

REVISING STYLE

REMEMBRANCES OF PEOPLE PAST

1. J. Cunningham is a tapestry. J. (his first name eludes me) heads the C's in my 1971 address book which turned up recently as I was rattling through the cartons in my closet. For some reason, J. does not appear in my present address book or, for that matter, in any of the revised editions since 1971. But he has never disappeared from my living rooms - and there have been many of them. The tapestry he gave me, right off the back of his 15th-century Italian chair, has presided over all my fireplaces, embodying J. and those long afternoons talking of things rococo and provincial in his cavernous Seattle store-house of antiques.
2. We all have our archival idiosyncracies, our ways of filing friendships. Some people stuff business cards in drawers. Some people save matchbooks in which they have jotted names and numbers. I collect miniature address books - my life in zip codes. Moving right along in the 1971 volume, the little leatherette chronicle of people who passed through my personal cosmos during the college, Kibbutz, Lahav, Greece, London, Monterey and Seattle years, I found Nina. We were so close that I didn't record her last name. Now I can't recall it. Somehow, after Monterey, Nina became a chili recipe - with no return address. And Anna Hostettler, my favorite college room-mate, is now a blue glazed mug, a treasure from her Swiss childhood which went on to hold, at various times, my paper clips, pens and pencils, coffee and several collections of crayons pour les yeux.
3. That I have never dropped this mug, that it has outlived an entire set of Baccarat crystal and countless other valued, but less emotionally charged, vessels is no miracle. A good friend is hard to lose. My paranoia protects the mug and its promise that someday Anna, last heard from in the winter of '75, having assumed a married name and a Massachusetts postmark, will resurface - again.
4. It is paranoia, too, that explains all those cartons in my closet, boxes of letters (if I keep them long enough, goes the subconscious rap, the senders will become as clear as their signatures); photos of people I can't quite place, but can't throw away either (I am as devout as a Moslem in connecting the image to its subject); the address books that contain the clues I'll start with should I ever find the time to track down J. Cunningham, Nina and Anna, as well as friends of later vintage, some as recent as today's address book, whose names with the prefix "Call" appear on each succeeding list of "Things to Do" that never get done.
5. It is hard enough, in the continuing drama of real life, what with remembering to replenish the toilet paper supply and calculating the Russian's next move, to find time for friends who live upstairs, let alone the ones in abeyance. And then I keep making new friends. They will send me greetings for at least two Christmases in a row. Their greetings will vanish into the cartons in my closet. They will vanish from my immediate thoughts. From time to time, I will excavate their greetings. My life will

pass before me like "The March of Time", complete with the apocalyptic sound track. Overcome with remorse, I will vow to drop a line to one and all.

6. Generally, I get as far as one. This month, it was Edoardo. Edoardo is an olive green, bat-sleeved sweater and about 95 post-cards emblazoned with ricordi di Roma. Late one night, with tears in my eyes, knocking back the Valpolicella, I scribbled to Edoardo the heartfelt wish that he and the rest of the gang in Rome lived down the block from me. I would have gone on to say the same to the rest of the population of my past, but I absolutely had to take my herring-bone skirt to the tailor and see my shrink (we're working right now on my feelings of rootlessness).
7. Somehow, though, I managed to call Frances. Frances during her periodic disappearances from my here-and-now, is a mauve-swirled Nekker vase. Over the phone, we experienced the special thrill that comes only when two friends discover that absence has not dimmed the intensity of their connection. Frances and I have experienced that thrill often. She wanted to take me to lunch to celebrate my birthday and the fact that one of us had finally called the other. At lunch, it was revealed that during the two years since we last got together, Frances has thought of me often. In fact, I occupy an important place in her kitchen. I am a pottery jar labeled "Vibes".
8. We are all more immortal than we think.

Elin Schoen

Group Assignments

1. Divide into seven investigation groups. The members of each group will first *individually* undertake a re-writing task and then re-convene as a group for preparation of a common group report to class.
2. The purpose of the assigned revision task is to get you to undo something that the writer appears to be doing. Pay attention to the different effects produced. Make notes and be prepared to talk about what the original piece is doing.

The Re-write Tasks.

Group One: Re-write paragraph #1 of the essay in sentences of equal length - say 10 words. You may find it impossible to stick to an exact word count but the less flexibility you take, the better the results.

Group Two: Re-write paragraph #2 making sure all the words you use, and all the place names, are completely familiar to classmates.

Group Three: Re-write paragraph #3 and change the first sentence in it to the same basic grammatical structure as the other two sentences there.

Group Four: Re-write paragraph #4 as five sentences.

Group Five: Either make the first sentence of paragraph #5 of the same basic length and arrangement as the other seven sentences in the paragraph, or, combine those seven sentences into two or three longer sentences.

Group Six: Re-write paragraph #6, reducing it by at least one third its total number of words. To do this, eliminate as many modifying words as you can.

Group Seven: Re-write paragraph #7 re-arranging word order within sentences. Again, try to keep the same words as the original, or allow yourself minimal changes. Simply change the order of items within sentences wherever you see the possibility.

3. After the re-writing and note-making is done, come together as a group for two purposes:
 - a) to share observations,
 - b) to formulate some ideas about
 1. The effects your re-write had on the original
 2. Some reasons the author might have had for writing it her way
 3. Language

Group Report

When your group reports back to class, it should

1. have the original and sample re-write paragraph on overhead
2. read both aloud as part of the presentation
3. make organized observations about each text and use some scheme for identifying detail on the overheads
4. present theoretical conclusions as an outgrowth of the observed material

What you have acquired is a particular strategy for attending to the style or voice of a passage, a kind of "tinkering" that can be done quickly to check out the effect of changes. Writers do this frequently. You can also do it as an editor for your own discovery or to show a writer something about his/her work.