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Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write
What You Think*

Lesson 7

THE COMMENTARY

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A COMMENTARY WHEN YOU HAVE A LOT TO SAY AND THE TIME TO SAY IT

A commentary is totally that and nothing more; but, being “totally that,” it is everything.

It covers any subject, all subjects, to any length, to all lengths. It can be no more than a shrug of shoulder, an eyebrow’s rise or it can be lethal and ruinous.

A writer with supersight and a venomous command of words can, assuming he has his facts straight, topple a president, depose statesmen, prompt war.

A commentator is paid for his comments. We expect him to be fresh and lively. We like him contentious but not arrogant.

We love his jokes and jibes. We like him sassy when he sasses for our side. We may discount him when he sasses “us”—our heroes, our party, our position—but we read what he has to say.

Let him start out with a quote, we’ll still read him:

“If you saw 10 troubles coming down the road, nine would run into the ditch before they reached you.”

That was President Calvin Coolidge’s wise counsel for doing nothing—until that tenth trouble was upon you.

That was Patrick Buchanan, writing early in the 1984 campaign about President Reagan’s “doing well by doing nothing.” He had found a good quote on which to build a political comment that summed up from the beginning all that he had to say.

After a theme sentence (“Watching one after another of the Democratic challengers to Ronald Reagan careen off into the ditch, it is easy to understand how the wisdom of Silent Cal (Coolidge) has always commended itself to Reagan.”), Buchanan offers a chronological restatement of the pre-

convention Democrat campaign.

Let him puncture a balloon right off, and we'll happily read our commentator.

The so-called age issue being used against President Reagan rests on the ridiculous argument that you have to be 73 years old before you don't know what you're talking about.

That was Russell Baker, a writer for the "New York Times," who was picking up on one of the supposedly critical issues liberals discovered after the first Reagan-Mondale presidential debate.

After that good hook, Mr. Baker followed with a theme sentence of his own that capitalized on what he had begun:

I'm not 73 yet, but, as even the most casual reader must notice, I frequently don't know what I'm talking about.

He follows that with the presentation of someone he knows well who exhibited the same characteristics as the President but at a far younger age. He tells about himself at 17. As a freshman in college, he had come up with egg on his face and he tells all about it—chronologically. He ends by getting the story back to the topic at hand:

I tell this story to expose the fool-

ishness of the age issue used against Reagan. It isn't being 73 that keeps you from knowing what you're talking about. I could do it at 17.

Buchanan has that same ability to end a commentary with a punch. He did it in the column just mentioned when he speculated to whom the Democrats would turn should their convention become deadlocked . . . "their now paunchy and middle-aged Lochinvar, Teddy Kennedy, might emerge buckled and cuirassed, to enter the lists against Ronald Reagan." His last sentence included a battleship:

Sending Teddy Kennedy out to dispatch the president would be like sending the Goodyear Blimp out to sink the Nimitz.

William Safire, another writer for "The New York Times," in a commentary he did on former President Nixon's return to daylight, chose a kind of "once-upon-a-time" lead to tell how it happened:

Last week, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger chose the most fashionable restaurant in New York for their lunch together: Le Cirque, where their fast-track tete-a-tete was frequently interrupted by the obeisances of table-hopping celebrities one cut below their status of international superstar.

So this is disgrace?

He quickly documents the Nixon fall from grace when he had to resign the Presidency in mid-term or face an investigation by Congress:

Only a decade ago, Nixon was buried at midnight, at a crossroads, with a stake through his heart, a mirror on his face and all the other precautions taken to prevent the vampire from rising again.

He tells how the resurrection has come about (a CBS interview, a new biography) and then asks and answers the essential question:

Why has the former president become the Halley's comet of American politics? His old enemies will say it proves that you cannot keep a bad man down; but less obsessed observers will point to an admirable mixture of doggedness and talent on his part, a forgiveness mechanism in the minds of the American electorate and the lift of a driving revisionism among historians.

With his next sentence, Safire reveals his theme:

Unnoticed, however, is the curious transposition of reputations of the two men coming full circle at Le Cirque.

From there he shows how, while

Nixon sank into near obscurity, Kissinger rose transcendent in the political skies.

“The strange switch came in the ‘80s.” Nixon rose from his nadir and Kissinger, “**out of favor with the doves**” became doubly damned “**by remaining the target of the hawks.**”

Safire writes like an educated man who knows his history and contemporary facts. He ends, asking, “**Where will this second (Nixon) comeback end?**” He sees Nixon's name put up for nomination as vice president in 1988 on a ticket led by Jeane Kirkpatrick.

