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# Tips for Student Writers: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and More

Eitelberg, Mark J.

Naval Postgraduate School

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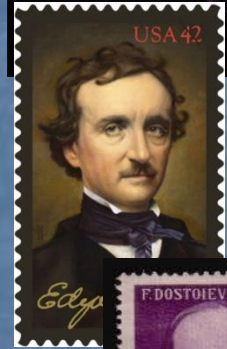
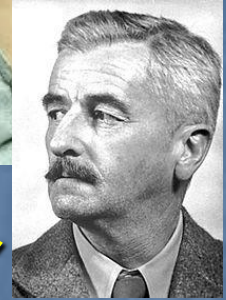
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# Tips for Student *Writers*

## Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and More

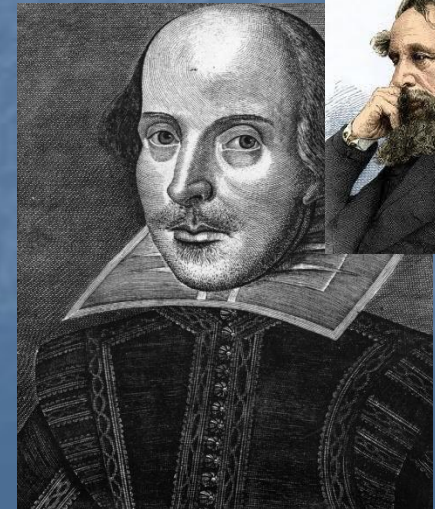
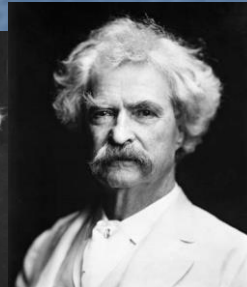
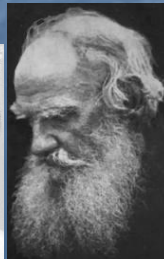
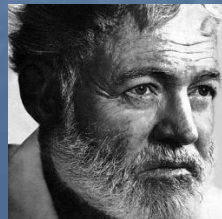
by

Mark J. Eitelberg, Ph.D.

Naval Postgraduate School

Monterey, California

2016





ROWLING



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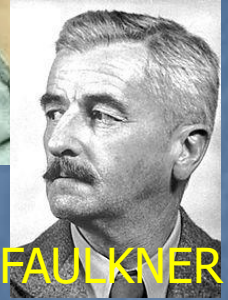
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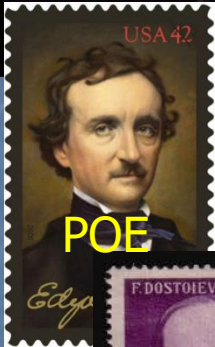
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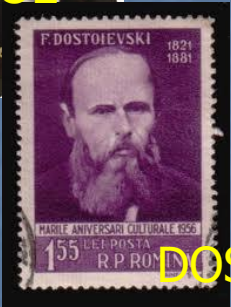
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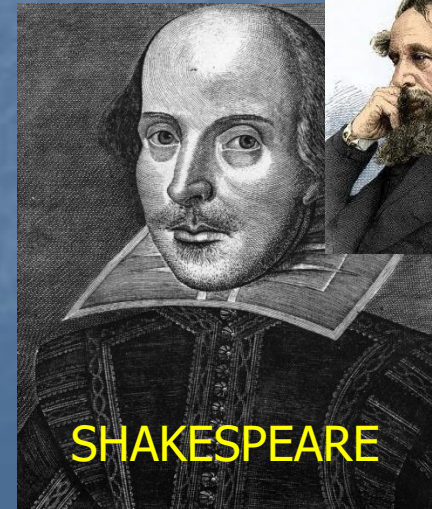
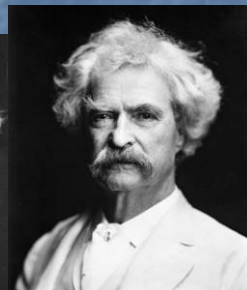
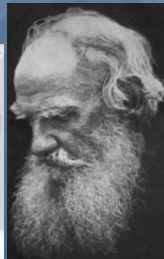
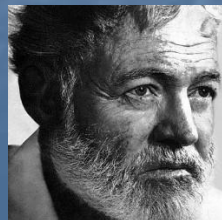
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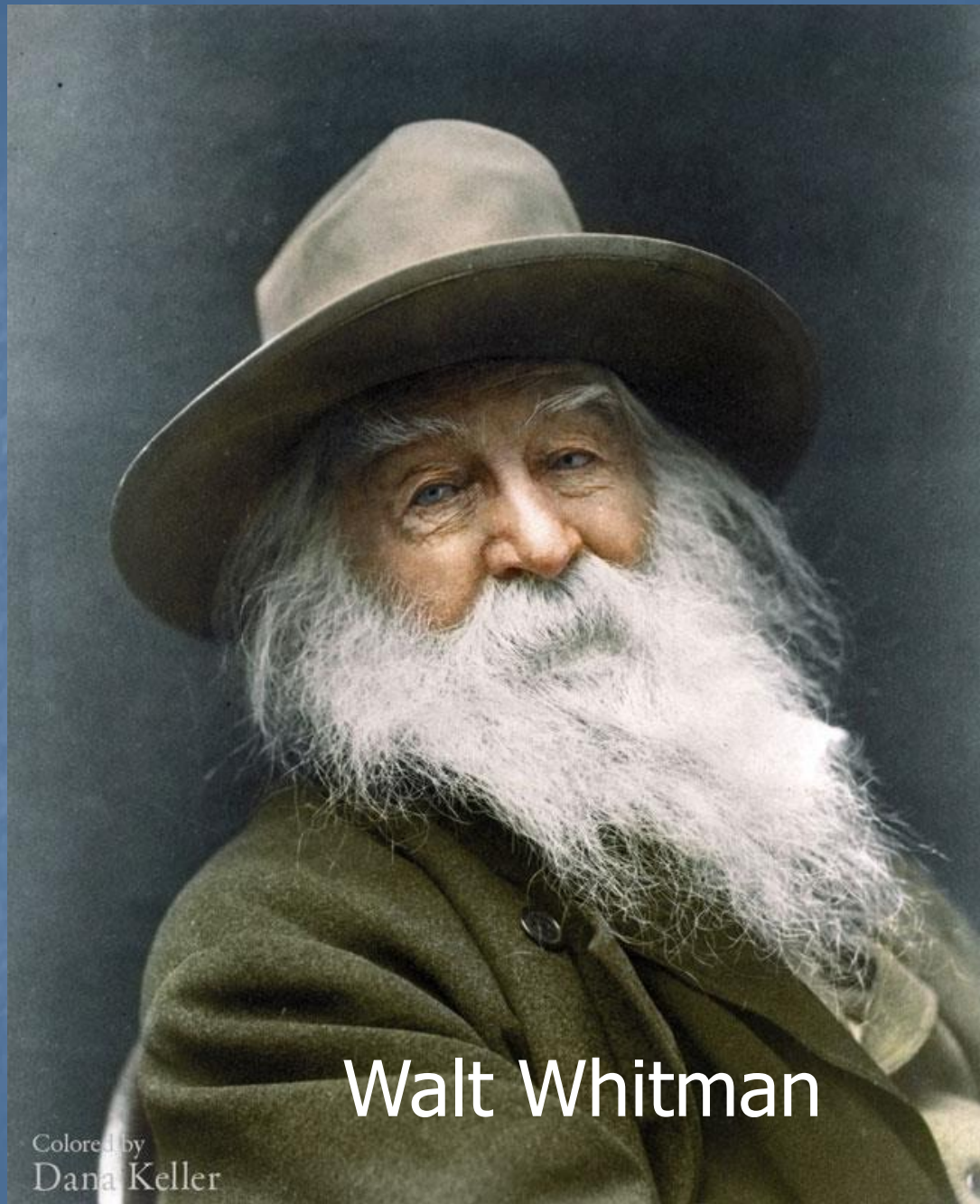
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SHAKESPEARE

