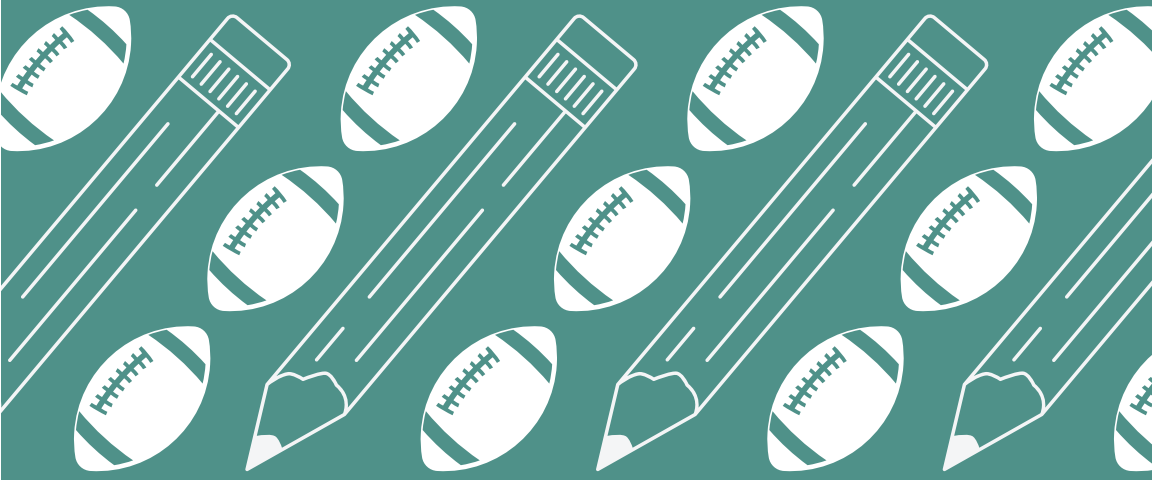
THE Syntax OF Sports

CLASS 4: PARALLEL STRUCTURE



Patrick Barry

Also by Patrick Barry

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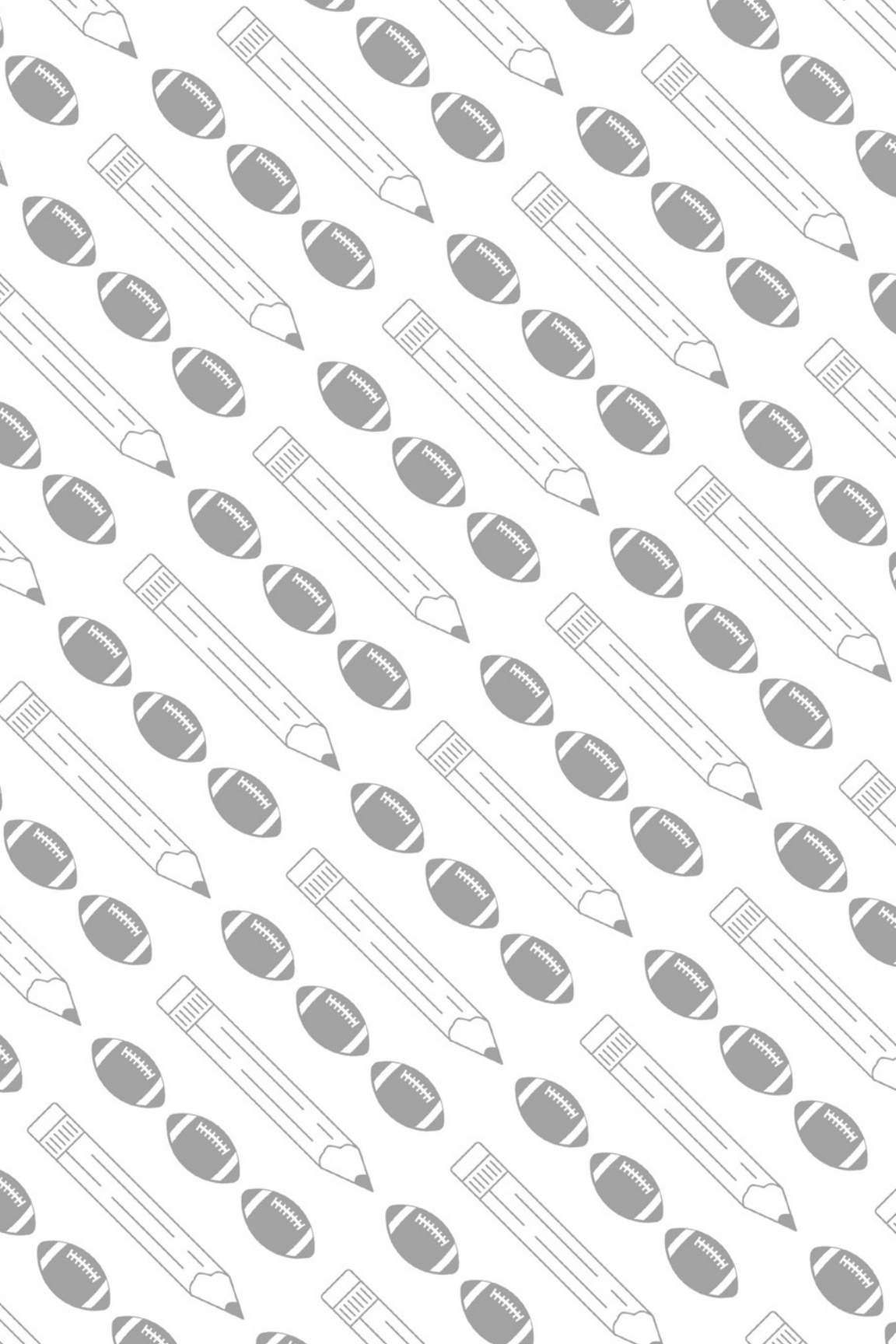

THE

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Class 4: Parallel Structure

Patrick Barry

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For my sister Christine (again).
She knew when to fight—and when to not.
(1977–2020)

The deep question is: Why does nature embody so much symmetry?

—Alan Lightman,
The Accidental Universe (2014)

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Class Roster

Teacher
Professor Patrick Barry

Student	*Major*
Ms. Amos	Psychology
Ms. Bart	Business
Mr. Boh	Engineering
Ms. Bristol	Kinesiology
Ms. Burke	Political Science
Mr. Carlos	Biochemistry
Ms. Carroll	Math
Ms. Cawlow	Art History
Mr. Dewey	Education
Mr. Farnoff	American Studies
Ms. Franzoni	History
Ms. Henrietta	Communications
Ms. Ida	Communications
Mr. Leigh	Film
Ms. Maat	Biology
Mr. Marshall	Political Science
Ms. Nina	Music
Ms. Toth	English / Creative Writing
Ms. Warsaw	Chemistry / Physics
Mr. Wild	English
Ms. Yona	Comparative Literature

1

Previously On: Iron Curtain

Prof. Barry: Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Marshall: Yes.

Prof. Barry: Do you remember what we were talking about at the end of last class?

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. The Iron Curtain.

Prof. Barry: And who came up with that phrase?

Mr. Marshall: Winston Churchill.

Prof. Barry: When?

Mr. Marshall: 1946.

Prof. Barry: Where?

Mr. Marshall: Westminster College?

Prof. Barry: Is that near Westminster Abbey?

Mr. Marshall: I don't think you told us.

Prof. Barry: You're right. I didn't. But any chance you know if it is?

Mr. Marshall: It sounds like it might be. Both have "Westminster" in the title. But I don't actually know.

Prof. Barry: How about the rest of the class? Does anybody know where Westminster College is?

Mr. Dewey (*jumping in*): Isn't it in Missouri?

Prof. Barry: Yup. But it is also in Utah.

Mr. Dewey: Really?

Prof. Barry: And Pennsylvania.

Mr. Dewey: Like a satellite campus?

Prof. Barry: No. A full campus. As far as I know, there are at least three Westminster Colleges in the United States.

Mr. Dewey: So which Westminster did Churchill give his Iron Curtain speech at?

Prof. Barry: The one in Missouri. He was invited by President Harry Truman. Remember that we said last class that Truman grew up in Missouri, met his wife there, and then moved back after leaving the White House?

Mr. Dewey: Yeah. You said he moved back to Independence, Missouri, right?

Prof. Barry: Right.

Ms. Burke (*jumping in*): Is that near Westminster College?

Prof. Barry: Somewhat. It's about 140 miles away. The city Independence is closer to Kansas, at the western edge of Missouri. Westminster is more toward the center, in a place called Fulton.

Ms. Burke: Fulton?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Kind of crazy to think that one of the defining moments in the Cold War occurred at a small college in Fulton, Missouri—but it's true. Churchill met Truman in Washington, DC, and the two of them took the train together all the way out to the middle of the American heartland. They passed the time by playing a lot of poker.

Ms. Burke: Who won?

Prof. Barry: Truman. Apparently, our 33rd president was quite the card shark, a fact that gives new meaning to a phrase he helped popularize: "The Buck Stops Here."

2

Previously On: The Rule of Three

Prof. Barry: In a little while, we are going to use Churchill's Iron Curtain speech to begin learning about parallel structure. But first I want to review the Rule of Three, which is the concept we introduced last class. Who can help me out? How about you, Mr. Carlos? Our first example involves your desired profession.

Mr. Carlos: Medicine?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. In 1984, an epidemiologist from the University of Chicago named Dr. John Bailar appeared on the talk show *Good Morning America*. An influential figure in the world of cancer research, Bailar had a very straightforward message for the millions of people watching at home. Read it for us, please.

Mr. Carlos: "Stop smoking."

Prof. Barry: You think he said those words just once?

Mr. Carlos: No.

Prof. Barry: You think he said them just twice?

Mr. Carlos: No. He probably said them three times.

Prof. Barry: Why?

Mr. Carlos: The Rule of Three.

Prof. Barry: Good. Here is what Bailar actually said on national television.

Mr. Carlos: "Stop smoking. Stop smoking. Stop smoking."

Prof. Barry: Notice that his statement is very similar, at least structurally, to the statement of another doctor, Thomas Fogarty, a prominent heart surgeon and medical device inventor whose approach to health care is the following.

Mr. Carlos: "Patient first. Patient first. Patient first."

Prof. Barry: It is also very similar to this classic line from the children's story *The Little Engine That Could*.

Mr. Carlos: "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can."

Prof. Barry: Influential doctors and heartwarming tales for kids—each rely on the Rule of Three to get their messages across, as do countless others.

Pulitzer Prize winner Sherman Alexie, for example, ends a cool poem about a football game played on an Indian reservation with the words "wild horses, wild horses, wild horses." An ad for Chipotle I remember seeing said, "We obsess over every ingredient. We obsess over every ingredient. We obsess over every ingredient." And in the Iron Curtain speech we've been talking about, Churchill uses two examples in a row of the Rule of Three to help highlight the important global role Britain and the United States needed to play in the years following World War II. I have underlined the Rule of Three parts.

Mr. Carlos: "Opportunity is here and now, clear and shining, for both our countries. To reject it or ignore it or fritter it away will

bring upon us all the long reproaches of the after-time. It is necessary that the constancy of mind, persistency of purpose, and the grand simplicity of decision shall rule and guide the conduct of the English-speaking peoples in peace as they did in war."

Prof. Barry: The Sherman Alexie lines and the Chipotle ad are examples of the straightforward version of the Rule of Three. But what do you notice about the two sentences from Churchill's speech?

Mr. Carlos: They're both the more subtle version.

Prof. Barry: By which we mean?

Mr. Carlos: Their structure is "short, short, kind of long."

Prof. Barry: Good. "To reject it (short) or ignore it (short) or fritter it away (kind of long)."

There is also another way we can describe that structure, right? We talked about it last class too.

Mr. Carlos: Yeah. We can describe it as "same, same, kind of different."

Prof. Barry: Right. "To reject it (same) or ignore it (same) or fritter it away (kind of different)."

A better example, though, of the "same, same, kind of different" structure is the tag line for the movie *Fight Club*, which was a big hit back in 1999, thanks in large part to the expert performances of Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham Carter. Read it for us, please.

Mr. Carlos: "Mayhem. Mischief. Soap."

Prof. Barry: Or how about the tag line from the movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, which came out over three decades before *Fight Club*?

Mr. Carlos: "They're young. They're in love. And they kill people."

Prof. Barry: That also uses "same, same, kind of different," right?

Mr. Carlos: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: What makes the third item "kind of different"?

Mr. Carlos: The word "and"?

Prof. Barry: Anything else?

Mr. Carlos: It doesn't have a contraction.

Prof. Barry: You mean it doesn't use "they're"?

Mr. Carlos: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Good. Both of those deviations make the item "kind of different."

Let's do one more. It comes from what was, for a while, the highest-grossing film of all time: Steven Spielberg's *E.T.*

Mr. Carlos: "He is afraid. He is alone. He is three million light years from home."

Prof. Barry: See? Even extraterrestrials like the Rule of Three.

3

Semicolons and a Hybrid Approach

Prof. Barry: A nice feature of the Rule of Three is its versatility. You can use it within a single sentence, like in the examples from Churchill's Iron Curtain speech. But you can also use it to connect multiple sentences.

We saw a little bit of that with the *Bonnie and Clyde* tag line, as well as with the *E.T.* one. But perhaps a better example is the following string of sentences from the opening of *Sport in America*, an HBO documentary released in 2013.

Would you mind reading the sentences for us, Mr. Leigh? Perhaps your time as a film major has included some documentaries.

Mr. Leigh: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. Here's the first sentence.

Mr. Leigh: "More people watch the Super Bowl than vote."

Prof. Barry: Here's the second.

Mr. Leigh: "More people know great athletes than presidents."

Prof. Barry: And here's the third.

Mr. Leigh: "We are a nation obsessed with our games and their players."

Prof. Barry: See how the Rule of Three connects each of those sentences, particularly with the switch away from the structure that begins with the phrase "More people . . ."

Mr. Leigh: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: That option really opens up some compositional possibilities, as does knowing that you can also employ a kind of hybrid approach by using semicolons. To show you what I mean, let's look at a few sentences by Don DeLillo, who became one of the titans of American fiction beginning in the 1980s.

We'll start with the standard approach. No semicolons. No complications. Just a straightforward Rule of Three structure within a single sentence. It appears in one of DeLillo's most acclaimed novels, *Underworld*. The sentence describes a boy who is racing to see the 1951 baseball game at the Polo Grounds in which Bobby Thompson ended up hitting the pennant-winning home run now known as "the shot heard 'round the world."

Concentrate on the parts I've underlined.

Mr. Leigh: "He picks up speed and seems to lose his gangliness, the slouchy funk of hormones and unbelonging and all the stammering things that seal his adolescence."

Prof. Barry: See that? See how the longest item—"all the stammering things that seal his adolescence"—is at the end, after two short items?

Mr. Leigh: Yup.

Prof. Barry: Good. Now let's move to the semicolon examples.

I describe these as a hybrid approach because semicolons typically connect clauses that could be sentences on their own. When

you use them, you are essentially packing multiple sentences into one, which means you get a mix of having the Rule of Three stretched over multiple sentences and also contained in just one sentence.

Take a look, for instance, at this excerpt from another DeLillo book, a novel about college football called *End Zone*.

