

[APPENDIX 1]

WRITING ABOUT MORAL ISSUES

The principles that apply to writing about moral issues are the same ones that apply to all expository writing. However, because moral discourse often involves the expression of ideas that readers may be inclined to disagree with, sometimes vigorously, there is a special reason to apply the principles thoroughly and thoughtfully. In this kind of writing, where persuasion is the main intention, there is no margin for carelessness.

The fundamental principles can be stated briefly: The main idea must be clear, the relationships between sentences and paragraphs must be coherent, the space assigned to each part of the presentation must match the relative importance of that part (in relation to other parts), all interpretations and judgments must be sufficiently explained and supported to satisfy the critical reader, and the overall style must be at least readable (and, preferably, *pleasurable* to read).

Let's examine these principles closely, concentrating on the strategies that will help you achieve each one in your writing.

HOW TO MAKE THE MAIN IDEA CLEAR (CLAR)

In most papers about ethics, the main idea will be the writer's judgment of the morality of the action that is being considered. Lack of clarity in expressing the main idea usually occurs because the writer began without knowing exactly what he or she wanted to say, hoping to discover the idea in the process of writing. Sadly, the writer will often reach the end of the piece without having made that discovery. Even when the writer is lucky enough to do so, perhaps midway through the piece, by that point he or she usually

has confused the reader and made one or more statements that are inconsistent with the main idea. In such cases, the reader is apt to dismiss the writer as confused or uninformed. You can prevent this development in your own efforts by scrupulously following two simple strategies:

Begin writing only after you have determined exactly what you are going to say; that is, after you have done your research, considered various viewpoints, and decided what your judgment is and what basis you have for making it. This strategy does not rule out brainstorming and freewriting.* In fact, it is perfectly compatible with them, as long as they are used as preliminaries to formal writing and not as formal writing itself. If you use brainstorming and freewriting—and they are well worth using—be sure to resist the temptation to deceive yourself by saying, “These notes look good enough to submit as they are; I’ll just copy them over to make them neater and the job will be done.” Instead, when you have finished producing your ideas, review the ideas and ask yourself what you really want to say.

Experiment with different ways of expressing your main idea and select the best one. Don’t settle for your first way of expressing the idea. That way may lack the qualifications and the exactness that reasonableness demands. As you try different ways of expressing the idea, look at the related ideas and evidence that your preliminary work produced. Ask which way of expressing the thought is most reasonable and best reflects the relevant moral principles that are involved. Ask, too, what your readers’ reactions are likely to be, particularly what objections they might have. Refine your statement of the idea in light of these considerations.

HOW TO KEEP SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS COHERENT (COH)

You will already have taken one step toward achieving coherence when you determine your main idea. The very fact that you have that idea before beginning will provide a center for your piece of writing, something to relate the other parts to. Yet there are specific strategies you can use to increase the coherence of your writing even more.

Plan the piece before you write it. The easiest way to plan is to develop an outline. This does not necessarily mean using Roman numerals, capital letters, and so on. (Of course, if you feel comfortable using them, then by all means do so.) It means arranging the ideas that will appear in your paper, deciding which will come first, which second, and so on. The easiest way to do this is to study the ideas you have on your rough-idea sheet

*These techniques consist of letting your mind range over the subject (or forcing it to do so), without evaluating the ideas that occur, screening any out, attempting to organize them in any way, or correcting your errors. The aim of such techniques is to produce a large body of ideas from which you can later select the best ones, the ones you wish to include in your final piece of writing. The principle that underlies brainstorming and freewriting is that ideas and associations flow best when they are uninterrupted by analysis and judgment.

and number them in the most effective order. The following guidelines will help you decide what that order is:

The introduction to your paper should identify the essential features of the issue and present a careful statement of your judgment.^{*} If possible, this should be done in an imaginative way that arouses reader interest and creates a positive impression as it informs.

The body of your paper should develop and support your judgment, presenting the various considerations that underlie that judgment and discussing the various questions and objections that might occur to critical readers. Useful patterns of organization for the body of the paper include *time order* (you might, for example, discuss the effects of an action in the order in which they would occur in time), *order of complexity* (simpler considerations first, followed by more complex ones), and *order of importance* (less important considerations first, followed by more important ones).

