

Writing a Paper - The Problem Isn't in the Writing Process

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If you're working at a business where you have to write a short memo every day or two to convey some information to somebody it's fine to have a rule it's fine to say this is what it's going to look like here's what your sentences should look like get it out but that is not what you're doing that is not the level of value your work has to generate and so you one of the things that I'm going to be saying to you is you need to stop thinking about rules and start thinking about readers so here's the problem that experts have you are in our our vocabulary you are what we call Expert writers what this means is not that you are necessarily expert at writing although you may be extremely good at writers but what it means is that you are writing about a subject at which you have expert knowledge you are not like high school students who are using their writing to introduce themselves to some something at a fairly basic level you are operating at the most sophisticated levels when I work with faculty on this and other campus I am working with people who are after all on the frontiers of knowledge they're thinking stuff nobody's thought before this is very hard stuff so here's what you're doing you are thinking about your world in very difficult ways this is a terrifically good thing and it's the source of most of the value of your work now you are also writing about that world and this is where it starts the problem starts arising unlike a journalist almost surely you are using your writing process to help yourself think in other words the thinking that you're doing is at such a level of complexity that you have to use writing to help yourself do your thinking this is quite different from high school students my high school teachers told me Larry there are two different processes first there's a thinking process then there's a writing process.

I had a teacher who said to me you are not ready to write your first word until you are finished thinking and she said to me to prove this to you I'm going to have you whenever you turn in a paper I'm going to have you turn in the outline you use to do your thinking this was not a problem for me first I wrote the paper then I wrote the outline but I thought I was the only one I thought everybody else when they did this thinking just you know thought it till they were done and then their essay like Athena burst from their forehead onto the page thought I was trying to keep it secret that I didn't work that way nobody works that way it

doesn't mean you don't have outlines or a good idea it doesn't mean you don't take notes it's a good idea it doesn't mean you don't have other ways of thinking but you are using your writing to help yourself think if you don't do this for most people you cannot think at the level you need to think quite different say from a journalist who's sitting down writing the journalist is not using the writing process to think up new ideas about the world you are this means you have a very different set of writing challenges than anybody else has this is a course about those challenges our program is about those challenges because here's the challenge you write this text this grant proposal this article this dissertation proposal this book you actually generate it on the horizontal axis you actually generate the text while you are doing your thinking but then you're going to send this text out to readers and the readers are going to look through that text and if you've done your job they're going to change the way they see the world so here's the problem symbolically you actually generate a text on the horizontal axis but whether it does its job depends on the vertical axis and here's the problem very predictably experts use language in one set of patterns to do their thinking but those very same experts read with a different pattern so here's what happens you have used your text as you must use it to help yourself think but you're going to use writing patterns and language patterns that interfere with the way through your readers read when they read even when those readers are also other experts so you are interfering with their reading process when you're writing.

I promise you you are what happens to readers when you do that last thing they're going to do is they're just going to stop what happens before then what leads up to that stopping you're absolutely right they stop but let's talk a little bit about what leads up to it you're writing like this they're reading like this what's the first thing that happens to them this has never happened to you it right right so they misunderstand that's the second thing that happens the second thing that happens is you interfere they do not understand what's the first thing that happened they're skipping stuff I'm going to put that in the bucket of stopping they just either either in little ways or big ways they stop right what's the first thing this has never happened to you you've never tried to read something which was clearly not written in the way you're trying to read it

I bet that in the last week you've written you've read stuff that was not written in the way you are seeking to read it what's the first thing that happens to you that I'm going to put that in that doesn't understand bucket see what I mean I mean I'm being recruited the first thing that happens is you slow down and re-reading is a version of slowing down you either read more slowly the first time or you have to read and reread and reread and reread you slow down we're going to get back to why this matters in a minute second you don't understand third come on you get aggravated then you're done right done now when this happens to you and you reread and reread why did you do that why didn't you just stop that's exactly right what do you suppose happens if they don't need to read it they don't problem is forgive me for saying this you have no idea how to handle that problem you don't you really don't why not how many things have you written in your life imagine the number of category academically stuff forget the letters and all that kind of stuff academically stuff order magnitude

I don't know 300 300 taxes make it up 500 000 I don't know how many is I'll make it up I'll make it up 200 200.

a hundred about a hundred she's better with a hundred you've written a hundred academic texts in your life did the reader stop reading them did they never no why not they were grading it let's be a little more crude about it they were paid oh my God guys academics get all freaked out when I talk about money I said guys I got news for you your teachers read your stuff because they were paid to want where your teachers reading your text to think about the world that's not what they're paid to do why were your teachers reading your text why were people paying them to do it to change the way they see the world no why teachers read texts because they are paid to care about the students you've learned to write in a system where you're writing to readers who are paid to care about you that will stop that will stop right that'll stop the rules that you've learned about writing were rules that were generated in the system where you are writing to somebody who's paid to care about you that's over in the real in the world Beyond school I call it a real world but I'm not sure it's real it's just the world Beyond School they're not paid to care about you why are they reading why are they reading your stuff why will they read it the journals your colleagues because they think it's valuable to them how much of student work is valuable to The Faculty to which the students are writing and by the way some faculty who said to you oh your work was so valued thank you they were lying oh they were lying it was valuable to them but it was valuable to them because they learned that people misunderstood things in ways they had no idea people could misunderstand hmm faculty sometimes look at me and say oh no no Larry you're wrong no no student writing is actually actually professionally valuable I say then did you publish it then if you didn't it's plagiarism and they said well no actually they're valuable look here's the problem you've got yeah your writing needs to be clear sure your writing needs to be organized the rules that govern this are not what you think they are in fact they're not rules yes your writing needs to be persuasive this is way more important than this but more than anything else from now on your writing needs to be valuable because if it's not that nothing else matters it makes zero difference faculty come into my office and forgive me for the drama but in my office there's two chairs in the writing corner.

