective manner.

Why couldn't he have written, "Call us any time, and let's discuss how your children are getting along."

Your style of writing should put the reader immediately at ease. As he understands what you say, he'll absorb your message and get your point.

If he has to work at it and go back over what he's just read to make sure he got it right, he'll quickly go on to other things.

You've got to be willing to edit

yourself. Just because the words came out of your mind doesn't mean they are now eternal and will go as easily into the mind of your reader.

You need to work like a housewife buying tomatoes. Handle each word and see if it's fresh and firm. If in doubt, don't.

If you can get along without it—and you can delete most adjectives (words that tell *which, what kind of, how many* and *whose*) and adverbs (words that tell *where, when, why, how* and *how much*)—do.

But these color words are not the chief offenders.

We are.

And here comes the conflict. We want you to write the way you talk—the way you yourself are.

But we don't want you to ramble on in long, run-away sentences—no matter how sincere you are.

Look at the following paragraph before and after it was edited:

Before

But money isn't the only investment congregations make in the life of their pastor. They build their man up with their supportive confidence, and they enrich his life with their love and encouragement. His entire experience can be one grand post-graduate course that is fitting him for the next church the Lord calls him to.

After

With their money, love and support now, congregations can prepare their pastor for his next church.

Here, 55 words have been cut to 16. The paragraph is as readable. The message hasn't changed. But the tone is more direct.

We call this economy-in-the-use-of-words. Each word probably costs the average publisher \$1 by the time you consider his overhead in his building, staff, printing—his expenses innumerable.

He wants to print what you know and think, but he'd rather you tell your message in fewer words.

He wants you to express your humanness clearly, simply and enthusiastically.

And that enthusiasm comes when you are excited about what you have to say and that you have the opportunity to say it to someone in writing.

He just doesn't want you to be loquacious (gabby) (extremely talkative) on his nickel.

Essentially, this is why so many manuscripts are not bought by editors. The writers have not learned to edit their own copy down, down, down.

It comes to the editor as it came out of the word processor—fat and heavy and full of water.

It's like the head of lettuce in the market. The grocer soaks it and sprays it with mist to keep it wet. It swells to great size and he sells it by the pound. Wary housewives—and editors—buy elsewhere.

The astute writer combs through his finished manuscript to see where he can cut.

Can this phrase go?

That clause?

This repetition?

That little point of emphasis?

Good writers also need to know their grammar.

How can you delete your prepositional phrases when you don't know one from another?

How can you combine simple sentences so your prose doesn't sound as if you just ran 40 miles and are out of breath?

Good grammar should be your forte so you don't have to think about it as you write it.

Editors expect this of you.

So as you learn to write what you think, learn to write with better and better style.

You want readers to go for your column first when they open their paper. Erma, Ann, Abby, Dave, Cal all enjoy that privilege.

Let's add your name to the list.

How To Write . . .

A HUMOROUS POLITICAL COLUMN WHEN YOU WANT TO POKE FUN AT POLITICS & POLITICIANS

The emergence of the political satirist has brought humor to the editorial pages of the nation.

No longer do we have drab editorials and long diatribes against our national woes. Now our Art Buchwalds turn the day's events into outlandish hilarity.

Take President Ronald Reagan's speech that referred to a fictional meeting between a typical American and a typical Russian couple. He was saying they would find they have a lot in common.

He said it seriously. He wanted to emphasize our commonality—our similarity of interests with the Russian people. But Art Buchwald never lets a matter drop. He picked that up and went skipping to his word processor. The result is one of the examples that follows.

Notice that the method is to make the first incidence of the basic story very clear.

He retells the story of the two couples clearly. He wants to:

- 1) authenticate that the story was told or that a given incident occurred,
- 2) remind the reader of the various facts and features of the news event, and
- 3) to use that information as a springboard to the humorous twists and turns that will follow as he retells what probably really happened (as he sees it) or what could have happened.

Then he goes into a chronological retelling of the incident.

He uses conversation.

He provides stage business (actions and well as words).

He takes the facts of the original incident to provide authenticity.

He makes no deliberate effort to be

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funny—although there will very often be humor throughout the piece.

But he underwrites and this is an art in itself. He doesn't play for belly laughs. He merely wants to tickle.

He'll use the ridiculous to get a laugh out of his reader.

The piece about the couple deep in debt from overuse of their credit cards is a case in point.

The agent from the bank speaks basic sense.

The husband, still slightly soggy from a wet Christmas, responds with excuses until the axe starts to fall.

Then he turns to his wife for rescue and she responds as if she hasn't heard a word. He's back in the soup all over again.

Maybe we find humor here because we're laughing at the helpless male—the figurehead who, at middle-age, no longer has a figure and certainly is no longer head of anything, much less his own household.

But the political humorist goes after a laugh wherever it can be found.

And he has a wealth of material.