The conclusion of your paper should reinforce the main idea—that is, your judgment. This reinforcement is usually not accomplished by direct repetition (except in rather long treatments—say, more than 3,000 words). Instead, you should use a more subtle method, such as the use of an apt quotation or a statement of your own that recalls the main idea without using the same words.

Decide what connecting words or phrases will make clear the relationships among your ideas, and add them to the numbers on your rough-idea sheet. The basic relationships among ideas in persuasive writing are *and* relationships, *but* relationships, and *therefore* relationships. These relationships exist whether or not they are expressed. By expressing them, you make it possible for your readers to move from one idea to another without confusion and help them understand your reasoning more easily. To indicate the basic relationships, you may use the words *and*, *but*, and *therefore* themselves or substitute words. Some common substitutes for *and* are *also*, *first*, *second*, *in addition*, *next*, *another*, and *finally*. For *but*, you can use *however*, *nevertheless*, *yet*, *in contrast*, and *on the other hand*. For *therefore*, you can use *so*, *consequently*, *accordingly*, *thus*, *as a result*, and *in conclusion*. Other relationship words that are helpful in making your writing more coherent are *for example* (to illustrate a point), *now and then* (to signal a time change), and *similarly* (to compare). At times, a single word or phrase will not do, and you will have to add a complete sentence to make the connection clear.

HOW TO ACHIEVE EMPHASIS (EMPH)

Emphasis is stress or prominence. A word, sentence, or paragraph has emphasis if it stands out from other words, sentences, or paragraphs in a piece of writing. Not every part is deserving of the same emphasis, so the careful writer controls

^{*} Skilled writers often withhold the complete statement of the judgment until later in the paper, sometimes at the very end, but this approach is not recommended for beginning writers.

the placement of emphasis. The following guidelines will help you exercise such control in your writing:

Assign an important idea more space than other ideas. If you discuss three considerations in a moral issue and give each consideration the same amount of space (say, a couple of sentences or a paragraph apiece), the subtle implication to your readers will be that all considerations are of equal importance. On the other hand, if you give one consideration more detailed treatment, that consideration will seem more important than the others. The space given to the development of each consideration should not be left to chance; it should be consciously chosen.

Assign an important idea better space than other ideas. Not every place in a piece of writing carries the same emphasis. Generally speaking, the end has the greatest emphasis because whatever is read last will usually be remembered longest. "End" in this context does not mean conclusion only. It means the final position of any sentence, any paragraph, or any section of a piece of writing (the body, for example). The construction of individual sentences that observe the principle of emphasis may be a little difficult for the beginning writer, but you should be able to make the final sentences of your paragraphs, the final paragraph of your body, and your conclusion more emphatic. The place of second greatest emphasis is the beginning, because first impressions tend to last. Accordingly, the beginnings of sentences, of paragraphs, or of any section of a piece of writing (the body, for example) are important places. If you have a number of considerations to discuss in the body of your paper, it will usually be possible to use both the beginning and the end positions to achieve maximum emphasis. For example, begin with the second most important consideration, then turn to the lesser considerations, and end with the most important one.

Use repetition, echo words, and underlining judiciously. (Echo words are words that do not repeat what was said but are so close in meaning that they recall it; *courage*, for example, might be used as an echo word for *bravery*.) The key word here is *judiciously*. To use any of these devices carelessly, particularly repetition, will distract and even offend the critical reader.

HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR IDEAS (DEV)

Developing your ideas means adding more words, lengthening your treatment of the case or issue. However, unlike padding, developing is not adding words simply for the sake of adding them. It is *purposeful* enlargement of your treatment that enhances its persuasiveness by removing any confusion or misunderstanding your readers might experience, fulfilling their desire to know more about your judgment and the reasoning that underlies it, and answering any doubts or objections they might have. There are two steps to follow in the development of your ideas:

Look at your rough-idea sheet and determine which of your ideas might be misunderstood or disputed by your readers. To perform this step effectively, you must get beyond your own perspective. (From that perspective, every one of your ideas will seem unquestionable simply because it is your idea.) You must adopt a critical perspective and see your ideas as your readers, who are unfamiliar with them and uncommitted to them, will see them. Decide which techniques of development will best overcome confusion or answer objections. The following techniques are especially helpful in a variety of situations:

Detailed description. This consists of a more specific presentation of the considerations in the case. For example, instead of merely stating that a certain consequence is likely to result, you would show why it is likely and exactly how it would happen, step-by-step.

