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Virtual Transformations—MWCA 2013

Email instruction

An email instruction framework

This framework emerges from the “mini-lesson” structures Beth Hewett describes in her 2010 The Online Writing Conference. Some tutors choose to use this as a template for their responses, while others have developed different approaches.

Hello! I’m _____, your Writing Center instructor for this draft.

Thank you for submitting your draft to the Writing Center! Just as in our physical location, the time we have to work together is limited. To make the most of our time together, in these notes I address some of the bigger-picture issues I see in your draft, and below my notes I have pasted a copy of your draft with my comments inserted in bold and brackets, **[like this]**.

Strengths

Example of a strength, and why that strength matters to readers.

Issue 1: TITLE

*What problem does this lesson address? Why might that problem matter for readers?
How can the writer take specific steps to address the problem?*

Issue 2: TITLE

What / why / how?

I’ve embedded further comments in your draft below.

Example 1: undergraduate student writer

Assignment in a journalism course: compare how two news outlets report the same story differently, and link their differences to course readings. The student gave us permission to share her work.

The tutor’s response

Suggestion 1: Use examples to clarify differences in *Times* and Fox reporting

In some of your arguments, you do not show your reader quite enough evidence—or analysis of that evidence—to prove that Fox is being partial or *Times* being impartial.

Without strong evidence supporting both your analysis of the *Times* as impartial and Fox as partial, your reader may think you are not making the strongest possible case.

I've marked a few places below where, as your reader, I was eager for a bit more evidence (or analysis of existing evidence). Here is a MadLibs-style example of the kind of revision I'm looking for (black text you wrote; blue text I added):

- They do this by being straightforward in their coverage and not exaggerating claims to please a certain audience. They simply give the facts and remain strictly informative. **For example, the *Times* reports _____ and also _____ without trying to persuade readers _____.**
- This is an example of Fox connecting with their audience by saying the Republican view is being favored. **In other words, Fox presents information that is _____ in order to _____; in contrast, the *Times* presents this same information by _____.**

The student's draft paragraph (bold text is our comment)

The *New York Times* successfully demonstrates impartial reporting. Their coverage does not lean too far left or right since they are able to balance facts with an equal amount of democratic and republican quotes. National Public Radio stresses the importance of impartiality within their new guiding principles. They believe that, "the public deserves factual reporting and informed analysis without our opinions influencing what they hear or see" (NPR, 4). Despite these expected standards, Fox News published, "Senate committee approves assault weapons ban" which elaborates on a republican quote that states that, "the last assault-weapons ban was an ineffective response to a genuine problem." **[How is quoting one Republican evidence of partiality? Were no Democratic senators quoted? What the Republican quotation not given the same level of scrutiny as Democratic quotations?]** Instead of providing the facts, Fox is not impartial and inevitably leans far right in their opinions regarding weapon control. Through examples such as these, Fox tends to color and frame their side of an argument. However, the *New York Times* article, "'Straw Purchases' Gun Law Is Approved by Senate Panel", provides an equal amount of quotes from Senator John Cornyn and Senator Dianne Feinstein, republican and democrat representatives, respectively.

The student's revised paragraph (bold text is the student's addition)

The *New York Times* successfully demonstrates impartial reporting. Their coverage does not lean too far left or right since they balance facts and evenly weight quotes from both parties. National Public Radio stresses the importance of impartiality within their new guiding principles. They believe that, "the public deserves factual reporting and informed analysis without our opinions influencing what they hear or see" (NPR, 4). Despite these expected standards, Fox News' **article about near-universal**

background checks positions a statistic supporting the republican point of view as the last piece of information in their article. They include, "around 4 in 10 got their firearms from friends or family and nearly that many got them from unregulated street dealers. Only about 1 in 9 got them for licensed dealers" (2013, March 12). **Although the quote is fair, the placement does not demonstrate impartiality because it leaves no room for a counterargument or a statistic supporting the democratic argument.** Through examples such as these, Fox tends to color and frame their side of an argument. However, the *New York Times* article regarding straw purchases is a great example of being impartial. They provide equal representation and quotes from both democratic and republican senators. **New York Times remains impartial not only through balance of quotes, but also providing counterarguments that are essential for wholesome reporting. They do this by including both standpoints side by side on each issue discussed. The New York Times supports the importance of impartiality because they leave the audience with the option to select a standpoint.**

Example 2: graduate student writer

Assignment in a social work course: consider mezzo/macro level systems related to clients served by your field agency. The student gave us permission to share her work. Identifying details have been removed.

The tutor's response

Issue 2: Details of several kinds

In the intro, I worry that there are details I am missing that I need. For instance, you reference being overwhelmed but do not connect that feeling to a specific problem as fully as you could, so your explanation of a solution feels unconnected to a specific problem.

Other details to be concerned with are in the sentences. I see more typos and awkward sentences than is typical of your work – I suggest reading this response out loud before being done with it. Go slowly and make sure that every word is what you want it to be, and that you do not let sentences conclude in confusing, unclear ways when a few more words would help their message arrive more fully.

The student's draft paragraph (bold text is our comment)

The change project selected for my field placement at ABC was to develop an intern manual for incoming interns **[this is a very passive sentence to lead things off – who did the selecting? We need a subject in this sentence, I think].** This idea of this manual was due to **[usually, tangible results are described as "due to" something, whereas an idea might be better described as "resulting from my frustration"]** my frustration with my experience at ABC, specifically when I began this placement. When I started in August, I became quickly overwhelmed by all the information and resources

ABC has both at the [REDACTED] site and on [REDACTED] Clinic's webpage. **[an explanatory step is missing here – you were overwhelmed by all the info and resources, but then the next sentence tells me you propose to gather it in one place – what is it like now? I am not sure what the problem is – explain it more fully]** I thought having all relevant information for an intern in one place would be beneficial to this agency.

The student's revised paragraph (bold text is the student's addition)

The change project I selected for my field placement at (ABC) was to develop an intern manual for incoming interns. This idea of this manual **resulted from** my frustration with my experience at ABC, specifically when I began this placement. When I started in August, I became quickly overwhelmed by all the information and resources ABC has both at the [REDACTED] site and on their company's webpage. **The website also does not address each individual site and while each ABC location should be the same in how it is managed, it turns out this is not true. I have spoken with interns at other sites and they do not see the same issues that I have experienced or observed during the past nine months.** I thought having all relevant information for an intern in one place that is specific to this agency's location would be beneficial.