The daily newspaper has it all.

The following column is not political, but it helps us analyze the style of a political satirist.

Study the flow of conversation.

How does he make everything so normal, so natural, so true-to-life?

How does he get humor out of it?

Hysteria no excuse for credit-card spree

By Art Buchwald

Buchwald's satirical column is written in Washington.

Toggle woke up on Jan. 2 bleary-eyed. A man was standing by his bed.

"Who are you?"

"I'm the Plastic Man."

"What the—is the Plastic Man?"

"I represent American Express, Visa, MasterCharge, Diner's Club and every other charge account that uses plastic."

"What do you want from me?"

The Plastic Man pulled out two fistfuls of flimsy tissues from his pocket. "You seem to have had quite a Christmas."

Toggle took the flimsies and studied them. "It does look like my signature."

"Then there is no doubt in your mind that they are yours?"

"I don't know. I went on a Christmas bender all of December. I remember going into stores and, if I saw something I wanted, I just bought it. I bought things for my wife, I bought things for my kids, I bought things for my friends, and I think I even bought things for people I didn't know. I had too much good spirits."

"And how did you budget to pay for all these things?"

"It never occurred to me. No one

ever asked me for money. They just asked for a credit card. Then they put the card into a machine, wrote something on a form, handed a piece of flimsy paper to me and said, 'Have a Merry Christmas.'"

"Are you trying to tell me that you thought everything you got in a store was free?"

"Well, I'm just telling you I was drunk with spending power. Everybody else in the stores was too. People almost came to blows trying to hand the salespeople their credit cards."

"Do you know what a credit card is?"

"Yeah, it's a piece of plastic that has your name and a number and expiration date on it."

"A credit card is more than a piece of plastic. It is an agreement between you and the issuer that it can be used in lieu of cash when you purchase something or receive a meal or a hotel room for the night."

"Did I use it for meals too?"

"Six-hundred and seventy dollars worth."

"Oh, does my head hurt. Wait a minute. Now I remember. I felt so good about buying so many things for Christmas that, after I did my shopping, I took the family and my friends out to celebrate. Boy, was I drunk, but did I have a great time. You should have been here on Christmas morning. You couldn't get into the living room it was

stacked with so much junk. The big joke was all the time I was out using my piece of plastic, my wife was out using hers. We couldn't stop giggling for two days."

"I can appreciate how you felt. Now can we talk about these flimsies?"

"What's there to talk about?"

"We need the money these pieces of paper represent. I believe they total up to \$8,760.70. We'd like your personal check or cash."

"I haven't got that kind of money."

"Then we'll have to charge 21 percent interest a month until you pay it."

"That's fine with me."

"You're not out of the woods, Mr. Toggle. You're up to your hips in debt, and I'm here to collect it. Whether you were drunk or not, we can't accept Christmas hysteria as an excuse for not honoring your flimsies."

"Wait a minute. Don't get excited." Toggle turned over to his sleeping wife and shook her. "Honey, there's a guy here that wants \$8,760 for what we spent for Christmas."

Mrs. Toggle mumbled sleepily, "Well, give him one of my credit cards. They're in my purse on the dresser."

Now, let's study this piece.

1. How does he handle attribution?

2. What verb tenses does he use? Why?

3. Circle the fragments. Why does he use them?

4. What is the tone of the piece?

5. What do you find humorous?

6. How does he build to the final sentence?

7. What is the conflict in the piece and how does he keep it going?

8. What effect does he get with the final paragraph?

Your analysis should have found that Buchwald uses simple sentences almost exclusively. Apart from an occasional “Well” or “Yeah,” he begins every sentence with the subject.

Even in a long piece, he will use only two or three introductory adverb clauses.

Notice the one he uses in the third paragraph up from the end of this article: “Whether you were drunk or not, we can’t accept Christmas hysteria as an excuse for not honoring your flimsies.”

This time through, notice how he handles attribution.

You always know who is talking, but he doesn’t clutter the conversation with “he said,” “she said.”

You can do that when two people are talking and you give each person his own paragraph.

You cannot keep three people distinct by omitting tags.

Notice his verb tenses.

Does he use sentence fragments?

Does he jump from item to item the

way Bombeck did?

How does he lead into his conversational narrative?

What else have you found?

Analyze this second piece.

Ronnie and Nancy, Yuri and Tatyana get out of the rain

In President Reagan’s “I’m Not Really Mad at the Russians Speech” last week he ended by saying, “Just suppose with me for a moment that an Ivan and an Anya could find themselves, oh say, in a waiting room, or sharing a shelter from the rain or a storm with a Jim or a Sally. And there was no language barrier to keep them from getting acquainted.

“Would they then debate the differences between their respective governments? Or would they find themselves comparing notes about their children and what each other did for a living? . . .

