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THE STORY: DRAMA THAT GRABS READERS

Teaching students to capture the emotions of everyday life

BY LORI OGLESBEE, CJE

I drove a school bus when I taught in Arkansas. A 72-passenger, turbo-charged-diesel, snub-nosed Bluebird bus. I navigated through the maze of abandoned cars on the narrow streets of the Keystone posse, one of the two worst areas of town. About 50 kindergartners and first graders and 12 high-school students rode my bus. Those two schools sat close to one another so it made sense, kind of. Two of my passengers were a junior mother and her kindergarten-age son.

The little kids had no real training about sitting down or following instructions. Two boys, Ontarius and Justin, misbehaved so much they had to sit on the front seats on either side, Justin opposite me and Ontarius behind me. Both boys were from unstable families and stayed in trouble all the time. Tattling was their favorite pastime.

Every sentence Ontarius uttered began with "00000000000000000000, Ms. Ogreebee." One day he said, "0000000000, Ms. Ogreebee. Justin's gotta gun." And Justin did.

He had a real gun, but I didn't know that when I started my usual lecture about bringing toys to school and fighting over them.

"Justin, you bring that gun up here right now." I glared at him in my mirror. "How many times have I told you guys not to bring toys on this bus. Toys are for home, not for school."

I reached my hand back as Justin slinked up beside me and placed the gun in my hand. When I felt the metal in my hand, I thought it was way too heavy. I brought it around to the front and looked down at a .22-caliber automatic pistol. I checked the clip and the chamber. Both were empty. The barrel was full of dried mud. No telling how many days he had had it. I took a deep breath and reached for the radio. "44 to 109 (my bus to the elementary school). Meet me at the bus with a brown paper sack."

I mean, how else are you going to get a gun off a bus with all the mommies dropping off their babies right beside the bus? Justin missed recess that day.

Well, at least he didn't get on my bus again — with a gun. ▶▶



◀ A ridiculous, sad story, but one filled with memorable lines and images. And a little laughter. It's a story. A story that conveys the ills of our society, the troubles teachers encounter and the antics of little boys. A story that illustrates a lesson like a parable without shoving the moral down your throat. But somehow we teachers have taken away the joy of telling stories. We make students write introductory paragraphs, vary sentence beginnings and use compound-complex sentences.

DISTINCTION OF A STORY

We forget to tell students that the actual story is the most important part. After all, only one person will read that introductory paragraph — that English teacher who is looking for the precious thesis statement.

If I had written this story for English class, it might have sounded like this:

Violence in the form of handguns is an ever-present threat in today's society that penetrate the foundation of our communities by leading our babies, our children, our youths down a path of destruction. Imagine an innocent 5-year-old lad suddenly boarding a bus and brandishing a weapon as he prepared to play with his new toy and unwittingly commit a heinous crime that will haunt him the rest of his days. It happened one day on a bus in southern Arkansas.

When you evaluate that paragraph, you might think that only John Lennon of Beatle fame could begin a sentence with *imagine*, and Justin was anything but innocent. Reality strikes when someone asks, "Are you kidding me?" Readers recognize common approaches or assumptions.

Stories are not dead. Newspapers may be on respirators. Sadly, iPhone apps may be the major source of written news. The media may continue to polarize the nation with the extremes of FoxNews and MSNBC. We may choose to watch our news, to see the news in a photograph or to read it online. We may want to analyze our own data and draw our own conclusions. But what remains is the art of telling a great story in any format.

A great story can be told with a keyboard, a camera, a pen. I tell my students, "There are only two types of writers: good writers and quitters. If your story isn't good, you quit before it was." The same applies here. Good storytellers or quitters. Will your students quit before your story is good? Will your students aim to be "finished" rather than good?

So what makes a great story?

Reporters have to care, and they have to invoke readers to care. The way to do that is to write about people. Issues are cold and do not move us. We line up with FoxNews or MSNBC — without the concern of seeing the effect on the people. Remember that stories are about people. If you have to cover an issue, cover the people it affects.