Mr. Leigh: "Some of us were more simple than others; a few might be called outcasts or exiles; three or four, as on every football team, were crazy."

Prof. Barry: Notice how the Rule of Three works there? DeLillo could have written the following: "Some of us were more simple than others. A few might be called outcasts or exiles. Three or four, as on every football team, were crazy."

But he instead tucked each of those independent clauses, which are clauses that can stand alone as sentences, into the same sentence.

A second example, also from *End Zone*, demonstrates the same technique. I've underlined it in the excerpt.

Mr. Leigh: "I repeated the story of my journey to friends, but I was surprised by how unsurprised they were. Some acted as if they were disgusted; others were amused; no one thought it was anything extraordinary."

Prof. Barry: See the hybrid approach?

Mr. Leigh: Yeah. The underlined clauses could be three separate sentences.

Prof. Barry: But because of the semicolons?

Mr. Leigh: They are contained within a single sentence.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. DeLillo is really skillful at this sort of thing, which is one of the reasons I brought him up. There is another reason as well: he has a helpful way of articulating what skilled writers do.

We'll learn about that next.

4

“I Construct Sentences”

Prof. Barry: To reiterate, we are focusing on Don DeLillo for a couple reasons. First, he is a fantastic writer. Even if you aren’t interested in the subject matter of his novels, you might still enjoy flipping through a few pages of them—if only to see the marvelous way he puts sentences together.

Second, he has, as I mentioned, a useful way of communicating what it means to be a writer and the steps he himself takes when trying to turn intimidatingly blank pages into highly readable ones.

To give us a sense of that, Ms. Toth, would you mind reading from an interview DeLillo gave to the *Paris Review* in 1993 for its “The Art of Fiction” series? Given your interest in creative writing, you might really enjoy that series. The first interview appeared back in 1953 with E. M. Forster, the author of the novels *A Passage to India* and *Howards End*. Since then, the series has featured everyone from Salman Rushdie to Simone de Beauvoir to Chinua Achebe.

Ms. Toth: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. The interviewer asks DeLillo the following set of questions.

Ms. Toth: "How do you begin? What are the raw materials of a story?"

Prof. Barry: Now read DeLillo's response.

Ms. Toth: "I think the scene comes first, an idea of a character in a place. It's visual, it's Technicolor—something I see in a vague way. Then sentence by sentence into the breach."

Prof. Barry: Keep going. DeLillo is about to get to the part I want us to focus on.

Ms. Toth: "No outlines—maybe a short list of items, chronological, that may represent the next twenty pages."

Prof. Barry: Here it comes.

Ms. Toth: "But the basic work is built around the sentence. This is what I mean when I call myself a writer. I construct sentences."

Prof. Barry: I love that. Writers are people who "construct sentences." They don't slip into them accidentally. They don't vomit them out indiscriminately. They construct them.

There is care involved. There is creativity. There is the need to negotiate various constraints and principles, especially when it comes to grammar, usage, and punctuation. And there is, of course, a whole lot of revision. As we said last class, writers pay attention not just to the "sense" of what we've written, Ms. Toth, but also to something else—do you remember? What did we emphasize along with "sense"?

In case it helps you remember, the authors we referenced during that discussion were Alexander Pope, Robert Frost, and Joan Didion.

Ms. Toth: It was "sound," right? We said those writers balanced "sound" and "sense."

Prof. Barry: Good. Sound and sense. DeLillo emphasizes those two things as well. Read the next part of the interview.

Ms. Toth: "There's a rhythm I hear that drives me through a sentence. And the words typed on the white page have a sculptural quality. They form odd correspondences."

Prof. Barry: Keep going.

Ms. Toth: "They match up not just through meaning but through sound and look."

Prof. Barry: He even says he factors in not only individual words but also individual syllables.

Ms. Toth: "The rhythm of a sentence will accommodate a certain number of syllables. One syllable too many, I look for another word. There's always another word that means nearly the same thing, and if it doesn't then I'll consider altering the meaning of a sentence to keep the rhythm, the syllable beat."

Prof. Barry: Finish the passage off with what is a nice summation of DeLillo's approach.

Ms. Toth: "I'm completely willing to let language press meaning upon me."

5
DeLillo and Twain

Prof. Barry: Let's be clear. We don't have to go as far as DeLillo does. We don't have to let "language press meaning" upon us. We don't have to let *sound* fully dictate *sense*.

That said, his views do nicely reinforce the idea that sound and sense go together, that we should consider them both when making decisions as writers. Take, for example, one of the sentences Mr. Leigh read for us from DeLillo's novel *End Zone*. Read it for us again please, Mr. Leigh.

Mr. Leigh: "Some of us were more simple than others; a few might be called outcasts or exiles; three or four, as on every football team, were crazy."

Prof. Barry: We might expect a sequence like that to have an "and" before the last statement, right? We might expect it to instead read like this.

Mr. Leigh: "Some of us were more simple than others; a few might be called outcasts or exiles; and three or four, as on every football team, were crazy."

Prof. Barry: But DeLillo decided not to include an "and" there, just like he decided not to include it in another sentence that Mr. Leigh already read.

Mr. Leigh: "Some acted as if they were disgusted; others were amused; no one thought it was anything extraordinary."

Prof. Barry: Without the "and," both of those examples are a little more rhythmic, a little more fluid, a little more elegant. We might also think of them as purposefully cumulative. Each subsequent item in the series seems to build on and expand the previous item. More ground and dimensions unfold with every clause.

Mr. Leigh: Right.

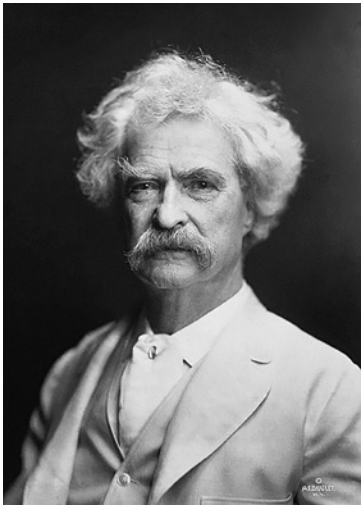
Prof. Barry: There's also a crispness that might be lost if DeLillo had decided to include the "and." Read the second example again please, first with an "and" inserted.

Mr. Leigh: "Some acted as if they were disgusted; others were amused; and no one thought it was anything extraordinary."

Prof. Barry: And now the way DeLillo actually wrote it.

Mr. Leigh: "Some acted as if they were disgusted; others were amused; no one thought it was anything extraordinary."

Prof. Barry: Hear the difference? The *sense* of the two sentences is the same. There's no real change in meaning. But the *sound* may cause us to favor one version over the other.



Mr. Leigh: Yeah. I like the DeLillo version better. It's snappier.

Prof. Barry: I think so too. Which is why I want to give you a term for what DeLillo is doing. To help with that, we are going to talk about another great American writer: Mark Twain.

6

Conjunction Junction

Prof. Barry: Before we get to Mark Twain, it might be helpful to clarify some vocabulary. When we keep talking about the word "and," what part of speech is that? Do you know, Mr. Wild? Do they teach you about parts of speech in the English department?

Mr. Wild: Yeah. Isn't it called a "conjunction"?

Prof. Barry: Good. And what do conjunctions do?

Mr. Wild: They connect things in a sentence.

Prof. Barry: Like?

Mr. Wild: Words. Phrases. Clauses. Pretty much everything.

Prof. Barry: Good. What about the word "and" in particular? That's a specific kind of conjunction. Do you know which kind?

Mr. Wild: A coordinating conjunction?

Prof. Barry: Yup. What are the other coordinating conjunctions? There are seven total, including "and."

I'll give you a hint: they spell out the word "F-A-N-B-O-Y-S."

Mr. Wild: F-A-N-B-O-Y-S?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, F-A-N-B-O-Y-S.

Mr. Wild: I don't think I know F-A-N-B-O-Y-S.

Prof. Barry: Well, let's try to figure it out. We'll start with *F*. What's a coordinating conjunction that starts with the letter *F*?

Mr. Wild: "For"?

Prof. Barry: Yup. How about *A*? It's one we've already said.

Mr. Wild: "And."

Prof. Barry: Good. Now, what about *N*?

Mr. Wild: "Nor"?

Prof. Barry: *B*?

Mr. Wild: "But"?

Prof. Barry: *O*?

Mr. Wild: "Or."

Prof. Barry: *Y*?

Mr. Wild: *Y*? I don't know if I know *Y*.

Prof. Barry: It's sort of like "But."

Mr. Wild: Oh, "Yet." *Y* is "Yet."

Prof. Barry: Right. *Y* is "Yet." Which leaves *S*. Do you know *S*?

Mr. Wild: "So"?

Prof. Barry: Exactly. "So." Those are the coordinating conjunctions: "For," "And," "Nor," "But," "Or," "Yet," "So."

Ms. Nina (*jumping in*): I always just think of the song when I hear the word "conjunction."

Prof. Barry: The song?

Ms. Nina: Yeah. "Conjunction Junction" from *Schoolhouse Rock*.

Prof. Barry: The kids' show?

Ms. Nina: Yeah. There's a song with trains. "Conjunction Junction. What's your function?"

Prof. Barry: Oh, right. I remember. The conjunctions connect the toy trains.

Ms. Nina: It's how I learned what a conjunction is.

Prof. Barry: Notice anything about the lyrics?

Ms. Nina: Of "Conjunction Junction"?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Sing them again, please.

Ms. Nina: "Conjunction Junction. What's your function?"

Prof. Barry: Focus on the question part.

Ms. Nina: "What's your function?"

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Think about our two foundational questions from the first day of class, the ones that we said you should ask of any piece of writing. The first is . . . ?

Ms. Nina: "Who is the audience?"

Prof. Barry: And the second?

Ms. Nina: "What is the function?"

Prof. Barry: Right. Just like the song lyrics: "Conjunction Junction. What's your function?" Which means you didn't need to take this course to learn about writing. You could have just watched old episodes of *Schoolhouse Rock*—and saved yourself a heck of a lot of tuition!

7

Reading List for Life

Prof. Barry: So now that you and Ms. Nina have helped us understand what a conjunction is, Mr. Wild, would you mind helping us see what role they play—or deliberately *don't* play—in some sentences from Mark Twain? I imagine that, as an English major, you've come across a few of his books.

Or is your program like the MFA program the writer Curtis Sittenfeld describes in her short story "Show Don't Tell"? She has the main character share that graduate school was a time when she "discussed fiction the most and read it the least." And I remember being told, when I myself was beginning graduate school, to be really careful. The concern was that I would soon be taught to hate the books I loved.

I hope that hasn't happened to you in undergrad?

Mr. Wild: No. Not yet.

Prof. Barry: You still love the books you love—or you're at least on speaking terms with them?

Mr. Wild: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Good. One way to think about college is that it gives you a "Reading List for Life." This seems particularly true for

students who take humanities classes, but I could see a similar approach working for students who focus more on the sciences. You know the syllabus you get for each class?

Mr. Wild: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Hold on to it.

Mr. Wild: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. And ask other good teachers on campus for copies of the syllabus they use, even if you don't get a chance to take their courses. A lot are probably posted online, although there can be something nice about reaching out to certain teachers individually. They might tell you not just what's on their syllabus but also what their own favorite books are. That's what one of my own teachers, Edward Rosenheim, did when I reached out to him after graduating from college.

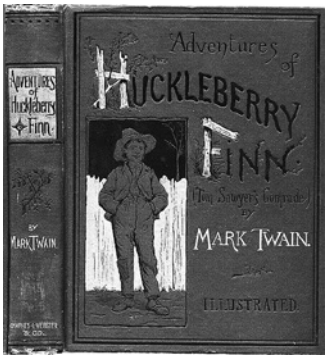
Mr. Wild: What did he say?

Prof. Barry: He said something really wonderful, actually. He said that, rather than telling me his current favorite book, he would tell me his favorite book when he was my age—which, at the time, was 22. This all happened in a great letter he wrote to me.

Mr. Wild: He wrote to you?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. I initially wrote to him, and then he wrote to me—by hand! I know email is an amazingly efficient way to communicate, but there should be spots in your life where you take the time to break out a pen and paper. Professor Rosenheim reminded me of that. And the book he chose, *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, was a neat departure from what I was reading at that time. He picked it because he thought it was good to cultivate a sense of adventure when you're 22 years old. He wanted to show me that reading doesn't need to feel like homework. With the right book, reading can actually be a lot of fun.

Which is one of the reasons I usually use Mark Twain to explain the writing move we've been discussing, the one where you intentionally remove the conjunction at the end of a list.



Yes, Twain's books are serious. Yes, they're canonical. But at the same time, they're filled with an endearing amount of humor and irreverence. Here, for example, is the disclaimer Twain puts at the beginning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Mr. Wild: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Prof. Barry: That's pure play. Immediately when you open the book, there it is: a punch in the nose from Twain's wit.

Notice, though, the form that punch takes. What does Twain leave out before giving the third item in the list?

Mr. Wild: A conjunction.

Prof. Barry: Good. Twain leaves out the conjunction "and"—just like Don DeLillo did in those examples that Mr. Carlos read for us. Here's how the disclaimer would have sounded if Twain had instead included the "and."

Mr. Wild: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; and persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Prof. Barry: That version isn't terrible, is it?

Mr. Wild: No. But it doesn't sound as good as what Twain actually wrote.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. I think Twain's version, without the conjunction, is sharper and more effective.

I think the same thing about another instance when Twain decided to leave out a conjunction. It comes in a letter he wrote in 1878 to William Dean Howells. Have you ever heard of Howells, Mr. Wild?

Mr. Wild: I don't think so, no.

Prof. Barry: He was the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* for a while and also a prolific novelist and literary critic. He and Twain became friends in 1869, a few years after Twain began publishing his first short stories.

Mr. Wild: Is this before or after *Huck Finn*?

Prof. Barry: About 15 years before. *Huck Finn* came out in 1884, so that book was a long way off when Twain wrote this letter to Howells.

Would you mind reading from the letter, Mr. Wild? Twain is talking about a recent trip to Germany.

Mr. Wild: "Munich did seem the horriblest place, the most desolate place, the most unendurable place!"

Prof. Barry: See the nice rhythm created by dropping the conjunction? See the way the sentence gains momentum as it moves along?

Mr. Wild: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Here's how Twain *could* have written the sentence, if he were a more ordinary, unimaginative writer.

Mr. Wild: "Munich did seem the horriblest place, the most desolate place, and the most unendurable place!"

Prof. Barry: It's better without the conjunction, right?

Mr. Wild: Much.

Prof. Barry: Later in the letter, while still complaining about Munich, Twain again drops the conjunction, though only after first using one.

Mr. Wild: "The rooms were so small, the conveniences so meagre, and the porcelain stoves so grim, ghastly, dismal, intolerable!"

Prof. Barry: See what I mean? He uses "and" right after "the conveniences so meagre," but then he drops it when he gets to "the porcelain stoves so grim, ghastly, dismal, intolerable!"

Mr. Wild: Right.

Prof. Barry: Twain's not the only one to treat conjunctions this way. We already saw Don DeLillo do it a bunch of times. And plenty of other writers do as well.

Let's take a look, for instance, at an example from Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake*, a novel we talked about on the first day of class. It's the book where a character remembers some advice his father gave him about traveling.

