

ECB FreeB

Four Voices Exercise

Edith Croake and Hal Weidner

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate how to get from your everyday style of using language to the written style expected of you in college. It takes you from the informal style employed to address yourself and your friends through a series of modifications ending with a formal essay. The style changes because the audience and the situation change.

Read "Shoplifting", the model which follows this exercise. You are to produce a paper of your own like this example. Select an experience which had a strong emotional impact on you and discuss this experience from four points of view: **Inner Voice, Face to Face with a Friend, Letter to a Friend, Formal Essay.**

You will have about 15 minutes to write each point of view. Label each part. You will not necessarily complete each part. Don't pay close attention to such matters as punctuation. Rather, concentrate on what you have to say given the audience and situation.

Before you begin writing this exercise, select the experience you want to discuss and be clear about the differences in the four points of view. In addition to the example of this exercise, the descriptions below should help in identifying these differences.

1. **Inner Voice** - This part records your conversation with yourself while you are experiencing the event. The purpose is to make a partial record of the many things that go through your mind at the time. It is often fragmented and need not make sense to anyone else. You know what you are talking about.

2. **Face to Face** - In this part you want to tell a friend about your experience. The friend was not there so now you have to tell about where and when it happened, what happened, why it happened, and how you felt. Since you are talking to a friend of yours who already knows a lot about you, the account can be relatively brief.

It is appropriate to use slang, incomplete sentences, run-on sentences, in short, to write the way you talk.

3. **Letter to a Friend** - The main difference between this version and the earlier one is that here you are changing from spoken to written language. The audience is still a friend with whom you want to share this experience. However, the audience will not be present when s/he reads your letter. Hence, s/he can't look puzzled, ask a question, or give some other signal which would encourage you to elaborate. You should do more thinking about what details the reader will need in order to understand the experience clearly. Also, this version should be more carefully arranged, and the sentences should be grammatical. Slang is still appropriate.

4. **Formal Essay** - In this version, you are not acquainted with the audience. Moreover, the audience is educated (very likely a professor), and s/he is expecting you to state a generalized insight or conclusion and then to illustrate or support this insight. In this version, the story of what happened is no longer at the center of your communication. Instead, you are supposed to look at

the impact which the experience made upon you. What did you learn from the experience? What did it teach you about life? --about yourself? Did the event teach you a lesson, a moral, or a general truth? Think back on the experience and try to make some sense out of it in terms of its meaning for you. Pretend that nothing happens to you that does not contain a hidden meaning message about the nature of reality.

After you analyze the experience, interpret its meaning in general terms. State this meaning as an insight or conclusion. The insight should be a single sentence or a short paragraph which contains a subject and an opinion and which does not contain the word "I." This generalized insight or conclusion will be the first paragraph of your **Formal Essay**.

Now, support your insight (i.e., explain how you arrived at this insight) by presenting selected aspects of the same experience you discussed in the other points of view. You tell the parts of the story needed to illustrate or provide evidence for the truth of your insight.

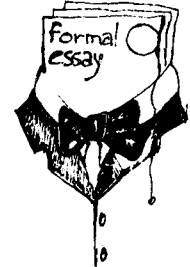
Notice how the author's point of view changes in the **Formal Essay**. She is distant from the event almost as though it happened to someone else. This is called objectivity. In this version of the story what happened is not so important as the meaning of what happened. Story telling is replaced by analysis of story. This approach to experience is expected in college. It requires you to go beyond the mere surface of experience and seek its underlying meaning.

What You Should Learn from this Experience

Often when you explore your thoughts, information will come to you in one of the earlier points of view practiced in this exercise. This is fine. Put it down any way it comes to you. Imagining the experience you want to recount as it was happening or speculating on how you might

discuss it with a friend can be an important resource for information while writing.

On the other hand, many times the style of the final version of an essay needs to be more formal than the initial draft. The reworking of your thoughts toward a more formal presentation is one of the things that necessitates the rewriting required for producing a polished, formal essay.



Example of the Four Voices Exercise

SHOPLIFTING

Inner Voice -

She crying... so scared... don't smash the bottle... stealing gets you into trouble... what a runny nose! no Kleenex a napkin will do... the policeman is too young to have children... he mistakes fright for hate and rebellion... how many times has she stolen things... the jacks are extra large and shiny... she should have them... or be able to buy them... the terror she feels must be awful... I don't like this... I want to leave... I couldn't steal anything... I'd feel too bad. Tall men in uniforms... clubs... helmets... guns... pads for writing on... break room is crowded... Coke left by someone... left over lunch small... claustrophobia... another lady... panic... fear... lose her license... no record... dumb thing to do... ruin her career... begging... can't quit talking... he'll think about it... can't sit... pacing... human being in trouble... anxiety in eyes... husband angry... you never listen to me...

Face to Face to a Friend -

It was an uneven day, Sally. The most difficult part occurred about 3:15 p.m. I was just finishing waiting on a woman who wanted advice on the books for her toddler. George came walking up rapidly, his face flushed. He said, "Carolyn you're

needed immediately in the 'break' room!" As we walked he added, "She's stolen some jacks. They found them in her coat pocket. A policeman is trying to question her, but she won't cooperate."