“And as they went their separate ways maybe Anya would be saying to Ivan, ‘Wasn’t she nice? She also teaches music.’ And Jim would be telling Sally what Ivan did or didn’t like about his boss. They might have even decided they were all going to get together for dinner some evening soon.”

Mr. Reagan’s point, I believe, was

that if people got to know each other one on one, they wouldn't want to go to war.

While getting Jim and Sally and Ivan and Anya together is a very nice scenario for peace, I think it's more important for Ronnie and Nancy and Yuri and his wife to find themselves sharing a shelter from the rain or storm.

"Hi, my name's Ronnie Reagan and this is my wife Nancy. We're originally from California."

"My name is Yuri Andropov and this is my wife Tatyana. We are hardline Communists."

"That's neat. We're rock-ribbed conservative Republicans. What do you do for a living?"

"I used to be the head of all Secret Police. Now I am the leader of the Soviet Union—when I don't have the flu."

"Hey, how about that, Nancy? Yuri here is the president of a superpower just like me. We have a lot in common."

Nancy turns to Tatyana. "Do you have to give a lot of state dinners?"

Tatyana replies, "Every night I have to give a state dinner. I never have enough china."

"It seems that's my problem, too. Who makes your clothes?"

"Oscar of Belorussia. Who makes yours?"

"Adolpho of New York. Here is a photo of the latest suit he designed for me."

"It is very beautiful. But then you are a beautiful lady ..."

"She's darling, Ronnie."

Ronnie says, "Tell me, Yuri, what bugs you the most about being president of the U.S.S.R.?"

"The Party bosses. They are always telling me I'm doing wrong."

"Isn't that funny? That's what bugs me the most about being president of the United States. I don't mind the opposition. But I sure get mad when my own people keep telling me I'm screwing up."

Nancy says to Tatyana, "How do you get along with your children?"

Tatyana replies, "Don't ask."

Nancy laughs, "Me, too. I guess we'll never close the generation gap."

Ronnie says to Yuri, "So what's the toughest thing about your job?"

"Balancing the budget, providing jobs and keeping the U.S.S.R. No. 1."

"I can't believe it. Here we are, strangers caught in the storm and we have the same common problems, interests and aspirations. How about the four of us getting together for dinner sometime and working out a plan to avoid blowing up the world?"

"I'd like that very much, Ronnie. Here is my hotline number. Call me day or night."

"Great. And here's my card. If I'm not at the White House, try the Camp David number. We're always there on weekends."

That night as Ronnie and Nancy are getting out of their soaking clothes, Nancy says, "Wasn't she a lovely person? Did you know she also plays the balalaika?"

And Ronnie says, "He's a first class guy. He told me that before he invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, his real ambition was to be a movie actor."

Now, using the same style of immediacy and personableness, use the article below to write your own humorous feature. Your narrative conversation must relate to the news event and then expand on it just as Art Buchwald's pieces do.

No mileage

PUEBLO, Colo. (UPI) - Almost 5 billion gasoline ration coupons, which cost \$11 million to print during the 1974 oil shortage, will be destroyed this week at the Pueblo Army Depot.

Phil Klefe, a Department of Energy spokesman, said 4.8 billion coupons would be shredded and buried on the depot grounds.

He said there was no chance the coupons, which closely resemble \$1 bills, would be used even if events in the Persian Gulf trigger another oil shortage.

"These are not usable because they have no serial numbers and they fit dollar bill changing ma-

chines," Keefe said Friday.

In 1982, former Energy Secretary James Edwards approved destruction of the coupons. Since then, Keefe said authorities had been trying to determine the cheapest method of destruction.

Recycling would have cost up to \$1 million to unwrap the packages.

Keefe said it cost nearly \$250,000 to store and guard them.

He said destruction would cost \$145,000. Another Energy Department official said it would take three weeks to destroy all the coupons.

Now let me show you what Joella Knight, my Liberty University student, wrote when I assigned this article to her class.

Now that we're in the days of plenty, paying \$1.50 for gas and occasionally leaving the bathroom light on, Joe Taxpayer sits back in his easy chair with a complacent grin on his face.

"What are you smiling about?" snaps a shadowy figure.

"W-w-who are you?"

"I'm the ghost of 1974. Thought you'd never see me again-- eh?"

"What are you doing here? Listen, bud, we're through with you. We finished gas lines and rations decades ago. If you think . . ."

"Wait a minute, who said anything about gas lines? I'm here to collect an old debt."

“An old debt? Don’t you think we paid enough back then?”

“Oh, sure--you guys paid plenty, no argument there. The problem is those 5 billion gas ration coupons printed in 1974. It took \$11 million alone to print those babies.”

“Coupons? I don’t remember any coupons.”

“Exactly. They never used them. That’s why the government is spending \$145,000 to destroy them.”