I have a chair at my desk and then there's two chairs over here there's my chair and then there's a writer's chair and next to the writer's chair is a box of Kleenex and I'm not kidding because I have people coming to me saying I'm not getting they're not accepting my proposal they're not accepting my draft like a faculty who come in and say they're not publishing my work and of course there's Kleenex there because like you know careers are depending on it and sometimes it's because it's not clear and sometimes because it's not organized and sometimes it's because it's not persuasive but overwhelmingly it's because it's not valuable and the other stuff doesn't matter if it's clear and useless it's useless it's organized and useless it's useless it's persuasive and useless it's useless that's the way it is now this terrifies people because they make the mistake fortunately I'm talking to social scientists physical scientists don't have this mistake they think value lies here they think oh my God what if my ideas just aren't valuable it's a Dopey there's no such thing as value here values here the question is whether this particular community of readers values it which is

why it's so much about readers and not about content can you imagine writing a text which one group of readers thinks is terrifically useful and another group of readers thinks is useless well yeah I gotta tell you sometimes PhD students come into my office and say I really got to get this article published I'm under so much pressure to publish I got to publish and I say okay what journals are you going to submit it to and they look at me and say what does that matter because they think it needs to be clear it needs to be organized it needs to be persuasive and those are just sort of in the thing itself or anybody could look at it and decide it's clear that's crazy wrong but most importantly is valuable value lies in readers right not in the thing and so how people can think about their writing without thinking about readers is probably the biggest challenge you face you've been trained to think about writing formally rule governed you have to stop and you have to think about readers not generic readers God help you if you came up in a system with standardized tests where you had to write papers for a standardized reader like on an AP test or an SAT test that's disastrous because it specifically teaches you not to think about any differences between readers we are going to be talking about differences between readers and thinking about those differences because that's what I think that's how writing actually works except in the bizarre world of standardized testing so I'm going to pass these out okay turn to the first page and here's what I want to do very quickly I want to imagine that this is a group of uh by the way any biologists in the group wonderful because biologists have to leave um now this is a this is a this is a test about it has to do with content has to do with Biology and I don't want you to know anything about it because I want you to be responding to the language the writing of it so here's what I'm going to ask you to do we're going to read two imagined uh contenders for a grant or publication and we're going to decide which of these two we're going to publish okay I'm going to read you stay with me as I read 1A as a consequence of the cost of sex the theoretical probability of clonal and sexual coexistence is low this is not sociology this is biology as a consequence of the cost of sex the theoretical probability and clonal of clonal and sexual coexistence is low observation of coexistence and vertebrae taxa has been reported within the Frozen Niche variation model the relevant parameters difference in overall Niche breadth a wider Niche breath for the sexuals and for the Clones is predicted in performances in monocultures performances and mixtures do not indicate such a relationship switching of behaviors or resource use patterns between mixed and pure cultures may be the cause the post study will examine the predictions of the FNB model okay as again I hope you didn't understand any of that.

1B as a consequence of the cost of sex a theoretical probability of clonal and sexual coexistence is low nonetheless observation of coexistence invertebrate tax that has been widely reported within the accepted model of Frozen Niche variation coexistence is explained by difference in overall Niche breath however although the fnv model correctly predicts wider Niche breadth for the sexuals and for the Clones its predictions are inconsistent with reported performances and mixtures the post study will examine whether the anomaly may be explained by the switching of behaviors or research use patterns between mixed and peer cultures which of these were going to be more likely to fund second one of course one now tell me why okay.

I'm gonna I'm gonna be really big on particular words right important right first thing you said now imagine if you're the writer of 1A and we said to her your work doesn't seem important what's her likely response he didn't understand and we said all right fix it make it better what is this is crucial what is that writer likely to do if we said we didn't it's not important and the writer thinks you didn't understand it they're about to make a gigantic mistake because they would do what what do you do when somebody says to you.