He will be 75 then, suitably above ambition, and a world-class funeral-goer. Lest we forget: Nixon never did anything impeachable in eight years as vice president.

See the class of the good commentator?

Remember, you can write about anything. But keep in mind the warnings given earlier in this book about libel.

Robert Wimer, editorial page editor of the Lynchburg, VA, newspaper, “The News and Daily Advance,” wrote his column on “Can't the IRS Write in Plain English?” He detailed his agony with the government's Form W-9 and the convoluted instructions:

How in the name of everything

that is right in the world can I certify that I am not subject to backup withholding for a new account under section 3406(a)(1)(C) if I don't know what the section says.

He added that he knew he was opening himself up for an audit by complaining, but he had touched my responsive chord. I was ready to hold his hand all the way to the dock.

So, how do you write a political commentary? You use the same good structures and good leads the professionals do. And you tie the knot, harking back to the lead, in your concluding sentence.

What kinds of leads are there?

1. Five W's These are the veteran WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY to which have been added HOW and WOW.

This lead tells up front who did it, what he did, where and when he did it (never begin with either when or where), why he did it (if known), how he did it and WOW-this-is-sensational!

Any time you can add a touch of enthusiasm to a lead you've helped yourself hook a reader—and hopefully, a purchasing editor.

2. Direct quote. Funny thing about quotes. You begin an article with one, no matter how appropriate, and it won't hook a reader. Quotes alone are not compelling. That's because you

are using someone other than yourself to bait the hook.

You need to know how to command attention. The lead is your business.

You would do far better to use portions of the quote in your lead instead of making the entire lead sentence a quote. That way you get all the good of the authority who said the important words in the first place, but you with your words remain in charge.

The State Department today recalled U.S. arms negotiators home from Geneva for consultation and said “it is doubtful” whether they will return to the talks.

A piece of quote can put exact words and strong opinion into a lead, can be dramatic or unusual—and it looks good. There's something about those partial quotes that attracts attention.

3. Question. As a first sentence, the question is weak. But following a strong declarative statement as a second or third sentence, the question can be strong. However, the question is a tool that can be effective if the subject matter is already compelling.

Can terror be stopped?

That is short and succinct, and it tells the reader at once what he's going to read in the commentary. Mention terror, violence, crime, any kind

of mayhem or disaster and the question lead will be read. But when none of those compose the article, the question lead falls flat.

4. Short statement. When scores of children were killed in a Texas school house explosion, the writer said it all in five words:

They buried a generation today.

Another one used eight words as he wrote up a high school band concert. You knew exactly what he thought:

School band played Beethoven last night. Beethoven lost.

You get several delicious impressions from this. It must have been a strenuous athletic contest. One faction tried to get the better of the other, but didn't. Players in "uniform" did their best to make an impression, but didn't. Trained, but untrained, they tried to better the master and battered him instead.

James Thurber, the venerable American writer/humorist, was told by his editor to shorten his leads. He wrote:

Dead. That's how they found John Taylor last night.

And his editor has a point. It's important not to cram too much information into a lead. It should act as a kind

of table of contents to the story, but it should not tell what everyone already knows nor should it repeat the headline. It should define the news the title gives.

5. Follow-up lead. This is used in the second story you write on the information you gave earlier. Your subject now is common knowledge. You want to build on that but insert something nobody knows. You tell what is known and you add what is not:

Disregarding accusations that her husband had lied to the Grand Jury, Tillie Gogoluski today called her opponent in the mayoralty race a "bigot."

6. Contrast. This kind of lead can be used in then-and-now stories, before-and-after, here-and-there, right vs. wrong, their way vs. our way.

Where 40 years ago Tokyo was the scene of nightly bombings, now she stands as the world's largest rebuilt city.

7. Round-up. This kind of lead triggers the story that will tell certain things about a given number of persons, places or things. Each one of the items will be treated individually and thoroughly before the writer goes on to the next one.

This year's Nobel Peace Prize will go to one of eight candidates se-

lected this week by the award's Board of Governors.

The article will identify each person and tell who he is and why he is qualified to receive such an honor. Notice that the lead identified by number those who would be covered in the story.

8. Summary. When a number of incidents have something in common, a summary lead will state it. The article will then develop by telling the reader what all those incidents have in common with one another.

An article on traffic safety could say that on a given weekend a certain number of accidents resulted in death for front-seat passengers. The lead would give the facts.

The body of the article would give the support, but not accident by accident. It would summarize findings from investigation of all the accidents. It could include reports from on-site police officers and fire-fighters, from insurance claims adjusters, from medical personnel.