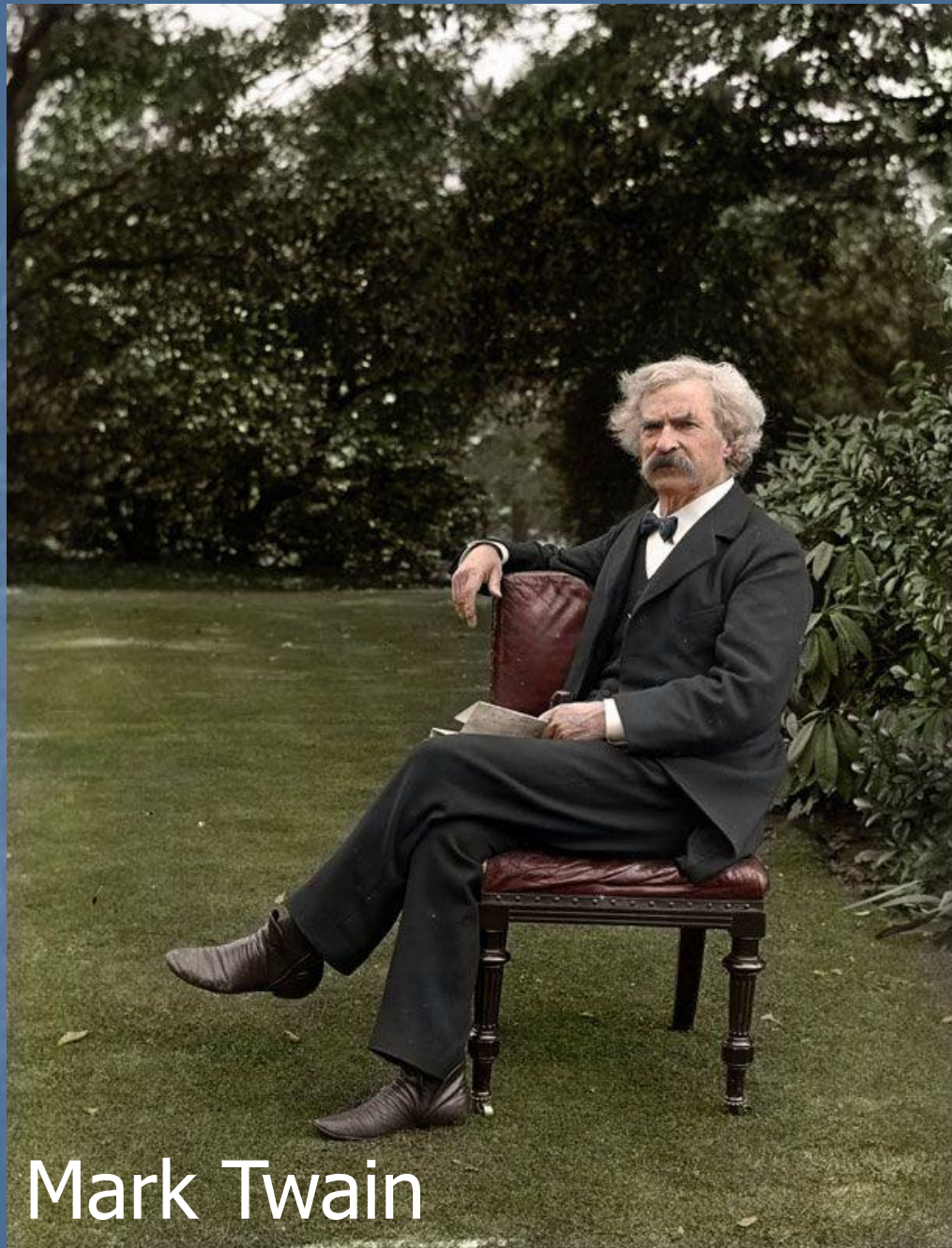


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Walt Whitman

Colored by  
Dana Keller



Mark Twain

# Reading

- Read, Read, Read if You Want to be a Good Writer
  - Everything: fiction and non-fiction, news, poetry, song lyrics, movie scripts, theses, recipes, blogs, law, obituaries, and so on
  - Self-help books galore
  - Mostly: examples of the best and worst in your area
- Read for Enjoyment, but Study *Technique*