“You mean the government printed \$11 million worth of gas ration coupons we never used and now they’re gonna spend hundreds of thousands of dollars just to destroy them?”

“Bull’s eye.”

“Can’t they recycle them or something?”

“It would cost \$1 million alone just to unwrap the packages. Besides, they’ve got to do SOMETHING with them. It’s costing \$200,000 just to store and guard them.”

“Why don’t they just give them out to the public as souvenirs?”

“They thought of that. The only problem is they fit in dollar bill changing machines.”

“Sounds like the guy who invented those coupons was a real loser.”

“I don’t know. At least he got away with it. Looks like you guys are the ones left holding the bag.”

Next, here’s another article that’s a Buchwald natural. Try to decide what your last sentence will be before you begin. Then you have something to aim for.

Now, it may be, that you are the kind of writer who lets the characters have their way. You are just as surprised as the reader to find where the characters have taken the story.

If that works for you, certainly do it that way. But I believe Buchwald has a sense of where he’s going before he starts.

As mentioned earlier, it would be wiser not to use the very names of the characters in the news story lest someone take you to court for holding him up to public ridicule.

Create a guard who talks to other prisoners or guards about the situation. But feel free to use the conversation that is already part of the news article.

Inmates shaken by robbery in prison

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. (AP) A gunman entered a prison dormitory cell and robbed an inmate serving an armed-robbery sentence, making off with a stereo, radio, TV and other items, officials said Monday.

The inmate and his roommate,

who was also robbed, were shaken but not injured, prison officials said.

“The whole inmate population is still in shock,” said Barry Ahringer, superintendent of the Pompano Beach Community correctional center, a minimum-security prison where the holdup occurred Friday night.

“If you’re not safe in prison from armed robbery, where are you safe?” he said.

Ahringer identified the victims as inmates Roy Whaley, 42, of Columbus, Ohio, who was serving time for armed robbery, and Mark Bukwitz, 22, of Fort Lauderdale, convicted of a weapons charge.

Whaley was sitting on the floor of his room at about 11 p.m. Friday, Ahringer said, when a gunman walked in and announced the robbery while another man stood watch at the door.

“This is a robbery. We’re taking all your stuff,” Fort Lauderdale police said the robber snapped as he put a revolver to Whaley’s head.

Whaley and Bukwitz offered no resistance as the gunman took \$30 from Bukwitz and gathered items from around the room, Ahringer said.

Taken in heist were a stereo, an expensive radio, a small television set, an alarm clock and a gold watch.

“It’s ironic for somebody in

prison to be robbed like that,” said Ahringer.

“This is getting to be a dangerous environment to work in,” added corrections officer John Albritton.

After the robbers fled, Whaley and Bukwitz climbed out a bedroom window and ran for help. “They ran up to me and said they had just been robbed,” Albritton said. “At first I thought they were kidding. I had just left their room a few minutes earlier.”

Albritton said Whaley, Bukwitz and a third inmate share the room in one of two dormitories on the center grounds. The minimum security facility, which provides a work-release program to its 140 inmates, has no bars, no barbed wire and no armed guards.

“We don’t have any security here,” Albritton said. “This is a minimum-security facility and people can come and go. They (state prison officials) ought to screen people a lot better before sending them here.”

Student Dawn Smoot wrote the following story as her rendition of what happened in that prison at 11 p.m. that night.

Jeb put his plate down on the long table next to his pal, Jake. He looked around to see who might be listening, then sat down.

“Did you hear what happened

last night down in Florida? An armed gunman robbed some prisoners right in their cell. Can you believe it?"

"No kiddin'?" Jake's eyes were wide.

"I ain't jokin'. This feller walked right in and held 'em up with a revolver. He took a TV, a radio, a watch and a clock--and he got away with it!" Jeb whispered.

"Good night!" Jake said. "What about security? Isn't there any sense of protection for those guys?"

"Well, from what I heard, that's a minimum security prison. Actually, it's one of those joke joints that calls itself a prison. But I wouldn't go to no place that didn't have guards. A person could get killed!"

Jake shook his head. "That kinda thing does happen."

"But why are folks allowed to just walk in and do something like that? There ain't no sense of justice anymore, is there?"

Jeb bit into his biscuit. "Shoot, when I broke into that jewelry store, I had to really rough up that policeman to get in. He was really watchin' it like a hawk. At least he had sense to defend the place."

"I know what you mean. I had an awful time gettin' into that bank without lookin' suspicious. Cops were everywhere."

"By the way, the fella they robbed was servin' time for armed robbery. Ironic, huh?"

"You're not jokin'," Jake replied. "That just means one thing, buddy," Jeb said.

"What's that?"

"Keep your cell locked tonight."

Here's a poem of rhyming couplets with political implications. Write your response to it!

