

NOTES: 1/31/12

Tonight: Seeing vs. Observing / Abstract vs. Concrete
Read pp. **5-10**; Writing Process: Planning
Read **49-53** “Writing for Sciences, Humanities, etc.”
Read pp. **11-14 (only up to —Drafting)** Thesis Statements;
Read pp. **25-27**, “Unity & Coherence” to “Development”
Discuss **Assign. #1 (due 2/7) – Story from Image**
Paragraph Anatomy; Voice & Tone; Strong Verbs
Describe an image (provided in class)

First, a quote to set the mood:

"I WRITE TO DISCOVER WHAT I THINK. AFTER ALL, THE BARS AREN'T OPEN THAT EARLY."

~Daniel Boorstin, Former Chief Librarian at the Library of Congress

Q: AND WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO ENGLISH CLASS?

A: What Boorstin is explaining here is that a person often doesn't truly have an organized understanding of how he or she feels about an idea, or has a solid understanding of how one issue relates to another until they are forced to put it into words.

(The part about the bars? Yeah, this is not your typical librarian humor. Maybe he's saying that writing keeps him out of bars...at least in the morning.)

REVIEW FROM LAST TIME

THREE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CLASS:

- (1) Relearn how to observe and express these observations
- (2) Learn to think about statements (and language) more critically and independently.
- (3) Learn to persuade your reader: $P^3 = P \times P \times P$
 - Persuade* your reader to *start* reading
 - Persuade* your reader to *keep* reading
 - Persuade* your reader to *see* and *understand* your point of view



**The Importance of Observation to Writing, to Anything:
Now, Step 1: Looking vs. Observing (a literary example)
From *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle
(see the full-text at www.booksshouldbefree.com)**

←By the way, here's a gasogene = a portable apparatus for carbonating water (The picture comes from a recreation of 221b Baker Street in L.A. <http://221bbakerstreetla.com/index.asp>)

Now, onto the Arthur Conan Doyle text:

Holmes's manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a **gasogene** in the corner. Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"

"My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out."

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel

cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession."

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. "When I hear you give your reasons," I remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room."

"Frequently."

"How often?"

"Well, some hundreds of times."

"Then how many are there?"

"How many? I don't know."

"Quite so! **You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps because I have both seen and observed.**

(continued on the next page)



ABSTRACT



CONCRETE –

*report, objectively, what you see, hear, smell, touch, taste and
provide verifiable evidence of experience or appearance*



Um, no. You're cut off from the wine, Richard.

Why have I included this? To demonstrate that useful, objective description will *always* be rooted in actual experience. Moreover, it must be understandable to the reader. Above, the man is trying to impress another wine taster with grandiose, totally ridiculous imagery.

Verdict: epic fail.

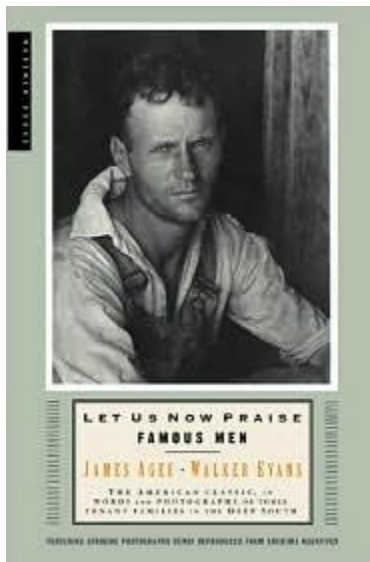
Putting an experience into words – making things CONCRETE
Case study: JAMES AGEE

CONSIDERING THE AUDIENCE:

Between 1932 and 1936, writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans, on assignment for *Fortune* magazine, drove into rural Alabama and entered the reality of three white tenant farm families. Agee and Evans examined the life of the tenant farmer as closely as President Roosevelt's special committee, which eventually helped to bring about the Farm Security Administration.

Agee and Evans knew that *traditional* methods of





photography and journalism would not work to accurately convey the hard and simple lives of the tenant farmers. So, they experimented, attempting to create an approach to art that conveyed a *new height of consciousness*, yet allowed their subjects to retain their dignity. The result of Agee and Evans' work was the 1941 book entitled [*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*](#).

WHO WAS THEIR INITIAL AUDIENCE?

- **Fortune Magazine readers:** people who had never experienced this crushing kind of poverty.

WHAT WAS THEIR PURPOSE?

- They are re-creating this experience, using the senses, so people could understand its realities.