He who sits, unbelted, beside a car's driver as it begins to crash will more often than not wake up dead. Figures, released last week

Notice that the source of the information will appear in the lead paragraph, but it does not need to cram its way into the first sentence.

Catch the difference between

round-up and summary. Round-up will open with a declarative sentence that tells how many people died in those accidents. Then it will review each accident, one at a time, and identify the dead and injured. Summary looks at the over-all picture in the method I noted above.

9. Multiple features. When the writer has more than one thing to cover in the article, he should mention all of them in the lead paragraph. The reader needs and wants no surprises. If you're going to cover a variety of items, say so early.

Again, the lead is a table of contents to the article. If the article will include three major facets of a topic, list them one after another in the lead. Then develop each one in turn.

If the article is one of length, you might wish to go through each one in turn the second time to give more detailed information.

In your concluding paragraph, restate the three—but this time put them in reverse order, three-two-one. The reader has become accustomed to reading your one-two-three succession. You, by rearranging the order as you leave by the back door, keep him thinking what you have to say is fresh. The third or fourth restatement of one-two-three goes stale fast.

10. Play on words. Sometimes the clever writer can play with his words in such a way that the reader is entranced.

A number of years ago a razor blade company put long story-ads in college newspapers across the country. Each ad was full of puns. I remember sitting in a barber's chair chortling over humor's lowest form. But I read every word!

In the following quote from an old Associated Press story about the destruction of Ebbets Field in New York, the writer played with his words and gave us a stream of consciousness flow of sentence fragments and short sentences that lent drama to his prose. It's the kind of piece people cut out and keep:

And now Ebbets Field itself is striking out.

The famed monument to zany baseball and even zanier fans is going down under a barrage of long, slow curves, tossed by a big wrecking crane swinging a two-ton iron ball.

The last half of the ninth inning began Tuesday with 200 sentimental spectators, a brass band, and a few old-time Dodgers on hand as demolition began to make way for a big housing project.

They were 'dugout-deep' in nostalgia. So many things to remember.

Fly balls bouncing off Babe Herman's head.

The fan who once exclaimed, "We got three on base," only to be asked

by somebody in the next seat, "Which base?"

The faithful little old lady who always brought her cat to the games and paid for the adjoining seat so the cat could occupy it.

Ebbets Field came into being in 1913, ending a long era in which fielders wore themselves out chasing balls across trolley tracks in adjacent streets

The lead isn't everything, but it's a whole lot. Once you hook the fish, you've got to get him to land. He will only come willingly if you will play the line, tantalize him, humor him, distract him.

As you support your position with facts and originality, you will convince him.

As you write in common English, you will meet him where he is.

As you let the uniqueness of what you believe meet the sweet reasonableness of good thinking and deduction, you'll have a lasting impact on your reader's mind, whether he realizes it or not.

Remember, commentary can cover any topic.

It's not just political.

Write your commentary on the two articles that follow:

The richer you are, the bigger the bed

By Stephen Frank

The rich may not sleep better than you and me, but they recline on bigger beds.

That's the finding of a study commissioned by the Better Sleep Council, a trade group of bedding manufacturers and suppliers.

American adults with household incomes above \$25,000 are more likely to sleep on jumbo mattresses than people with incomes below that level, the market researchers found.

While 60 percent of those with household incomes above \$25,000 sleep on a king- or queen-size mattress, only 40 percent of those with incomes below \$25,000 have the large-size beds.

The study, designed by the Market Research Bureau of Washington, D.C., consisted of telephone interviews with 1,002 people. The pollsters found that, regardless of income, men are 20 percent more likely than women to opt for king- or queen-size bedding.

The sleep council's survey was no eye-opener to Harry Falk, vice president of the Troy Mattress Co. of New York, which manufactures and ships 500,000 mattresses a week.

One reason the better-off sleep on bigger beds is they have bigger bedrooms, Falk said.

"People with larger incomes generally have larger homes, and therefore larger bedrooms, and will put larger beds in them."

Cost is also a factor.

"Queen-size sets generally run 20 percent more than full-size. If you can afford more, you're going to pay more," he said.

What you get for the extra money, of course, is more room in which to toss and turn. A full-size mattress is 54 inches wide and 75 inches long. People with queen-size mattresses sprawl on beds 60 inches wide and 80 inches long. And king-size sleepers have an area 78 inches wide and 80 inches long on which to rest.

The sleep council study also found that westerners, used to living in the wide open spaces, have a preference for spaciousness when it comes to sleep. The study reports that 64 percent of adults living west of the Rockies sleep on king- or queen-size beds, compared to 46 percent of adults in the rest of the country.