I LOVE AMERICA

I come for visit. Get treated legal.
So I stay. Who care? I illegal.
Cross the border poor and broke.
Take the bus. See customs. Joke.
Nice man treat me good in there.
Say I need to see Welfare.
Welfare say come down no more.
We send you cash right to your
door.
Welfare checks they make you
wealthy.
Medicare it keep you healthy.
By and by, I got plenty money.
Thanks American working dummy.
Write to friends in Motherland.
Tell them to come as fast as can.
They come in vans and Chevy
trucks.
I buy big house with welfare
bucks.
They all come. We live together.
To live off America and make life
better.
Fourteen families all move in.
Neighbor's patience growing thin.
Finally white guy moves away.
I buy house and then I stay.
Find more aliens. House I rent.

**In the garden I put tent.
Send for family. They just trash.
But they all draw more welfare
cash.**

**Everything is mucho good.
Soon we own the neighborhood.
We have a hobby. It's called
breeding.**

**Welfare pay for baby feeding.
Kids need dentist. Wife need pills.**

**We get free. We got no bills.
Americans crazy. He pay all year
To keep his welfare running here.
We think America very good
place.**

**Too very good for white man
race.**

**If they no like us they can go.
Got lots of room in Mexico.**

And with e-mail, the political jokes keep flooding in:

Three guys, a Canadian, Osama Bin Ladin and Uncle Sam are out walking together one day. They come across a lantern and a genie pops out of it.

"I will give each of you one wish. That's three wishes total," he says.

The Canadian says, "I am a farmer. My dad was a farmer, and my son will also farm. I want the land to be forever fertile in Canada."

With a blink of the genie's eye, 'POOF,' the land of Canada was forever made fertile for farming.

Osama Bin Ladin was amazed; so he said, "I want a wall around Af-

ganistan, so no infidels, Jews or Americans can come into our precious state."

Again, with a blink of the genie's eye, 'POOF,' there was a huge wall around Afganistan.

Uncle Sam (a former civil engineer) asks, "I'm very curious. Please tell me more about this wall."

The genie explains, "Well, it's about 15,000 feet high, 500 feet thick and surrounds the country; nothing can get in or out—virtually impenetrable."

Uncle Sam says, "Fill it with water."

What humor can you cull from this?

Expedition believes 'lost army' found

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) – A U.S.-Egyptian expedition searching for a Persian army that vanished in the Sahara 25 centuries ago has discovered several hundred graves with bone fragments that may be the remains of the "lost army," the expedition leader said Wednesday.

Gary Chafetz, 36, a writer from Boston, Mass., said the bones appeared to have been buried in the Persian fashion. They were laid out on flat stone outcroppings among the sands, then covered with stones.

The largest fragment is little more than three inches long.

“We need to have the bones analyzed for dating,” said Chafetz. “If they turn out to be from 500 B.C., then one might safely conclude that these are the remains of the lost army of Cambyses.”

Chafetz hopes his find will solve one of the great mysteries of Egypt’s 7,000 year old civilization, the disappearance of the army of Persian King Cambyses, son of Cyrus.

The expedition was sponsored by the Egyptian Geological Survey, which was interested both in seeing a remote part of the western desert explored and in Chafetz’s use of sophisticated radar equipment that can pinpoint foreign objects in sand dunes.

Survey director Dr. Bahay Issawi, who has written on archaeological topics, said he believed Chafetz had found the army. “Judging by the number of graves, I’m sure they are the army,” he said.

Dr. Carl Lamberg-Karlovsky, director of Harvard University’s Peabody Museum and a professor of archaeology, said in a telephone in-

terview that the graves found by Chafetz appeared to be Persian. He said he had excavated many similar graves in Iran.

“I think it’s rather remarkable what Gary found out there,” Lamberg-Karlovsky said. “The presence surely demands some explanation – there were no human settlements of any size in that area. He has discovered a problem that has to be solved.”

King Cambyses conquered Egypt’s dynasty in 525 B.C. He dispatched an army from the ancient Egyptian capital of Thebes, now known as Luxor, to the temple and oracle of Amun, at Siwa Oasis, 625 miles to the northwest.

The Greek historian Herodotus quoted the people of Siwa as saying of the army, “A southerly wind of extreme violence drove the sand over them in heaps as they were taking their midday meal, so they disappeared forever.”

Remember, the secret behind the humorous-political column is poke fun.

AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE WHEN YOU WANT TO SHARE WHAT YOU'VE THOUGHT THROUGH

Long feature articles are becoming more and more common in the daily newspaper.

Writers with a bone to pick or a position to proclaim do an interesting commentary.

Or they'll pick into a scab on the face of the day's news and search for human interest buried beneath.

House organs and news letters sometimes exist so that a person or organization with strong views has a vehicle through which to influence the public.

The writer will write at length, present his thesis (usually) in the first few paragraphs and then launch into the development of his argument.

