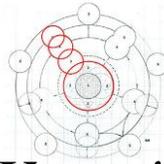


§3.20 Taming the Beast Within Us

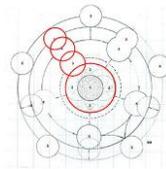


Poke Your 'I' Out!

Video WordShop eLecture Talking Points

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Physics of Writing *Dream-Writing* Chaos to Creativity
Wake Up! your powerful Natural Intuitive Creative Potential



§3.20 Taming the Beast Within Us ... Poke Your 'I' Out!
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Hey! You! Look at Me!

Imagine having stoked up on Dew™ or Jolt™ to help you stay awake to see your favorite 'Hot Body' (e.g. favorite singer, actor, sports celebrity) on The Late Show with David Letterman; and doing it in spite of the fact that you know you will not be able to fall asleep after the show, even though you have to be at work at 5:30. Telling yourself, '*Just in case, never know*', you slip a blank DVD into the DVR and program it to record the show.

Sucking on a liter-size bottle of Dew, you click on the TV only to learn that Letterman is out sick and has been replaced by that edgy, in-your-face comedian --- rat-faced Bill 'who-cares-what-your-name-is' --- a guy you cannot stand. Things go from bad to worse, when rat-face Bill announces that Hot Body will be the last guest.

Jerk! you mumble and sit back, nursing the *Dew*.

Ten minutes before the end of the show --- and thanks to the *Dew* you're now jumping up and down like you're on an electric pogo stick --- your 'Hot Body' walks out onto the stage wearing an X-Rated outfit. The audience goes postal.

Yes! you screech and jump up, spilling the *Dew* all over your roommate's brand new, snow-white area rug, which now looks like a Great Dane used it for a fire hydrant.

So what! you snap and drop to your knees in front of the TV, your hands locked together in mock prayer.

Instead of taking the customary seat beside the host, 'Hot Body' saunters out to center stage and begins to engage the audience. The camera zooms in.

Yes! Yes! you scream.

No. No.

What! No? Why not?

Because the scrawny, rat-faced jokester you love to hate walks into the scene --- placing himself between the camera and your Hot Body's 'hot body' --- and starts making fun of your Hot Body's see-through outfit. Another camera jockeys around for a better view, but scrawny rat-faced Bill hogs the screen, hamming it up: It's all about him and not you or your Hot Body, who you gave up a nights sleep to see, and possibly risked getting fired.

Get that stupid 8#\$%+ &! idiot out of the way! you shout, and launch into a tirade that sounds like a bleep-less version of Ozzie Osborne screaming at his pervert dog.

Welcome to the metaphorical world of writing in the first person, using 'I' instead of the objective third person point-of-view [POV]. Use of the first person e.g. 'I', 'me', 'my', 'mine', places the writer between the reader and the written text, blocking the reader --- the critical target audience

--- from seeing 'the' subjects, 'the' topics or 'the' issues in the text. Use of the explicit first person --- 'I' --- when opening a paragraph, essentially establishes the writer as the 'default' subject; therefore, the intended subject of the paragraph, e.g. the thesis argument, is subordinate to the writer.

One of the more significant adverse consequences of using 'self-focused' personal pronouns in formal, business and professional writing is that the use of 'I' and 'you' shifts the focus of the discourse away from 'the' [subject, topics, issues] to 'thee' [Read as: 'you']: this essentially serves to weaken both the writer's authority and the authority, or credibility, of the written discourse. The cure for this all-too-common WordSmithing affliction is quite simple, though it takes practice: *Poke Your 'I' Out!* of the writing and write about 'the' subject, 'the' topic, 'the' issue, and not about 'thee' --- ['I' and 'me'] --- which is, essentially, what the 'first person' in writing is about, instead of the reader.

Time Out

Thank you, Homer, for your epic poem, *The Odyssey* (written c. 800 BCE)
and the fierce Cyclops giant, *Polyphemus*, Poseidon's one-eyed son.

Time In

Blinding the one-'I'ed beast within us, permits us to refocus the writing from being '*egocentric*', self-focused, to being '*exocentric*', as in ['the'] other or 'audience-focused'. Preoccupation with 'self' in our writing is evidenced by the repeated use of *I, me, my, mine*. This is most often due to the fact that the writer does not possess a credible working knowledge of the subject s/he is writing about.

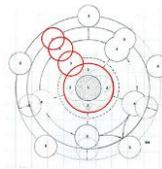
Note: A lack of in-depth subject knowledge is revealed when the writer does not employ subject-related words, terms and phrases [read as: vocabulary; normative system language].

Many novice WordSmith's engage in what I call *Shout Writing!!!!*, a serious and potentially deadly writing disease evidenced by blinding egocentrism. Common symptoms of *Shout Writing!!!!* disease include, but are not limited to, the use use of stylized fonts e.g.: ***HEY! LOOK AT ME!***
Look at How Important I am! I am more important than you and this text!