Read that advice for us again, Ms. Henrietta. I believe you were the one who read it for us before.

Ms. Henrietta: "Do yourself a favor. Before it's too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late."

Prof. Barry: And now read the example where Lahiri drops the conjunction. It's from later in that same novel, when the narrator is talking about the power of nicknames—or what the narrator calls "pet names."

Ms. Henrietta: "Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated."

Prof. Barry: Notice the place the conjunction could have gone?

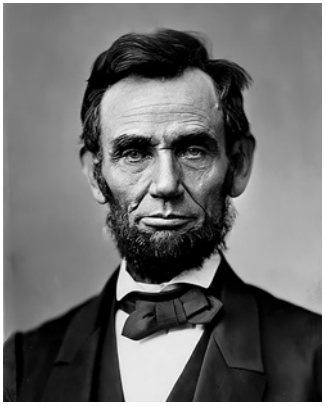
Ms. Henrietta: Yeah. Right after "so formal."

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Lahiri could have written, "a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, and so complicated."

Ms. Henrietta: That's not as good.

Prof. Barry: I agree. Some of the music of the sentence is lost if you add the conjunction.

Which may be why Abraham Lincoln, in the closing part of the Gettysburg Address, decides to go without a conjunction as well. Here's the section I am talking about.



Ms. Henrietta: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Prof. Barry: There's another example earlier in the Gettysburg Address. I encourage you all to check the whole thing out at some point. Perhaps you'll even recommend it to someone, years from now, when some 22-year-old asks you for your own "Reading List for Life."

8

Touch of Twain

Prof. Barry: The formal term for the move we've been looking at—the one used by Lincoln, Lahiri, and countless others—is *asyndeton*.

Ms. Henrietta: Asyndeton?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Asyndeton. Do you remember on the first day of class when Ms. Carroll helped us go through a bunch of examples of polysyndeton, the move that involves adding extra conjunctions to a sentence?

Ms. Henrietta: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Well, asyndeton is basically the opposite move. Instead of adding conjunctions, you remove them. The prefixes of the two words signal the difference. What does the prefix "poly-" in "polysyndeton" stand for?

Ms. Henrietta: Many.

Prof. Barry: Right. Like *polyglot*, which means?

Ms. Henrietta: Many languages.

Prof. Barry: Or *polygon*, which means?

Ms. Henrietta: Many sides.

Prof. Barry: Good. So then what do you think the prefix "a-" stands for? Think here of words like "asymmetry," "amorphous," and "amoral."

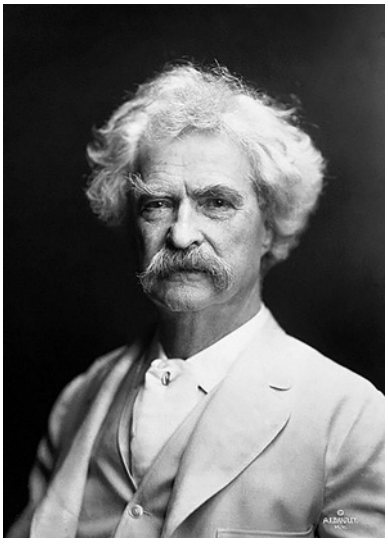
Ms. Henrietta: Does it mean "without"?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Something that is asymmetric is "without symmetry." Something that is amorphous is "without shape." And something that is amoral is "without morals."

Which brings us back to the definition of *asyndeton*. What do you think it is?

Ms. Henrietta: Maybe "without conjunctions"?

Prof. Barry: Exactly. The word *asyndeton* means "without conjunctions." But because students often have a tough time remembering this, just like they often have a tough time remembering the word *polysyndeton*, I began calling it something different. I began calling it the "Touch of Twain."



Ms. Henrietta: Really?

Prof. Barry: Really. It started because, when introducing asyndeton in class, I used those two examples we looked at from Mark Twain's writing. Read the first one again for us please, Ms. Henrietta.

Ms. Henrietta: "Munich did seem the horriblest place, the most desolate place, the most unendurable place."

Prof. Barry: And the second.

Ms. Henrietta: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in

it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Prof. Barry: After that, the "Touch of Twain" name just kind of stuck.

Mr. Wild (*jumping in*): The alliteration helps: "Touch of Twain."

Prof. Barry: Yeah, so does, I think, the association with a writer most students have heard of.

Mr. Wild: Right.

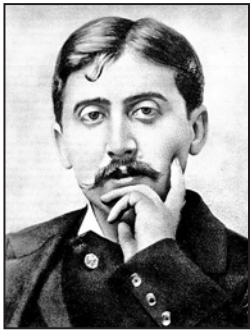
Prof. Barry: Of course, you're all welcome to call the move anything you want. Most of the law students I teach just call it "asyndeton." But I am fine with whatever works best for your brain.

9

Structure Can Generate Content

Prof. Barry: I know I started calling the asyndeton move the "Touch of Twain," but that wasn't the most informed of choices. I'm not even sure Twain uses asyndeton that much. It's not like I've ever done an empirical study or anything. My guess is that writers with a much more fluid, layered style of writing might use it more: Henry James, Marilynne Robinson, V. S. Naipaul, Toni Morrison—those kinds of folks.

And maybe Marcel Proust. He seems like a good candidate for asyndeton.



Mr. Wild (*jumping in*): Have you read Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. It took me a few years. When put together, the book is, what, six, seven volumes—and maybe 4,000 pages?

Mr. Wild: Something like that.

Prof. Barry: Whatever the exact amount, those books are definitely a long-term commitment. Fortunately, I took a class on the first volume, *Swann's Way*, in college. It was

taught by this really interesting guy, Stephen Meredith. He wasn't a professor in the English department. He wasn't a professor in the French department. He was actually a professor in—get this—three different science departments: the department of pathology, the department of biochemistry and molecular biology, and the department of neurology. And almost as a hobby, he was also interested in great works of literature.

Remember on the first day of class when I said that I once took a course on James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*?

Mr. Wild: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Stephen Meredith taught that course too, as well as one about another book in which we might find a bunch of examples of asyndeton: *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann.

I say that because *The Magic Mountain* is filled with a lot of long, winding sentences. That's prime real estate for asyndeton.

But you can also find the move in shorter, more declarative sentences. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from an essay Joyce Carol Oates wrote about the legendary boxer Jack Johnson, whose combination of immense talent and unapologetic bravado riled up the sports world in the early 20th century to such an extent that he became, in the words of documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, "the most famous and the most notorious African American on earth."

The asyndeton move comes at the end.

Mr. Wild: "After Johnson's equally decisive defeat of Jim Jeffries, in 1910, Jeffries was unexpectedly generous in conceding

to a reporter, 'I could never have whipped Johnson at my best. I couldn't have reached him in a thousand years.' More often, white reactions to Johnson's victories were bitter, vicious, hysterical."

Prof. Barry: Or how about this next example. It's from another essay about boxing: "The Fight" by the British writer William Hazlitt.

Mr. Wild: "He made mince-meat of a drunken, stupid, red-faced, quarrelsome, frowsy farmer."

Prof. Barry: Notice a couple of things about Hazlitt's sentence. The first is the alliteration at the end.

Mr. Wild: "Frowsy farmer"?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. I have no idea what "frowsy" means, but I love the sound of it, particularly when paired with "farmer."

The second thing to notice is that the list of asyndeton items doesn't have to stop at three. Hazlitt includes five: "drunken, stupid, red-faced, quarelsome, frowsy." And the American writer Lorrie Moore includes four in a sentence that has even more alliteration in it than Hazlitt's sentence. It appears in her 2009 novel *A Gate at the Stairs*, which revolves around a 20-year-old college student in the Midwest.

Mr. Wild: "In the corridors, students argued over Bach, Beck, Balkanization, bacterial warfare."

Prof. Barry: The reason I bring up these examples is the same reason I brought up the examples last class involving the Rule of Three. I want to expose you to sentence structures you might not have otherwise noticed. I want to expand your mental menu of composition.

I also, however, want to do something more foundational: help you understand that structure can generate content.

Don't make the mistake of thinking content always comes before structure, that you first need to figure out all your ideas before you figure out how you are going to organize them. A lot of value can come from going in the opposite direction. First, figure out how you are going to organize your ideas, by which I mean figure out the appropriate structure. Then figure out the appropriate content.

I often make this point to my law students by offering them the following suggestion.

Mr. Wild: "Once you find the right structure, perhaps it will be easier to find the right content."

Prof. Barry: That chronology won't hold true in every situation. So rather than following a strict order of operations, a better approach might be to just be aware of the interplay between structure and content, between the architecture of your ideas and the ideas themselves. It's like the relationship between, say, the blueprint of a stadium and the sports that will eventually be played inside. Each affects the other. The influence is not one-way.

To make this point more concrete, let's return to Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain speech and learn about a particularly useful kind of structure: parallel structure.

10

Sinews of Peace

Prof. Barry: Would you mind helping us out with Churchill's speech, Ms. Burke?

Ms. Burke: Sure.

Prof. Barry: We'll start by calling the speech by the name Churchill originally picked. Any chance you know the title he first used?

Ms. Burke: "The Sinews of Peace"?

Prof. Barry: Yeah.

Ms. Henrietta (*jumping in***):** What's a "sinew"?

Prof. Barry: It's often defined as a tendon or some other connective tissue. But it can also mean something closer to a source of power or strength, especially when the word is used in its plural form.

Ms. Henrietta: So which meaning is Churchill using?

Prof. Barry: Maybe Ms. Burke can tell us, since she knew the name of the speech. Should we interpret "The Sinews of Peace" as "The Tendons of Peace," "The Source of Peace," or "The Strength of Peace"?

Or should we interpret it as some combination of all three?

Ms. Burke: I guess it could be some combination.

Prof. Barry: Yeah?

Ms. Burke: But I'm kind of leaning toward "The Source of Peace" or "The Strength of Peace."

Prof. Barry: Why?

Ms. Burke: Because Churchill uses the plural form. He calls the speech "The Sinews of Peace"—not "The Sinew of Peace."

Prof. Barry: Right.

Ms. Burke: And doesn't Churchill focus on how the United States and Britain need to stand up to the Russians, that they now have to face this "Iron Curtain" that has descended on Europe?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Would it surprise you that Churchill uses the word "strength" at least 6 times during the speech? Or that he uses the word "power" close to 20?

Ms. Burke: Nope.

Prof. Barry: Keep in mind that this speech is also where Churchill highlights the strong bond between the United States and Britain. Coining another famous phrase, he says the two countries have a "special relationship."

Ms. Burke: Really? That's where "special relationship" came from—this speech?

Prof. Barry: Yup. "Iron Curtain." "Sinews of Peace." And "special relationship." Churchill is quite the phrasemaker.

More importantly for our purposes, he is also quite the user of parallel structure, which is what we are going to turn to now.

11

Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic

Prof. Barry: As we look closer at parallel structure, we'll eventually bring Ms. Cawlow into the conversation. I want us to benefit from her artistic eye, especially once we start to connect parallel structure in writing to parallel structure in painting.

But first let's take a look at the Churchill line that Mr. Marshall read for us last class. It's the one where Churchill actually uses the term "Iron Curtain." Here it is again, Ms. Burke.

Ms. Burke: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent."

Prof. Barry: Notice the structure of the beginning part of that sentence: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic." There is an attractively balanced pattern, with the word "to" acting as the midpoint. "Stettin in the Baltic" is on one side; "Trieste in the Adriatic" is on the other. The phrases helpfully mirror each other.

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: We can see the same pattern in a speech Churchill gave at a different American university. Receiving an honorary

degree from Harvard in 1943, he included the following words in his address to the faculty and students.

Ms. Burke: "The empires of the future are the empires of the mind."

Prof. Barry: Notice the mirroring effect?

Ms. Burke: Yeah. This time the verb "are" is the midpoint.

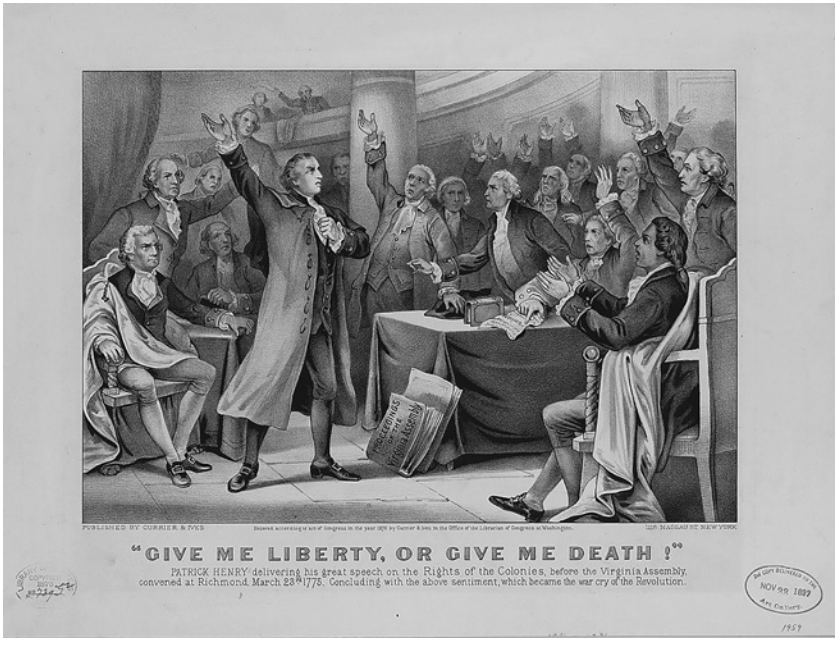
Prof. Barry: Right. And the phrase to the left of that midpoint ("The empires of the future") has the same structure as the words to the right of it ("the empires of the mind"). The syntax is identical.

Ms. Burke: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: We might also think back to the American Revolution and the famous words of Patrick Henry. Read them for us please.

Ms. Burke: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Prof. Barry: What's the midpoint of that sentence?



Ms. Burke: The conjunction "or."

Prof. Barry: Good. So on one side of "or" we have a verb, right?

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: What is it?

Ms. Burke: The word "give."

Prof. Barry: Which means on the other side of "or" we are going to have a verb, right?

Ms. Burke: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: And in this case, it is actually the same verb: "give."

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: The other parts of speech follow the same pattern. The pronoun "me" on one side of the midpoint matches up with another pronoun, "me," on the other side of the midpoint. And the noun "liberty" matches up with another noun, "death." Read the sentence again, please.

Ms. Burke: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Prof. Barry: So we have "verb, pronoun, noun" on one side and we have?

Ms. Burke: "Verb, pronoun, noun" on the other side.

Prof. Barry: Think that's an accident?

Ms. Burke: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Me neither.

12

Corresponding Ideas in Corresponding Forms

Prof. Barry: To better understand how this kind of parallel structure works, we can borrow some language from Carl Klaus, who taught for many years at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and also produced many books of his own. In one of them, *A Self Made of Words*, Klaus offers the following tidy way to think about parallel structure.

Would you please read it for us, Ms. Cawlow? We will soon apply it to some works of art.

Ms. Cawlow: "Corresponding ideas expressed in corresponding forms."

Prof. Barry: Notice anything about the structure of that definition?

Ms. Cawlow. Yeah. It's parallel structure.