Brady Dennis wrote a series of 300-word award-

winning stories for the *St. Petersburg Times*. Each story was about ordinary people he encountered. 300-words — that's shorter than most bad yearbook stories I've read. The following example illustrates his skills.

Few drivers on the dark, lonely stretch of the Suncoast Parkway in Pasco County pull up to the tollbooth, hand their dollars to Lloyd Blair and then speed away. None of them knows why the old man sits here, night after night, working the graveyard shift.

Well, here's why:

- Because years ago, on a freezing winter night at a party in Queens, N.Y., he met a woman named Millie.
- Because he fell in love with her brown hair and wide eyes and 100-watt smile.
- Because they got married, moved to Staten Island, had a son and worked for decades in Manhattan; she as an accountant, he as a banker.
- Because it had been their dream to retire to Florida so they saved all their lives to make it possible.
- Because, when they began to talk about leaving New York and heading south, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. The discovery meant they spent their time and money traveling to New Jersey, San Diego and Mexico in search of a cure.
- Because, in the end, they came to Florida anyway.
- Because they finally bought a house in Spring Hill although she was too weak that day to get out of the car.
- Because she died nine days later on Jan. 5, 2002, a day "the whole sky fell," he said.
- Because, after she was gone, he found himself alone and \$100,000 in debt.

And so he took a job collecting tolls. The drivers who pass by see a smiling 71-year-old man with blue eyes and a gray mustache who tells each of them, "Have a great night."

They do not know the rest of Lloyd Blair's story or that he keeps Millie's picture in his shirt pocket, under his name tag and over his heart.

IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

So now that we're focusing on people, give us a character we'll remember. He doesn't have to be a hero or brave. We just need to identify with this character through empathy or curiosity.

Have you heard the rhetoric from the health care debate in America? The Glenn Becks and the Keith Oblermans of the news channels keep count of Republican and Democratic victories rather than the score for when life is better for an individual. Dennis Brady made us care about Lloyd Blair, and he never mentioned the issue of healthcare. He told a story about a man who has been affected by the overwhelming debt from the medical bills. ▶▶





Photographs tell stories. MELANIE BURFORD, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning photographer formerly with the *Dallas Morning News* and now a freelance photographer in New York City, says each one of her photographs is a paragraph in her story. I love that description. Look at these images. The individuals are characters we care about. Their raw emotion makes us care. It's not always the story told, like the score or who was a hero, but these photos are memorable images. ❶ It's an important game. We know this kid is a team leader with all the stickers on his helmet also letting us know it is late in the season. The coach has had past success because that's a state championship ring on his finger. They embrace with closed palms making it such a man moment. The blurred background helps isolate the moment. *Photo by Selynda*

Reed. ❷ The girl on the left didn't run the best time. We didn't have to write that. The picture tells us that. The girl on the right placed higher and is a leader. I love the details like the timer in the back to let us know the race wasn't over. The not-so-neat nail polish is so high school. This photo shows heart. Their heads and the arm actually form a heart. *Photo by Alison Woomer.* ❸ This photo has voice. It's the worst moment for a high-school freshman at open house. That mom is saying, "You told me you didn't have homework." Earlier this year, I used this photo to illustrate storytelling. From the back of the room, a voice shouted, "That's me!" I asked him if his mom said that, and he said, "How'd you know?" The photo tells us. *Photo by Brian Gallardo.*

◀◀ If something is intriguing, it will intrigue readers. Teach students to write about people instead of about issues. Make the people memorable and follow curiosity.

There is nothing in this world I hate more than a cockroach. I cannot find anything redeeming about them. I grew up in Louisiana, and those giant black flying ones crawl on every surface. One night a cockroach brazenly jumped in the bathtub with me. Eek! But recently when our broadcasting students aired this story, I was intrigued.

You may not have a cockroach hall of fame, well at least not an official one.

But you may pass doors in your school and have no idea what is in that room. Does someone reveal an interesting detail?