Brief or extended illustration. This consists of offering examples, scenarios, or cases in point to support your assertions. Instead of saying that the effects of a certain action would be harmful to the people involved, you would give examples of the harm that would (or might) be done. Illustrations may be actual examples that occurred in similar situations or hypothetical examples (plausible speculations).

Definition. This technique is helpful whenever you are using a term in a special sense or in a way that might be misunderstood.

Comparison. This consists of evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of two or more different lines of reasoning about a case.

Explanation. This technique is useful for answering those questions that you anticipate your readers will ask. Common questions are why you consider a particular illustration typical, why you choose one interpretation over other possible ones, and why you believe that one consideration in a case (an obligation, for example) outweighs all others.

Tracing and summarizing. These techniques are more commonly used in advanced ethical analyses, but you may find them appropriate to some of your treatments. *Tracing* consists of briefly presenting the historical development of an idea or a perspective. *Summarizing* consists of presenting a capsule version of some material that is too long to use in its original form. One of the most common uses of it in ethical analysis is to present the reasoning of ethicists to reinforce your analysis of a particular case.

HOW TO WRITE READABLE PROSE (STYLE)

Readable prose is prose that people find interesting, even pleasurable, to read. To some extent, interest lies in the taste of the individual reader. What one person finds interesting will put another to sleep. Nevertheless, there are at least three qualities that tend to generate or at least increase enthusiasm among readers, qualities associated with energy and vitality rather than with

dullness and monotony. Those qualities are *exactness, economy, and liveliness*. Here are some guidelines to help you achieve them in your writing.

TO ACHIEVE EXACTNESS

Avoid empty or overworked expressions. It is easy to acquire the habit of expressing your thoughts in clichés or in currently fashionable phrasing. To break that habit, take note of your language. If you find it filled with the kind of phrasing you hear many times each day, make an effort to substitute less predictable phrasing.

Prefer concrete, specific terms to abstract, general terms. It is not always possible in ethical analysis to avoid abstraction or generality, but it is important to do so whenever you can. Keep in mind that the purpose of writing in ethics, like the purpose of any writing, is to make your thoughts clear to your readers, not to befuddle them.

TO ACHIEVE ECONOMY

Choose words to communicate your thoughts, not to impress your readers. Many people have the notion that fancy language and jargon will make them seem knowledgeable. The truth is quite the opposite; such language only makes them seem foolish. The right approach was best summed up by the distinguished essayist and novelist George Orwell when he said, "Never use a long word where a short word will do."

Wherever possible without sacrificing meaning, reduce a sentence to a clause, a clause to a phrase, a phrase to a word. (This does not prevent you from developing your ideas. Development is adding content, not multiplying words unnecessarily.)

TO ACHIEVE LIVELINESS

Control the rhythm and pace of your phrasing. Rhythm refers to the melodiousness of your writing, pace to the relative speed at which it moves. By reading your writing *aloud*, you can get a good idea of whether it is lively to read, whether it not only looks good but sounds good as well. If your writing does not sound good when read aloud, try changing the phrasing of rough passages (to improve the rhythm) and moderating the sentence and paragraph length (to improve the pace).

Use vivid language in place of bland, colorless language. This guideline must be used with care, of course. Vividness can add a dramatic quality to your writing that will increase its liveliness, but if you use it carelessly, it will undermine exactness. To use it effectively, be sure the vivid expression does not convey an idea you cannot defend.

Vary your sentence style and your paragraph length. The essential ingredient in boredom is *sameness*. By reducing the degree of sameness in your writing, you overcome monotony and increase liveliness. Examine your sentences and paragraphs whenever you write. If the sentence length is unvaried, change it; make some sentences longer, some shorter. If all your sentences begin in much the same way, change the order of phrases or clauses or move an adverb around. Similarly, if your paragraphs are all the same length, and especially if they are all long, your paper will appear monotonous even before it is read. With a little skillful adjusting, you can usually achieve some variety in paragraph length without awkwardly separating related ideas. (A good average length for your paragraphs is ten lines, with variations from perhaps five to fifteen lines.)