Commentary STUDENT PAPERS

Article: The richer you are, the bigger the bed

Author: Ron Starner, Liberty University

The more we make, the more we spend.

A study commissioned by the Better Sleep Council reminded us of the fact when it recently reported that people with higher incomes sleep in larger, more expensive beds.

Market researchers discovered that American adults with household incomes over \$25,000 are more likely to recline on jumbo mattresses than people with incomes below that level.

Sixty percent of those with household incomes above \$25,000 own king- or queen-size mattresses, while only 40 percent of those below that mark do.

Simple reasoning says that people with more money will want bigger beds. And you better believe that the bedding manufacturers and suppliers know that.

To prove the point that the bed-makers are getting rich off the rich, here's some simple math:

A full-size mattress measures 54 inches wide by 75 inches long, for a total of 4,050 square inches.

A queen-size sprawls 60 inches wide by 80 inches long, or 4,800 square inches. That comes up to 18 percent more square inches of sleeping space than the full-size.

However, the queen-size costs 20 percent more!

In other words, we are paying more for less, and the mattress-makers know it and laugh all the way to the bank.

Now, this is not a call to arms for all the opulent sleepers. No, it's just

cold reality. No one will fuss over the lost two percent of sleeping space or the lost three percent 'of head room in the car or the lost five percent of room in the shower.

The point is--if we make it, we'll spend it--and we won't even bat an eyelash.

Sleep on that for awhile.

Commentary STUDENT PAPERS

Article: The richer you are, the bigger the bed

Author: Joella Knight, Liberty University

"Oh, honey, LOOK. The Joneses got a brand new Toyota Corolla!" Mrs. Smith said.

"I knew we shouldn't have come to this party," her husband muttered.

"But we'll get to see the inside of their house. I heard she has an antique sideboard."

"I heard she made Frank refinish it the last five Saturdays he's had off."

"Never mind that. What I really want to see is their bed."

"Their bed? What on earth do you want to see their bed for? I hope it's not antique--"

"No, no. I just want to see if they make more money than we do."

"But I thought you said you wanted to see their bed."

"I do."

"What's that got to do with how much money they make?"

“Everything. Let’s see . . . if it’s a double bed like ours, that means they’re paying through the teeth on a loan for that car and she probably needs that recipe I have for chicken wings.”

“What if they have a queen-size bed?”

“Oh, that means they’re a little better off and she’d probably be insulted if I gave her that recipe.” She rang the bell.

“Is that how you women operate?”

“Of course. How else do you think we get along so well? Smile, dear, he’s coming to the door.”

“I suppose this means you want me to follow Frank to the bedroom as he puts away our coats?”

“You’re very perceptive. And see if they have a telephone in there too.”

The Smiths enter the Joneses’ house and a few minutes later the husband returns from the bedroom.

“Well?”

“King-size waterbed.”

“Oh, my goodness. They’re rolling. They must’ve paid CASH for that car!”

“Nope. “

“Whataya mean, nope?”

“They borrowed for the car and the bed.”

“Well, still—that probably just means they’re living off the interest. How do you know they borrowed?”

“I asked.”

“You ASKED? Men are so tactless. What’d he say?”

“He said they were in debt up to their noses and that his wife had to have that waterbed before the party.”

“You mean they just bought it so people would think they were well off?”

“No, they just rented it so people would think they were well off. Frank gets sea sick on moving things.”

“How stupid. They shouldn’t care if people know how much they make.”

“That’s what I told Frank and he agreed. He said it was important to his wife though. He also said to remind you that Joyce wants you to take over her Tupperware party next week.”

“Why?”

“They have to return the waterbed by then.”

“Do you think we could rent it for that week, honey?”

“I thought you hated waterbeds.

“I do, but I already have 16 spinach casserole recipes.

“Because of our double bed?”

“That and our used car. Do you want 20 more versions of casserole next month or shall I order the bed?”

“We’ll order the bed.”

20 years later, killing serves as reminder of public apathy

NEW YORK (AP) - In life, Kitty Genovese was just an ordinary woman working in a quiet neighborhood in Queens. In death, she became a tragic symbol when a

killer stalked and stabbed her as 38 witnesses did nothing.

That was almost 40 years ago.

Today her name remains a symbol of public apathy. The name of her killer, Winston Moseley, is less well known, but it will be heard again this week when a parole board decides whether to free him.

His parole is seen as unlikely. What is more certain is the legacy of Kitty Genovese.

Her name was evoked last year when Minnesota passed a law making it a duty to help in an emergency.