Prof. Barry: Good. That's part of why I like it so much. What's on the left side ("Corresponding ideas") mirrors what's on the right side ("corresponding forms"), just like in one of my favorite slogans from the NFL. Read it for us, please. The league used it to promote the charitable commitments of the players.

Ms. Cawlow: "My Cause, My Cleats."

Prof. Barry: What do you think happens in the games when "My Cause, My Cleats" applies?

Ms. Cawlow: Players get to decorate their cleats?

Prof. Barry: With what?

Ms. Cawlow: I'm guessing a cause they care about.

Prof. Barry: Yup. For some players, that cause is gun violence. For others, it's cystic fibrosis. And for the NFL, it's a good way to at once give back to the community and highlight its own philanthropic efforts and civic-mindedness. The catchy bit of parallel structure—"My Cause, My Cleats"—helps pack a lot of information into a tidy space.

Some charitable organizations even build parallel structure directly into their core slogans. Here, for example, is the tag line for the Houston Food Bank, one of the leading distributors of free meals in the country.

Ms. Cawlow: "Filling pantries. Filling lives."

Prof. Barry: And here's the one for Nothing But Nets, which provides lifesaving malaria nets all over Africa.

Ms. Cawlow: "Send a net. Save a life."

Prof. Barry: A final example comes from a local organization here in Michigan called Ozone House that my law students and I have worked with. Designed to offer a wide range of shelter and support to homeless youth, it sums up its mission in the following way.

Ms. Cawlow: "Safe place. Real support."

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): Did you come up with that slogan?

Prof. Barry: No. The slogan was around long before I started getting involved at Ozone House. But the words definitely made me smile when I first came across them. Putting corresponding ideas in corresponding forms is great. And the technique is even better, in my view, when done to advance a worthy cause.

13

Nothing But Nets

Prof. Barry: It's not only nonprofit organizations that make use of parallel structure. In a moment, we'll look at some examples of for-profit organizations as well. But first I want to see if anyone caught the play on words in one of the nonprofit examples we just talked about.

Ms. Cawlow: In the slogans?

Prof. Barry: No. In the titles of the organizations. Here they are again.

Ms. Cawlow: "Houston Food Bank."

Prof. Barry: Yup.

Ms. Cawlow: "Nothing But Nets."

Prof. Barry: And the final one.

Ms. Cawlow: "Ozone House."

Prof. Barry: Perhaps some of you have already spotted it. But for anybody who hasn't, I will narrow it down: the play on words involves sports—basketball in particular.

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): It's "Nothing But Nets," right?

Prof. Barry: Right. In basketball, what does the phrase "nothing but net" mean?

Ms. Bristol: It means that your shot went right in the hoop without even touching the rim.

Prof. Barry: Exactly, like a lot of the shots of Steph Curry, one of the best pure shooters of all time. We briefly mentioned him last class, remember?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: He's been the league MVP. He's led the Golden State Warriors to multiple championships. And he is often credited with changing the game of basketball by turning the three-point shot into such an effective weapon.

So if you were on the executive board of Nothing But Nets and you were looking for a celebrity to partner with, you might, in an ideal world, try to link up with Steph Curry, right?

Ms. Bristol: Definitely.

Prof. Barry: Do you think we live in an ideal world, Ms. Bristol? Do you think Nothing But Nets was in fact able to link up with Steph Curry?

Ms. Bristol: I don't know. I imagine a lot of organizations try to partner with him.

Prof. Barry: Well, to find out the answer, let's read what Nothing But Nets posted on its website on June 12, 2018, after Curry and the Warriors won their third NBA title.

Ms. Bristol: "At *Nothing But Nets*, we're big Warriors fans, thanks to a long partnership with Steph Curry. He just won his third championship, and as fellow NBA star and *Nothing But Nets* champion Anthony Tolliver said, it 'couldn't happen to a better guy.'"

Prof. Barry: The post then lists various ways Curry has helped raise money for the organization. One involved his 30th birthday.

Ms. Bristol: "When Steph turned 30 this past March, he challenged his friends and his fans to help him celebrate his birthday by raising $30,000 for *Nothing But Nets*. Within only an hour, he raised over $13,000. Steph likes to go big or go home, so he tripled his goal."

Prof. Barry: Keep reading.

Ms. Bristol: "Over the next few weeks, he raised a total of $82,515—that's enough to send more than 8,000 lifesaving bed nets to those in need!"

Prof. Barry: You can learn about similar fund-raising efforts on the Nothing But Nets website, including a trip Curry took in 2013 to distribute nets at a refugee camp in Tanzania.

You could also take a look at the column in *Sports Illustrated* from which the whole idea for Nothing But Nets was born. Written by Rick Reilly in 2006, it challenged readers with the following directive.

Ms. Bristol: "If you have ever gotten a thrill by throwing, kicking, knocking, dunking, slamming, putting up, cutting down or jumping over a net, please go to a special site we've set up through the United Nations. . . . Then just look for the big SI Nothing But Nets logo (or call 202-887-9040) and donate $20. Bang. You might have just saved a kid's life."

Prof. Barry: Reilly even uses parallel structure himself at one point.

Ms. Bristol: "Bill and Melinda Gates have just about finished single-handedly covering every bed in Zambia. Maybe we can't cover an entire Zambia, but I bet we could put a serious dent in Malawi."

Prof. Barry: The mirroring isn't perfect. There are slightly more words in the underlined section on the right of the sentence than there are in the underlined section on the left side. But the construction is still worth noting—as is the fact that since Reilly's column first appeared, Nothing But Nets has raised over $70 million and delivered 13 million nets.

Remember when we talked on the first day of class about how "writing is a superpower"? Well, Reilly's column is a good example of that. His words have helped save an extraordinary number of lives.

14

Flexible and Generous

Prof. Barry: I mentioned that the sentence by Rick Reilly about Zambia and Malawi was not perfectly symmetrical. That will happen occasionally, so we'll just have to be somewhat flexible in our determinations of what counts as parallel structure.

But I'm okay with being flexible. In fact, I'm okay being anything that will make it easier to spot and reproduce helpful patterns in the words we see and hear. Variations from a strict definition of these patterns can still be instructive.

Consider the following sentence from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address. Would you mind reading it for us, Ms. Burke? You've done really well with our Kennedy examples in the past.

Ms. Burke: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. I've underlined the instances of parallel structure in Kennedy's speech. Try to emphasize those when you read.

Ms. Burke: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Prof. Barry: You might have noticed that the last two instances in the list—"support any friend" and "oppose any foe"—have verbs with two syllables, while the first three—"pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship"—have verbs with only one.

Ms. Burke: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: And the nouns are varying lengths as well: "price," "friend," and "foe" are all one syllable, but "burden" and "hardship" are each two syllables. Like the parallel structure in the Rick Reilly example, this instance of parallel structure isn't perfectly symmetrical either.

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: The same is true of a sentence from a little earlier in Kennedy's speech. He's calling attention to how the era in which he is operating, the 1960s, is very different from previous eras, both in the capacity of technology to improve the world and the capacity of technology to utterly destroy it.

Ms. Burke: "For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life."

Prof. Barry: Yet the pairing can nevertheless serve as a helpful model of the rhythm and cadence that make parallel structure so effective. There is an appealing melody to Kennedy's words, a distinct pace and purpose. His skillful use of parallel structure is a big part of that. It's a great way to organize information, to bring a clarifying and elegant style to thoughts and ideas—and not just with writing.

We are about to see a similar effect in one of the most recognizable paintings in the world.

15

The Last Supper

Prof. Barry: As I mentioned a little earlier, Ms. Cawlow, I'd like you, our resident art historian, to help us see how parallel structure applies to the world of art. You can start by providing some background information on *The Last Supper*, the famous painting of the moment when Jesus tells his 12 apostles that one of them will betray him.

Ms. Cawlow: Sure. What do you want to know?

Prof. Barry: Who painted it?

Ms. Cawlow: Leonardo da Vinci.

Prof. Barry: Where?

Ms. Cawlow: Italy.

Prof. Barry: What city in particular? Florence, where da Vinci was born?

Ms. Cawlow: No. He was hired to paint *The Last Supper* in Milan.

Prof. Barry: Who hired him?

Ms. Cawlow: I don't know the name of the exact person, but I do know the name of the church.

Prof. Barry: That works. What's the name of the church?

Ms. Cawlow: Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Prof. Barry: And this all took place during what year? Do you know when da Vinci started the painting?

Ms. Cawlow: Around 1495.

Prof. Barry: When did he finish?

Ms. Cawlow: Around 1498.

Prof. Barry: So it took him approximately three years to compete.

Ms. Cawlow: Right.

Prof. Barry: Not everyone, I recently learned, was happy with that pace. Any chance you know the story of the church official who got particularly mad?

Ms. Cawlow: Yeah. He complained that da Vinci was taking too long.

Prof. Barry: How did da Vinci respond?

Ms. Cawlow: He wrote a letter.

Prof. Barry: To whom?

Ms. Cawlow: To the person in charge of the church.

Prof. Barry: What did it say?

Ms. Cawlow: That for a while da Vinci had been searching for a face to use in the painting for Judas—the apostle that betrayed Jesus and so the real villain in the piece.

Prof. Barry: And now?

Ms. Cawlow: He had one.

Prof. Barry: Who?

Ms. Cawlow: The official who complained.

16

Symmetry

Prof. Barry: I'm not sure that story about the prior is actually true. You'll have to do your own research to find out. But what I am sure of is that da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper gives us a great way to continue studying parallel structure. Look at the image again, Ms. Cawlow.

Ms. Cawlow: Okay.

Prof. Barry: See the big panels on the right side of the painting? They are on the wall, behind the figures seated at the table.

Ms. Cawlow: My right or the painting's right?

Prof. Barry: Your right.

Ms. Cawlow: Got it. I see them now.

Prof. Barry: How many are there?

Ms. Cawlow: How many panels?

Prof. Barry: Yeah.

Ms. Cawlow: Four.

Prof. Barry: Good. Now, count the panels on the other side.

Ms. Cawlow: There are four on that side too.

Prof. Barry: Think that's a coincidence?

Ms. Cawlow: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Neither do I, especially because we're going to see similar examples of symmetry throughout the painting.

Check out, for instance, the three windows behind Jesus.

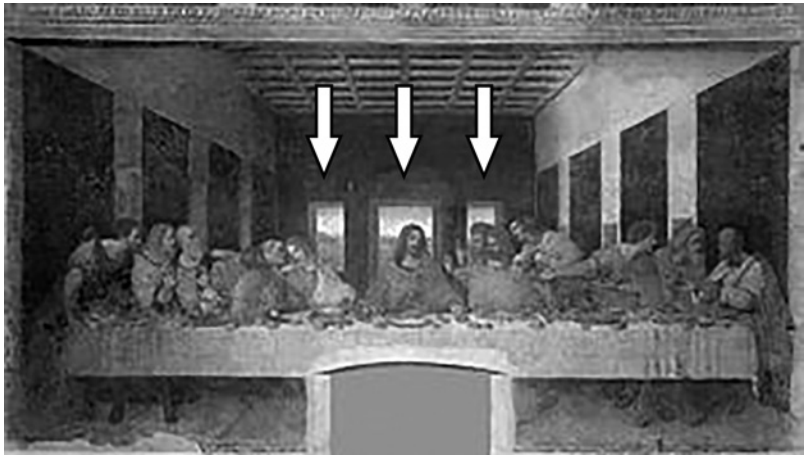
Ms. Cawlow: Okay.

Prof. Barry: How many are on his right?

Ms. Cawlow: One.

Prof. Barry: How many are on his left?

Ms. Cawlow: One.



Prof. Barry: Good. Now look at the slates on the ceiling. The slates in the back are a little hard to see, but if you focus on the overall distribution, does that distribution look symmetric or asymmetric?

Ms. Cawlow: Symmetric.

Prof. Barry: Good. I agree.

The final thing I want you to do is focus on the 12 apostles. I know they each have different shapes and that they're wearing different clothes. But if you count how many are arranged to the right of Jesus and how many are arranged to the left, what do you get?

Ms. Cawlow: Six on one side and six on the other.

Prof. Barry: Accident? Random chance? Just happened to be the way the paint fell off da Vinci's brush?

Ms. Cawlow: No. The symmetry seems deliberate.

Prof. Barry: And pretty effective, right?

Ms. Cawlow: Yeah. It adds an element of order and control to the painting, like you're in the company of someone who knows what they are doing.

Prof. Barry: Good. That's exactly what I want people to say about your writing. Reading your words should feel like being in the company of someone who knows what they are doing.

17

Michelangelo and Michigan

Prof. Barry: Leonardo da Vinci is by no means the only artist who uses parallel structure to great effect. Plenty of others do as well. If you go to Florence, for instance, which is the city where we said da Vinci was born, you can see a wonderful example of parallel structure in a famous library. It was designed by another legendary Italian: Michelangelo.

Do you know which library I am talking about, Ms. Yona? I remember seeing on your résumé that you spent a summer studying in Florence.

Ms. Yona: I think so. It's the Laurentian Library, right?

Prof. Barry: Right. Commissioned in 1523, the Laurentian Library holds an amazing collection of rare books and manuscripts, many of which at one point belonged to the Medicis. There is the Codex Amiatinus from the year 700, the earliest surviving Latin translation of the Christian Bible. There is the Squarcialupi Codex, an important primary source of 13th-century and 14th-century Italian music. And there are a number of ancient texts by the Greek playwrights Sophocles and Aeschylus, as well as the Roman historians Pliny and Tacitus.

But the best part of the Laurentian Library, at least for our purposes, is the reading room. Here's a picture.

The picture is pretty old. There have been a lot of updates since it was taken. But the basic layout of the reading room remains largely the same. Parallel structure in the way the desks are set up. Parallel structure in the way the windows are set up. There's even parallel structure in the way the ceiling is set up, like we saw with da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.

Ms. Yona: There is also parallel structure around the door at the back. The shapes that appear on one side of the door match the shapes that appear on the other side.

Prof. Barry: That's right. The arrangement of the door definitely adds to the overall elegance and balance of the room.

Unfortunately, I haven't yet visited the Laurentian Library myself. But from photos and other representations, it strikes me as the kind of space where, just by walking through it, you feel a little bit smarter, like with each step you gain an extra IQ point or two.

Ms. Yona: Yeah. I wish I could take all my exams there.

Prof. Barry: That would definitely be nice. But the good news is that we don't have to go all the way to Florence to experience that kind of intellectual elevation. There is a similarly grand example of a parallel-structure-enhanced reading room right here on campus.

I am guessing a bunch of you have been there. It's over at the law school.

Mr. Marshall (*jumping in*): I study there all the time.

Ms. Maat (*jumping in*): Me too.

Prof. Barry: Well, next time you are inside, look up at the chandeliers and count them. You'll find that there are the same number on the right side of the room as there are on the left side of the room. You'll also find that there are the same number of tables on the right side of the room as there are on the left side of the room.

Think that applies to the number of chairs as well?

Ms. Maat: Probably.

Prof. Barry: How about to the number of study lamps?

Ms. Maat: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Bookcases?