I don't understand you explain do not do that you think I'm kidding why do I not want you to explain and by the way why did your teachers want you to explain why did your teachers want you to explain stuff because they wanted to know whether you understood it you guys don't know how to explain stuff you explain stuff under the model of demonstrating to somebody that you understand it that's how you've learned to explain you don't even know you know that you've done this you have learned that what explaining is it's revealing to the world the inside of your head no one cares about the inside of your head at least not unless you pay us if you pay us to Care we will care right but in the real world you're going to stop paying your readers to care about the inside of your head here's a shock you think writing is conveying your ideas it's not let me say that again you think that writing is communicating your ideas to your readers it is not what is professional writing professional writing what is it it's not conveying your ideas to your readers it's changing their ideas nobody cares what ideas you have this is way more radical than it sounds I used to make the mistake of saying to students who came in I teach argument a lot and I say to students who make an argument why do you think that and then I realized this is a horrible question it's a teacherly question a teacher says why do you think that because the teacher wants to know what what's in his head I said oh my God I'm doing the same thing so I know I don't say to him why do you think that I say now why should I think that because I think and guess what that doesn't work right which is interesting why it doesn't work in Academia why doesn't it work in Academia why doesn't that work a professional this is a great question right why is it that I don't say okay you think you're not thinking why does that not work and I mean at least it's not supposed to work and sometimes it works why is it not supposed to work in an academic Realm well that's probably why it does work but that's not why it's supposed to work supposed to critically examine because there's a rule of Western Academia it's rule that's of course Broken in the breach a million times but the rule says nothing will be accepted as knowledge or understanding until it has been challenged by someone competent to challenge it that's the rule this is very important because it changes your readers look teachers read because they're paid to care about writers some readers in the world in many cases read to find out information they need if you go to somebody on the quad and say excuse me or somebody's option in the quad and says excuse me can you tell me how to get to the library and you say okay yeah go over there and turn right and go up there they don't say well I doubt that because they're not they don't as readers have the function of challenging what you say but at least in theory and in a lot of practice your readers are different from those readers on the quad and they're way different from teachers your readers have the professional function of challenging what you say so explaining turns out only to happen inside of these two functions you only explain inside a value having been generated and persuasion having begun it is an enormous mistake of PhD

level riders that they try to explain first and I know why you try to explain first because in school they just wanted you to explain first because the whole thing was just about seeing what you know start explaining line one classic thing begin with the definition teachers love this begin with the definition because it tells the teachers that you what you know the definition don't begin with definition guys all right so back to B how are you going to make it important how do you make it important now the second word you said oh no that's a terrible word do me a favor do me a favor take the word new or Worse original if you think that you're here to do new and original work if you would find the synapse in your brain that is storing those words kill it oh and people say to me oh does that mean I'm here to do non-original work no but you are not here to do original work you're here to do valuable work what's the difference you think you're here to create new knowledge well you know how hard it is to create new knowledge we can create new knowledge in the next 30 seconds all we have to do is count up the number of people who are in this room because nobody in the world knows how many people are in this room no one knows and we will create new knowledge right now we'll just count the people in this room we'll say okay now we know is anybody going to read that paper why not they're going to say who cares how many people are in that room dear friend of mine when I was a PhD student here discovered journals written by a woman in the last part of the 19th century in England she traveled around the world and every year she wrote a journal and somehow they ended up in a library in Norwich and she was over in Norwich one day and she stumbled into a back room and there's all these journals with tons of dust on him she blew out the dust and she said oh my gosh it's amazing this woman traveled the world for 30 years and wrote a journal every time she traveled he came back here wrote up a grant and said whoa I want to spend three months studying this and then she got her money and she went over to the Norwich and she spent three months and she read the whole thing and she wrote it all up and she handed it to her Committee in an hour and a half they sent it back and they said you've got to be kidding she said well I'm going to get my dissertation I'm going to get green now right they said you've got to be kidding of course we're not going to give you your PhD and she said but but but but but nobody in the world knew what this woman said right they said and we still wish we didn't know what she said because we do not care and she said but it's original research she said I guarantee you it's new and they said that's right it's new and it's original but it is not knowledge and she said that's ridiculous it has to be knowledge no it's not ridiculous she was living in a positivistic world where knowledge looks like this in a positivistic world knowledge is just built up over time and anytime you find out something that people didn't know you get to just add up to this model and knowledge just keeps on growing and everybody's happy and that is dead dead well mostly here's the model now sorry these are people these are human beings there are conversations moving through time and there's a bunch of people and they get to say what knowledge is and that horrifies you why would those people get to say why do they get to say especially because historically of course they've looked just like me foreign as my niece says to me every time she sees me two male two pale too stale why on Earth would these people get to say what knowledge is I get it I get it big problem but they do and that's a fact these people get the same what counts as knowledge the good news is they are changing way too long way too late way too slow but they're changing but the point is that's the way it works you may not

like it but that's the way it works they get to say so they get to say yep you're right that was new I didn't know how many people were in 302. but it doesn't count as knowledge it doesn't have any value to us doesn't count the good news is this thing just moved does move through time the other good news is this boundary is permeable stuff comes in and unlike this model stuff goes out I like to think of academic conversations as sort of excreting as they go stuff gets left behind it's not like this where everything gets added up is always there forever that's not the way it works they go along for a while they think of things for a while and they say whoop that was dumb don't think that anymore they go along for a while and they say whoa we were doing that don't do that anymore it's not this build up model this buildup model assumed that everything was right we don't think that we think a lot of what we think right now is wrong we just don't know what the wrong is and we don't know what better is we want to know we do we want to get better at it but in order for us to do that you have to be dealing with the stuff we say is knowledge that might not feel good but that's how it works so important isn't going to do it new isn't going to do it original isn't going to do it because I talk to people and they say you know people don't think this is bad they're not publishing it well somebody says they don't think it's important so you know what they do they say this important study I don't know what is it about bee that makes it feel important what is it tell me the words on the page here's what I literally want you to do I want you to literally everybody in the room I want you to literally go through one b and circle the words the specific words that are making it valuable to the audience to the readers what's the first herb you see a word that verb what's the first word you see that makes it valuable nonetheless next except it is but actually widely accepted next however next although although next inconsistent next reported next anomaly here's my first piece of advice to you that you can use to make your writing better starting this afternoon.