**OMG, I HAVE TO  
READ A LOT AND  
WRITE A LOT TO  
BE A WRITER?**



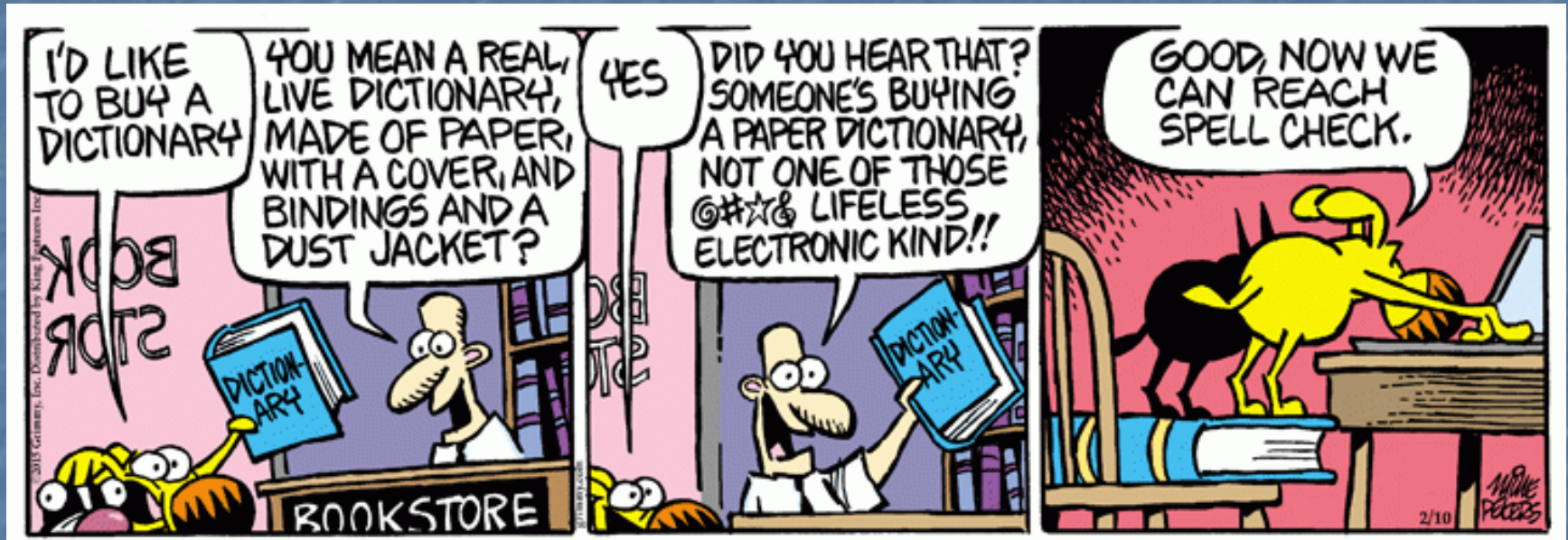


“To write well, we need to *read* well.”  
---John Steinbeck (to his son, Thomas)

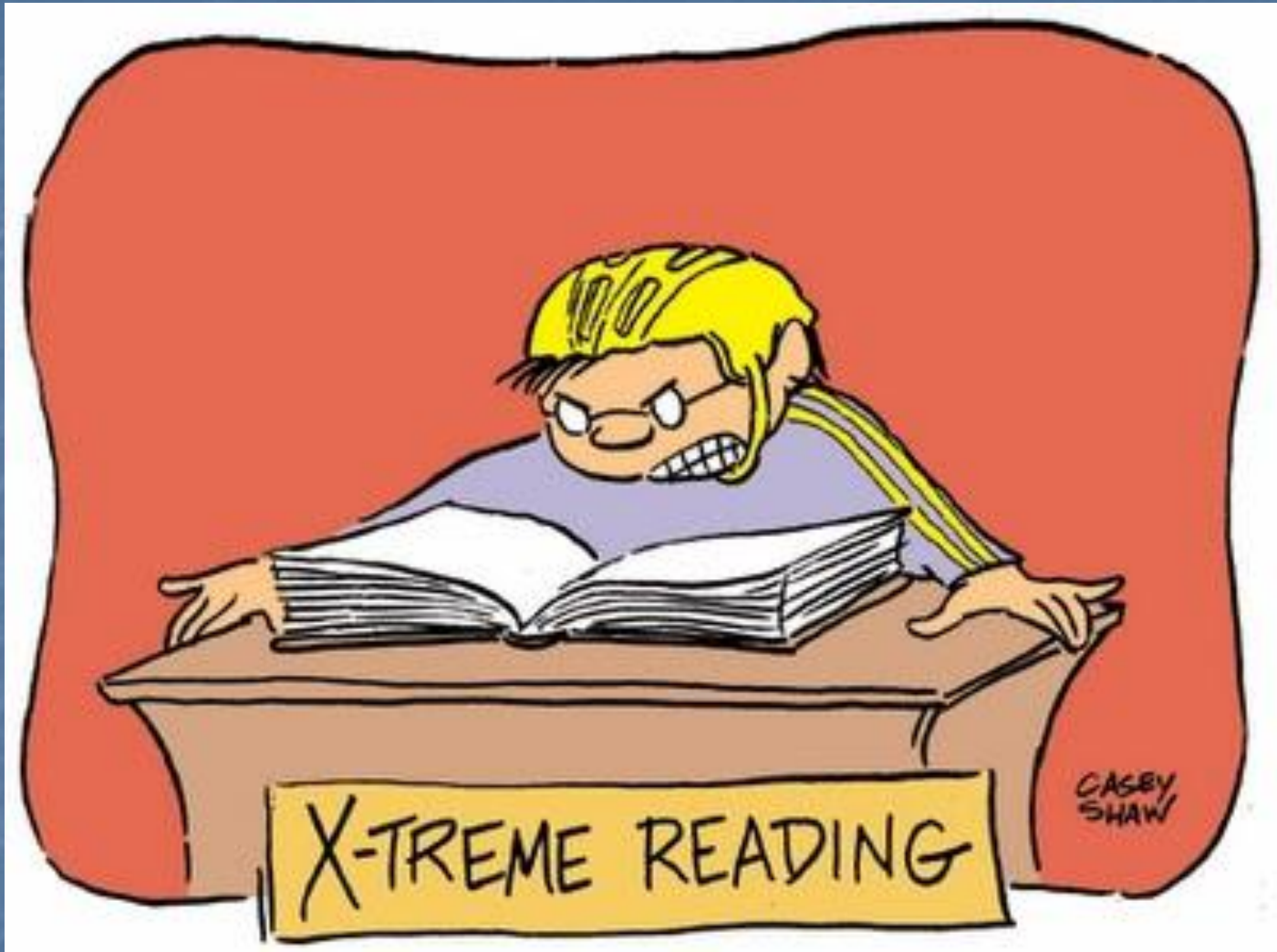


# Reading (cont.)

- What's effective; what's not?
- Tricks of the trade; description; local color
- Trust your instincts: what you enjoy, others will, too
- Learn the Rules
  - Be a "style chameleon": essay, report, conference paper, presentation—structures change to fit the norm
  - Start with the basics: remind yourself periodically
- Build a library of tools
  - Thesaurus (a "bridge across the chasm")
  - Dictionary (with English usage examples)
  - English Usage Guides