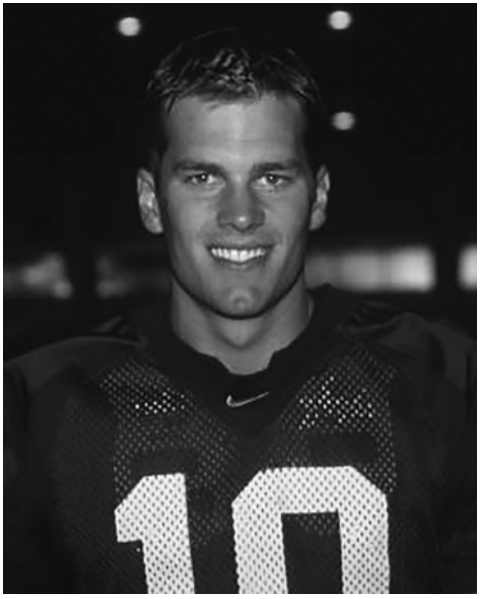
Ms. Maat: I'm not actually sure about the bookcases. There seem to be some bends in the doors and openings in the room that might throw off the symmetry.

Prof. Barry: Fair enough. Yet it is nevertheless true that a big reason the space is so compelling and memorable is because of its built-in parallel structure.

The same can be said of another University of Michigan icon.

Ms. Maat: What?

Prof. Barry: Tom Brady's face.



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Tom Brady's Face

Prof. Barry: Mr. Boh.

Mr. Boh: Yes.

Prof. Barry: Can you please tell us who Tom Brady is?

Mr. Boh: He's one of the greatest NFL quarterbacks of all time.

Prof. Barry: Where did he play in college?

Mr. Boh: Here. At Michigan.

Prof. Barry: Was he good?

Mr. Boh: What do you mean?

Prof. Barry: Did he, for example, win the Heisman Trophy when he played at Michigan?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: Was he an All-American?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: Was he the number-one pick in the NFL Draft?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: Did he even get picked in the first round?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: The second round?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: The third, fourth, or fifth round?

Mr. Boh: No.

Prof. Barry: In what round did he get picked?

Mr. Boh: The sixth.

Prof. Barry: So in terms of other players being picked before him, that means what, like—100 players?

Mr. Boh: More like 200.

Prof. Barry: And in terms of NFL teams, how many had a chance to add Brady to their roster?

Mr. Boh: Every one of them.

Prof. Barry: How many teams decided to pass up that opportunity?

Mr. Boh: All but one.

Prof. Barry: Which one?

Mr. Boh: The New England Patriots.

Prof. Barry: Did the Patriots make a good decision?

Mr. Boh: Very.

Prof. Barry: How many Super Bowls did Brady help them win?

Mr. Boh: A lot.

Prof. Barry: More than Joe Montana helped the 49ers win?

Mr. Boh: Yup.

Prof. Barry: More than Terry Bradshaw helped the Steelers win?

Mr. Boh: Yup. I think Brady has the most Super Bowl wins of any quarterback.

Prof. Barry: That's right. He does. And he also has something else—something that gives us another way to think about parallel structure. He has a very symmetrical face.

19

The Beauty Premium

Prof. Barry: In 2009, a trio of economists—David Berri, Rob Simmons, and Jennifer Van Gilder—collected data on 121 quarterbacks who had recently played in the NFL. The economists looked at a number of factors that might influence the difference between how much each quarterback was paid, including their age, draft position, Pro Bowl appearances, and overall career statistics.

They also looked at the quality I mentioned about Tom Brady: how symmetric each quarterback's face was.

Mr. Boh: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. In many employment markets, there's something called a "beauty premium." The better looking you are, the more you get paid relative to similarly qualified people.

Noting that symmetric faces tend to be rated as more attractive, the economists used symmetry as their beauty metric and found the specific premium for NFL quarterbacks to be 8 percent. So if there are two quarterbacks with the same stats, same experience, and same everything else, the one with the more symmetric face is going to earn a slightly higher salary.

The research article is titled "What Does It Mean to Find the Face of the Franchise? Physical Attractiveness and the Evaluation of Athletic Performance" in case anyone wants to check it out.

Ms. Carroll (*jumping in*): Did Tom Brady have the most symmetric face in the study?

Prof. Barry: No. At the time the study was done—which was, as I said, back in 2009—it found that Matt Ryan of the Atlanta Falcons had the most symmetric face. But Russell Wilson of the Seahawks was up there too.

And really, all three of those guys—Brady, Ryan, and Wilson—have the kind of face that reminds us of the power of parallel structure. What's on one side of their nose nicely aligns with what is on the other side of their nose. It's like getting to sit at the 50-yard line at a football game or at center ice at a hockey game. You get this wonderfully balanced view of the terrain.

In fact, if I were to try to buy tickets to a football game at Michigan Stadium, where would some of the most expensive seats be, Ms. Carroll?

Ms. Carroll: The 50-yard line.

Prof. Barry: And if I then walked over to the Crisler Center and tried to buy tickets to a basketball game, where would some of the most expensive seats be?

Ms. Carroll: Half-court.

Prof. Barry: Why?

Ms. Carroll: Because you get to see both sides of the floor. You're right in the middle of the action.

Prof. Barry: Parallel structure, right?

Ms. Carroll: Right.

Prof. Barry: We could easily come up with more examples. Behind home plate at a baseball game. At midfield on a soccer pitch. In line with the net at a tennis or volleyball match. Any one of those visuals can give you a way to picture what you are doing when you use parallel structure. You're creating a pleasing symmetry. You're making it easy for readers to see and process multiple things at once. You're, in a way, putting them in great seats.

20

Yes We Can

Prof. Barry: We'll soon dive deeper into the mechanics of parallel structure, with the help of a speech Barack Obama gave at the 2004 Democratic Convention, years before anyone thought he could ever become president. It's the speech that helped launch his career.

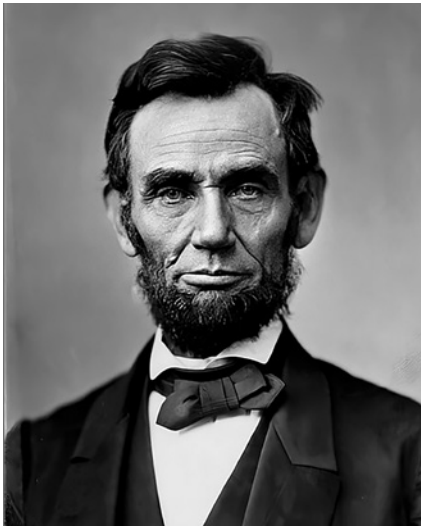
At the time, he was a state senator in Illinois. Not a US senator. Not someone with a national profile and a grand office on Capitol Hill. Nope, when Obama gave this speech, he had a very low profile, and his office was nowhere near Capitol Hill. It wasn't even in Washington. It was in—well, maybe Mr. Dewey can tell us. You said on the first day of class that you grew up in Illinois, right?

Mr. Dewey: Yup, in Chicago.

Prof. Barry: Any chance you know the name of the state capital?

Mr. Dewey: Isn't it Springfield?

Prof. Barry: Good. Now don't get me wrong. Springfield, Illinois is a lovely city. But its state senate house is not exactly the place where the world expected to find someone who would become, in only four short years after giving this speech, the first Black president of the United States.



Ms. Franzoni (*jumping in*): Wasn't Abraham Lincoln from Springfield?

Prof. Barry: Yes. Abraham Lincoln practiced law in Springfield for close to 25 years.

Ms. Franzoni: So maybe there is some presidential magic there.

Prof. Barry: Maybe. But what I want to call our attention to is a different kind of magic: verbal magic. Obama definitely used a bunch of that magic, not just in his performance at the 2004 Democratic Convention, but throughout his run for president. In speech after speech—and also in his best-selling books *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*—he crafted words that really resonated with large groups of Americans. We might even say the following about his campaign, Ms. Franzoni.

Ms. Franzoni: "Obama wrote his way to the White House."

Prof. Barry: Or we could reframe that statement slightly, highlighting the competitive advantage his skill with language gave him.

Ms. Franzoni: "It probably helps to be better at words than the other side."

Prof. Barry: Take Obama's campaign slogans in 2008, when he ran for president against John McCain. Read one of them for us please.

Ms. Franzoni: "Change we can believe in."

Prof. Barry: And another?

Ms. Franzoni: "Yes we can!"

Prof. Barry: Both of those slogans helped galvanize a lot of people. The slogans appeared everywhere—T-shirts, bumper stickers, storefronts, signs on people's lawns. They produced excitement. They produced hope. They produced . . . *votes*.

Compare that to John McCain's slogan. Any chance you know it, Ms. Franzoni?

Ms. Franzoni: No. I don't think so.

Prof. Barry: I'm not sure many people still do. It didn't gain nearly as much cultural traction as Obama's. Maybe seeing it will help us understand why.

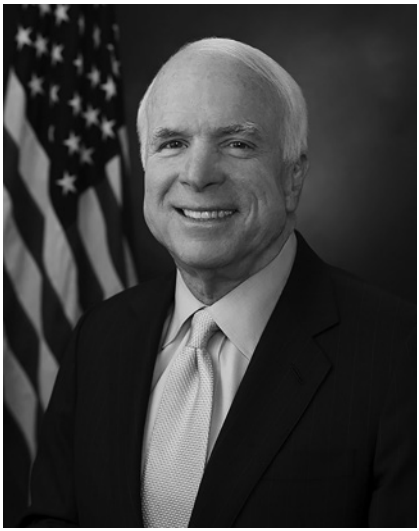
Here it is.

Ms. Franzoni: "Country first."

Prof. Barry: Not exactly the most inspiring sequence of words, is it?

Ms. Franzoni: No.

Prof. Barry: Which is a shame, because in many ways McCain was a really impressive guy. He was a decorated war veteran. He was a respected member of the Senate. And when he died, two former presidents honored him with separate, thoughtful eulogies. One of those presidents was, get this, Barack Obama—McCain's 2008 campaign rival.



Obama said that McCain made the Senate better, that McCain made the country better, and that McCain made Obama himself better.

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): Who was the other president who spoke?

Prof. Barry: Anybody want to guess? McCain ran for president against this person as well.

Mr. Farnoff (*jumping in*): Bill Clinton?

Prof. Barry: Nope.

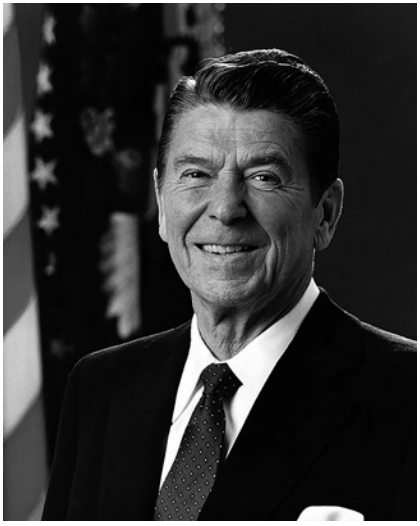
Mr. Farnoff: Ronald Reagan?

Prof. Barry: Nope. George W. Bush. But I am glad you brought up Reagan, Mr. Farnoff. We're going to talk about a couple of his campaign slogans next.

21

Morning in America

Prof. Barry: The slogan from Ronald Reagan I want us to start with was actually more of a question. The year was 1980. Reagan, who was running against then president Jimmy Carter, knew the country was in a bit of a rut. Unemployment and inflation were both really high. Fifty-two Americans were being held hostage in Iran. And because of a panic about the supply of oil, lines at gas stations stretched for what seemed like miles.



Reagan and his rhetorically savvy team saw all this bad news—and the blame directed at President Carter for it—as a tremendous opportunity. So in the last debate before the election, Reagan asked the following question in his final statement to the local audience and the millions of people watching at home.

Would you mind reading it for us, Mr. Leigh? As a film major, you might like Reagan. He was an actor before he became president.

Mr. Leigh: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. Here it is.

Mr. Leigh: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

Prof. Barry: What's really clever about that question?

Mr. Leigh: Given what the country was going through, there probably was only one answer.

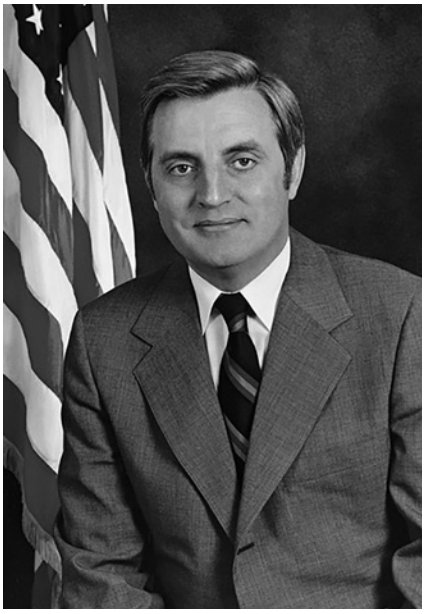
Prof. Barry: Which was?

Mr. Leigh: A big "No."

Prof. Barry: Good. I think that's right. Reagan's question tapped into a set of frustrations that many Americans were feeling and eventually acted on in the voting booth. Carter won his home state of Georgia and a few others, but Reagan won all the rest in a landslide. The breakdown of the electoral votes was 489 for Reagan and only 49 for Carter.

That's not quite the biggest blowout in a presidential election. In 1936, Franklin Roosevelt beat Alf Landon 523 to 8. And Reagan himself won 525 to 13 in 1984.

Mr. Leigh: Against who?



Prof. Barry: The guy who was vice president when Carter was in office: Walter Mondale.

Mr. Leigh: So Reagan first ran against Carter and then ran against Carter's vice president?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. And Reagan's slogan when he ran against Mondale that year was good too. He was fully aware that the economy recovered during his first four years as president and that a returned sense of power and prestige was starting to become felt all around the country. So he didn't stick with "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

Instead, he went with the following short, confident statement.

Mr. Leigh: "It is morning again in America."

Prof. Barry: You think that resonated with people?

Mr. Leigh: Probably.

Prof. Barry: Why?

Mr. Leigh: Because it's hopeful.

Prof. Barry: And?

Mr. Leigh: Kind of inspiring.

Prof. Barry: Good. Remember that idea of the "words under the words" we introduced on the first day of class, the one we borrowed from a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye?

Mr. Leigh: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Well, what are the words under the words of "It's morning again in America"? Focus in particular on "morning." What was Reagan trying to communicate by using that word, particularly after the country had just lived through the Carter era?

Mr. Leigh: That things are finally looking up.

Prof. Barry: Yup. What else?

Mr. Leigh: Maybe a sense of renewal. The chance to have a new beginning.

Prof. Barry: Good. We often have those kinds of positive associations with the word "morning." Imagine, for instance, if Reagan had instead said, "It is *night* again in America."

Mr. Leigh: Yeah, that would've been a bad choice. People might start to worry about the future of the country.

Prof. Barry: Which may have been why, when President Bill Clinton asked Maya Angelou to read a poem at his inauguration eight years later, she didn't call it "On the Pulse of Night." She called it?

Mr. Leigh: "On the Pulse of Morning"?

Prof. Barry: Exactly. "On the Pulse of Morning." Let's read how she ends the poem. You might notice, in tone and word choice, a bit of Reagan's optimism in the final few lines.

Mr. Leigh: "Here on the pulse of this new day"—

Prof. Barry: Keep going.

Mr. Leigh: "You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
Good morning."

22

Maya Angelou

Prof. Barry: I encourage you all to check out more poems by Maya Angelou. Among her most famous are "Phenomenal Woman" and "Still I Rise," but there are a bunch of other gems as well. When it comes to being good with words, there are few people better with them than she was.