One final note: Throughout this section, we have been discussing rhetorical principles but have not mentioned grammar and usage. The reason for this is not that those concerns are unimportant but that they cannot be treated adequately in a brief appendix. Critical readers may overlook an occasional lapse in grammar and usage. However, numerous errors will create a formidable distraction and suggest to readers that you are a careless person. Such a suggestion will hardly help your efforts to persuade readers of the soundness of your views. To make the best impression on your readers, see that you correct any errors in grammar and spelling before you complete your final draft. Word-processing tools that check for such errors, though helpful, are sometimes mistaken. A good dictionary and a composition handbook are indispensable tools for this task.

[APPENDIX 2]

RESEARCHING MORAL ISSUES

DOING RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET

The Internet has become the research tool of choice. It provides access to a variety of sites. Among the main categories designated in suffixes attached to the Web addresses are these: commercial sites, by "com"; organizational sites, by "org"; government sites, by "gov"; and educational sites, by "edu." If you have a topic in mind but don't know which site to consult, you can use a search engine. One of the best is Google—the address is <http://www.google.com>. Once connected to the Internet, just type in that address and Google's main page will appear. The subject box is provided for you to enter the topic you wish to research. (Note: For information on Google's various features, just click on one of the departments presented in blue.) Other well-regarded Web sites that you might consider are Bing.com and DuckduckGo.com. Some researchers prefer them to Google.

Suppose you wanted to research the ethical aspects of human cloning. You would access your search engine and type "ethics human cloning" in the subject box. The engine would respond with a page that lists the results. Then you could scan the results and click on the titles that seem most relevant to your search. When you have finished checking the results on that page, you would click on the number 2 at the bottom to proceed to the next page.

Use a search engine when you don't know which Web site is likely to provide the information you are seeking or when you wish to expand your search. On the other hand, if you do know the most likely Web site, start your search there. Here are some Web sites that may be helpful in researching issues in ethics.

For the Subject of Ethics

<http://www.ethicsweb.ca/resources/>

Sponsored by the Centre for Applied Ethics, this site provides an overview of Internet resources for applied ethics in numerous fields.

For Finding Hoaxes

<https://www.thoughtco.com/hoax-list-current-netlore-and-urban-legends-3299539>

<http://www.truthorfiction.com>

<http://www.scambusters.org/legends.html>

For Informed Opinion on Ethical and General Issues*Conservative*

<http://www.townhall.com>

<https://www.nationalreview.com>

<https://www.weeklystandard.com>

Liberal

<http://www.thenation.com>

<https://front.moveon.org>

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com>

Nonpartisan

<https://www.factcheck.org>

For News

<http://www.foxnews.com/> (the Fox News Channel site)

<http://www.ap.org/> (the Associated Press site)

<http://www.cnn.com/> (the CNN site)

For Reference Materials (including encyclopedias; thesauruses; dictionaries; collections of quotations; guides to English usage, religion, and literary history)

<http://www.bartleby.com/reference/>

<http://www.infoplease.com> (the Information Please site)

For Quotations

<http://www.thinkexist.com>

EVALUATING YOUR INFORMATION SOURCES

The task of evaluating information sources, always important, has become increasingly so as use of the Internet has grown. No information source should be presumed error-free. Print and broadcast journalists can make honest mistakes in reporting. Commentators can let their biases color their thought and expression. Individuals with personal agendas can deliberately mislead their audiences. It is up to the reader/listener to remain alert and, where possible,

to test the source's reliability, especially that of Internet sources because there are no editors checking what is "published" there. Anyone can set up a Web site and say anything.

False information typically takes the form of an excited e-mail from a seemingly credible source, often a trusted but incautious friend. One such message said that Bill Gates was giving away money and explained how to get some. Another warned against eating bananas from Costa Rica because they contain a flesh-eating virus. Yet another claimed that asparagus cures cancer. Then there was the one that instructed recipients to check their computers for a file with a teddy bear icon, and if they found such a file to delete it at once before it destroyed their computer. All these were hoaxes. The last one was especially harmful because it caused people to delete an essential file.