Mother Goose & Grimm (by Mike Peters, 10 February 2015)



# Reading (cont.)

## ■ Other Guides

- Strunk & White, *Elements of Style*
- Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*
- Format or style: MLA, APA, University of Chicago (Turabian's classic work)
- NPS publications
- Many, *many* online resources

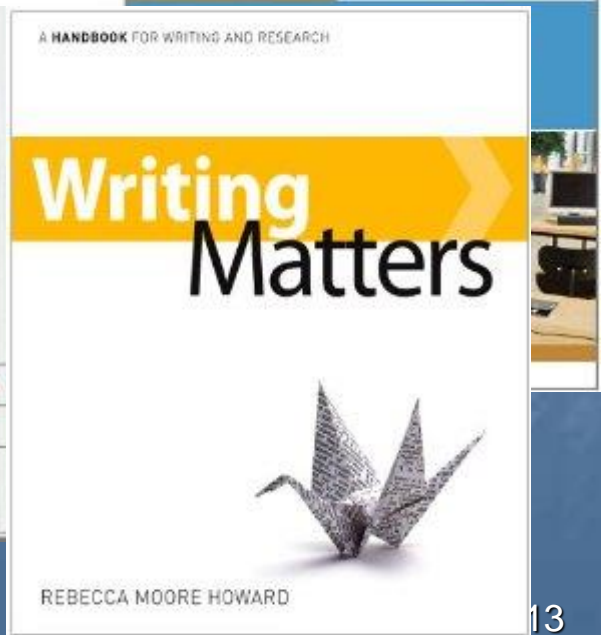
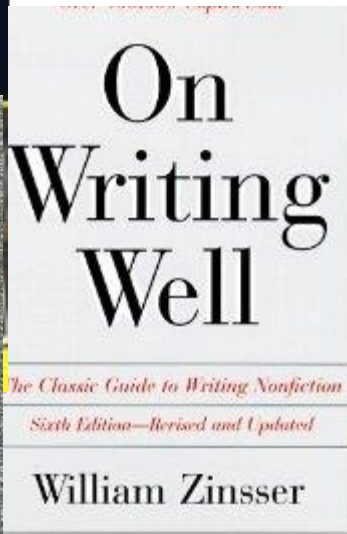
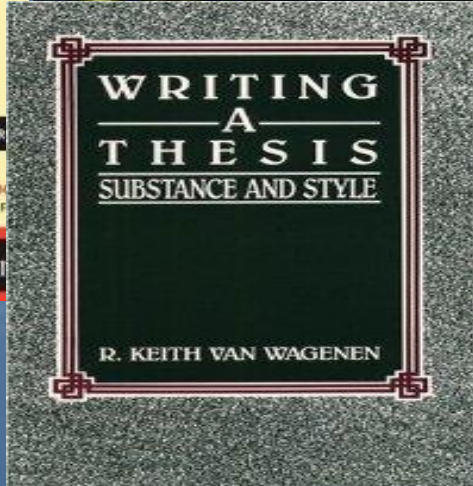
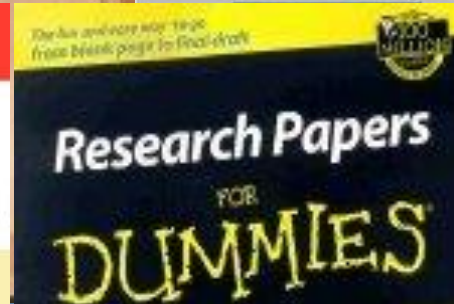
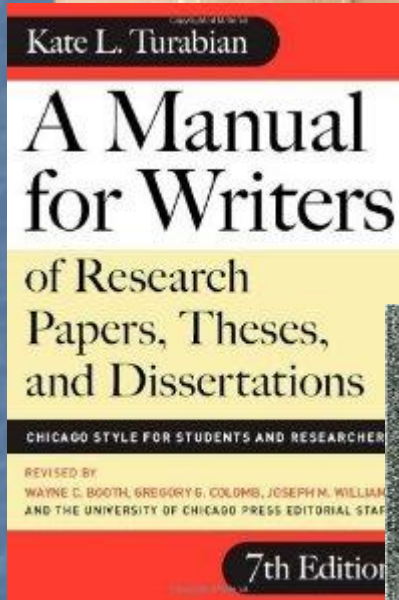
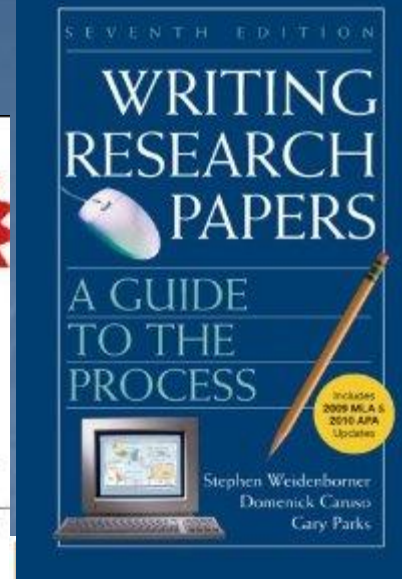
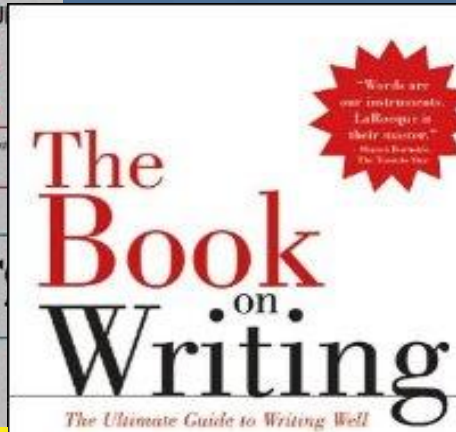
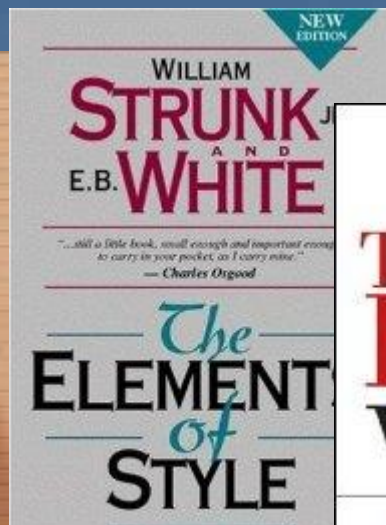
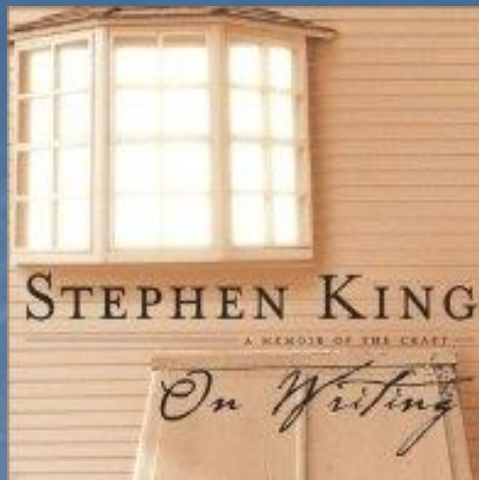
## ■ Be a Smart Student