I spent 15 minutes a week for the rest of this year taking articles in your field print them out so you have a hard copy go through and circle every word in the writing that is creating value to the readers if you see an article that you think doesn't have any of those words send it to me I'll give you my email send me your email and say Larry I found an article that doesn't do it here's what I bet you will see none I will see 10. now tens and five I guarantee five likely 10. what's going on how come you don't see him and I see five or ten you miss them here I see him I know the code every Community has its own codes the communities you're entering have their own codes set of words that communicates value you must know the codes of the communities you're working in and they are particular to communities some codes are shared among a bunch of communities some aren't you've got to know you've got to know you spend 15 minutes a week for the rest of this year you'll be doing two things one you'll be training yourself to look for the code of creating value the other thing you'll be doing if you're smart is you'll be writing down each of those words and you'll be creating an invaluable word list so that when it's a week before something is done and you're doing one of your revisions you're going to do what you're going to do the same thing on your own work and if you can't underline 10 words in the first two paragraphs you're going to do what you're going to go to the word list and you're going to jump them in right sometimes sometimes it's that simple sometimes we take articles that wouldn't get published in an hour we do things and think about it sometimes weeks.

I'm not suggesting this is always magic but sometimes it's magic because sometimes the problem are pretty simple the problems have to do with these people you have to know them as I say to undergraduates who look at me and they say why does it take six years or five years or even four years to get a PhD aren't they just learning more stuff no half their time is spent learning more stuff the other half is learning their readers I will say this again if you do not know your readers the particular people in a community if you do not know these people you are very unlikely to create value and you are very unlikely to be persuasive because persuasion depends on what they doubt you don't know what they doubt how on Earth are you going to overcome those doubts you must know them it's not enough to know your subject matter you got to know your readers okay so what is it about none there's two things going on here then one of them has to go on with the community of readers tell me the words you underline that has to do with the community of the word you underline and be which words have to do with the community widely accepted reported those are words that cued that there was a community of people who want to understand this you don't have those words you're not signaling any community what do the other words do nonetheless however although what do they do and find the synapse in your head that has that word here's what's going on he has been told or taught or learned that in order to have persuasive clear organized prose you had to have what are sometimes called flow words or are sometimes called transition words words like because and if and unless and however and although and and and but right are those words bad those words aren't bad I'm as bad is it bad to have float it's not bad to have flow but they have nothing to do with value why what's the difference between and and but in creating value imagine if you go to your readers and say hey readers hey community hey community I've read your stuff I've thought about what you think and I have something to say hey readers I've read your stuff I know what you think but you're wrong which one are they going to pay attention to here's not here's what I will say and if somebody wants to do it right now check it he can name a journal we will go to the every edition of that journal in the last 20 years and every paper will say that somebody's wrong everyone now he just said what's the difference he says and he's been and I understand it I can't go to these editors and say they're wrong and I am telling you that every article published in that journal in the last 20 years has opened by saying readers are wrong first looking at me like I don't believe it look what's the difference yeah one way to put it is you have to know the code you have to know the code if you say to the people who are the dominant figures in your field you know what I've read all your stuff and you're idiots not going to go around well right don't say that what did you say to them the dominant figures in their field I say what do you say to them yeah but if you want to learn the code what do you suppose the code is yeah but the code is wow are you smart wow me whoa.

I'm just amazed you are so smart and you've contributed and you've Advanced this you've Advanced this community Through in fabulous ways there's this little thing thank you for appreciating it what do you think what do you think we have Rob and then you better have an argument not an explanation do not explain argue you're talking to people who like wrote this stuff you don't have to explain it to them you have to predict what they're going to doubt when you say they're wrong so you say to them you're wrong about this and they

say why should I agree that I'm wrong and you say well here's why that's what introductions do they give a quick version of why these people should think that they're wrong and they say well okay preliminarily.

I've read your first two pages now I'll start reading the rest of it why because you've caused them to think that your work might be valuable for them imagine if you go to them and say wow your work has been really great and now here's something new that you didn't know see here's what happens people say to me man if I say that they've done something wrong I'm taking a huge risk true you think you're not taking a risk if you do this what's the risk you run if you do this hey really smart people