To evaluate the reliability of your information sources, answer the following questions. The first question applies to search engines. The others apply to print or broadcast sources or Internet sources or both.

Does the search engine distort the results of searches for information? In 2016, it was alleged that Google was engaging in this practice during the election campaign, thus influencing the public's understanding of candidates and issues. For an explanation of the assertion and Google's response, see <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/06/10/google-says-search-isnt-biased-toward-hillary-clinton/85725014/>. In a similar case, Facebook was the subject of a Senate inquiry concerning allegations that its "Trending" section had an anti-conservative bias. For information on this, see http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/05/yes_facebook_is_biased_now_it_should_admit_it.html.

What is the purpose of the publication or Web site? Is it to entertain, inform, persuade, sell products or services? In the case of a publication, the purpose will often be stated in the front matter (for example, in the preface of a book). In the case of an Internet source, it will be expressed in a "mission statement" on the home page. Identifying a source's purpose will help you decide its potential for bias.

What is the source's point of view? Determine where the source stands on the subject under discussion; in other words, is he or she endorsing or opposing a particular viewpoint or policy? Although there is nothing necessarily wrong with either perspective, knowing where the source stands on the subject will make you more aware of where the person might fall short of fairness and objectivity.

Does the source engage in personal attacks? When a problem or controversial issue is being discussed, the focus should be on supporting or challenging particular solutions or points of view, not on the personal characteristics of the person proposing them. The only exception to this rule is if someone's personal failings are directly relevant to the matter under discussion—in such cases, it is appropriate to mention them. However, it is never appropriate to engage in personal attacks gratuitously, or as a substitute for addressing the

problem or issue. Sources that behave this way should be considered unreliable.

Does the source make extravagant assertions? Consider the assertion that astronauts never really landed on the moon but, instead, the entire story was manufactured by NASA. Also, the assertion that the people responsible for the loss of several thousand lives on 9/11 were not foreign terrorists, as reported, but that George W. Bush and members of his administration planned and executed the horrible events. Both examples qualify as extravagant—that is, beyond credibility—because they are inconsistent with voluminous photographic evidence and analytical data. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that these or other conspiracy theories are valid, that possibility is so remote that anyone who traffics in such theories should be considered unreliable.

Does the source present evidence for his/her assertions? Asserting is far easier than demonstrating or documenting: that is why many people settle for asserting. Entire articles and even books have been constructed almost entirely of assertions, one piled on another. When assembled by an articulate, engaging person, these works can give the impression that a formidable case has been made when, in fact, there is no case at all—only unsupported claims. That is why the question of what evidence is offered for assertions is among the most important to ask of any source. The kinds of evidence that responsible writers offer include personal experience, factual reports in reputable publications, eyewitness testimony, expert opinion, experimental data, statistics, and research studies. Be sure to check the amount and kind of evidence that the source offers for each important assertion.

What criticisms have been made, or could be made, of the source's assertions and evidence? How worthy are those criticisms? Unless you happen to be well versed in the subject under discussion, you will have to consult other sources to answer these questions. In some cases, you will find criticisms that have sufficient merit to affect your judgment. Consider an assertion that was made before and during the Obama administrations by so called Birthers who alleged that Barack Obama was born in a foreign country and was therefore not qualified to be president of the United States. One particularly interesting fact offered by critics of this assertion and supported by photographic evidence was that an announcement of Obama's birth appeared in a Hawaiian newspaper at that time. In order for Obama's parents to have faked the announcement, they would have had to foresee the possibility of his candidacy *forty-seven years later!* Because that is impossible to imagine, the birth announcement represented a strong argument against the "Birther" assertion.

As you review your answers to these questions and decide on the reliability of your information sources, keep in mind that even honest, conscientious people can make mistakes. Distinguish carefully between sources that happen to be mistaken on an issue and those whose mistakes are so numerous and/or egregious that they suggest dishonesty or the habit of carelessness.

For guidelines in evaluating Web information, see Marsha Ann Tate's checklist at http://www.mtateresearch.com/checklist_for_an_advocacy_web_page. Also see a related resource by Tate and Jan Alexander at <http://www.mtateresearch.com/evaluationrevised2009.pdf>.