- Other projects/theses advised by *your advisor*
- Publications by *your advisor*
- Publications recommended or admired by *your advisor*



ask the

**PROS**

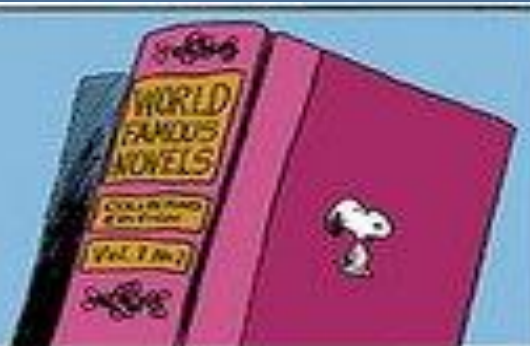


# Writing

“Begin at the beginning and go on ‘till you come to the end; then stop.” The King in *Alice in Wonderland*

- Beginning Can be the Hardest Part of Writing
  - Some start at the beginning (the title); others start at the middle; still others start at the end – but all start with a **PLAN**
  - The benefits of an outline, a proposal, a milestone schedule (a “trip map”)
    - As in research, assume that writing will **always** take much longer than originally planned
    - Prepare to be flexible (within limits); write when inspired; schedule rest and sunshine to recharge batteries

Classic  
**PEANUTS**  
featuring  
"Good ol'  
Charlie Brown"  
by SCHULZ





# It was a dark and stormy night

“It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents — except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.”

\*\*\*English novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1830

“The sentence went on to serve as the literary posterchild for bad story starters, and it also became the inspiration behind the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, in which writers compete for top honors by penning egregiously bad fake first lines. (That said, Bulwer-Lytton’s work wasn’t *all* bad—after all, he gave us the quote “the pen is mightier than the sword” with his play *Richelieu*.)”

\*\*\*Zachery Petit, *Writer’s Digest*, 18 January 2013.

# Writing (cont.)

- Find a Writing Place
- Find a Writing Time: Be Diligent
- Use the Method that Works Best
- Take Breaks
- Seek Inspiration
  - Find your Muse (the source of great ideas)
  - Find your thinking time & spot (stare blankly)
  - Find interest & enjoyment (the right angle)
  - Talk about it (think aloud with others)
  - Take notes (ideas disappear quickly)

# The Isolator

By HUGO GERNSBACK

MEMBER AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY



The author at work in his private study aided by the Isolator. Outside noises being eliminated, the worker can concentrate with ease upon the subject at hand.

Helmet invented in 1925 to help writers, among others, focus on a task. The helmet renders the wearer deaf and restricts vision to a small, centralized location. Breathing is assisted by oxygen tank.



# PEANUTS

featuring  
"Good ol'  
Charlie Brown"  
by Schulz



It was a dark and stormy night.



THAT'S A TERRIBLE WAY TO BEGIN A STORY...IT'S SO TRITE!



"ONCE UPON A TIME..." THAT'S THE WAY ALL THE GOOD STORIES BEGIN..



DO THAT... BEGIN YOUR STORY WITH "ONCE UPON A TIME"



Once upon a time, it was a dark and stormy night.



© 1983 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

B-7

Schulz

# Once upon a time, . . . .

- The typical first line in stories for young children, dating back at least to 1380 in the English language.
  - Fairy tales
  - Fables
  - Folklore
  - Oral stories
- The same stories may end with: "They lived happily ever after."
- Examples:
  - Commonly used in translations of stories by Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm ("es war einmal")
  - "Once upon a time, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house."  
\*\*\*Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*



A Writer's Nightmare: The Typical Start

# Writing (cont.)

- Writing is Storytelling: What is ***Your*** Story?
  - The beginning
    - Introduction or Background: who killed Colonel Mustard?
      - **“We have an important/curious/interesting problem.”**
    - Literature Review: describe the setting & characters
      - **“Others have examined related aspects of the problem, but *more* clearly needs to be done.”**
    - Methodology: conduct the investigation; gather evidence
      - **“This is who/what/why/where/how I studied the problem.”**



# Writing (cont.)

- The middle
  - Results: reveal the evidence
    - **“This is what I found.”**
- The end
  - Conclusion: and the murderer is . . .
    - **“This is what the results *mean*.”**
- The epilogue
  - Recommendation: passing judgment
    - **“And this is what we can/should do with the new information.”**
      - **“Further research”** is the standard recommendation in academic work