I've done all your work I've studied all your stuff and I have something I want to add no that's actually a really good reaction right what's the risk you run there when you say there's something I want to add we don't care or worse I'd like to put my voice into the conversation say we don't have any reason to listen to it let's pause on that one for a minute the University of Chicago writing program is not real popular in the world of writing programs and you can see why a lot of people think we're fascists I don't this be here's what we teach people to do we say identify that people with power in your community and give them what they want foreign that's what we teach people to do lots of people have said to us in some version or another you're supposed to teach people to challenge the existing Community well actually I just did right but notice that I did it inside the terms of the community people say why don't you teach people to have their own individual voice and I'm gonna say I get that argument I get the moral and ethical pressure to teach people to have their individual voices but when I sit with somebody up in my office who's worried about their career not going anywhere it can't be about their individual voice it's about what's going to make it valuable to their readers you need to understand that this program that we have is motivated by those people who have come to us and said our writing is not succeeding and the whole program is aimed at them how do you make them help them succeed there's a ton of ethical issues involved in that they're not going you don't really care I just want to put them out there there's also the personal at risk issue you want me to go to this really important person is the editors of this journal and tell them they're wrong yeah I do I need you to do it under the code you want to do it under the code there's polite ways to do it there's insulting ways to do it you need to learn how they do it in that community if you don't do it in the way they code it you're going to get slapped down what if you don't do it at all you're going to get rejected right so all right sorry for the Drama Oh My Gosh especially because we're on page one of the 30 page handout all right page two page three sorry it's technically we were on page two because there was no page one let me just show you a couple of things quickly from this two paragraphs the top paragraph why people write essays this is a caricature I admit this is a character it's come from something trying to explain to high school students why people write essays and I just want to show you how wrong this is how dangerous this is and how much some of it has actually you've adopted without knowing you've adopted it by definition an essay is a structured creative written composition dealing with a specific subject from a more or less personal point of view that's wrong you notice it says nothing about readers and it says nothing about value by definition anything you write as the function of helping your readers understand better something

they want to understand well that's what it is because that's what it does I'm thickening on this point what something means is what it does here's what your writing does it helps a particular set of readers understand better something they want to understand well that's what its job is all this other stuff being structured being creative being written dealing with subjects is how you fulfill the function and sometimes you do it this way and sometimes you don't but what you what is immediately lost is that sense of function people write essays because it gives them an opportunity to analyze ideas situations and people and to preserve them indefinitely can you see how mystery this is all about the writer it's why people write essays so that they can think okay.

I got no problem with somebody writing an essay because they want to think what I have a problem with is I come to my office and say my readers don't appreciate me well why did you write it.

I wrote it so I could think they don't owe you their appreciation they're not going to appreciate it just because you wrote it and this is very different and in many you could make the case you make a very important case homie Baba and I used to argue about it when he would not argue I just told me you're right there's really moral problems with this right I want to be clear about that preserve them indefinitely very very dangerous idea can you see how that's this model this notion that your writing preserves your ideas indefinitely no it does not a student of mine who's now the chair of a philosophy.

Department had a lot of trouble getting his first book out he wrote this book and he was working on it kept working on it working on it and he sent it to me he was actually a student of mine in his first year here and he used to write me two page papers and I would give him six pages of comments so he now he sends me a 400 page book and he says oh this is cooler I'm going to get 800 pages of comments I send him two words I said you're done and he came back at me and said no I'm not done I could make it better I said you're done he said but Larry this is ridiculous look at I look at myself and I say I can make it better I said Jonathan you're done he said but but somebody's going to read this in 500 years and I don't want to find mistakes now that nobody's going to read it in my heart the function of your writing is to move this conversation forward it cannot do that if it's in your desk drawer your function is to move a conversation forward it's not to preserve indefinitely because guess what you could be some of the stuff count on it you're going to be some of this stuff at some point that gets left behind this is not a bad thing if you think it's going to be preserved indefinitely you're just wrong it's really not and he looked at me and he says but Aristotle I said come on Jonathan not only does it ensure permanence of ideas for the permanence of ideas no it doesn't it also ensures a degree of permanence for the writer no it doesn't if you have that in your head of course you cannot write that's a standard none of us can meet except like Aristotle right don't don't let yourself go there it is a way for the writer to understand more clearly ideas and Concepts horizontal axis horizontal axis horizontal axis it's a way for the writer to participate in the world by sharing his feelings.

okay is it a way for you is your writing a way for you to participate in the world yes but not by sharing your feelings or your thoughts but by changing other people's thoughts that's how you participate it's a way for the writer to sharpen thinking and organizational skills can

you see how skewed this is towards students there's a way for the writer to enjoy the personal thrill and satisfaction of communicating his own personal ideas and feelings.

