

## Tools for writing

*Lacks Development*

Scientific and technical subjects, if written from a purely scientific standpoint, in exclusively scientific lingo, can be tedious, boring, and incomprehensible. Do writers take these things into consideration when writing essays and articles on these subjects? Three writers did. Jessica Mitford, in her essay "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain"; Horace Miner, in his essay "Body Ritual among the Nacirema"; and Alexander Petrunkevitch, in his essay, "The Spider and the Wasp," <sup>map of discussion</sup> use humor, vivid imagery, and clear linear sequence to make these subjects <sup>global issue</sup> interesting and accessible to the ordinary reader.

When writing about serious subjects, such as science and technology, humor can be effective in many ways. For instance, the manner in which Horace Miner uses humor in "Body Ritual among the Nacirema," not only creates a different point of view on American customs and habits, it also makes the piece interesting and engaging. Instead of simply comparing American cultural rituals to those of another culture, Miner writes as if he is actually describing another culture. This approach allows Miner to have some fun with cultural references. For example, he refers to dentists as "holy -mouth -men," doctors as "medicine men," nurses as "vestal maidens," and hospitals as, "latipsos." Furthermore, a household shrine devoted to rites and ceremonies created because of the fundamental belief that the human body is ugly and prone to debility is much more humorous than "bathroom." In addition to cultural references, Miner also has fun with actual rituals. He describes brushing one's teeth as, "inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures," and shaving as, "scraping and lacerating the face with a sharp

9/28

instrument." Miner uses many such references and the result is a clever essay that is not only entertaining, but gets us to take a look at ourselves, without taking ourselves too seriously.

Another example of an excellent use of humor is in Jessica Mitford's essay, "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain." She uses morbid humor to lessen the weight of the gruesome topic of this piece which is the embalming process. Without the use of humor this essay would certainly be hard to read. However, <sup>makes it</sup> ~~with the use of~~ humor ~~it is~~ tolerable and quite informative. For one thing, Mitford uses terms usually applied to food preparation, such as "sliced, pierced, pickled, trussed, and creamed," to describe what happens to a corpse upon arrival at the mortuary. She also employs ~~the use of~~ what sounds like advertisement slogans to describe the results of the various embalming products. This creates a definite sarcastic tone that continues throughout the essay. Mitford concludes on an especially sardonic note, speaking of the funeral director, "He has done everything in his power to make the funeral a real pleasure for everyone concerned."

avoid repetition

good

example of using quote to illustrate the preceding sentence

(Mitford #)

In addition to humor, vivid imagery is a powerful and efficacious tool. Creating a strong, distinct, vivid picture of the images in an essay grabs and holds the readers' attention. All three writers successfully use this device. When Alexander Petrunkevitch, in his essay, "The Spider and the Wasp," depicts what happens when the wasp finds the correct species of tarantula, people might feel as if they've witnessed the events themselves. Images such as the spider rising up onto all eight legs "as if it were on stilts" or the wasp cleaning herself by "dragging her body along the ground," "sucking a drop of oozing blood from the spider's abdomen," and "grabbing the spider by its flabby leg," and dragging it down to its grave, give the reader a clear picture that leaves little to the imagination.

(Petrunkevitch #)

Horace Miner uses vivid imagery as well in "Body Ritual of the Nacirema." In the case of the aforementioned bundle of hog hairs in the mouth, as well as when explaining the process

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of the holy-mouth-men and in many other parts throughout the essay. Additionally Jessica Mitford uses much vivid imagery in "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain," starting with the arrival of the corpse to the mortuary, then again when describing the preparation room, the surgeon's tools, and the chemicals used in the process, and the actual process. For example, Mitford writes, "Mr. Jones, whose mouth has been sewn together with a needle between the upper lip and gum and brought out through the left nostril," with the corners raised slightly "for a more pleasant expression." It doesn't get much more vivid than that. But vivid imagery is a needed and welcome device for creating clear mental pictures that the reader can relate to.

While humor and vivid imagery are very important in helping to make these subjects more readily understandable, clear linear sequence is the most vital component. Science and technology essays usually explain how something works or a process. Therefore, these essays and articles should be written in a straight forward, logical order that is easy to understand. If the reader doesn't understand the process or what is being explained, it won't matter how humorous it is or how vividly the images are depicted. Moreover, the objective of the essay is to provide information. And that is just what Alexander Petrunkevitch does in "The Spider and the Wasp."

His explanations possess simplicity, clarity, and logic. He starts by explaining the struggle for existence in the insect world. Next, he explains the balance between fertility and mortality.

Petrunkevitch then tells how this balance affects the two subjects of his essay, the Pepsis wasp and the tarantula spider. Petrunkevitch goes step by step, explaining each section in a clear, concise manner. After reading "the Spider and the Wasp" there is no doubt about (how many eggs the spider lays, how many eggs the wasp lays, how the wasp catches the spider, why the spider lets the wasp catch it, what happens after the wasp catches the spider, or how the spider as a species survives.) Petrunkevitch covers each step in a comprehensive sequence.

Good for

Good sentence variety

ex of parallelism

good

Jessica Mitford also uses a clear linear sequence in "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain."

Although she begins her essay on a humorous and sarcastic note that continues through ~~the~~ <sup>she</sup> ~~piece~~, when Jessica Mitford gets to the technical explanation of the embalming process in paragraph seven, she moves along in an easily understandable, orderly succession. Even though Mitford interrupts the explanation of the process to inject important information, she always brings the reader back to the sequence with easily identifiable phrases and time signals, ~~as~~ ) good

*overuse of quotes. Be more selective.*

~~follows.~~ "The body is first laid out." <sup>(cite)</sup> "To return to Mr. Jones, the blood is drained out through the veins and replaced by embalming fluid." <sup>(cite)</sup> "The next step is to have at Mr. Jones with a thing called a trocar." <sup>(cite)</sup> "The embalmer, having allowed an appropriate interval to elapse, returns to the attack." <sup>(cite)</sup> "Mr. Jones is now shaved, washed and dressed." <sup>(cite)</sup> "Jones is now ready for casketing." <sup>(cite)</sup> "Jones is next wheeled into the appointed slumber room." <sup>(cite)</sup> "The funeral service may be held in a church or the chapel of the funeral home." <sup>(cite)</sup> "At grave, side the casket is lowered into the ground." <sup>(cite)</sup> One can see that, even when all the other information is omitted, there is a clear linear sequence of the process; as a result the reader comes away from Mitford's essay with a complete understanding of the subject matter. This is also true of Petrunkevitch's essay.

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Writing about science and technology, ~~most likely~~, is not an easy task. However, Mitford, Miner, and Petrunkevitch, with the use of the right tools, were able to write accessible essays that are humorous, interesting and informative.