# Writing (cont.)

- The First is *Never* the Last
  - Draft and revise; draft and revise; draft and revise
    - Rarely one pass
    - Each change could cause a ripple effect
    - Allow time for multiple drafts
    - Get feedback from others, if possible
    - Respect your readers (imagine yourself as a reader)
  - Keep moving forward
    - Avoid detours, backtracking
    - Place a sign in eye's view
    - Exception: you've chosen the wrong destination!
    - Think of connections in all assignments

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (One Person's View)
  - Too many little errors, too little time
    - Typos, spelling errors, wrong words, poor grammar—problems easily fixed
    - Reflects **carelessness** generally; **distracts** reader
    - The report may be the *only* research product; take the time to do it well!
  - Poor distribution of content
    - Light on original contribution
    - Balance or placement of elements in story
  - Poor (or no) conclusions
    - Confusing results with conclusions
    - Running out of time (or interest) at the end
    - Lacking imagination
    - Taking results too far; generalizing from scant evidence

# NO TYPOS!



An *actual* highway sign (see rust marks) owned by the professor.

**OPEN DAILEY**

**9 A.M. TIL 2 A.M.**

**CLOSED MONDAYS**



**COLTON HIGH SCHOOL**  
COMMITTED TO HIGH STANDARDS

**CENTENNIAL  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
CONGRADULATION  
SPELLING BEE WINNERS  
MAIESHA AKHAND  
ANAMARIA BROWN

**LAKESIDE LAKWOOD  
HIGH SCHOOL**  
LEARNING TO LITERACY  
NIGHT 6:30 PM

**ASSISTANT PRINCIPLE**

**LARRY G. SMITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
BRING ON THE  
TAKS TEST  
WE ACCEPT THE  
CHALLENGE  
DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Preparing our Children  
in a Positive and Caring Environment*  
**SECURITY 1300880021**  
**PARENT TEACHER  
INTERVIEWS**  
**WEEKS 2 & 3**

# TROPHYLAND

Plagues Awards

Specialty Engraving  
& Trophies, Inc.

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♡ Veggies

I ♡ MY  
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LOUISVILLE

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TOP CASH PAID  
"FOR TRUCKS & CARS"

CENTER  
LANE  
ONLY

FAR WOOD  
FER SALE  
-9679





THE  
POWER  
OF  
PUNCTUATION

© Dan  
Pikaro  
2-8-14  
w/andy cowan  
Dist. by Kine Features

"Let's eat Grandma!"



"Let's eat, Grandma!"

**PUNCTUATION  
SAVES LIVES.**



Mother Goose & Grimm (by Mike Peters, 13 January 2014)

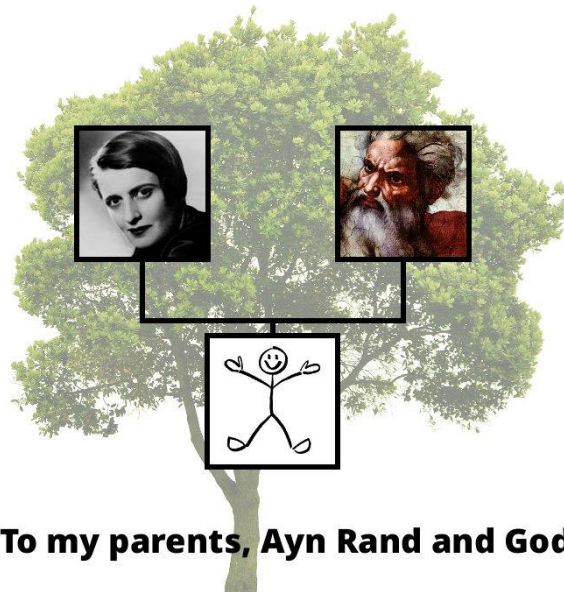


Sometime during the night, Howard slipped into a coma.

# The Oxford Comma



**To my parents, Ayn Rand, and God.**



**To my parents, Ayn Rand and God.**





Non Sequitur (by Wiley Miller, 30 March 2015)

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (cont.)
  - Use of passive voice; same words; long sentences
  - Paragraph *mis*construction (follow the rules)
  - Plagiarism (intentional or *un*intentional)
  - Missing block quotes
  - Failure to identify “speaker” being quoted
  - Mistakes on cover page (the ego deflator)
  - Boring or long title (creative economy)
  - No (or few) section titles (reader’s roadmap)
  - No page-numbering
  - Too many words [in order] to write effectively



I WILL NOT PLAGIARIZE ANOTHER'S WORK  
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I WILL NOT PLAGIARIZE





# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (cont.)
  - Use/overuse of I/me/my/mine/us/our/we
    - Personal anecdotes can add interest and meaning—but use them very, very carefully and rarely in academic writing
    - Don't make it personal; keep an *objective* distance
  - Lack of evidence to support argument
    - Picture a courtroom: you are the defender/prosecutor; the reader/professor is the jury. The writer presents *evidence* (data) and *expert witnesses* (references) to support a case.
  - Bias
    - Takes many forms, including disciplinary bias
    - The way we interpret information—even facts—is influenced by who we are, what we think, how we filter and apply our views of “reality” (thus, “reality judgments”)

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (cont.)
  - Length (too long or too short); imbalance
  - Inconsistency
    - Even if wrong, be *consistently* wrong!
    - However, it's better to be consistently *right*!
  - Writing in sequence
    - The introduction is the **LAST** part to write
  - Failing to “tell a story”
    - Again: a beginning, middle, and end
    - The writer should tie the beginning, middle, and end, and then tie the end *back* to the beginning—this is the “running thread” that circles the story and holds it together



# Brattleboro Reformer

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## Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow Northern New England braces for winter storm

## Snowstorm means jolt to the local economy

By DAVID SHARP

Associated Press

A week after torrential rain in parts of New England, skiers and snowboarders rejoiced over the approach of the season's first major winter storm, an old-fashioned nor'easter that ski resort operators hope will erase memories of last year's unseasonably warm winter.

businesses catering to skiers and snowmobilers in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

The storm system erupted Christmas Day with tornadoes on the Gulf Coast and snow across the nation's midsection before heading for the Northeast, bringing with it expectations of a foot or more of snow across most of northern New England on Thurs-



Anthony R. Nigro/Brattleboro Reformer

By HOWARD WEISS-TESSMAN

Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO — Meteorologically, it might not be the perfect storm, but economically Thursday's projected snow fall might be just what Vermont is looking for to add a little bump to the economy.