I taught Bliss Froehlich's older sister six years ago. She was editor of the yearbook. Bliss has been on staff for two years now, and I found out during workshop this summer that her grandfather is Amish. Amish? Now there's a story. I can think of a thousand questions, and I peppered her with every one.

Students should use their natural curiosity. We bog ourselves down in stories we have to tell every year, like homecoming. Look at the tired old coverage and give it life.

INFLUENCE OF IMAGES

Our stories must be full of images that burn in our memories. I remember Annie Priolx's description of one of her characters, Quoyle, in *The Shipping News*. "He had a sea of face, and his features were as bunched as kissed fingertips." Can't you see them?

Bruce Springsteen knows how to "show" a story. The boss is the poet of the working class. Bruce wrote "Glory Days" about people who achieve nothing past high school. He sings, "Well, there's a girl that lives up the block; back in school she could turn all the boys' heads."

Ask girls what she looked like? "Pretty?" No. They don't know if she's pretty. Ask guys what she looked like. Those guys never even made it to her face. Sorry, girls. Springsteen's description shows us that without offending. Use metaphors and similes, not adjectives and adverbs. Teach students to use the details that advance the story.

Great stories have great characters to make us care, but we also need conflict. We need look no further than the football field. I never understand why yearbooks think copy does not belong. I mean, sports begs for a story. The natural element of conflict works so well in a sports section. Consider this story from the McKinney High School 2007 *Lion* yearbook.

Lions and Broncos fans were on their feet as Boyd's offense ran onto the field following a timeout. The Broncos stood on the Lions 12-yard line. With 1:20 remaining, a touchdown would seal the game for Boyd, but a defensive stop would force a fourth down.

Boyd quarterback Jacob Coffey took the snap from under center and pitched left to running back Bryan Maxwell. The back took the pitch, found a crease between his guard and tackle and shot out of a cannon into the south end zone.

Lion fans could only hang their heads and reach for their car keys as they watched ▶▶

◀◀ Boyd score two fourth-quarter touchdowns to take a 12-7 lead.

Trailing by 6 with 1:15 left, the kick return unit headed out to the field in an attempt to set up the offense with decent field position. Sophomore kick returners Robert Radway and Dario Jackson adjusted their positions to field what they thought would be a squib kick, but a confident Bronco kicker decided to kick deep instead.

“It was such a nervous feeling being on the field for that play,” Radway said. “Before we went out on the field, Coach told me I was going to run it back. When they kicked it deep, I knew I had a chance.”

Radway fielded the ball on the 17-yard line and fired off behind a Jackson block. The front four on the kick-off team opened up a seam on the left side of the field. He burst through the crease leaving all Broncos behind except for the kicker.

“As soon as I got to the kicker, it was over,” Radway said. “I broke his tackle and blew right by him.”

With the crowd and the sideline going crazy, Radway high-stepped into the end zone untouched for the score.

“The best feeling was getting into the zone because we had to win the Battle of the Blue,” Radway said.

A huge swing in momentum hushed the Bronco nation, and Radway’s kick return proved too much for Boyd to overcome.

On the final drive of the game, Coffey hurled a ball into the Lions’ secondary in desperation only to be picked off by safety Matt Hanson.

“It was nice being the guy to put the nail in the coffin,” Matt said. “but our kick return is what won the game.

Joe Arriola wrote that. Joe, who never had an Advanced Placement class; Joe, who was the first person in his family to graduate from high school. I found Joe in my Journalism I class and encouraged him to join yearbook. Now he is a stringer for three Dallas-area newspapers, has a blog on mckinneynews.net and is a junior journalism major at University of North Texas. Joe knew how to tell a story.

He read *Sports Illustrated* and the sports page of the *Dallas Morning News*. He could see the power of the moment. His beginning was not “The 2007 junior varsity McKinney High School football team.” He could capture conflict with details. I can see that play happen in my head. ▶▶

THE POWER OF STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE

Brady Dennis, an award-winning writer for the *St. Petersburg Times*, shows how effective a reporter can be when he or she sees, listens and portrays the essence of an individual. His story about Stretch exemplifies the power of tight writing.