The focus on 'self' --- using the *subjective* 'singular' first person, the proverbial *me, myself* and *I*, and emoticons, instead of the formal and commanding [*Give me facts! Give me evidence!*] *objective* 'plural' first person pronouns 'we', 'our' or the definite article 'the', essentially declares to readers that the discourse [spoken, written or multi-media communications], is not about the titled subject, the thesis argument, the writing, the reader, the intended audience; but is instead all about

the writer: 'I'; 'me'; 'myself'. In so doing, writers are, essentially, revealing that they do not possess a credible command of formal writing or an in-depth knowledge of the subject. One of the more obvious examples of this disease is the use of 'I', when beginning a new paragraph, which implicitly establishes the writer as the focus, albeit subject, of the text.

What is the remedy for this common novice WordSmithing affliction? A daily dose of knowledge and knowledge-related Normative System Language: nutrition to fuel your brain; *nibble, nibble, nibble* and 'tame' the beast within you.



Example

The following excerpt from a "Lights! Camera! Action! *Using Words to Create Talking Pictures* assignment [*Introduction to the Modes of Writing and Methods of Development*], presents one student's effort to use the objective third person, in spite of the obvious autobiographical nature of the subject matter. As you read this excerpted text, please notice how the writer: [1] focuses on 'the' topics instead of 'thee' or 'thysself' ['I', 'me', 'my', 'mine']; [2] and almost seamlessly integrates subject-related technical terminology (Normative System Language) into the discourse.

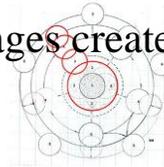
A battlefield, or theatre of engagement in military-speak, presents a unique communications challenge for the combatants, the men and women in the field charged with engaging the enemy. Clear, concise and accurate communication, whether expressed orally, in writing, using graphic images, or by silent hand or flag gestures, can often be a life or death matter in armed combat.

By its very nature communication is two-way e.g. send and receive; speak and listen; write and read; gesture and see. Based on what is said and heard, written and read or gestured and seen, decisions are made and actions taken. Regardless of the medium of communication, the language used to communicate a message cannot allow for misinterpretation. Add distractions to this communications challenge --- such as small arms fire whizzing past a soldier's, medic's or mechanic's head, the shock of mortars exploding nearby, or the terrifying growl of tanks steadily advancing on a position --- and what may have been considered a nuisance in a college writing course is suddenly a 'life-or-death' survival skill. Screw-up and you and/or your buddies may be wounded, captured, publicly humiliated, ridiculed, tortured, and possibly executed, all because someone could not communicate effectively.

The need for state-of-the-art communication skills [creating, sending, receiving, and decoding mediums and messages] goes beyond soldiers in a battle. A medic in the field, a true triage nurse, must be able to critically read and accurately describe symptoms presented by a wounded soldier

[e.g. solder suffering from effects of chemical weapons] in order clearly communicate with a doctor at a 'MASH' unit, to arrive at a diagnosis and treatment.

Clear, concise, accurate and 'visually descriptive' descriptions and explanations of persons, objects, places or events are just as important in writing. Without vivid and recognizable images of what a writer has in his or her mind, a reader cannot 'see' --- visualize --- what the writer sees and, therefore, may not accurately understand what the writer is trying to say. However, a more serious consequence arises when readers 'fill in the blanks' and infers --- literally 'constructs' --- their own images based on the fuzzy or fragmented images created by the writer and 'misses the target'.



Endnotes

- ¹ Ego. A person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance ... (Psychoanalysis) the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity (ODE, 2010, t140.e0257690).
- ² Cyclops. The Cyclops (*Cyclopes*) of Greek mythology were the one-eyed sons of the first Greek Mother Goddess, Gaia, and her consort Ouranos / the smiths who forged [Zeus'] thunderbolts / The Cyclops with whom most readers are familiar is the terrible Polyphemus from whom Odysseus narrowly escapes after he blinds him in Homer's *Odyssey* (Leeming, 2004, t208.e375).
- ³ Egocentric. Self-centred (Colman, 2009, t87.e2640); Egocentrism. Self-centredness, a term given a technical meaning / to denote a cognitive state in which a child in the pre-operational stage of development comprehends the world only from its own point of view and is unaware that other people's points of view differ from its own (Colman, 2009, t87.e2642).
- ⁴ Exo-centric. Exo- (prefix) external; from outside (ODE, 2010, t140.e0280390); centric (adjective) in or at the centre (ODE, 2010, t140.e0133600).
- ⁵ Substantive. Having a firm basis in reality and so important, meaningful, or considerable (ODE, 2010, t140.e0825530).
- ⁶ Formal Writing. Denoting a style of writing or public speaking characterized by more elaborate grammatical structures and more conservative and technical vocabulary / officially sanctioned or recognized: a formal complaint ... relating to linguistic or logical form as opposed to function or meaning (ODE, 2005, t140.e29055).
- ⁷ Standard English. In everyday usage, *standard English* is taken to be the variety most widely accepted and understood within an English-speaking country or throughout the English-speaking world / use of 'standard English' relates to social class and level of education, often considered (explicitly or implicitly) to match the average level of attainment of students who have finished secondary-level schooling (McArthur, 1998, t29.e1153).
- ⁸ Grammar. The whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics (OAD, 2010, t183.e1251786); The entire system of a language, including its syntax, morphology, semantics, and phonology. Popularly, *the structural rules of a language* (Chalker & Weiner, 1998, t28.e609).

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