Her case is discussed in legal circles, in psychological studies, in legislative halls. It is still discussed in Kew Gardens, a quiet neighborhood in the borough of Queens, where the 28-year-old woman met her death, though some residents now deny that so many of them could have failed to act.

“That’s a lie. It’s an excellent neighborhood. Any kind of disturbance, the police are notified. It’s rehashed every year. It’s a disgraceful thing,” said Robert Tobin, who works at the liquor store next to Miss Genovese’s old apartment building and has lived in the area 25 years.

Residents like Tobin resent the unwanted attention and want the news media to quit “harping” on the case. But the fascination will not fade.

“It’s one of these events that occur every century and capture the public imagination, that galvanize us into action, that result in a spate of statutes and court decisions, but 40 years later the situation hasn’t changed too much,” said Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard University professor of law.

Catherine Genovese, known as Kitty, returned from work at a tavern at 3:20 a.m. on March 13, 1964. She parked her car in a lot near a Long Island railroad station and walked toward her apartment in staid, middle-class Kew Gardens.

In the darkness, Miss Genovese noticed a stranger. She sensed something and began walking quickly toward a police call box, evidently to summon help. She got as far as a street lamp when the man grabbed her.

Her screams cut through the night.

“Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!” she cried.

Lights went on. Someone called down, “Let that girl alone!”

It was just the beginning of Miss Genovese’s horrible death. For as police later reconstructed the events, the killer left when lights went on but returned when they went out, and stabbed her again.

Again she screamed. Again lights went on. The killer fled but returned a third time to inflict the fa-

tal wounds as Miss Genovese lay slumped at the door of an apartment building where she had crawled for safety.

During the 35-minute ordeal, 38 people watched or heard all or part of the attack. One couple later said they turned their lights out and moved closer to the window to get a better view.

A 3:50 call to police, from a man who said “he didn’t want to get involved,” came after Miss Genovese sustained her final wound.

Moseley’s arrest came a week later after a neighbor in another Queens neighborhood did get involved, calling police to report a burglary when he saw Moseley lugging a television set out of a fellow tenant’s apartment.

In custody, Moseley confessed to the Genovese killing. At his trial, his attorney asserted Moseley was insane at the time and not responsible for his actions.

To people in the nation’s small towns, the case seemed to sum up the worst of city life. But even New Yorkers were outraged. Social scientists launched studies to explain the Kitty Genovese “phenomenon.”

It was attributed to things then just beginning to be realized about life in big cities—feelings of anonymity, of being out of touch with other people, of not being able to control one’s environment.

“It was a symbol of the new

America, the new urban America,” Dershowitz said in a telephone interview. “It brought home to us how much crime is a function of this kind of public refusing to take responsibility for each other, how isolated we all feel in the midst of enormously crowded conditions.”

In the years since, neighborhood watch committees and private security patrols have become common. Many places now have a central “911” emergency telephone number. States have passed “Good Samaritan” laws that relieve a person of liability when they help in emergencies.

But in most cases, doing nothing still is not a crime, notes Richard Miller, professor at the Columbia University School of Law.

“Mere failure to act carries no criminal consequence,” he said. “It may well be a sin, but it’s not a crime.”

Commentary
STUDENT PAPERS

Article: 20 years later, killing serves as reminder

Author: Ron Starner, Liberty University

In Kitty Genovese’s case, public enemy number one was the public itself.

On March 13, 1964, in Queens, New York, 38 people watched or heard all or part of her 35-minute or-

deal with her killer, Winston Moseley. Not one person did anything to help her until she was dead.

Twenty-one years later, little has changed.

While many communities have started neighborhood watch committees and private security patrols, public apathy still exists.

Some states have even passed "Good Samaritan" laws that relieve a person of liability when helping in an emergency. But in most cases, bystander apathy still is not a crime. And, until we reduce the factors causing it, public indifference to violence will continue to spread like a cancer.

Our modern, urban society actually encourages public apathy. Life in the city is competitive, fast-paced and self-centered.

People feel anonymously detached from their neighbors and helpless to control their environment.

Isolated persons in automobiles fight other isolated persons for position on jammed-up, four lane highways. Cold businessmen in dark blue suits crowd each other out of busy elevators.

And, when everyone gets home, we turn on the television set to watch imaginary heroes go through the same struggles we just fought all day long. In all this confusion, relief from stress appears non-existent. Who would ever want to help anyone else, anyway?

State laws and city ordinances won't solve the problem. The solution

must come from caring individuals who see the need for community interaction. Neighborhood softball games, street block parties and old-fashioned sing-alongs are great ways to bring people together, to help people identify with each other.