Many of us note the length and put the article aside, promising ourselves

that we'll read it later. Usually, "later" never comes. Those who do take the time to read it either absorb the message or react. You need to become the kind that reacts.

You may like the article. Write the author and tell him.

You may boil. Tell him that.

Write the editor of your local newspaper and tell him what you think. His paper is the arena in which you should fight (if he'll let you).

But you need to read the article carefully.

Is the true thesis really in the first few paragraphs?

Or does the writer smoke screen what he really thinks until you get deep inside?

You need to read it with a constant question on your mind: Is this writer propagandizing me or does he really have something to say?

Look for his main points. Some writers put them in the first sentence of each major paragraph and then develop each point. Others put the point in the last sentence of the paragraph as a thrust that says, “I’ve been telling you my opinion. Now, here in a nutshell is what I really think.”

Some writers build up to their main point in the middle of a paragraph and then support it in the remainder of that paragraph. Pictorially, this would look like a pyramid sitting on an inverted pyramid. The main point would come where the pyramids join.

Search for the main points and highlight where they are because the writer may be consistent, putting them in that same position all the way through the article. As you go back and review what he’s said, you can go from point to point.

Then analyze the support data. How well is he supporting his charge?

Does he have facts?

Good logic?

Frequent reference to authorities whose opinions can be trusted?

Footnotes for references to texts?

Does he have enough facts to win your trust?

In your critique, come right out first and give your opinion in strong terms. Refer by name to the article, writer and publication—giving the date the publication appeared as well as the page(s) on which the article appeared.

Then retell the article.

Next, give three points either prais-

ing the piece or criticizing it or both. Don’t forget, first praise what you can before you dismantle. Then go back and flesh out your three points one by one.

End with your opinion.

My goal is that you will learn to do critical thinking and writing. Remember, no one is out of reach of your analysis. High and mighty or popular and rich or poor or mean, no one is out of reach of your praise or criticism.

Analyze the following article and write your critique.

WHO, AFTER ALL, DOES THE CONSTITUTION PROTECT?

By Roger D. Congdon, Th.D.

From “The Moral Majority Report” newspaper

*** If a child is born with congenital defects, may the state by neglect permit it to die?**

*** If a baby develops a condition with a high mortality prognosis, may a parent let it die by avoiding medical care?**

*** What responsibility lies with the state?**

*** How much freedom do parents rightly have to determine the fate of a retarded child?**

For years, the media has reported on parents whose religious convictions prohibited the use of vaccines

or blood transfusions; on parents who, persuaded that faith alone was needed for healing, have kept children with rectifiable birth defects from receiving medical aid; on parents who, when their children suffered, disclaimed the reality of suffering.

By denying sickness and death, these parents denied their children medical care with death the result.

Does a government have authority to intervene in behalf of children in such cases?

When a child suffers a communicable infection, the majority would agree that the safety of the community demands it be cared for. But more complex problems in recent years have only added confusion as parents have differed and states have had conflicting practices.

Example 1. Baby Doe, born in Bloomington, Indiana, with a serious congenital deformity, could not swallow food. This condition could be remedied. Doctors told the parents the child would be retarded and would probably die before adulthood. The parents approved the doctor's suggestion that the child be permitted to starve to death.

The state did nothing.

Example 2. A Down's syndrome baby with an intestinal obstruction was permitted to starve to death in Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Example 3. Phillip Becker, a Down's syndrome boy now about 12, born with a correctable heart defect, will probably die soon. His parents oppose the operation. The State of California upheld the parents, even though the operation would reverse the present dying process and add several years to the life of a boy who, though retarded, is able to work and communicate.

Example 4. Pamela Hamilton, afflicted by a form of cancer, was denied chemotherapy treatment by a fundamentalist preacher parent. The pastor-father says, "Only God heals." The court in Knoxville required that the parents give up the child for medical treatment. Doctors express doubt that her condition can be cured, but they can prolong her life.

Example 5. Baby Ashley, a girl abandoned by parents when ten days old, received care by the State of Idaho. A serious birth defect prevents development beyond idiocy. Should the state remove life-sustaining equipment?

Example 6. A Down's syndrome baby needed an intestinal correction to live. The mother said, "The retarded infant would be impossible for me to care for and would have a destructive effect on my marriage." A local child welfare agency invoked the child abuse statute result-

ing in a court order that the child be given medical treatment. The child lives.

Our first observation from these examples is that courts act inconsistently. Some babies, whose defects prevent hope for development beyond a dependent idiocy or whose continued life regresses irreversibly toward death, receive medical attention even over parental objection.

In other cases, courts approve “involuntary euthanasia” by voluntary neglect of treatment. They do this even where such treatment can predictably reverse a decline to death.

In some cases medical care could result in a person’s working, communicating, and living a life independent of a life-sustaining apparatus.