WHAT AGEE COULD HAVE WRITTEN (ABSTRACT):

The bedroom was as shabby as the rest of the cabin and very uncomfortable. I lay down on the bed but found it difficult to sleep. It was miserable and the mattress made noises. After a while I discovered bugs. Just lying there was more than I could stand, so I tried to kill as many as I could find.

WHAT AGEE ACTUALLY WROTE (CONCRETE):

[I saw] how the shutters filled their squares of window and were held shut with strings and nails: crevices in the walls, stuffed with hemp, rags, newsprint and raw cotton: large damp spots and rivulets on the floor, and on the walls, streams and crooked wetness; and a shivering, how chilly and wet the air is in this room... I sat on the edge of the bed, turned out the lamp, and lay back along the outside of the covers. After a couple of minutes I got up, stripped, and slid in between the sheets. The bedding was saturated and full of chill as the air was, its lightness upon me nervous like a belt too loosely buckled. The sheets were at the same time coarse and almost slimily or stickily soft: much the same material flour sacks are made of. There was a ridgy seam down the middle. I could feel the thinness and lumpiness of the mattress and the weakness of the springs. The mattress was

rustling noisy if I turned or contracted my body. The pillow was hard, thin, and noisy, and smelled as of acid and new blood; the pillowcase seemed to crawl at my cheek. I touched it with my lips: it felt a little as if it would thaw like spun candy. There was an odor something like that of old moist stacks of newspaper...I began to feel sharp little piercings and crawlings all along the surface of my body. I was not surprised; I had heard that pine is full of them anyhow...it was bugs all right. I felt places growing on me and scratched at them, and they became unmistakable bedbug bites...to lie there naked feeling whole regiments of them tooling at me, knowing I must be imagining two out of three, became more unpleasant than I could stand. I struck a match and a half-dozen broke along my pillow; I caught two, killed them, and smelled their queer rankness. They were full of my blood. I struck another match and spread back the cover; they rambled off by the dozens. I got out of bed, lighted the lamp...I killed maybe a dozen in all; I couldn't find the rest; but I did find fleas, and, along the seams of the pillow and mattress, small gray translucent brittle insects, which I suppose were lice...



Above: [Walker Evans](#). Part of the bedroom of Floyd Burroughs' cabin. Hale County, Alabama.

AVOID ABSTRACTIONS in your writing

Instead, use specifics, provide evidence...give your reader information and important details. If a book or a movie was “good”, tell the reader why—*what characteristics, inclusions, or structure made it that way?*

A. She fed us well.

- a. She fed us steak and eggs with Baked Alaska for dessert.

B. The party was awful.

- b. There were three people at the party, and they played disco music all night.

C. She dresses funny.

- c. She wears striped tights and feather boas.

D. I just love nature and the woods and all that.

- d. I go camping every weekend during the summer and hiking every chance I got.

E. Roberto looked terrible after the fight.

- e. Roberto had two black eyes and a swollen lip after the fight.

Your first assignment: DUE 2/7 (next class)

Choose an image (preferably a detailed photographic image or a painting...a magazine image is fine. For example, [these images by 70s fashion photographer Chris von Wagenheim offer some interesting details](#)). Observe what’s happening in the image. What’s there? Focus on the details using at least two of the senses and report what you see: sight, touch (meaning, indicate the textures of items included)? If there are people in the image, what do you know about them based on what you are able to see? Use these visual clues to tell a story. Please include the image with your essay, even if it’s a photo copy or you can email the image (or link to the image to savannahguz@yahoo.com). I’ll refer to the image as I’m reading.

Purpose: get you in the habit of observing and drawing logical conclusions based on available evidence.

Audience: General (specialized vocabulary may need to be explained)

Format: 1-1/2 to 2 pages; typed (single or double spaced—your choice); no larger than 14 pt. font please. I don't need large print just yet. Soon, but not yet.

* * * *

Quick Review: Subjective vs. Objective Statements

Which sentences are infused with opinion? Which appear unbiased, factual, and can be verified by someone else?

- 1) That's a stunning sunset.
- 2) The house at the end of the road has three broken window panes and a fallen gutter.
- 3) That house looks awful.
- 4) This coffee smells metallic.
- 5) Jan's fried chicken tastes terrible.

More Review:

What steps does the **writing process** involve?

What 3 kinds of **voice** are there?

What is **tone**?

What is **tone** defined by?