Inside the locker room, the drifter drifts to sleep.

He pays no attention to the country music blaring outside or to the bulls pacing restlessly or to the bull riders swaggering in too-tight Wranglers.

They call him Stretch, a wild man, a bullfighter, the American kind, who paints his face clown-like and dresses in red and throws himself willingly into the path of angry beasts who have bucked cowboys to the ground.

When he was 14, the road called, and Stretch answered. He ran away from home and landed at an Oklahoma rodeo and has lived a hundred lifetimes since.

He has slept at truck stops, on the shoulder of highways, in the dirt beside livestock. He has drunk his share of Jack Daniels. He has been tattooed a half-dozen times in a half-dozen cities, dipped enough Copenhagen to roof a house with the tin cans. He has been arrested for fighting. He found a girlfriend in Utah named Kasey.

He has stared down a thousand bulls in a thousand nowhere towns from Tennessee to Texas to Montana to Mississippi. The bulls have knocked out his front teeth and broken his arms, ribs, ankles, tailbone, collarbone and kneecap.

They have given him more concussions and stitches and joy than he can measure.

“I live kind of different,” Stretch says, smiling toothlessly.

Back in Kansas, the family never understood. His dad is a lawyer, and his sister is a dentist. His brothers turned out normal, too.

But Stretch, well, he lives kind of different. He owns two bags of clothes and probably won’t ever own much else, except this: “I’ll have a lot of good stories.”

And maybe that’s enough.

Maybe, unlike so many people, he has found the place he belongs, in the ring with the other untamed souls, kicking up dust and mud.

The drifter opens his eyes.

Showtime. ■

◀ IMPORTANCE OF AWARENESS

Journalists do not have to be AP students. They have to have a heart. They do not have to have heroes. They have to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. They write about people, not issues. They paint pictures with powerful images from the camera and through the choice of words. In the process, young journalists find themselves at the crossroads in the field of journalism.

I'm not sure what the future of the newspapers is. I'm not sure how to drive someone to a Web site. I'm not sure why funding is so hard to find for such an important part of a high school, but I do

know that readers love stories. They are like small children tucked in the arm of an adult when they realize there's a story.

The goal for student journalists is to find the story to tell in every medium — yearbooks, newspapers, Web sites, blogs, photographs, videos, even college essays. Help them find their voices. Teachers need to help students follow their curiosity. And do not ever let them bring a gun on a school bus.

You can write stories they will remember. But will they? ■

THE POWER OF STORIES ABOUT REALITY

Superior reporting reveals more about the ordinary than about the extraordinary. Not everyone will earn an Eagle Scout badge or save someone from a fire. All reporters, though, can write stories to which all readers will relate. The high-school experiences of adviser Lori Oglesbee hints at the unnoticed awaiting to be discovered.

Back in high school, my best friend Allison Bennett and I were spending the night together. Allison's mom came into her room and said, "Allison, Lori, I need you girls to pick up Freddie and his little friend at the movies. I have a terrible headache and am going to bed."

Wow. Here we were — 15 years old with brand-new drivers' licenses — and we were going to drive the two-door, two-tone, brand-new 1979 Thunderbird that had a sunroof. We were cool. And we were going across the river bridge all the way over to Eastgate Twin Cinema. That's right. Our movie theater had TWO screens.

It was still more than an hour before we had to pick them up. Now Freddie was the most easily embarrassed middle schooler who ever lived. He barely spoke and turned red when he heard his name. So of course, we decided to embarrass him. We just had to decide how.

We dressed in fishnet hose, short Rocky shorts, halter tops, stacked platform disco shoes and teased our Farrah Fawcett hairdos.