Our second observation is that the ethics of medical practice becomes increasingly complex with our advancements in technology, rejection of God’s enscriptured standards of righteousness and the inconsistent decision of the courts.

Logic asks: “If we can massacre more than a million unborn babies by aborting births that would have produced probably 900,000 normal children and 100,000 physically and mentally superb adults, why should we have qualms about administering expensive medical care to retarded or malformed babies?”

But every person is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6) and is of infinite value (Mark 8:36).

Therefore we conclude:

1. When medical advice assures that treatment can reverse a trend toward death, treatment should be administered. A parent does not have the right to practice infanticide-by-neglect for religious reasons. A state does not have the ethical right, under God, to permit such a practice.

2. Dr. Paul Ramsey of Princeton states our second conclusion (*Ethics at the Edges of Life*, p. 192): “No treatment is indicated when none exists that can do no more than prolong dying.” If the best medical aid available cannot reverse death processes, then Christian ethics does not require medical care.

To this Roman Catholic theologians agree. Father Kelley says (*Theological Studies*, Vol. Xi, p. 218): “Intravenous feeding . . . is not obligatory . . . for the mere prolonging of life.”

If medical help for a baby can predictably accomplish only a slowing of death due to irreversible defects, parents of the baby should be left alone to pray. “Who can tell whether God will be gracious . . . that the child may live?” (II Samuel 12:22).

3. We believe that the right to life assured by the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S., and the right to equal protection, promised by the Fourteenth Amendment, must be applied to all regardless of age, I.Q., mobility, birth defects, social status or parental lack of love.

We disagree with the courts which define personhood as beginning with a third trimester of pregnancy or birth.

Unborn persons also have rights.

And if the Constitution does not protect a baby with birth defects, then it protects no one!

Ever get a burr under your saddle?

Something annoys you so you wear your family's ears off because you can't stop thinking and talking about how awful it is.

Everybody you know is going ape over a new book. You think it's for jerks.

Your kids paint faces on their knee caps. They idolize some singer who's shaved off all his hair. Or one who sings through his tonsils. To you it's like fingernails scraping blackboards.

Write about it!

There are a million of us out here who feel the same way, but we don't have your way with words. Write for us. Help get our message to the people.

Remember, in the chapter on libel and faulty thinking is a discussion of things you can criticize freely without fear of suit. Books and actors are among them.

One writer I know was given a copy of a children's book in which nursery rhymes had been rewritten. Their message was no longer about the exploits of little Jacks who jump over candles or cram their sisters inside pumpkins or of animals who keep losing their gloves. Now the new rhymes deal with religious matters. They take the old familiar shell—the "Jack be nimble" part—and attach to it a deep spiritual significance. Well, maybe not all that deep.

Maxine Hancock, a Canadian writer, reacted sharply to the "Christian Mother Goose" book in an opinion article Moody Monthly printed in November, 1981. (And the editors of the book reacted back in kind.)

The author Hancock began her expository article by recounting an experience she had when an ecstatic young mother confronted her with the book in question. She tells what went through her mind as she framed an answer and in so doing gives her reader the first of many reasons presented in the article why she did not like it.

Readers like such articles. It gives them the feeling that they are standing there with the author, listening in on the conversation.

And it gives the writer a friendly way to begin an article of criticism.

In fact, the first fourth of Maxine's article recounts that conversation.

As the young mother asks, "Really? Why not?" the author has a made-to-

order excuse for giving her reasons.

She mentions what she thinks of the art and then of the rhyme scheme (the dancing rhythm of the lines and the way they match sounds in ending words). She says:

“To me, it seems like a theft of our children’s heritage. Those old nursery rhymes have been worn smooth and lovely by a thousand tellings. They are literature filled with history for generations of English-speaking children. I think they belong to children just as they are.”

The young mother asks, “But what good are they? At least the Christian version teaches something.”

I was being pressed to put into words what I had merely felt in my first exploration of the book.

“The old rhymes teach, too. Not doctrines, of course. But really important things like the joy of the sound of rhyming words, the lilt of perfectly matched rhythm. And in a way that I can’t explain, they build a foundation of love for literature and probably for history too. Nursery rhymes and other folk literature are foundational to learning.”

Notice, the author is a thinking person. She doesn’t write out of emotion and flail at everyone in sight. She’s reacted to something she doesn’t like, and she must now convince others that what she has to say makes sense.

She doesn’t want to appear as if she lives out in left field where none of the action goes on. Those who write opinion convincingly must root their feet on home base and let it show.

And the author is a reasonable person. She knows why the book is so popular with mothers of young children and she says so:

I was beginning to understand why the converted Mother Goose, latest star of the Christian stage, is so popular. She appeals to a deep desire in young parents to give their children a solid Christian training. And she may appeal to parents who—perhaps because of television—missed out on the lore of folk literature themselves.