With schools closed, tourists up for the holidays and last season's disappointing winter still on

worth said a good dump in the days after Christmas can kick off what he hopes will be a long, cold and white winter.

"It sounds like something is coming tonight and we are looking forward to it," Woodworth said on Wednesday. "Even those people who don't like snow have to rest for this and what it will do for the Vermont economy."

"Oh the weather outside is frightful  
But the fire is so delightful  
And since we've no place to go  
**Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!**"

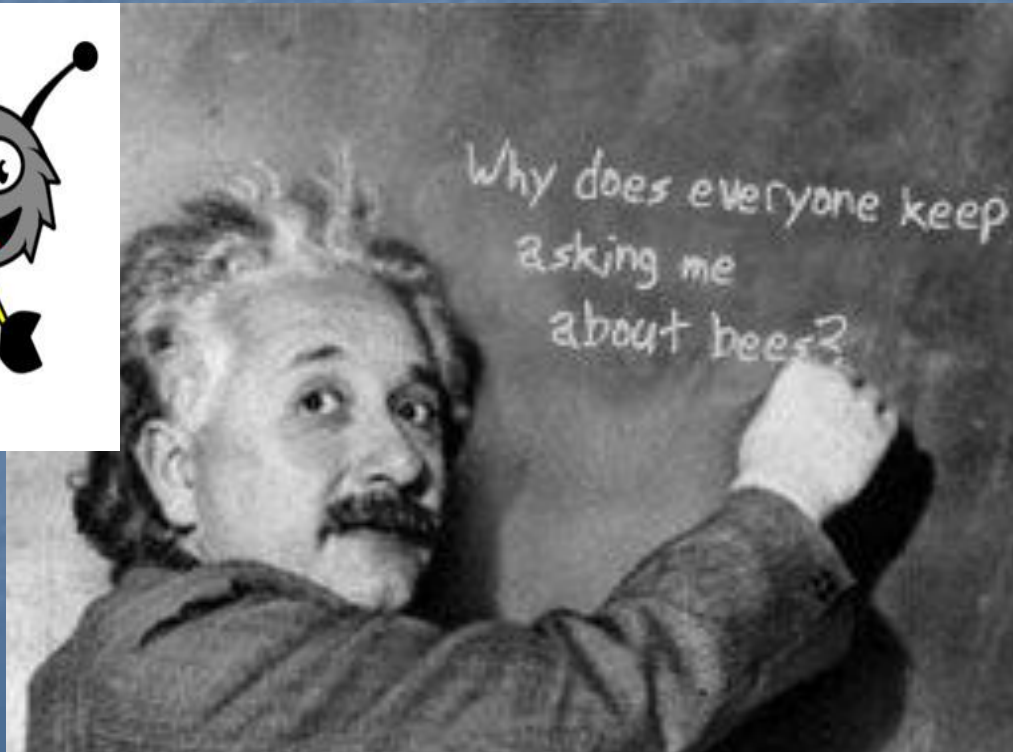
[From "Let It Snow," by Sammy Cahn & Jule Styne, 1945]

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (cont.)
  - Weak beginning or weak ending
    - Aside from the title, the beginning and the end are often the only parts of a research document/report/thesis that will be read
    - Be strong, be error-free; end with a *flourish* (that is, “a dramatic, sweeping gesture”) for a standing ovation!
  - Improper or missing citations
    - Why cite others? Credibility, strength, knowledge!
    - Do many citations weaken the work? No, no, *no!*
  - No creativity: blah, blah, blah, yadda yadda

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problems (cont.)
  - Fact-Checking





August 19, 2013

Zakaria: The new / Ted Cruz / Forohar: Yellen over / Low Rolling in Vegas  
at Qanda threat / Summers for Fed chief

# TIME

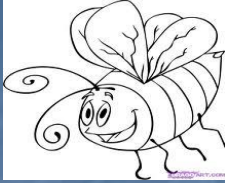
## A WORLD WITHOUT BEEES



THE PRICE WE'LL  
PAY IF WE DON'T  
FIGURE OUT  
WHAT'S KILLING  
THE HONEYBEE  
BY BRYAN WALSH

August 19, 2013

TIME.COM



# Writing (cont.)

**"If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man." Albert Einstein?**

- Quoted often, and by reputable sources, since it apparently first appeared in a **1994 Associated Press** account of a beekeepers' protest in Europe. The AP article cited a pamphlet distributed by the National Union for French Apiculture.
- Until recently, origin of quotation has not been seriously questioned. Natural inclination is to simply *assume* authenticity. **Be skeptical!**
- Should a researcher "fact check" quotations? Google: "Einstein Bees" (1,050,000 hits); "Einstein" (43,700,000 hits)
- Importance of citing *your* source; **protect yourself**
- Sidebar: "If I told you that the earth is *flat*, would you believe me? Why? Just because my name is ALBERT?" Albert Einstein, 1954

