

Editor's Note

By Daniel Rozmiarek, Editor, drozmiarek@towson.edu

Editing is much harder than writing... or grading.

I am confident in my skill as a writer. As I think back on my formal education, I realize that I had quality writing instruction. In high school I learned grammar. My high school grammar and essay instruction was structured and formulaic. I memorized more than thirty rules for using a comma. I learned that a paragraph has ten sentences and that an essay has five paragraphs, each with ten sentences. I realized much later that my writing had absolutely no style at all, but at least it was technically flawless.

In college I learned about organization. I had failed my junior year thesis because I never wrote it. I was so intimidated by the thought of writing a twenty page paper that I simply didn't even try. When I returned for the fall of my senior year, I knew that I had to redo my junior thesis, as well as complete my senior thesis, an even longer, more complex writing task. I had a new advisor that year and I was open with her about my difficulties the previous year.

She told me not to worry about writing twenty pages. She gave me a yellow legal pad and told me to go off and write everything I knew about my topic. I returned a few days later with a dozen or so handwritten pages. She took them and made an appointment for me to return in a few days. When I came back to her office, I saw that she had taken all my pages and cut them apart into dozens of strips of paper, some only a few sentences long. She had divided them into sections and paper clipped them together and numbered the sections. She explained how the numbers were the order of the paragraphs and told me to go put it all together. From that exercise, I learned how to organize my thoughts and to not become intimidated by a huge writing task.

In graduate school I learned the process and value of revising my written work. My advisor for several of my academic papers was an expert in writing research and particularly in the area of revision strategies for students with writing disabilities. I often submitted a paper, several pages long, that I thought was finished, and he returned it with entire sections completely rearranged. He showed me the importance of making sure that sentences were clear and concise. I learned how changing a particular word can improve the effectiveness of a sentence. Basically, I learned how to appreciate the process of revising my own writing to incorporate an effective style—one that had been missing since high school.

When I started teaching writing courses at Towson University several semesters ago, I was confident in my own writing skill and in my abilities as a teacher to convey that knowledge to college students. I taught them to appreciate



Daniel Rozmiarek

writing as a craft the way William Zinsser explains it in *On Writing Well*. When grading their papers, I did not hesitate to mark up their papers by crossing out weak modifiers, rearranging passive voice, and underlining sentences with errors in parallel structure. During the course, I had the opportunity to guide them through the process from the development of the idea, through the creation of text, to a polished, final product. Grading that final paper is always the easiest for students who have

made an honest effort to follow the process along the way.

But, now, as the editor of *Writing Works*, I am faced with a new challenge. Because I am not creating my own writing or evaluating the writing or my students, I am no longer in control of the message of the essays. It is my responsibility to maintain the voice and style of the writer who submitted the piece while using my editing skill to improve that piece as I prepare it for publication.

I primarily used two sources to guide my editing decisions. With regard to organization and sentence structure, I follow the lessons in *On Writing Well*, a book I first discovered fifteen years ago as a teaching assistant for a writing course. For correcting grammar and mechanical errors, I use *Gregg's Reference Manual*, a widely used style guide particularly in business writing. It is similar to Diana Hacker's style guide but much more comprehensive.

While it is easy to correct spelling mistakes and other typos, it is much more difficult to make editing changes when I need to improve a paragraph with passive voice or unclear word usage. When it's my own writing, I can think about what I intend the sentence to accomplish and I can play around with several options until I get it right. But, when I am working with somebody else's text, I have to carefully examine the entire piece to make sure that I have not changed the writer's intention or replaced the writer's voice with my own. I believe that my role as the editor is to help each writer create the best piece possible. I do that by using my experience to improve what was submitted without changing it. That task is the most challenging one I have had yet as a writer.

To the writers who submitted pieces for this issue, I thank you for trusting me with your work. To all the readers of *Writing Works*, I hope I have given you interesting, informative, creative, and thoughtful pieces to read that all express the ideas and emotions of those who wrote them. As with any piece of writing, I know that this issue is not finished, but only published. Now it is your opportunity to complete the relationship between the writer and the reader. Enjoy these articles and discuss the ideas among yourselves, but most importantly, share your thoughts with the writers and with me.