These are positive solutions--preventive measures--which could even eliminate the need for crime-watch groups. People would know and care for their neighbors and want to protect them, anyway.

If just one person out of 38 had cared, perhaps Kitty Genovese would be alive today.

By way of further example, I would like to include a commentary I wrote which "Moody Monthly" magazine published when I worked there as senior editor:

SCIENTISTS THINK THEY HOLD KEY TO CREATION OF LIFE

By Dick Bohrer
Moody Monthly

What has been symbolism to readers of the Book of Revelation for 20 centuries is on the drawing boards of this nation's geneticists today.

Recombinant DNA, a laboratory technique discovered in 1973, enables microbiologists to splice together genetic material from unre-

lated organisms to manufacture novel forms of life.

Scientists in hundreds of laboratories across the country are spending millions of dollars in government approved projects seeking the “mastery of life.”

No hoax, the genetic revolution and the facts—that biological knowledge is doubling every five years and that genetic knowledge doubles every 24 months—could revolutionize the study of microbiology and bring into being such unusual creatures as the Apostle John described in the following passages:

“And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions” (Revelation 9:7-8).

“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion” (Rev. 13:2).

Ted Howard and Jeremy Rifkin in their book *Who Should Play God?* (Dell) have documented the discovery of recombinant DNA.

“Twenty-five hundred years after the flowering of the Greek civilization, two teams of scientists led by Drs. Stanley Cohen (Stanford University) and Herbert Boyer (University of California) reported that

they had constructed a novel life form. Taking two unrelated organisms that would not mate in nature, Cohen and Boyer isolated a piece of DNA from each and then hooked the two pieces of genetic material.

The result was literally a new form of (micro-biological) life, one that had never before existed.

“The discovery of the recombinant DNA process in 1973 was immediately hailed by biologists. . . . With the new techniques the genetic material from virtually any two unrelated organisms can be spliced together, opening up a whole new arena of experimentation and study. . . .

“Recombinant DNA is a kind of biological sewing machine that can be used to stitch together the genetic fabric of unrelated organisms. . . .

“On the surface, the combining of different organisms in this way—mouse DNA with human, or rhododendron with horse—may seem bizarre. Researchers, however, are quick to point out that they are not creating giant mice with human heads that will walk out of a laboratory a la Frankenstein’s monster.

“Though recombinant DNA is still in its tooling-up phase, its proponents already envision a wide range of applications that will solve various medical and social problems.”

Science magazine (Nov. 1979) dis-

cusses the wide range of uses recombinant DNA will serve:

“Potential applications of recombinant DNA techniques are limited only by the imagination of the people using them,” Irving Johnson, Eli Lilly Company vice president, says.

He sees uses in three broad categories: 1) developing complete biological molecules that will aid medicine (insulin, growth hormones); 2) developing biologic substances that will improve existing fermentation processes and for making antibiotics; 3) producing materials that will benefit chemical and energy industries.

Some of the latter would assist the clean-up of oil spills at sea by consuming the petroleum before it ruined beaches.

The prime candidate for the first recombinant DNA product to reach the consumer market is human insulin (now being produced by the Eli Lilly Company). It could be in the marketplace within a year, assuming the Federal Drug Administration does not set up a roadblock. Lilly spokesmen have declined to be that specific as to a marketing date.

An elaborate legal battle has arisen over whether corporations may obtain patents to protect their rights to the micro-organisms their scientists have developed. The Patent Office has declined to issue patents on the living cells while the

Court of Customs and Patent Appeals asserted that “the fact that micro-organisms, as distinguished from chemical compounds, are alive, is a distinction without legal significance.”

The Supreme Court has now granted companies the right to patent their findings.

Howard and Rifkin are alarmed. They fear the open door will prompt scientists to move to whatever extreme interests them and that without self-restraint they could move into human genetic engineering.

The results could be apocalyptic.

California Institute of Technology biologist James Bonner argues this fear is groundless:

“Modern progress in microbiology and genetics suggests that man can outwit extinction through genetic engineering. Genetic change is not basically immoral. It takes place all the time, naturally.

“What man can do, however, is make sure that these changes are no longer random in the gigantic genetic lottery in nature. . . . Instead, he can control the changes to produce better individuals.”

The authors ask, “Who will decide on the traits and attitudes these ‘better individuals’ embody?” And what right have they to dicker with what God has created?

Scientists know they will have to

be careful. They have no way of knowing at what point stray micro-organisms might escape from their laboratories on the persons of technicians; and they have no way of knowing what toxic threats to public health and welfare may result. But they reserve to themselves as scientific right the pro-cess of using the keys to life they now find themselves holding.