We slipped out the French doors in Allison's room. Who gives a teenager a

room with double doors to the outside? Anyway, we made our way to the movie theater and parked across the street. Allison popped up through the sunroof, and I swung open my long door and stuck my leg out. Then we whistled and yelled. "Freddie. Over here Freddie. Come with us, pretty boy."

Freddie looked up, down, side to side but never at us. He and his friend waited until every other teenybopper left with their moms before he darted over to the car. He slapped my seat forward and fell into the backseat. His friend climbed in behind him.

He kept growling "I'm going to kill you, Allison." "I'm going to kill you, Lori." It was before Columbine so it wasn't that scary. All we could do was laugh.

We headed back over to our side of the river. We wove through the neighborhoods avoiding the interstate that we weren't allowed to drive on yet. We were almost home when the car stopped dead in the road. Allison turned the key. Whah whah whah ... but it wouldn't catch. What was the problem? It was a new car.

Freddie lurched over from the back seat and looked at the dashboard. "You're out of gas, moron." Out of gas? Now this was before mobile phones. We would have to go somewhere and use a phone to call a parent. We had stopped right in front of Ridgecrest Nursing Home.

Now remember what we looked like. We were not dressed in nursing home attire. We turned to Freddie, but we couldn't convince him to go in for us, no matter how many times we batted our eyes. Fine then. We would do it ourselves. We slipped behind some pampas grass and pulled off the fishnet hose

and tugged our jersey shorts to make them longer. We took off our shoes and headed in.

We couldn't call Allison's dad because he had been called to the hospital to do surgery. He was a doctor. Allison's mom was in bed with a headache. My mom was not the sympathetic type and wasn't easily fooled so we prayed for my dad to answer the phone. Besides, we had a gas pump in our backyard then. We had it until the EPA made us get rid of it.

I sighed relief when my dad answered. "I'll be right there." He showed up with his 5-gallon gas can, and poured it in while giving us a little lecture.

"Now you girls shouldn't be running around in your pajamas."

"Yes, Daddy, Mr. Buddy."

You're old enough to drive now so you have to be old enough to think about things like this."

"Yes, sir."

Freddie was seething but too cool to rat us out.

My dad followed us to Allison's driveway and tooted his horn to let us know he was headed home.

How many students have ever had a sibling embarrass them on purpose? How many have run out of gas? How many have gotten away with something their parents still don't know about?

But how many of them had a best friend named Allison Bennett in 1979 and went to West Monroe High School?

This story strikes a cord because it's a typical teenager story. It's the ordinary, not the extraordinary. It's the way a story is told. And it is a mesmerizing reminder of stories ready to be unveiled in every school community. ■

DO YOUR READERS HAVE 2 MINUTES?

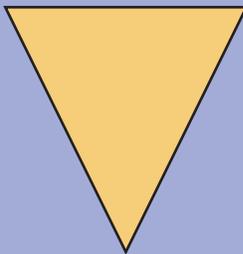
BY JACK KENNEDY

The heart of a newspaper or online publication lies in news and sports coverage. Sometimes we find ourselves with cool narratives to share, complete with characters and setting, conflict and resolution. But most of the time we have facts, quotes and little space to convey a lot of information to readers.

Indeed, what if we thought of our stories in terms of minutes required to read rather than word

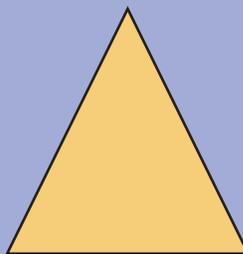
count or column inches? The Average Reading Time is approximately 200 words per minute. In two minutes, most readers can understand a 400-word story. In four minutes, they can understand an 800-word story.