I will say it again your writing is not communicating anything about you that's not its job its job is to change the way your readers think now people look at me and say well that must mean you're lying no it's not like there's only two options in the world right communicating your inner thoughts or lying it's not you don't understand the function sometimes sometimes the function of something I say is to communicate my inner beliefs if I'm on trial and some it says I literally had an FBI agent in my office this morning that's kind of freaky but it's actually the truth sometimes I sort of have this okay I need to know about the inner part of you sometimes I'm sitting with a friend who's just gotten some really bad Health news and my language is not about me it's about her the idea that language has only one function seems to me impoverished beyond measure you have to think I urge you to think of language as having many different functions the function of an academic piece is not to communicate your ideas it's to change the ideas of an existing community now sometimes you do that by communicating your ideas sometimes you don't but understand what it's for and understand that your training has been all about revealing your head you've been trained it's in your blood but that's how you're supposed to do when you run and that's just not the case so go to the bottom one welcome to the world the new world we may thus expect the thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the knower at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process the old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training of minds or even of individuals becoming obsolete and will that become ever more so the relationship here's what he's talking about when I was in school and somebody said oh she's amazing this professor she's Professor so-and-so she's amazing well we talked about we talked about how much she had in her head we said she knows more about this she's forgotten more than I will ever learn and what leotard is saying here is that knowledge no longer has anything to do with the inside of individual heads now if you talk about somebody being a great Professor what are you talking about you're talking about what they have he or she has done in this exterior space between heads now it's not how smart they are how much they know it's what they've done in the space between heads what they've exteriorized what they've done out there that's your job it's not to reveal the interior of your head it's to change what's going on in the spaces between heads or however much you want to talk about the construction of knowledge this is very unpleasant to lots of people the relationship between the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they Supply and use that is your relationship to your own knowledge is now tending and will increasingly tend to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the Commodities they produce and consume that is the form of value your relationship to your own knowledge is the same as a relationship of a farmer to the wheat or miner to the coal the relationship is the form of value and I bet for many of you that doesn't feel very good people don't like that I get that they don't like it but I can tell you that's the way it is all right now let's get out of the stratosphere and get down to some nuts and bolts the next few pages just summarize what I've been talking about go to page eight foreign go back to the difference between because if and unless and and talk about words like but although however inconsistent and

anomaly these words are all serving the same function in this text these are transition words as he rightly said or flow words these are not anomaly is a noun inconsistent is an adjective but can you see what all these have in common anomaly inconsistent but however although these are flow words but these are not so what does this list have in common however but although inconsistent anomaly they create tension it's a good word for it tension give me some other words challenge good contradiction the slangs we use the word for all of this instability we use two words first of all we use instability there's not magic I don't have I have no trouble at all if you want to use the words like tension uh can't read my own handwriting challenge contradiction red flag we find the word instability to be helpful because here's what we think is one General way to talk about it it's not magic which is helpful and that is a lot of people come out of school with a model for writing at the beginning of a text that's basically in the mode of explanation that is they think that what you should do is give background or something like definitions or and then move to something like a thesis notice this is all very much on the positivistic model that is learn knowledge starts by a solid foundation you have a solid foundation of previous knowledge you have a solid foundation of a definition you have a solid foundation of here's the worst one of all generalizations right so many people have been taught this model they don't even know they're using it you open with the generalization you move to a specific thesis then you talk about the thesis then you move out to a generalization at the end we call it the martini glass model of writing wow you don't want to do this you really don't want to do this all right instead you open with when I show you on page eight is a problem whose problem s Ghana a specific set of readers not which is what you're doing right now very likely your problem I see all kinds of texts that have the language of dear reader I have this problem that really interests me sometimes you have this sense of ever since I was young I've been fascinated by fill in the blank and now I've spent I want you to fund me for a year of solving my problem of not knowing enough about blank right wrong problem wrong.

location of the problem problem needs to be located not in necessarily in the readers but in something the readers care about for academics it's something the readers want to understand if they're not academics is something to read a problem that the readers want to fix so for example..

I know nobody's probably here in education but if you want to get funding in a grant for studying something on education you start with a problem in the world we got an education system that's clearly broken that's a problem that's the problem your readers care about probably not the reader's problem they actually probably have pretty good educations they probably are sending their kids to pretty good schools but they care about that problem all right you locate problems in specific reading communities this is very different from General background or definition then you move to a solution and of course notice your thesis can be in a solution only if the readers perceive the problem sometimes I'll say to people this thesis is it a solution to a problem they say yeah of course it is okay so where did you say what the problem is it's not there it's not there it's got to be there

I've got to be there nine times out of ten ninety nine times out of 100 it's got to be there so the readers can say it's a solution to that problem now in very general terms and I'm just

going to sketch this out quickly we find that problems have two chief characteristics one is the situation has to be unstable that is you have to generate a sense of instability words like but however inconsistent although anomalies show the situation to be inconsistent unstable can you see the crucial difference in why so many writers are so bad at this look at this language look at this model this model is a model of stability and continuity this model is a model that says this thesis validity its validity is established by it being continuous with something that we already know to be valid so the language that people use is a language of continuity and consistency the horrible irony is your readers are actually searching for language of instability inconsistency and tension so the crucial point.