Thoughtful people might well feel helpless in the face of the legal and scientific conspiracies abroad today.

Their essential hope, however, can only be in the God of history who intervenes (Genesis 11:6) when men throw off restraint.

Human genetic engineering?

Perhaps it is time for God to intervene again.

That commentary was the result of research.

It uses primary sources, and it makes a moral judgment.

The language (apart from the scientific terminology) is simple.

The paragraphs are short.

The reader's interest (hopefully) was hooked early.

The premise was developed in depth.

Authoritative sources were quoted.

The theme was fully fleshed out.

This kind of writing is not difficult. It calls for you to do your homework and then explain to the reader what

you have found.

It also allows you to tell what you yourself think and here lies the service to mankind.

Though we need writers who think and thinkers who write, anyone who is willing to dig can write thoughtful prose.

Books (we'll get to book reviews in our tenth lesson) offer you the opportunity to write long commentaries as you note the issues they bring up and then make your own comments.

Commentaries are much longer than book reviews. They give you more room to examine the source material and then to counter it with what you don't agree.

Keep your eye on your local bookstore and buy each new book that comes out in the area of your chosen specialty. That could be politics or gardening or music or geography.

Your serious review of the book could interest magazine and newspaper editors across the country.

The reason to rely on bookstores not libraries is that you lose time if you wait for librarians to read reviews and then order the books. You want to be the reviewer.

Keep your eye out for other reviewers who might beat you to the editor's desk. You could include them in your review to either agree with them or to oppose their findings.

Whenever you can find sources to give you a quote, your commentary is the better. You might search on

google for specialists in whatever field and e-mail them for their opinion and quote.

But you must keep in mind one thing and that is that YOU are the one writing. We don't want just the facts, ma'am. We want what you think, what you feel, what you believe about them.

Write in conversational style.

Put the words, "Dear Mom," at the top of your article and write your article to her in the way you would tell her if she were with you in the room.

That will bring a warmth, a naturalness, a hominess to your writing.

You want as well to "write bright." That means that your reader will come happily to dance with you. You want to keep him interested as you build to the climax of your message.

Use lots of verbs and verbals.

Limit your "be" verbs and as many prepositional phrases you can.

I hesitate to put restraints on your writing for fear you will straightjacket your YOUness. Be free in your commentary. Relax. Tell your story.

Intrigue us.

Delight us with your flowing language. Include similes if they come to you naturally.

We want to feel we are there with you as you show and tell us what you know and how you feel about it.

As one editor wrote, "Give way to living, breathing words that soothe and cradle grown people's hearts in the mysterious and marvelous worlds

that language can create."

Hold our hand and talk to us.

What I want you to know is that commentaries don't have to all be cold hard facts, fully researched and accompanied with quotes.

They can be your response to other people's problems. Mrs. Bonnie Weiss, a veteran Sunday school teacher and Bible club leader who lives in Portland, Oregon, wrote the following commentary we printed in "Moody Monthly" magazine when I was senior editor.

Brian Was a 'Lemon Kid'

By Bonnie Weiss

The excitement of being promoted into a new class and of meeting a new Sunday school teacher had made seven pairs of eyes sparkle and had produced seven crooked smiles. But the eyes of the eighth child weren't sparkling; Brian was not smiling.

I studied him closely for several Sundays. He was usually the last one to arrive. He would poke his way down the hall, shuffling along.

As he slid into his chair for the opening session, he never glanced my way. During class he hid his feelings behind a glassy stare.

He also appeared to be hard of hearing. He never volunteered an answer to a question. If I called on him directly, his usual answer was, "Huh?" Had he not heard me at all?

His behavior carried over into the workbook and sharing time. Week after week he “forgot” to learn his memory verse. He put forth as little effort as possible. Instead of being the class clown and causing one disruption after another, he simply chose to withdraw.

Was this normal for him? I telephoned his mother, and she introduced me to a Brian I had yet to meet.

I listened, amazed as she told me of his progress in school. Not only was he one of the top readers in his class, but he was also being considered for a gifted child program. He was talented in art.

His mother said that their backyard often became the after-school playground for Brian and his friends. This happy little redhead bounced his way all through the week in typical second-grade fashion . . . until Sunday.

His mother was as concerned as I. She said she had observed many of the symptoms I described, often as early as Saturday night.

She also told me that the previous year had been a most unhappy one for him. He hadn’t enjoyed Sunday school at all and often came home complaining that he had “heard all those stories before. All we ever do is color anyway, and I can do that at home,” he would lament. Could Brian have had a teacher that read her lesson from the teacher’s book

while the children colored?