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problem: No “AHA” Factor



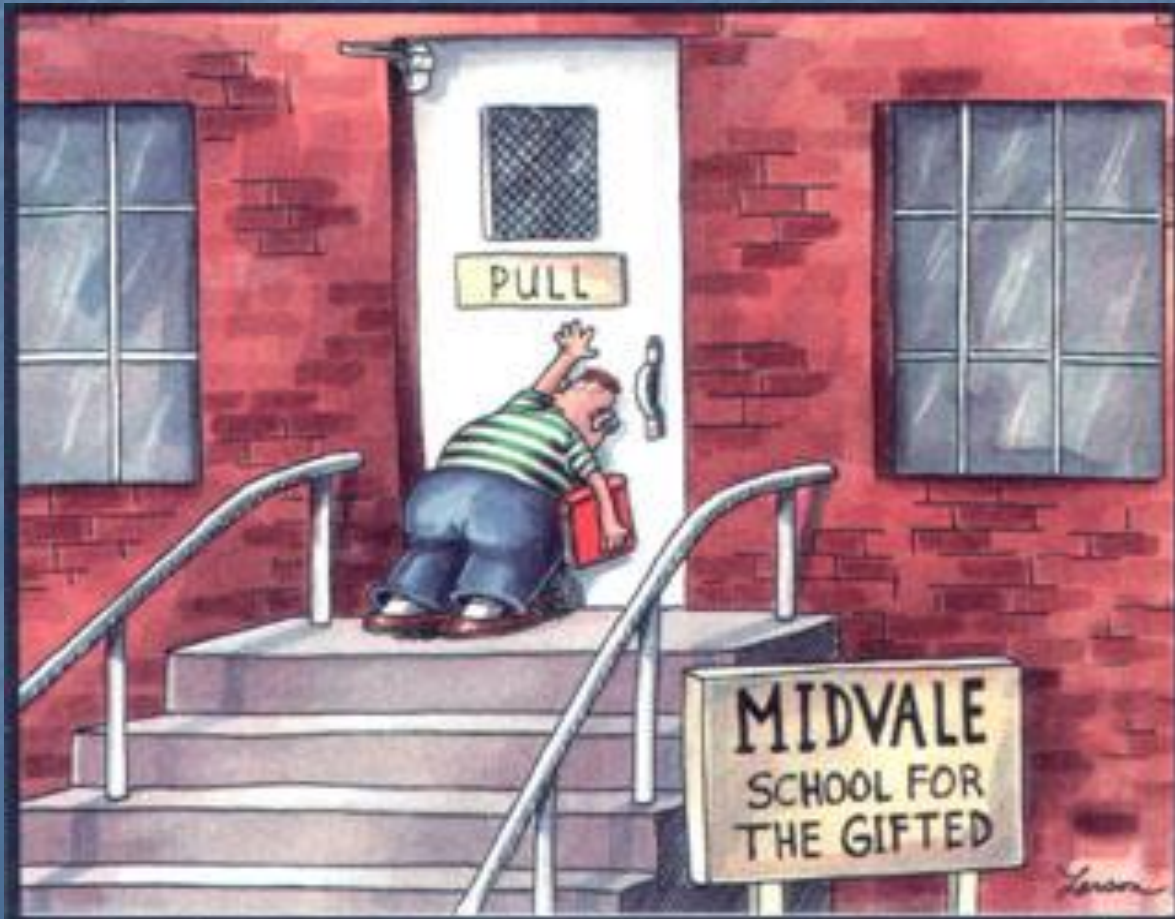
“I’ll be happy to give you innovative thinking. What are the guidelines?”



*"I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers who will do exactly as I say!"*

# Writing (cont.)

- Common Problem: Overestimating Readers' Ability



# Arithmetic

- Quantification is often an ideal toward which we strive in research and analysis, but . . .
  - Quantitative and qualitative research can be equally strong and effective
  - The trend in research has moved in two separate directions: over-quantify, because statistical methods are easier to perform as well as more “convincing”; combine quantitative and qualitative methods, to achieve “the best of both worlds” and strengthen the impact of findings
  - “The data are crap.” (Dr. Bernard D. Karpinos, 1976)

# Arithmetic (cont.)

- Presenting Data
  - Selected rules for tables
    - **Introduce** tables
      - Table should appear (if possible) after introductory paragraph
    - **Discuss** tables
      - To explain how to read it; to demonstrate why it is presented and why it should be examined; to strengthen a research claim
      - “If a table isn’t worth **discussing**, it probably isn’t worth **presenting**.”
    - **Title** tables
    - **Reference** sources in tables
      - “Source” appears at the bottom of the table

# Arithmetic (cont.)

- Selected rules for tables (cont.)
  - Make stand-alone tables
    - Enough information/explanation to appear apart from text
    - What would happen if you cut it out?
  - Be consistent with all tables
  - Follow the formatting rules commonly used in your discipline
  - Obey the “**Idiot Rule**”
    - If it isn't clear in *three* seconds, revise
  - Arrange columns and rows for best effect
    - Influences impact, readability, impressions
    - Exception: try to place upright (portrait) on page
  - Don't try to show too much (or too little), but . . .
    - Err on the side of *less* in one (with more in two tables)
    - Simplicity can be elegant



# Arithmetic (cont.)

- Presenting Data (cont.)
  - Selected rules for figures
    - “Pictures say a thousand words” (if meaningful)
    - Figures are *figures*
      - Not illustrations, charts, and so on
      - What’s the difference between a table & figure?
    - Normally, figure titles go *below*
      - Table titles go *above*
    - As with tables, figures are “stand-alone”
    - Keep it simple
      - Choose the most effective style
      - Limit variations of style: again, strive for consistency

# Arithmetic (cont.)

- Selected rules for figures (cont.)
  - The “Idiot Rule” applies
  - Use standard techniques for one’s field
  - Reference sources in figures (Source: . . . .)
  - Assume black-and-white
    - Color’s nice for presentations
    - Experiment with photocopy for print
    - Gray scale variations may meld
    - Copying can obscure small print
  - Label properly; use keys, if necessary
- Use appendices to your advantage
  - Too much information ruins flow
  - Assume some readers want more data; but most want *less*

# and More

- Random Tips for Academic Writers
  - Consider using a professional formatter and editor
  - Create back-up copies for “worst-case” scenarios
    - Keep drafts updated (label files carefully)
  - Read **VERY** carefully before submission
    - Check for formatting problems, cover page, page-numbering, grammar, and so on
  - Strive for originality: the “AHA Factor”

# and More (cont.)

- Random Tips (cont.)
  - Follow guidelines, but please *yourself* first
    - Evaluation is subjective
    - Understand that opinions differ: be **self-confident**
    - Accept constructive criticism with grace and appreciation; control natural defense mechanisms and protect ego; recognize the process of incremental improvement
    - Emulate the “stars”—but be better
  - Impact comes in many forms
    - The distance between love and hate is shorter than the distance between any one of these and **indifference**
    - Creativity often involves risk—and *reward*.



# and More (cont.)

- Random Tips (cont.)
  - Creative problem-solving abhors the obvious
  - E.g., applying the principle of homeopathy\*
    - “The Birds” (not Hitchcock)

\*A system of therapy based on the concept that disease can be treated with drugs thought capable of producing the same symptoms in healthy people as the disease itself.

- Once Again (& Again & Again & Again):  
**Respect the Reader; *Demonstrate Care***



"Creativity  
takes courage."

(HENRI MATISSE)





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