I want to make is we're back to this interference pattern people say well look I just want to talk at this point about inconsistency about consistency I want to show the I want to show the continuity between what I'm saying and what comes before that's what I want to do at this part of my text what happens if the readers are looking for that moment of your text for a problem what if they're looking to decide whether it's valuable by whether or not they have a problem it's not neutral they're looking for something that shows them inconsistency you are giving them language of continuity you are interfering with their writing reading process they are slowing down they are getting confused they're getting aggravated and they can stop two paragraphs into your text two paragraphs they're done because what they're looking for is value and you're using language that's not neutral it is contradicting and interfering with their sense of identifying value okay there's a second point which a lot of academics really dislike some don't mind it at all which we call the language of costs and benefits and we differentiate that for a reason what we mean is not always but very often you need to code use code language to your readers to show them that the instability imposes a cost on them not on you on them or conversely that the instability if it's solved offers a benefit to them the language is different there's a language of cost and a language of benefit there's a version of saying dear readers they're important readers you were brilliant you've advanced this enormously we're so grateful but there's this little inconsistency in your work now they want to know well does that inconsistency cost us anything because guess what you know what about my work it's got tons of inconsistency in it much of it doesn't make any difference is the inconsistency you're pointing out costing us anything or you can say to them hey does inconsistency in your work if you improve it you get this benefit from it those are different coded languages I urge you to pay attention to the actual journals that you're imagining publishing in and see whether or not there's a pattern of language of benefit and language of cost there may not be a pattern you may see both but if there's a pattern you know what my advice is going to be use it follow it rhetoric the the published articles will show you the language that works right there in front of you if you just look at it so skip past page nine page 10 this is just some um some explanations of some bad habits oh yes please oh the literature review yeah okay sure if I don't put it then I should have it right okay no I'm happy to talk to him talking about the lit review um let's start by doing this let's specifically talk about a sorry literature review.

I just did a terrible thing to whoever poor people who are actually going to watch this all right let's talk about that first of all writing a lit review as a PhD student is one of the hardest things there is to do it's incredibly hard because you don't know who your readers are let's

talk about a straight teacher reading a lit review what is the function of a lit review for the teacher who is not reading it to change her view about the world but is reading it to judge you what's the function of a lit review for that reader to show that you understood it right that's perfectly clear is that its function in a professional text is that his function in a professional text you think they're reading is to find out whether you know the stuff about anything what's his function in a professional text it has several what's one what's the function of a lit review and professional text ego massaging that's a real function.

I got no problem with that people are going to say no no it's a real function ego massaging is a function credibility is a function forgiving credibility is a function yeah but I hate the language of moving forward right or what you're challenging there you go you know how to no you see the difference you see the difference here's what professional good lit reviews and I didn't include one in this handout but you sent me an email I'll send you some really good professional lit reviews we'll use the lit review to enrich the problem instead of saying here's what a student let review says in 1998 he said this in 2000 he said this in 2002 he said this in 2005 he's sorry for the he's but I'm looking at a bunch of he's here right a professional that review says what in 2001 he said this but in 2004 he said something which if we're smart we realize puts in tension and then in 2005 he said this which complicates the situation here but even more complicated if we put that in motion with what he said back in 2001. now we have layers of complexity complication and tension now can we say I'm moving forward yeah but you notice I'm not moving forward from stability I've now enhanced their sense of instability and if you're really good you're hype with the costs you start saying wow not only is there a little tension there but it's a tension that matters is this community as we go forward because it suggests that not only were they wrong but we're wrong as we move forward based on their ideas so it's not just them and the rest of us are we moving forward yes but from instability not from stability that's a big difference so for example let's take a couple of examples of this because perfectly we can use these examples to talk furthermore about more about lit reviews page 12. um here's an instance from Bill Sewell who was just a terrific writer ever since Herodotus historians have written about events battles alliances scandals conquests conspiracies revolts Royal successions reforms elections religious revivals assassinations discoveries momentous events have always been the bread and butter of narrative history.

now if you talk to some high school teachers and they'll say you'll say to them what is he doing there they will say to you oh he's giving background no he's really not when do we find out that he's not giving background the next word is but he's not giving background he's building a problem and the differences are enormous so many faculty members will say to students you know what this paper really isn't working very well this introduction doesn't work and the student says what do I need to do and they'll say something like well you need to give me more background here oh my God when you say background of people they usually say okay I guess I guess give more history of the subject or something they don't mean that they mean I can't figure out why this matters the background they need is a problem but despite the prominence of events in historical narratives the event has rarely been scrutinized as a theoretical category.

now is that a problem is it coded as a problem it's an it's undoubtedly a instability but is it a problem I'm going to cut to something that's I want to just be able to put on the table for you later on in this handout you're going to see a couple of pages on the difference between what we call.

Gap and what we call error a lot of especially young academics very worried about telling their these important people that they're wrong instead they use the language of Gap that is they say we've studied this stuff for a long time but we haven't looked at this there's a gap in our knowledge and the truth is that that sometimes works but way more often than not it does not work why not a gap in knowledge we have a gap in our knowledge why wouldn't that work pardon me it should be a small Gap that's true well why would it work you're probably not the first one well but but perhaps you're the first one who's been able to fill it still isn't gonna work often doesn't work here's what Gap assumes another model of knowledge that is now dead this is supposed to look like a crossword puzzle can you imagine that this is a crossword puzzle here's what the Gap model assumes it assumes that knowledge is bounded assumes that knowledge is like a crossword puzzle with a fixed number of pieces and you say oh look I filled in this piece this only makes sense in a bounded model of knowledge go back to this model what if we think this is wrong and that knowledge is infinite it's just going to keep on being infinite now what happens the gap think of it this way if knowledge is infinite and you filled in a gap how many gaps are left you have done nothing because there's still an infinite number of gaps left.

I'm not saying Gap can never work I'm saying Gap is very dangerous is Bill talking about a gap here when he says it's rarely see the word rarely that's usually that's often code for Gap oops Gap haven't done something Gap is this a gap no it's rarely been scrutinized as a theoretical category why is that a problem and for whom is it a problem for whom is it a problem if you say ever since.