We can certainly create short narratives (check the samples), but we also need to polish the basic writing structures. ■



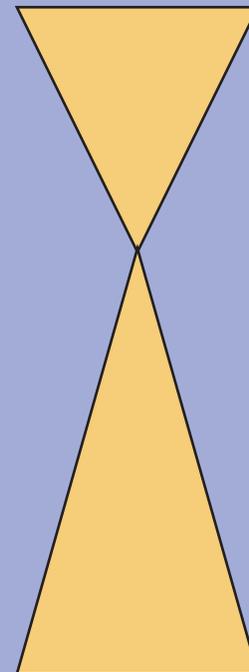
INVERTED PYRAMID

- 5 W's and H
- summary news lead
- often leads to the quote-transition formula



PYRAMID

A steady build from setting and character through conflict and resolution. Save something good for the end as a reward.



HOURLASS

A professional writer's technique that works, leading the reader from the top through the turn into the narrative.

THE POWER OF A FEW WORDS.

The last man on earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door.

“KNOCK” BY FREDERIC BROWN

For sale: baby shoes, never worn.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY (SUPPOSEDLY) SAID THAT WAS HIS BEST WORK.

SHOTS FIRED WHILE HE STABBED HIS EX-WIFE

By **Connie Piloto and Molly Hennessy-Fiske**
The Miami Herald
Aug. 9, 1998

THE TOP (all the info the time-pressed reader will need)

It wasn't the first time that Dennis Leach had violently terrorized his ex-wife. But it will be the last.

Leach, 37, was shot by Davie police Saturday afternoon after he disregarded their orders to drop his knife and instead plunged it repeatedly into Joyce Leach outside her duplex at 6110 S.W. 41st Court.

Dennis Leach was pronounced dead at the scene. His ex-wife, who asked police, "Why did you shoot him?" as she was loaded into the ambulance, was taken to Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, where she was listed in stable condition.

The mayhem was witnessed by Dennis Leach's parents and some neighbors. The neighbors said turmoil at the Leach home was nothing new.

In May, Dennis Leach was charged with aggravated assault when, according to police, he showed up with a hammer, broke a window and chased his ex-wife around the duplex as he shouted, "I'm going to kill you!"

THE TURN (what could be simpler?)

Police and neighbors gave this account of the latest domestic violence:

THE NARRATIVE (move to chronological story telling)

Dennis Leach became angry with his 37-year-old ex-wife after he went to a neighborhood bar Friday night. He stormed into her duplex Saturday afternoon and threatened her with a butcher knife.

A terrified Joyce Leach dashed next door to the adjoining home of Leach's parents.

"He's got a knife, and he's gonna kill me!" Leach's mother, Reba Leach, said her daughter-in-law screamed.

At the same time, 15-year-old April Leach, one of their six children, called from a convenience store blocks away.

"Your father is going to kill me!" Joyce

Leach yelled.

April Leach hung up and dialed 911.

When officers arrived at the duplex, Dennis Leach was chasing his ex-wife with a knife.

Police ordered him to drop the weapon, Davie Capt. John George said.

Instead, Leach started stabbing her.

An officer fired at Dennis Leach, striking him around a knee, but he wouldn't stop plunging the knife into his ex-wife, neighbors said.

An officer or officers fired again, this time hitting Leach in the chest. He collapsed and died on the side of the road. His parents were watching from inside their home.

Davie police would not say whether more than one officer fired at Dennis Leach, nor would they identify the officer or officers.

Neighbors say they heard at least five shots.

As police carried Joyce Leach to an ambulance, the knife still stuck in her right shoulder, she turned to police and said: "Is he dead, is he dead? ... Why did you shoot him?" next-door neighbor Shannon Schmitzer said.

As Joyce was hoisted into the ambulance and police placed a yellow tarp over Dennis Leach's body, April Leach and a brother arrived.

The two siblings cried and tried to run to their mother and father but were escorted away.

Police later drove them to Memorial Regional Hospital to be with their mother.

Dennis and Joyce Leach lived for years in the duplex owned by Leach's parents.

"They've had a lot of trouble in the past," Schmitzer said.

As the couple's problems escalated, the Department of Children and Family Services stepped in. The state took custody of the children for a while, placing them in foster homes, neighbors said.

Joyce Leach got a job at Dunkin' Donuts, just blocks away, but Dennis Leach couldn't stay out of trouble.