I am guessing you agree, Ms. Toth. I remember seeing "Maya Angelou" listed in the "Interests" section of your résumé.

Ms. Toth: Yeah. I love her writing.

Prof. Barry: Her poetry? Her memoirs? Which books of hers do you like the most?

Ms. Toth: All of them.

Prof. Barry: I'm the same way. If Angelou had written a phonebook, I'd read it. Which is why I'm really hoping we'll find time later in the semester to look at a section of the book that helped turn her into a star when it was first released back in 1969.

Ms. Toth: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?

Prof. Barry: Yup. There's a chapter in there that has a great description of a boxing match involving someone whose monument you can see the next time you spend a day in Detroit: Joe Louis.

Ms. Toth: Is that the monument that's a big fist?

Prof. Barry: It sure is. *Sports Illustrated* commissioned the Mexican American sculptor Robert Graham to create it a few years after Louis died. It's really worth seeing if you haven't already.

But for now, let's get back to the phrase I used to describe Angelou: "good with words." I picked it deliberately.

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Good with Words

Prof. Barry: I said I picked the phrase "good with words" deliberately. Would you mind, Mr. Marshall, helping me explain why?

Mr. Marshall: Sure.

Prof. Barry: I ask you because I actually teach a course called "Good with Words" over at the law school. If you decide to start your own legal career here at Michigan, perhaps you can take it.

There are two versions of the course. One focuses on writing and editing; the other, on speaking and presenting. In both, students learn how to improve the way they use words to connect with people.

Who do you think are some of the people we focus on, Mr. Marshall? Who might law students need to learn how to connect with?

Mr. Marshall: Judges.

Prof. Barry: Good. Who else?

Mr. Marshall: Jurors.

Prof. Barry: Yup. How about clients?

Mr. Marshall: Definitely. And probably coworkers.

Prof. Barry: Right. Think about how many emails coworkers exchange each day. Or just think of email in general. Every email you send is an opportunity to connect with someone. So is every blog post, text message, and op-ed. It is one thing to have good ideas and good intentions. But add verbal dexterity to that mix and your potential to bring about real change increases dramatically.

Nelson Mandela gestures toward this point when he writes the following in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Read it for us please.

Mr. Marshall: "A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special."

Prof. Barry: Or think back to last class when we talked about Bryan Stevenson, the civil rights lawyer that the actor Michael B. Jordan played in the movie *Just Mercy*. Stevenson and his team at the Equal Justice Initiative could have all the compassion and intellect in the world, but if they weren't good with words, they wouldn't win very many cases, would they?

Mr. Marshall: Nope.

Prof. Barry: And that's true for more than just lawyers, isn't it? Consultants, teachers, doctors, bankers, engineers—each of these professions, and plenty more, requires a certain amount of advocacy. For people, for projects, for all kinds of things.

Mr. Marshall: Right.

Prof. Barry: Plus, at various points in your life, you're going to need to advocate for yourself. That might be in an interview, a board meeting, a cover letter, an application essay—perhaps even in a love letter.

So as we return to Barack Obama and the speech that catapulted him to political stardom, let's really focus on the mechanics of how he communicates and pay special attention to his use of parallel structure in particular. He and the other examples we'll look at have a lot to teach us about what it means to be good with words.

24

Red States vs. Blue States

Prof. Barry: I want us to start with the speech Obama gave at the Democratic National Convention in 2004 because it shows a couple of things. First, you can use parallel structure to organize a lot of complex information—not just within a sentence but also between sentences.

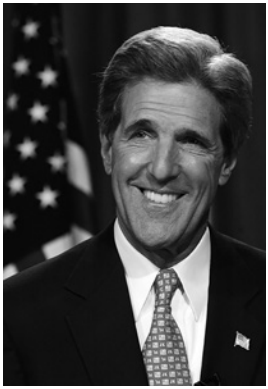
Second, under our very inclusive definition of parallel structure, you don't have to match every construction word for word. Even a somewhat loose pattern can helpfully cue the audience into the parallels you want to communicate.

So please start us off, Ms. Burke. As our political science major, perhaps you'll have special insight into why Obama's speech resonated with so many people.

Ms. Burke: Okay.

Prof. Barry: And remember, Obama delivered this speech back in 2004, when he was still a state senator in Illinois's legislature. Not a US senator in Congress.

He was making his first major appearance on a national stage, having been asked to give the Democrat's keynote address right before the party officially picked John Kerry as its 2004 presidential



candidate. Here's the sentence that begins Obama's parallel structure tour de force.

Ms. Burke: "The pundits like to slice and dice our country into red states and blue states: red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats."

Prof. Barry: See the pretty straightforward use of parallel structure there?

Ms. Burke: Yup. "Red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats."

Prof. Barry: Good. Now read what Obama says next, after transitioning with a line about how he has some "news" for the pundits.

Ms. Burke: "We worship an awesome God in the blue states, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the red states."

Prof. Barry: That's less straightforward, because the words and parts of speech don't line up exactly. But the overall effect is still there. And the same is true in the next sentence.

Ms. Burke: "We coach little league in the blue states and, yes, we've got some gay friends in the red states."

Prof. Barry: Notice what's going on here. The content, the individual details, that can switch. In one sentence Obama is talking about federal agents poking around in libraries and in the next he's talking about coaching little league.

Yet the architecture and organization always remain the same, which is a really helpful thing for the audience. Why do you think that is, Ms. Burke?

Ms. Burke: It makes the speech easy to follow.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Super easy. That's an important aspect of parallel structure. It's not just ornamentation. It's an aid to comprehension.

Researchers at Yale and the University of Massachusetts have actually studied this phenomenon. They've tested the effect parallel structure has on people's ability to absorb content. Here's what they found.

Ms. Burke: "Readers and listeners strongly prefer coordinated elements of sentences to be parallel in structure."

Prof. Barry: The pervasiveness of this "parallel structure effect" is what struck the researchers the most. They tried out several different sentence constructions. Some constructions used active voice. Some used passive voice. Some used "animate nouns," which are words like *girl*, *dog*, and *monster* that refer to people, animals, or other creatures. Others used "inanimate nouns"—so not *girl* but the concept *girlhood*. With each, the audience more easily comprehended the parallel version than the nonparallel version. Here's a little bit more from the researchers themselves.

Ms. Burke: "These observations suggest that the preference for parallel structure is not simply an aesthetic judgment about the elegance of various sentence forms."

Prof. Barry: Instead, the structure actually helps folks understand what you are trying to communicate.

So it's probably not surprising that Obama kept on using the technique throughout the speech. Here's an additional example.

Ms. Burke: "There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq, and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq."

Prof. Barry: And here's another. It appears in a sentence that brings together the main idea of the speech. I've underlined the part that uses parallel structure.

Ms. Burke: "We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America."

Prof. Barry: Given how effective parallel structure was for him, do you think this speech was the only high-stakes circumstance when he used it?

Ms. Burke: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Good. We're about to look at a second.

25

A More Perfect Union

Prof. Barry: About four years after the "Red States vs. Blue States" speech we just looked at, Obama turned to parallel structure again in one of the more important appearances of his 2008 presidential campaign. At the time, the sermons of a religious figure with whom Obama had strong ties, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, were being attacked in the media as racist and antigovernment. Then those attacks quickly transferred to Obama himself.

So he put together a speech called "A More Perfect Union." Anybody know where that phrase comes from?

Ms. Franzoni (*jumping in*): The Constitution?

Prof. Barry: Yup. The phrase appears at the very beginning of that document, in an introductory sentence known as the "Preamble." Here's the exact wording. It's a bit of a mouthful.

Ms. Franzoni: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Prof. Barry: Obama's decision to call his speech "A More Perfect Union" also took on added meaning because of where he delivered it. Any chance you know which city he picked, Ms. Franzoni?

Ms. Franzoni: I'm pretty sure it was Philadelphia.

Prof. Barry: Which is?

Ms. Franzoni: Where the Constitution was created, right?

Prof. Barry: Right. You think that was a coincidence?

Ms. Franzoni: No.

Prof. Barry: How about the specific venue he chose—the National Constitution Center?

Ms. Franzoni: Is that where the Constitution is held?

Prof. Barry: No. The Constitution is held at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, along with the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

But the Constitution Center is definitely an important, symbolic place. It was established in 1988 when Ronald Reagan signed the Constitution Heritage Act. The goal was to, in the words of the act, "disseminate information about the United States Constitution on a nonpartisan basis in order to increase awareness and understanding of the Constitution among the American people."

Ms. Franzoni: If the place is supposed to be "nonpartisan," why did they let Obama give his speech there in the middle of a presidential campaign?

Prof. Barry: That's a good question. I don't know. But what I do know is that the speech was a big hit. It was the most-watched video on YouTube the day it was released, and NBC News later named it the speech of the decade.

More personally, I remember once asking a lawyer I really respected what steps I could take to improve my own facility with words. Here's what he said.

Ms. Franzoni: "Study that speech."

Prof. Barry: So that's what we are going to do, beginning with a sentence that combines parallel structure with another tool we have been learning to use: alliteration.

26

Kenya and Kansas

Prof. Barry: Ms. Maat.

Ms. Maat: Yes.

Prof. Barry: Would you mind starting off our look at Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech? The first sentence I would like you to read references your home state.

Ms. Maat: Kansas?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Obama's mom was born there. His father, however, was born more than 8,500 miles away, in Kenya. Here's the line where Obama shares that detail.

Ms. Maat: "I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas."

Prof. Barry: Did you catch the alliteration Obama snuck in there?

Ms. Maat: "Kenya" and "Kansas"?

Prof. Barry: Yup. That adds a little something extra to the parallel structure, doesn't it?

Ms. Maat: Yeah, especially because "Kenya" and "Kansas" also have the same number of syllables.

Prof. Barry: Good point. It would be nice if the speech always maintained that level of symmetry. But when Obama transitions to talking about his grandparents, for example, he loosens up the parallel structure in a way that allows him to sneak in a few additional bits of information.

Ms. Maat: "I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas."

Prof. Barry: See what I mean? The sentence doesn't have anything like the rigid symmetry of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" declaration. Obama's structure is much more relaxed. Yet there remains a clear grammatical link between the phrases "white grandfather" and "white grandmother." That parallel helps give the sentence shape and nicely sets up the next sentence. Read it for us, please.

Ms. Maat: "I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations."

Prof. Barry: Obama then decides to do something really smart. He breaks the parallel structure pattern.

Ms. Maat: "I am married to a Black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters."

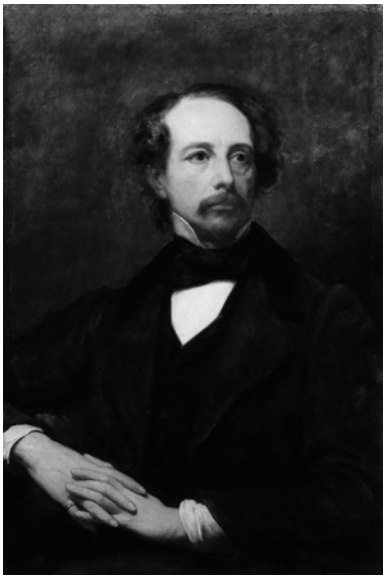
Prof. Barry: Why do you think I say that Obama's decision was really smart, Ms. Maat? Why can it be good to break a pattern of parallel structure or any other rhetorical rhythm after a little while?

Ms. Maat: If you don't, the pattern might become stale and predictable.

Prof. Barry: And maybe a little annoying?

Ms. Maat: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Do you think Charles Dickens crosses that line in his famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*? Here it is.



Ms. Maat: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Prof. Barry: Stale and predictable?

Ms. Maat: No.

Prof. Barry: Why not?

Ms. Maat: Because it's only one example of parallel structure. There's no annoying pattern yet.

Prof. Barry: Good. Let's see if you change your mind as we read more of the opening. That was just the first part. Here's the second.

Ms. Maat: "It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness."

Prof. Barry: Now read the third part.

Ms. Maat: "It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness."

Prof. Barry: And the fourth?

Ms. Maat: "It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity."

Prof. Barry: Starting to get annoying?

Ms. Maat: A little, yeah.

Prof. Barry: I feel the same way. And keep in mind that I have broken these statements into separate parts so that they would

be easier for us to absorb. Dickens crammed them all into one comma-spliced sentence.

Here's what I mean. I have included all the lines you just read, Ms. Maat, plus the ones we didn't get to yet.

Ms. Maat: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its nosiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Prof. Barry: Do you see that it can be a little dangerous to stick with a pattern too long, even a good pattern like parallel structure?

Ms. Maat: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: At some point, it's good to scale back, to switch to something else, to show some restraint.

Obama does that in the "More Perfect Union" speech. He doesn't overdo parallel structure. He doesn't get to the point where the symmetry becomes gratuitous or irritating. Instead, he creates something at once pleasing and powerful: syntactic balance.

27

At a Glance

Prof. Barry: There is a specific reason I just used the word "balance" to describe the sweet spot Obama achieves in his "A More Perfect Union" speech. The reason has to do with there being another way to refer to a sentence that uses parallel structure. Would you mind reading it for us, Ms. Ida? I am guessing you and Ms. Henrietta have encountered a fair amount of parallel structure working for the *Michigan Daily*.

Ms. Ida: "A balanced sentence."

Prof. Barry: Yeah, a balanced sentence. Why do you think we call it that?

Ms. Ida: Because one side of the sentence matches up with the other side of the sentence.

Prof. Barry: Good. You can think of the two sides as having the same weight, like a perfectly balanced scale. A good example is a statement that has been attributed to Albert Einstein but more likely comes from a book called *The Metaphorical Mind* by Bob Samples.

I've highlighted the parallel parts.

Ms. Ida: "The intuitive mind is *a sacred gift* and the rational mind is *a faithful servant*."

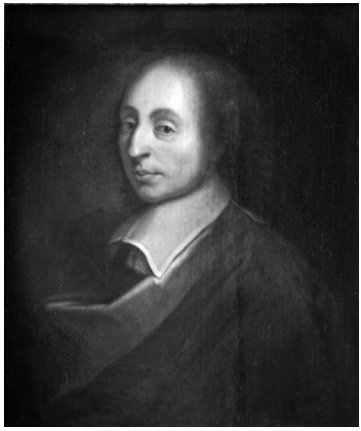
Prof. Barry: Or how about this next slogan from *Wild World of Sports*, a television program that ran on ABC for over 30 years, beginning in the early 1960s.

Ms. Ida: "The thrill *of victory*, and the agony *of defeat*."

Prof. Barry: That's pretty catchy, right?

Ms. Ida: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: One way to explain the appeal of those kinds of constructions is to consider an observation made by the 17th-century mathematician Blaise Pascal.



Has anyone heard of him? Maybe our math major, Ms. Carroll?

Ms. Carroll: Yeah. I've heard of him.

Prof. Barry: Good. It's not often in this class that that we get to read the words of one of your fellow mathematicians, so let's have you share what he said. Then I want everyone to start thinking about how the symmetry of a balanced sentence can make it easier to comprehend and remember content.

Ms. Carroll: "Symmetry is what we see at a glance."

Prof. Barry: What do you take that to mean?

Ms. Carroll: If two things look the same—if they have the same structure—they become easier to process.