My heart sank. I wanted to leave the store. I knew George was counting on me to try and stabilize the situation. But I felt so torn. Sure stealing's wrong. But sometimes it is clear that there is no money for the child to buy a toy, especially these days.

As I approached the "break" room, I could hear her sobs. She was about seven, all hunched over in a chair in the corner. "Why did you steal these jacks?" the officer demanded. "Do you want to end up in jail?" Then she grabbed a coke bottle sitting on the chair next to her and it looked as though she was going to smash it on the floor. She was hysterical, and I didn't think she knew what she was doing. I grabbed the bottle and gave it to George. George convinced the police officer and the security guards to go to the other side of the room and let me talk with her.

She calmed down enough to tell me she thought the jacks were pretty, and she didn't have any money. Also, she was terrified to ride anywhere in the police car. She kept saying, "Dad's goin' to kill me for this!"

I talked to the policeman and he agreed to talk with her father and to let her friends ride with her in the police car. I can't help wondering what happened to her.

Letter to a Friend -

January 27, 1980

Dear Jane,

I am still upset about something that happened at the store today. A young girl was caught shoplifting a set of jacks from the toy department.

I had to stay with her until the police arrived. I really dislike this part of my job. She was so frightened that she threatened to break a bottle sitting in the break room where we were sitting.

The police were less than sympathetic. I suppose it's not their job to be sympathetic. She had no money to spend, though, and it seems to me that, in some crazy way, she should have been able to have those jacks.

I kept remembering something I had read at my children's school when I was a lunch room supervisor there. "People in trouble are still people."

I tried to get the officers to understand that the reason she refused to leave with them was that she was very afraid to ride in the police car.

Also, she was afraid of the spanking she thought she'd get when she got home. They agreed to talk to her father and also let her friends ride along on the trip home.

I hope she learned a good lesson and won't try it again. But I can't help thinking about what's happened to her.

Do you remember the time when our Sue was about seven, and she stole several small items?.

Formal Essay -

Shoplifting is a big problem for managers of retail stores, and most think someone who steals something is a criminal. After having some experiences with shoplifters, it is clear that they are people--people who are making big mistakes, but people still.

When a shoplifter is caught in the store where I work, I am sometimes asked to come to the room where everyone involved waits for the police to arrive. This is especially true if the person accused of stealing is a child or a woman.

One day a young girl was caught with a set of jacks in her pocket. The police were called. She was obviously terrified. Soon after I arrived, she became so frantic that she threatened to "bust" a bottle that was on the table.

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LETTERS (cont. from p. 41)

students engage in a variety of writing tasks. We now have students write in journals frequently, and we follow Moffett's suggestion that students engage in constant, free associative writing for the time allowed. Much of the assigned writing students do now follows extensive pre-writing activities and study models--published essays or portions of essays, but the content of their writing derives from the students' own experiences. All writing is kept in the students' files.

To help diagnose student writing skills and to determine the effectiveness of the **process approach** to teaching writing, we gave each sophomore an assignment modeled after The University of Michigan writing assessment. These papers were then placed in a central file and each semester at least one sample of the student's writing will be added to the file. The files will be useful in counseling students for future writing courses they may take.

We have also changed our curriculum at Mott. We now require that at least one

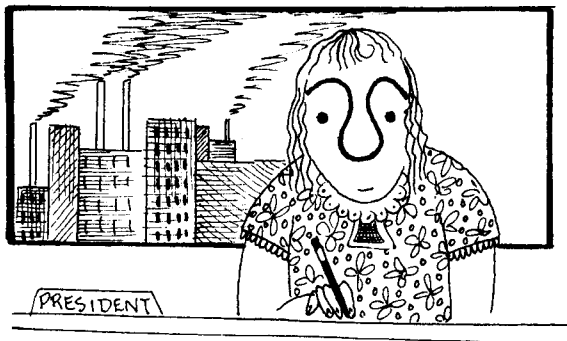
writing course be included in the 2 1/2 English credits required for graduation, and we have developed four writing courses that meet the composition requirement.

Our one week cross-curricular writing workshop enabled us: 1) to share the writing activities currently being required in other departments, 2) to adapt activities to various curricular areas, and 3) to devise new activities in and approaches to writing. In September we shared our findings and suggestions for cross-curricular writing with the entire staff and gave each of them a packet of sample exercises and suggestions.

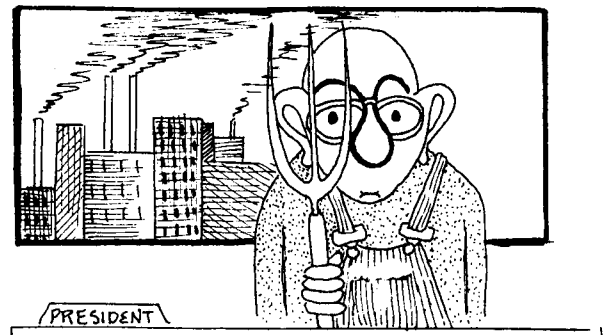
Our ESEA IV C planning grant enabled us to buy the time and services to focus on the writing abilities of our students, to discover improved methods of teaching writing without overloading the teacher, to encourage cross-curricular writing, and to begin improving the writing abilities of our students.

Sincerely,

Norm Ballou



WELL-PLACED MODIFIER



MISPLACED MODIFIER