In May, Davie police charged him with domestic violence and aggravated assault after the incident with the hammer. He was convicted and jailed for 90 days.

He got out Tuesday night and returned to his family's house, his mother said.

"We weren't supposed to let him stay here," his mother said. "But he just showed up." ■

600 words.
Average Reading Time: 3 minutes

TIPS FOR BETTER SHORT-ITEM REPORTING

- Be as brief and clear as possible, but strive for originality.
- Avoid label leads, leads that begin with date, name of school or its initials, name of a person, name of a club or an article.
- Write leads that answer "why" or "how."
- Do not waddle into the story. Place the most important information first.
- Avoid quote leads unless the quote is truly dynamic. Sprinkle quotes in your stories, but make sure the quotes add substance to the story.
- Avoid question leads, especially rhetorical questions.
- Do not chat with the reader.
- Remain objective.
- Delete unnecessary fillers such as "this year" or "in the 2009-2010 school year."
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. An average sentence is 20 words long. Mix long and short sentences to increase readability.
- Buy a good stylebook, and use it. Bring discipline to your writing.

WHAT GREAT BOSSES KNOW ABOUT COACHING

PRODUCED FROM INFORMATION
BY DON FRY & JILL GEISLER
POYNTER INSTITUTE FOR MEDIA STUDIES

TIPS FOR BEING A COACH

by Jill Geisler

- Coaches know their students: Have an understanding of the students' learning styles, what they're good at, what they feel their weak points are and what their goals may be.
- Coaches check their egos at the door: You may have been a star performer before going into management, but coaching is about the other person, not you.
- Coaches ask questions: "Could you tell me about your story? What do you love about it?" (They'd almost immediately tell me what they thought didn't work, saving me the trouble of breaking to them what they already suspected.)
- Coaches really listen: They listen for insights into how the employee thinks through a problem and how they feel about their work. They listen for indications that the questions they're asking are leading the employee to come up with solutions. It is human nature to prefer our own ideas and solutions over the ones that others impose on us.
- Coaches are positive: Employees dread presenting their work to a person whose main interest seems to be fault-finding. That's a "corrections officer," not a coach.
- Coaches develop a learning lexicon: It's shorthand language that's both descriptive and instructive. "Are we revving our engine too long at the start of this story?" "Does the last line really kiss me goodbye?"

COACHING STUDENT WRITERS

from material by Don Fry

As an editor, it is easier to take someone's story and to doctor it up yourself than to sit down with the individual and to point out the problem areas. However, when you fix once, you will have to fix every future story. By coaching the writer, writers will learn what they are doing wrong and can start turning in stories that do not need fixing.

FIXING

improves copy
deals with now
done quickly
corrects errors
focuses on writing
creates resentment
divides writer and editor
undercuts writer
gets the story published
takes place at deadline

COACHING

improves reporting and writing
deals with later
done gradually
corrects tendencies
focus on writer
fosters independence
unites writer and editor
builds writer's confidence
develops the writer
occurs throughout the writing process

GOALS OF COACHING

- Help writers see their own prose.
- Encourage writers to improve their work and work habits.
- Establish collaborative relations for fast editing.
- Correct recurrent errors.
- Improve communications between writers, especially before deadline.
- Foster an atmosphere in which good work receives reward, recognition and encouragement.
- Build a common vocabulary for discussion of writing and editing.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COACHING

- Let the writer do the talking; let the coach listen.
- Find things to praise.
- Focus on major problems — and only a few at a time.
- Talk in terms of effectiveness for the reader rather than about "rules" and "errors."
- Writers know their own problems; help them express them with precision and find solutions.
- Avoid equating your own taste with truth.
- Take your time; writers are not copy.
- Use any pen but a red one.
- Meet with the writer on neutral ground. Stay out of your office, and don't go into the writer's work area.
- Before you jump on problems in the story, ask writers to point out what they think are problem areas. Solutions are easier if the writer sees the problem.