Prof. Barry: Apply that to "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat."

Ms. Carroll: The structure of the first part—

Prof. Barry: "The thrill of victory"?

Ms. Carroll: Yeah. The structure of "the thrill of victory" prepares you for the structure of "the agony of defeat."

Prof. Barry: Good. The symmetry is in some sense symbiotic, or at least reciprocal. Each part of "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" enhances the effect of the other—to the great benefit of the reader or listener.

We'll expand on this idea next class when we talk about rhetorical repetition. For now, I want to turn our attention to two concepts that will be important as we continue to develop not just as skillful users of parallel structure but as writers more generally. The first is "deliberate practice." The second is "grit."

28

Deliberate Practice

Prof. Barry: We'll start with "deliberate practice," a term coined by the psychologist Anders Ericsson of Florida State University. For years, Ericsson has studied the methods and mechanics of expert performance—in music, in sports, in all kinds of areas.

Ms. Amos (*jumping in*): Is he the 10,000 hours guy?

Prof. Barry: You mean 10,000 hours of practice?

Ms. Amos: Yeah. I remember reading that it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in something. Didn't he come up with that idea?

Prof. Barry: Kind of. In the book *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*, Ericsson and his coauthor, the science journalist Robert Pool, explain that people often misunderstand the research that led to this so-called 10,000-hour rule. Expertise is not achieved by simply putting in 10,000 hours of practice. Expertise is achieved by putting in 10,000 hours—or something close to that—of the *right* kind of practice. Here's a passage from early in the book.

Ms. Amos: "The right sort of practice carried out over a sufficient period of time leads to improvement. Nothing else."

Prof. Barry: They define that "right sort of practice" as having several characteristics. Here's one.

Ms. Amos: "It develops skills that other people have already figured out how to do and for which effective training techniques have been established."

Prof. Barry: Sort of sounds like what we've been doing in this course, right? The writing techniques we discuss each week are definitely ones other people have already figured out how to use.

We sometimes add new names to describe those techniques, just to make them a bit easier to process and remember. But the techniques themselves have been around for years, decades, even millennia.

Here, for example, is some parallel structure from the Old Testament. It comes from Psalm 19.

Ms. Amos: "Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge."

Prof. Barry: And here's some from the Koran in sura 91.

Ms. Amos: "By the day when it displays it,
By the night when it veils it,
By the sky and the One who built it,
By the earth and the One who spread it."

Prof. Barry: We can also find examples in the ancient texts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism as well as in the works of many other great traditions. How, Ms. Amos, does this wealth of material make it easier, for our class at least, to do the kind of "deliberate practice" Ericsson recommends?

Ms. Amos: Because we have tons of models to follow.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. We're not just taking some vague, "I know it when I see it" approach to good writing. We're breaking good writing down into discrete, reproducible moves. We're identifying experts who perform these moves quite well. And then each of you

is trying out the moves yourselves, every week, in the short papers you write and submit.

Which brings me to Ericsson's insistence that deliberate practice involves having "effective training techniques." What is a big part of our technique, Ms. Amos? What do I make you do every time you write a paper?

Ms. Amos: Come to your office and read it out loud.

Prof. Barry: Do you like doing that?

Ms. Amos: Not especially.

Prof. Barry: Why not?

Ms. Amos: Because my initial drafts are usually pretty terrible.

Prof. Barry: And?

Ms. Amos: Terrible writing is not very fun to read out loud.

Prof. Barry: Especially?

Ms. Amos: When I'm the one who wrote it.

Prof. Barry: Good. I think we all feel that way about our terrible writing. But as painful as the experience of reading that writing out loud to another person can be, do you agree that it is also really helpful?

Ms. Amos: Definitely.

Prof. Barry: Why?

Ms. Amos: Because I hear things when reading my words to you that I would never catch if I were just looking at them alone.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. We'll talk more in future classes about this particular training technique and how it aligns well with advice from people as different as the surgeon Atul Gawande, the Supreme

Court justice John Roberts, and what the folks at Pixar like to call their "Braintrust."

For now, however, we'll just take the word of the writer Susan Orlean, who we have mentioned a couple of times this semester. Here is something she tweeted in 2012.

Ms. Amos: "I always, ALWAYS, read my work out loud as I'm writing. It's the single best tool for self-editing."

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Your Horribleness

Prof. Barry: We now have a basic understanding of the deliberate practice that Anders Ericsson champions. We know it involves identifying an already-established set of skills and then using proven training techniques to learn those skills. But there's more to it than that. So let's return to *Peak*, which is the book you read from earlier, Ms. Amos. We're ready to learn some of the other components. Here's one.

Ms. Amos: "Deliberate practice is deliberate—that is, it requires a person's full attention and conscious actions."

Prof. Barry: Keep reading.

Ms. Amos: "It isn't enough to simply follow a teacher's or coach's directions. The student must concentrate on the specific goal for his or her practice activity so that adjustments can be made to control practice."

Prof. Barry: Elsewhere in the book, Ericsson and Pool emphasize that the amount of solitary practice elite performers put in is a big part of what separates them from average or even very good performers. Here's how they summarize a study Ericsson did on students at an elite music academy in Berlin.

Ms. Amos: "Among the students who had become good enough to be admitted to the Berlin music academy, the best students had put in, on average, significantly more hours of solitary practice than the better students."

Prof. Barry: Along those same lines, here is Ericsson and Pool's advice for how to get better at chess.

Ms. Amos: "If you want to improve in chess, you don't do it by playing chess; you do it with solitary study of the grandmasters' games."

Prof. Barry: Which is very similar to their advice for how to get better at darts.

Ms. Amos: "If you want to improve in darts, you don't do it by going to the bar with your friends and letting the loser buy the next round; you do it by spending some time alone working on reproducing your throwing motion exactly from one throw to the next."

Prof. Barry: And also for how to get better at bowling.

Ms. Amos: "If you want to get better at bowling, those Thursday nights with your bowling league team won't do much good. You'll want to spend some quality alley time on your own—ideally, working on difficult pin configurations in which being able to control exactly where the ball goes is essential."

Prof. Barry: They then end with the following admonition.

Ms. Amos: "Remember: if your mind is wandering or you're relaxed and just having fun, you probably won't improve."

Prof. Barry: I mention all this because, although the time we spend together is useful for introducing you to key writing concepts and getting you to think in new and creative ways, the real work of this course will come when you are by yourself, struggling to make your paragraphs a little more powerful, your sentences a little more stylish, your words a little more precise and effective.

If all that comes naturally, if it feels like you are operating on intellectual cruise control, you're probably not doing it right. A more accurate description of what you're likely to experience comes from Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose memoir *Between the World and Me* won all kinds of awards when it came out in 2015.

Ms. Amos: "The challenge of writing is to see your horribleness, on page, to see your terribleness, and then to go to bed, and wake up the next day, and take that horribleness and that terribleness and refine it, and make it not so terrible and not so horrible, and then go to bed again, and come the next day, and refine it a little bit more, and make it not so bad, and then go to bed the next day and do it again, then make it maybe average. And then one more time, you know, if you're lucky, maybe you get to 'good.'"

Prof. Barry: That kind of fortitude—where you persevere toward a worthy goal, overcoming many doubts, frustrations, and

disappointments along the way—is the essence of what Angela Duckworth calls "grit."

A psychologist at Penn, Duckworth includes Coates's "horribleness" comments at the end of the best-selling book she wrote about grit. Here's the title.

Ms. Amos: *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*.

Prof. Barry: We're going to turn to some lessons from that book now. We won't, however, be leaving Ericsson and deliberate practice behind, given that large sections of Duckworth's book address Ericsson's work.

Plus, Duckworth and Ericsson once teamed up for a study about one of the fiercest competitions on the planet. Contestants train up to 12 hours a day for it. They come from all over the world. And it is not uncommon for the stress of the event to cause some of them to break down in tears.

Anybody want to guess what the competition is? Here's a hint: it has often been televised on ESPN.

Ms. Warsaw (*jumping in*): The Tour de France?

Prof. Barry: Nope.

Mr. Boh (*jumping in*): The CrossFit Games?

Prof. Barry: Nope.

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): The Iditarod?

Prof. Barry: You mean the dog sled race in Alaska?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: No. It's not the Iditarod. Nor is it the Ironman World Championships in Hawaii. Or the Badwater Ultramarathon in Death Valley. Or the Marathon des Sables, a 150-mile trek across

the Moroccan desert. The competition I am talking about is not even held outside. It takes place in an auditorium.

And none of the contestants can have passed beyond eighth grade. In fact, a contestant in 2016 was only six years old.

Maybe our film major, Mr. Leigh, knows the competition I am talking about. It was the subject of a wonderful documentary in 2002 that was nominated for an Academy Award.

Mr. Leigh: Sorry. I'm blanking too.

Prof. Barry: No problem at all. I'll just tell you. The movie is called *Spellbound*, and the intense, go-for-blood competition is . . . the National Spelling Bee.

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Effort Counts Twice

Prof. Barry: Has anyone ever watched the National Spelling Bee?

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): I have, or at least highlights of it.

Prof. Barry: On *SportsCenter*?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Remind us who competes in it, please. I mentioned some of the characteristics a moment ago, but perhaps it would be helpful to highlight them again. Are the contestants adults?

Ms. Bristol: No. They're kids.

Prof. Barry: How old are they? Are they high schoolers?

Ms. Bristol: No. Younger than that. I think if you are in high school, you're no longer eligible.

Prof. Barry: That's right. Everyone has to be in the eighth grade or below. They also can't be older than 14.

Mr. Farnoff (*jumping in*): Didn't a 5-year-old compete once?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. In 2017. She was a little girl from Texas. And the year before, an 11-year-old actually won the whole thing.

If anybody wants to learn more about the competition, I highly recommend the documentary I mentioned, *Spellbound*. It follows a bunch of kids and their families as they prepare for the finals. There is a wide range of study strategies that people use, which is why Angela Duckworth and Anders Ericsson got interested in the Spelling Bee as a research project. They wanted to find out whether kids who engaged in deliberate practice—which in this context meant long hours alone memorizing words—did better than kids who didn't. Here's a summary of what they found. Can you read it for us please, Mr. Farnoff?

Mr. Farnoff: "Deliberate practice, operationally defined as studying and memorizing words while alone, better predicted performance in the National Spelling Bee than being quizzed by others or reading for pleasure."

Prof. Barry: Keep reading.

Mr. Farnoff: "Rated as the most effortful and least enjoyable type of preparation activity, deliberate practice was increasingly favored over being quizzed as spellers accumulated competition experience."

Prof. Barry: So the more students competed in the Spelling Bee, the more they seemed to realize that deliberate practice was the key to doing well. They didn't spend all those solitary hours memorizing words because it was fun. They spent all those solitary hours memorizing words because it was effective, because it helped them improve, because it got results.

Ms. Carroll (*jumping in*): So are you anti-fun?

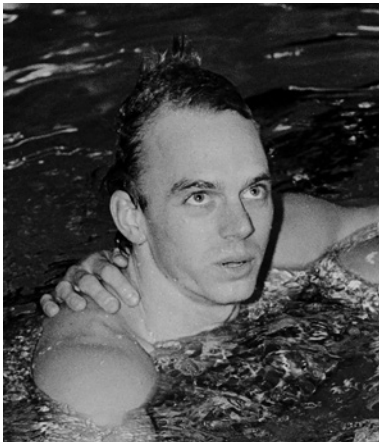
Prof. Barry: No. I'm not antifun, especially when it comes to education. You need to be interested in a subject and ultimately find joy in what you are doing for all those solitary hours to seem worth it, whether you are competing in a spelling bee, studying to become

a scientist, or learning to play the piano. That's one of the big takeaways for Duckworth—so much so that she put the word "passion" in the book's subtitle. Read the full thing for us again, please.

Ms. Carroll: "*Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*."

Prof. Barry: She also, as evidence, includes portions of an extended conversation she had with the swimmer Rowdy Gaines, who won three gold medals at the 1984 Olympics and has since become a wonderful ambassador for the sport. If you have ever tuned in to Olympic coverage of swimming, you've probably heard his voice.

What Gaines makes clear is that his love of swimming really helped him push through the more brutal and monotonous aspects of the training.



Ms. Carroll: "I'm not going to lie. I never really enjoyed going to practice, and I certainly didn't enjoy it while I was there. In fact, there were brief moments, walking to the pool at four or four-thirty in the morning, or sometimes when I couldn't take the pain, when I'd think, 'God is this worth it?'"

Prof. Barry: Keep reading. Gaines now explains why he didn't quit.

Ms. Carroll: "It's because I loved swimming. . . . I had a passion for competing, for the *result* of training, for the feeling of being in shape, for winning, for traveling, for meeting friends. I hated practice, but I had an overall passion for swimming."

Prof. Barry: Another Olympic gold medalist Duckworth interviewed, the rower Mads Rasmussen, made a similar point.

Ms. Carroll: "It's about hard work. When it's not fun, you do what you need to do anyway. Because when you achieve results, it's incredibly fun. You get to enjoy the 'Aha' at the end, and that is what drags you along a lot of the way."

Prof. Barry: Duckworth has two tidy formulas that capture the payoff of the hard work Gaines and Rasmussen describe. Here's the first.

Ms. Carroll: "Talent × Effort = Skill."

Prof. Barry: What do you think she means by that? Why isn't talent enough to produce skill? Why do you need something more if you really want to become good at something?

Ms. Carroll: Because talent is pretty easy to waste. Without effort, it's really not going to lead to much.

Prof. Barry: Good. We might think of that situation like a really wonderful plot of soil that dries up because of lack of attention, or a coveted piece of real estate that forever remains a vacant lot. We could even apply those images to the second equation Duckworth offers.

It's directly related to the first.

Ms. Carroll: "Skill × Effort = Achievement."

Prof. Barry: Given what you said about the first equation, what's going on with this second one? What does the equation "Skill × Effort = Achievement" tell us about the role of effort once you have developed a skill?

Ms. Carroll: That if you really want to achieve something meaningful, you need to combine whatever skill you have with even more effort.

Prof. Barry: And also that the more effort you put in?

Ms. Carroll: The bigger your achievement will be.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. You can think of effort almost like compound interest—though Duckworth herself frames the effect a bit differently. Given that "Talent × Effort = Skill" and "Skill × Effort = Achievement," she essentially combines the equations in the following way.

Ms. Carroll: "(Talent × Effort) × Effort = Achievement."

Prof. Barry: Which means what, Ms. Math Major?

Ms. Carroll: Effort counts twice.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. It counts once when paired with "Talent" to produce "Skill." And it counts a second time when paired with that "Skill" to produce "Talent."

Ms. Carroll: Right.

Prof. Barry: Duckworth really emphasizes this point in her book, even going so far as to make it the title of one of the book's chapters.

Ms. Carroll: "Effort Counts Twice"?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. That's the title of chapter 3. She also emphasizes something else: "the mundanity of excellence."

That phrase, admittedly, isn't quite as pithy and memorable as "Effort Counts Twice." But it's nevertheless a key part of Duckworth's view of performance and improvement. To learn more about it, we'll need to hear from another swimmer.

31

The Mundanity of Excellence

Prof. Barry: The phrase "the mundanity of excellence" comes from a paper written by the sociologist Dan Chambliss about elite swimmers. When Angela Duckworth sat down to read it for the first time, she apparently became so excited that she immediately read it again, without even getting up.