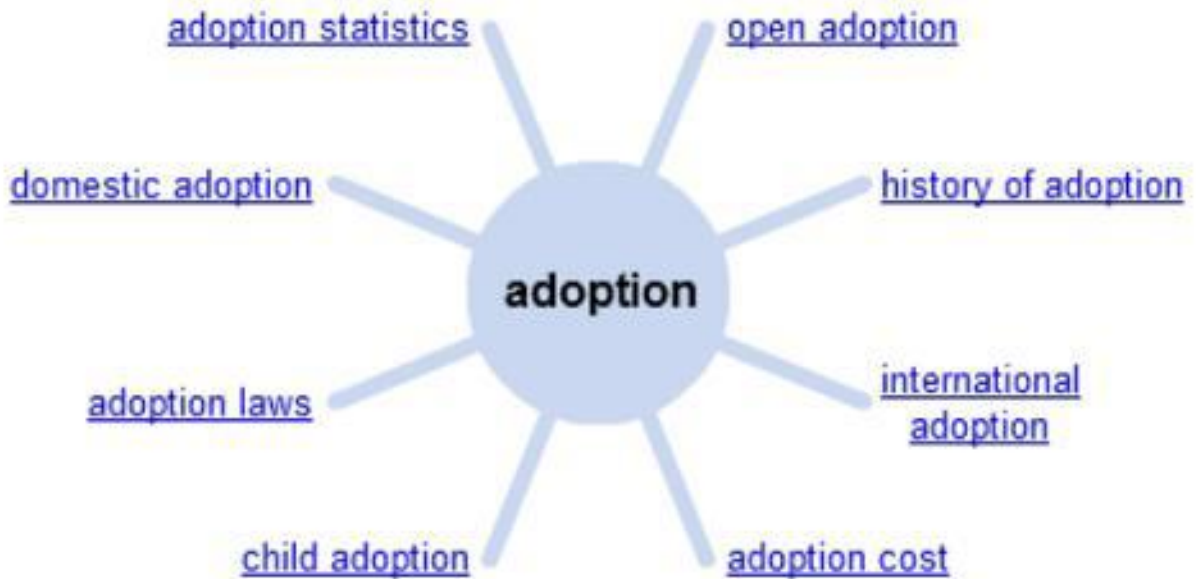
To the Book: Brainstorming & Clustering

Brainstorming p. 6

- creative process of generating ideas without regard to their eventual usefulness.

Clustering (a.k.a mapping) p. 9

- examining the relationships of the terms to each other and to the broad topic, students create new meaning.
- sometimes, one branch of the cluster exercise will give you all the material you need; other times, it will allow you to understand parts about the subject you don't know enough about.



REVIEW: ANATOMY OF PARAGRAPH

a) **Topic Sentence** – tells reader what the paragraph will be about. States the main idea of the paragraph.

b) **Supporting Points** - usually 2-4 sentences that explain/clarify the topic sentence

- Examples
- Data, supporting evidence
- Language is vivid, descriptive that allows the reader to see or understand

c) **Concluding Sentence** – Used to **re-emphasize the main point** or provide **transition** to the next paragraph

* * * *

Now, quick look at pp. **25-27**, “Unity & Coherence” to “Development”

* * * *

CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE & PURPOSE—what does the audience expect?

pp. 50-51 Writing a Lab Report → Format

- What’s an “Abstract”?
- We’ll talk about passive verbs on Thursday.

pp. 52 Organize Empirical Research Paper
What’s “Method”?

pp. 53 Writing for the Humanities

- Active verbs – contributes to brevity with precision, too

Quick Sidebar: the power of Active Verbs (more on this later):

- **Weak Verb:** I got in late last night. (tells you nothing sensory; offers one detail—lateness, but nothing else about the circumstances)
- **Strong Verb:** I crept in late last night. (this suggests someone else’s *reaction* is involved)
- **Another Strong Verb:** I stomped in late last night. (this suggests your *mood* or *intention* when you got there.)
- **A select list of strong verbs is here:**
 - <http://www.ems.psu.edu/~schall/Verbs.html>

* * * *

The ‘virtual’ Library at WVNCC:

Let’s talk about research you can do from the comfort of a computer lab chair
<http://www.wvncc.edu/current-students/librarylearning-resource-center/1159>

* * * *

To pp. 11-14 (only up to —**Drafting**) Thesis Statements (we’ll start talking about this, in depth, later....but let’s take a peek at thesis statements to prepare before we move on.

* * * *

LAST THING TONIGHT:

Describe what’s happening in this photograph by Walker Evans—Use your powers of observation:

- 1) What time of day is it? How do you know?
- 2) What time period is this, do you think? Is there enough evidence to tell?

- 3) Is there anyone outside the image frame?
- 4) Who are the figures and what are they doing?
- 5) What are they dressed in?
- 6) As the observer, where are you located?
- 7) What's happening?
- 8) Describe what you see—use strong verbs, precise nouns and adjectives....*OBSERVE, REPORT*....