Herodotus historians have talked about events but nobody's ever asked what they mean by that oh that's a gap not for some communities for some communities it's one it's a gigantic problem if the community is using categories that they do not understand right in some communities they went whoa this is a problem because we're taking for granted that we understand some fundamental Community category for our field and we don't even know what the hell we're talking about dangerous so what is he doing in the next sentence is traditional narrative historians who reveled in the contingency in particular area of events generally refused on principle to engage in explicit theorizing background no what what community what community talking about here narrative historians you people have a problem narrative historians next sentence meanwhile historical sociologists along with the minority of historians turned in the social sciences in order to escape the hegemony of political narrative generally disdain the study of mere events and Sutton said to discover General causal patterns underlying historical change.

what's he doing there another community he's defining his communities here are the two communities who have problems traditional narrative historians and basically every other historian two sentences he's described his community the people who have a problem you want to know a very extended version of this read the introduction of saeed's orientalism

where he constructs I think nine communities people say to me oh my God I have this huge problem I'm writing interdisciplinary stuff interdisciplinary stuff is extremely extremely difficult to write people come to this campus Because we Proclaim that you can do interdisciplinary studies here we scorn traditional disciplinary boundaries.

you know here's the problem you're going to have when you do interdisciplinary work who's in your community of readers go ahead put that committee together that has somebody three people on it and they're from three different committees be very careful you got the right three people amazing you have the wrong three people you're gonna have a writing nightmare because those are three different communities who are not only going to Define problems differently they're going to see arguments differently so what bill is doing here is he's saying there's two communities of people I'm writing to he lays them out in the first paragraph of a text this is first-rate functional writing you've got to understand the function not what it looks like not the rules not the formal but the function I will shut up in one minute so page 13 summarizes the model from this point let me just tell you what's left in the handout page 16 one of the best pieces of problem construction I've ever seen a couple of economists writing a very long introduction that that establishes layer upon layer upon layer of problem on page 17 they do something which I have virtually never seen done before see this chart see this graph at the bottom of page 17. you don't usually see charts and introductions because they usually what do you thinking charts are for either to explain or to give evidence for something you know what this chart is it's wrong how cool is that it's a problem right using a chart as a problem constructing technique wow and by the way watch their codes you'll see how they do this in a very deferential everybody's really smart but gosh you know really really nice piece of writing um stage 20 talks about something that I've already mentioned the danger of Gap page 22 goes to Gap and error I look at bill again Bill's work on page 23 I said one more minute but I'm going to take two more the last thing I'll look at is this I think quite useful article on page 24 from John Totino whom I've never met um but I think this is such a great example of cycling all the way back to where we started the revolution in Mexican Independence first paragraph the Hidalgo Revolt of 1810 marked the commencement of conflicts that brought Independence to Mexico in 1920 and led to a series of revolutionary changes that endured for decades into the national era as colonial rule ended the contested processes what is that you look to anybody they're going to say oh that's background he's giving a little historical background right no look at the beginning of the next paragraph the interpretation just given challenges and entrenched vision of Mexican history you know he says this is really really open John tatino was strong enough professionally that he could say hey all you people you're all wrong right now he talks about the view that's wrong in the second paragraph look at the beginning and third paragraph This essay argues for a different interpretation okay so what he's done is he's first said here's a view of history and then it said this challenge is what all you people think now he says in this essay here's what I'm going to do here's what I want you to notice the footnote this essay was first presented in a seminar organized by Eric Van young at the University of California San Diego look at the next page page 25 here's what I'm quite sure John setino presented in that seminar at the University of California San Diego he presented this data which he had spent quite a lot of time in Mexico generated tenant Rancheros at

Puerto di Nieto 1820-1825 rents in pesos table 2 maize plot rentals at Puerto di Nieto 1820-1825 you know because in 1820 it was 60 and in 1821 it was 33 in 1822 was 30. this I'm quite sure is what he presented at the Workshop what do you suppose people thought to themselves at the workshop why would I care what happened in the rents of maize plots at Puerto di Nieto from 1820 to 1825. go back to the footnote discussion there helped to clarify the importance and the uncertainties of the issues explored here more recently several hahr that's the journal readers ask that I make the larger significance of the case study more explicit I don't even think who the hell cares what happened in Puerto venietal John I mean I went there you went down there you got a grant you looked through a lot of books and you came up with a lot of numbers but why would we care a final reader you see why I love this so much he's probably been working on this essay for article for what three years maybe a final reader suggested that my interpretations appear controversy like hey John you see this work you've been doing it suggests that everything the people in this community think about the Hidalgo revolt is wrong he didn't even know that until the end of his process in his thinking process it was probably three years into a final reader told him what problem he was actually engaging where does that come in his article it's the first sentence the difference between this process and this process to the extent that you are embedded in making your writing handed to the reader on this process you are very likely to interfere with their reading process the more you can you've got to do this guys you've got to do this process to do your thinking but the more that you can learn how to alter it for these people the more successful you're likely to be and the less painful this whole reading this painful writing process is going to be for you okay.

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