Now I was certain of my diagnosis. Though only seven years old, Brian was a victim of “lemonitis.” He had all the symptoms.

Our Brian was a “lemon kid.”

Lemonitis is a spiritual disease afflicting people of all ages. It affects the heart, hardening it like concrete. It is also progressive. Children even younger than Brian get it, though the symptoms are often hard to identify in a very small child.

Though we are accustomed to seeing classes dwindle as children enter the teen years when lemonitis becomes easily recognizable, church and Sunday School leaders are now seeing disinterest and dropping enrollments in junior high and even junior departments.

And what of that hard-to-reach adult of today? Is it possible he could have been a Sunday school “lemon kid” of yesterday?

Lemonitis is contagious. Certain children seem to be more susceptible, and afflicted children seem to find each other immediately in any class situation. I was becoming concerned about Tommy’s copying Brian in my little class.

Brian seemed to hate Sunday because he was bored. Could lemonitis be caused by such a simple thing as that? Could I hope to find a cure as simple?

I had inherited this lemon kid.

Could it be that he had had a “lemon teacher?” Could a teacher be a carrier?

The time had come for self examination. Brian did not need another lemon teacher this year. I realized that the cure was going to involve a spiritual battle, because Brian was following the natural bent of the human heart.

Paul tells us that “the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them” (I Corinthians 2:14 NIV).

Brian’s heart could be softened to receive and understand the Word of God only by a working of the Holy Spirit. I prayed that the Lord would use me as a channel to begin a work in the life of this little boy.

Joyless teachers become sour and susceptible to lemons themselves. I was sure that teaching was God’s assignment for me, but would I be more useful teaching another age group? Did I really enjoy second graders? Primaries wiggle, primaries giggle, primaries drive some people right up the wall! Could I be in touch with them?

I could not begin to reach them or teach them otherwise.

Did I have the time to do the job right? I evaluated my Christian service by listing every responsibility I had outside my home.

The list was too long. I was too

busy. I had been teaching long enough to know it is the most time-consuming job of all. Was I really needed on this committee? Couldn’t I be quite easily replaced on that one?

“Lord,” I prayed, “show me Your priorities and give me the wisdom and strength to accomplish them for You.”

My list shrank until my Sunday school class was at the top.

Now my teaching tools needed sharpening. It would take time and effort to learn new methods, but could I expect a lemon kid like Brian to be interested in a lesson unless I was?

He said he “knew all the stories,” but I knew he had yet to learn the lessons the Word of God had for him. Brian needed to have these Bible truths related to his second-grade life.

I tried new visual aids in class and we invented our own. A stack of workbooks became Jericho and the children marched their pencils round and round it. Brian joined in. The materials we had used, though prepared for the average second grader, had been too easy for Brian. Kids need to be challenged.

I found ways of padding the material to bring it up to the interest level of the more advanced children. Brian became interested. He used his imagination to make up stories to illustrate the truths of the lesson.

More than anything, Brian needed a teacher who really loved him. Lemon kids need all the love we can give them.

But Brian needed more than my love. He needed to see the love of the Lord Jesus Christ shining through my life. And I knew that this could only come as I lived everyday in close fellowship with the lord.

The curing of a lemon kid would take time, effort, and discipline; it would involve me more than I could have realized.

My greatest desire for Brian was that one day he would come to trust in Christ as his Savior and that he would walk with the Lord all his life. Such a goal made it all worthwhile.

It was amazing. When Brian began to feel loved, he began to respond. He started learning his verses and I praised him.

He began bringing me presents, beautiful drawings he proudly presented to me on Sunday mornings. I pinned them up for all to see. And best of all, Brian began to listen.

I still remember the day Brian first smiled at me. I knew that he was cured.

A lemon kid never smiles in Sunday school.

You get from the tone of this article

that here is a woman who loves children and in her concern for them makes changes not only in her teaching but in her private life.

This is her commentary about a significant event in her life, one which she was able to analyze, change and witness the positive results.

You can do that, too.

In your own natural tone of voice, let me say again, write what you know, what you feel, what you believe.

Your subscribing to these lessons and your reaching this point shows that you have a serious interest in writing. My goal is to equip you and to stir you up to get out there and let yourself be heard.

In our next lesson we will study the speech critique, another vehicle for you to share what you see and hear. I'll give you the recipe.

You can use it in church or wherever you hear a speech.

Using it in church and submitting your write-up of the pastor's message each week to a local newspaper could bring your church publicity it might not ever have.

As interested townspeople crowd into your church as a result, you will know that your writing can become your spiritual ministry.

Professor Dick