Now, at the middle point of her opinion article, she returns to her initial points and speaks at greater length of the art:

Visually, the book is shoddy with its lack of perspective or grace in line and figure. . . . It is worth considering that visual arts are among the ways we reflect upon the beauty of God’s world. Poor drawings detract from that. For children, poor art is serious because it may impair their ability to see beauty truly there.

The reviewer did not know that the artist was a handicapped person with great heart. And she doesn’t need to

know it. She is judging the book as a reviewer with strong opinions. It should not matter to her that the author, also, is a wonderful woman and her family, helping her publish the book, are wonderful people.

A reviewer reviews as she sees it. She brings to her review the unique contribution she herself has to make.

The reader doesn't have to agree. This is a free world. We have every right to express our opinion. Our readers have every right to reject it.

But it is imperative that your article have a structure that makes it fluent, authoritarian, easy to read and well organized. That's why, when you sow the seeds of your argument at the beginning, you want to let them grow tall as you pick up those items in the middle.

The author now comments further on the words:

The Christian edition has lost subtlety, not only in visual art but also in the rhymes themselves. The beauty of metrical verse has been destroyed with awkward and ill-scanning lines. Even worse, we've lost the pun and riddle from nursery rhymes. Imagine a generation that does not have the joy of discovering that Humpty Dumpty is an egg!

Then the author gives an example from the book (third paragraph below). Unfortunately, she has not illustrated the former point (the paragraph

above) with text from the book. She has gone on to another point:

For important as the art and language may be, they are less important than the message.

The old nursery rhymes honestly convey a world in which there are good people and bad, and in which things do not always turn out perfectly for everybody. But the revised lines take us into a spun sugar world that children will recognize—perhaps more quickly than adults—is just not true. . .

When we sing, "Lavender's blue, dilly, dilly . . ." the content and skipping beat match perfectly. But when we say, "God loved the world, dilly, dilly (p. 41) we trivialize the love of omnipotent God. Even the astonishing mystery of the death of Christ becomes a little ditty.

The author did two interesting things in technique in the last two quotes. She used words that belong to the subject.

She wrote of "metrical verse" and "ill-scanning lines." People who know their poetry (and certainly a reviewer of a book of poems will know her poetry) will understand at once what she means when she refers to meter and scanning—marking where the accents fall on the poetic line).

People who don't know their poetry so well will recognize that she's using the language of the poetic world. This do, too, thou writer of criticism!

She referred to a quote and then gave the number of the specific page in the book she's referring to. This kind of documentation is the stuff of sound reviewing.

The author now goes into one final point before beginning her conclusion:

Another deep concern I have about these poems is the danger of confusion. They mix historical and imaginative folk rhyme with biblical literature. I see this as potentially harmful.

We not only destroy historic moments encapsulated in rhyme, but we also create anachronistic mix-ups with Bible stories. Children may lose any sense they have of where in history the stories of the Bible happened.

Worse, the child's mind, in its ongoing attempt to classify what it hears and sees, may group the Bible stories with nursery stories, believing they happened separate from time in some never-never land.

With the best of intentions, we may be robbing our children of one of the Christian faith's fundamentals—a sense of history and the assurance that “God was in Christ” in a specific time and place on this globe of ours.

The author has written in the language of the people for the most part. Her **encapsulated in rhyme** and **anachronistic mix-ups** may send the reader to his dictionary. (He won't

go.) A writer takes a chance when he uses big words that he may lose his reader. **Caught in rhyme** and **date-and-time mix-ups** would say it more simply. It's just too bad the average reader is victim of a limited vocabulary. These longer words do have more power.

The writer then returns to her young mother and ends the article with these words:

The next time I visited my young friend

She takes along some classics suitable for very young children. She recommends Bible story books as well and encourages the woman to introduce her two-year-old “to the real Mother Goose.”

She ends with:

Because that young mother wants to give her child only the best, I know she was listening. I hope some other parents and grandparents are, too.

She ties back to the young mother from the beginning of her article and concludes with the hope that this analysis and critique will help her give her child the best in Christian literature.

She hopes for a larger audience of responsible relatives who will guide the reading of children raised in Christian homes.

Now, as professor of a class in which students (you) do not have to submit to the professor your work from lesson to lesson, I must go on thinking you are doing the exercises and catching my torch.

I could have charged a mint in an effort to prompt you to do the homework because you have had to pay so much for it.

My aim, instead, is to charge much less so that folk with an urge to write can afford the price no matter how low their income.

It is essential that Christian people speak up and write!!!

Our next lesson will consider music recital reviews and articles that instruct and comment. Wherever you have an opportunity to express YOUR opinion, I want you to be equipped to do so.

You say you don't go to recitals? Go and write your opinion. Editors have so few writers. They can't send someone to every recital. You may find you get your first article actually published when you send in a recital review.

Professor Dick.