To better understand why, let's first talk about what the word "mundanity" even means. Can you take a shot at it please, Mr. Wild? I trust that being an English major has helped you develop a pretty expansive vocabulary.

Mr. Wild: Sure. Am I right that *mundanity* comes from the word *mundane*?

Prof. Barry: Yup, it does. So then what's the definition of *mundane*?

Mr. Wild: It's a synonym for *ordinary* or *boring*.

Prof. Barry: Can you use it in a sentence?

Mr. Wild: Now?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Or suppose I make it easier on you. If I said, "This weekend I spent most of my time handling the mundane tasks of life"—what are some of the things I might have done?

Mr. Wild: Your laundry.

Prof. Barry: What else?

Mr. Wild: Cleaned your bathroom.

Prof. Barry: How about one more?

Mr. Wild: Paid some bills?

Prof. Barry: Good. None of those things is terribly exciting or difficult, is it? Each is rather routine.

Mr. Wild: Right.

Prof. Barry: Yet each is also really important in terms of keeping my life progressing in the right direction, especially if we look at those tasks as individual components of a larger, interdependent system. Daily acts of discipline, performed over a long stretch of time, can really pay off.

Which is precisely what Chambliss found when he started studying elite swimmers. One of them, Mary Meagher—who won three gold medals at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and earned the nickname "Madame Butterfly" for all the world records she broke in the butterfly events—responded the following way when Chambliss asked her what people least understand about competitive swimming.

Mr. Wild: "People don't know how ordinary success is."

Prof. Barry: She didn't mean that success is common, that it is easy to achieve, that it requires no effort or drive. She meant that it comes from boringly consistent execution.

Chambliss puts the point in somewhat more academic terms.

Mr. Wild: "Superlative performance is really a confluence of dozens of small skills or activities, each one learned or stumbled upon, which have been carefully drilled into habit and then are fitted together in a synthesized whole."

Prof. Barry: Read a little more.

Mr. Wild: "There is nothing extraordinary or superhuman in any of those actions—only the fact that they are done consistently and correctly, and all together, produce excellence."

Prof. Barry: Here's how he applies those findings to swimming.

Mr. Wild: "When a swimmer learns a proper flip turn in the freestyle races, she will swim the race a bit faster; then a streamlined push from the wall, with the arms squeezed together over the head, and a little faster; then how to place the hands in the water so no air is cupped in them; then how to lift them over the water; then how to lift weights to properly build strength, and how to eat the right foods, and to wear the best suits for racing, and on and on."

Prof. Barry: Each of those tasks, Chambliss says, seems small in itself. But each also enables the athlete to swim a bit faster every time they get in the pool, the cumulative effect of which is what, Mr. Wild?

Mr. Wild: Excellence?

Prof. Barry: Right. That's "the mundanity of excellence." It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen in front of a huge audience filled with people chanting your name. It happens mostly by yourself, through the unrelenting application of proven techniques for getting better.

In that way, the process is actually nicely summed up by someone who has achieved Olympic-like success not in swimming but in finance: billionaire investor Ray Dalio.

Here's one of the observations Dalio offers in *Principles*, his best-selling account of the values and practices he used to build both his fortune and his company's unique culture. You'll notice that he explicitly uses the word "mundane."

Mr. Wild: "While there might be more glamour in coming up with the brilliant new ideas, most of success comes from doing the mundane and often distasteful stuff, like identifying problems and pushing hard over a long time."

Prof. Barry: "Get rich quick" often sounds good. But at least according to Dalio, whom we will return to next class, a much more dependable strategy is "Get rich slowly, day-by-disciplined-day."

32

Notes on Nuance: What the Yankees Are to Baseball

Prof. Barry: We're going to stick with Duckworth's book *Grit* as we start to finish our session today with another set of those "Notes on Nuance" moves we've been doing each week. Really impressed by how many of you have started to incorporate previous moves into the papers you've been submitting; I want to give everyone the chance to continue to experiment.

As is often the case when learning something new, your first several attempts may feel forced and awkward. But the more you practice—and the more you spot them in the writing of others—the better you'll be able to figure out when and how to use them.

Ms. Warsaw (*jumping in*): How many are we going to learn this year?

Prof. Barry: A bunch. We'll add two more today, both related to parallel structure. Here's an example of the first one, from an interview Duckworth includes in *Grit* with the former cartoon editor of the *New Yorker* Bob Mankoff. Mankoff is explaining why he spent so many years trying to get his work published in that magazine. I've underlined the key parts of the move.

Ms. Warsaw: "'The *New Yorker* was to cartooning what the New York Yankees were to baseball,' Mankoff explained. 'If you could make that team, you too were one of the best.'"

Prof. Barry: See the parallel Duckworth creates there? She does something similar later in the book when talking about ETS, which is the company that produces standardized tests like the SAT and the GRE.

Ms. Warsaw: "Basically, ETS is to standardized testing what Kleenex is to tissues. Sure, there are other organizations that make standardized tests, but most of us are hard-pressed to name them."

Prof. Barry: Focus on the word "what" in these constructions. That's the crucial component. The other aspects, like the verb tense, sometimes vary. In the Yankee passage, for example, Duckworth uses past tense: "what the New York Yankees were to baseball." In the ETS one, she goes with present tense: "what Kleenex is to tissues." But in both, she sticks with the word "what" to establish the analogy.

We can see the same setup in a comment made by Laura Hillenbrand—remember her from last class?

Ms. Warsaw: Yeah. She's the one who wrote *Seabiscuit*, right?

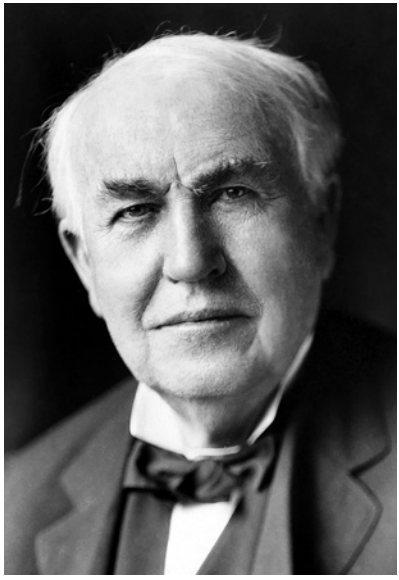
Prof. Barry: Yup. And she also wrote a book called *Unbroken* that tells the incredible story of Louis Zamperini, a middle-distance runner who competed in the 1936 Olympics and then somehow managed to survive being repeatedly tortured in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. Like *Seabiscuit*, this second book by Hillenbrand was a big best seller and eventually got turned into a movie.

Few authors have that kind of success. What's all the more remarkable in Hillenbrand's case is that she has struggled for years with chronic fatigue syndrome. Here's how she explained, in an

interview with the *New York Times Magazine*, why she hates the name of that disease. The "what" move comes at the very end of her explanation. I've underlined it on the slide.

Ms. Warsaw: "The average person who has this disease, before they got it, we were not lazy people; it's very typical that people were Type A and hard, hard workers. I was that kind of person. I was working my tail off in college and loving it. It's exasperating because of the name [chronic fatigue syndrome], which is condescending and so grossly misleading. Fatigue is what we experience, but it is what a match is to an atomic bomb."

Prof. Barry: We'll look at one more example before turning to the next move. It comes from, well—I'll let you try to guess the author. All I will say for now is that the sentence appears in a document filed with the US Patent Office on October 17, 1888.



Ms. Warsaw: "I am experimenting upon an instrument which does for the Eye what the phonograph does for the Ear."

Prof. Barry: Any idea who it is?

Ms. Warsaw: Not based on just that sentence, no.

Prof. Barry: Fair enough. Here's a little bit more information. Born in Ohio, the person who wrote that sentence grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, which is about 100 miles from here.

Ms. Warsaw: Henry Ford?

Prof. Barry: Nope. Henry Ford grew up in Dearborn, Michigan. But Ford did eventually buy, as a historical keepsake, the Menlo

Park Laboratory, where this person, who holds the most patents in US history, did all his inventing. You can see the setup if you go to the Henry Ford Museum and walk around Greenfield Village.

Mr. Boh (*jumping in*): I've been there. It's Thomas Edison, right?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Before he died in 1931 at the age of 84, Edison received a record 1,093 patents. But here is the encouraging part, at least for those of us whose ideas don't always take hold the first time around: Edison apparently filed hundreds of *unsuccessful* patents on his way to earning those 1,093 successful ones.

Full of exactly the kind of "passion and perseverance" Duckworth highlights in *Grit*, he is often given credit for popularizing the following maxim.

Mr. Boh: "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

Prof. Barry: There are other sayings like this that are attributed to Edison. Here's one.

Mr. Boh: "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."

Prof. Barry: Here's another.

Mr. Boh: "Everything comes to him who hustles while he waits."

Prof. Barry: But perhaps the best way to sum up his impressive combination of creativity, vigor, and resilience is a sentence that previews the next nuance move we are going to learn.

Mr. Boh: "Edison was <u>as</u> industrious <u>as</u> he was inventive."

33

Notes on Nuance: "As"

Prof. Barry: Ms. Maat.

Ms. Maat: Yes.

Prof. Barry: Take another look at the sentence about Thomas Edison that Mr. Boh just read for us. Here it is again.

Ms. Maat: "He was as industrious as he was inventive."

Prof. Barry: Any idea how the word "as" is working there?

Ms. Maat: It seems to be setting up a comparison.

Prof. Barry: What kind of comparison?

Ms. Maat: An equal comparison.

Prof. Barry: Between?

Ms. Maat: Between the extent to which Edison was industrious and the extent to which he was inventive.

Prof. Barry: Good. The "as" provides a cool, parallel-structure-like way of communicating that relationship.

We might even imagine an implicit "just" in the sentence, right? Here's what I mean.

Ms. Maat: "He was (just) as industrious as he was inventive."

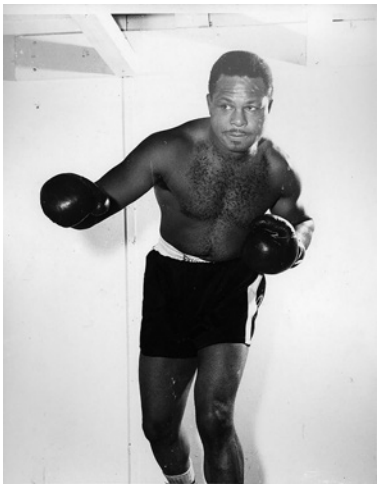
Prof. Barry: Or consider a few more examples, starting with a book by Susan Casey called *Voices in the Ocean*. Do your studies in biology include marine biology, Ms. Maat?

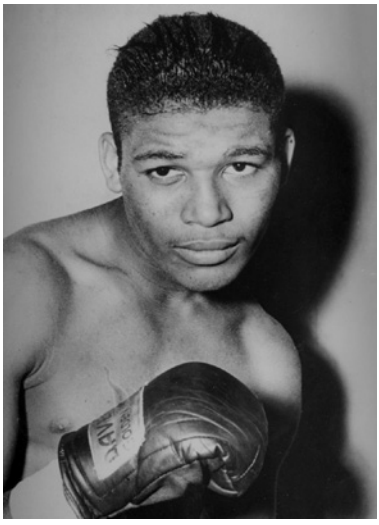
Ms. Maat: Not yet.

Prof. Barry: Well, you still might be interested in Casey's book. She's a great storyteller, having worked at *Time* magazine, *Outside* magazine, and *Sports Illustrated for Women*. Here's the sentence with the "as" move in it. She's describing swimming with a special kind of dolphin called "spinners."

Ms. Maat: "When I think back on it now, my swim with the spinners in Honolua Bay was an experience as mystifying as it was uplifting."

Prof. Barry: Or how about this next example, from a classic book about boxing called *The Sweet Science* by A. J. Liebling. Back in 2002, *Sports Illustrated* put the book at the top of its list of 100 Best Sports Books of All Time.





I'd like to think that the sentence you are about to read—which highlights a couple of great fighters from the 1940s, Archie Moore and Sugar Ray Robinson—had something to do with that honor.

Ms. Maat: "Archie Moore, a later maturing artist, like Laurence Sterne and Stendhal, illuminated the skies with the light of his descending sun, and Sugar Ray Robinson proved as long-lasting as he had been precocious—a tribute to burning the candle at both ends."

Prof. Barry: You know who else is a fan of this "as" move?

Ms. Maat: Who?

Prof. Barry: HBO.

Ms. Maat: The television channel?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Here is how the writers for their Emmy Award–winning show *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel* introduced a segment in 2016 on Bruce Arians, the coach of the NFL's Arizona Cardinals at the time.

Ms. Maat: "Get ready for a story that is as intriguing as it is surprising."

Prof. Barry: And it's not as if this "as" move is strictly a modern phenomenon. Remember how earlier we looked at the famous

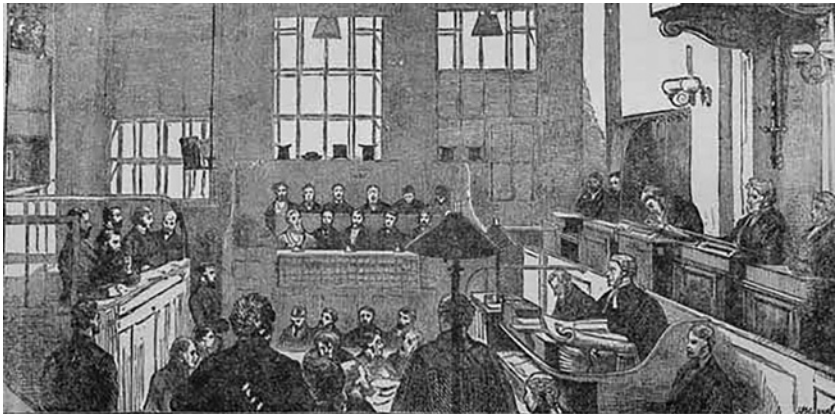
parallel structure in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens?

Ms. Maat: Yeah. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

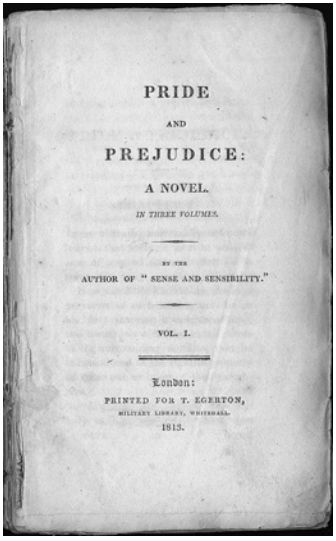
Prof. Barry: Well, later on in that book, which first came out in 1859, Dickens uses the "as" move while describing a famous London courthouse called the Old Bailey.

Read the sentence for us please.

Ms. Maat: "Altogether, the Old Bailey, at that date, was a choice illustration of the precept that 'Whatever is, is right,'—an aphorism that would be as final as it is lazy did it not include the troublesome consequence that nothing that ever was, was wrong."



Prof. Barry: Even farther back in the 19th century is a sentence from Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*, a book published in 1813.



PRIDE

AND

PREJUDICE:

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY."

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR T. EGERTON,

MILITARY LIBRARY, WHITEHALL.

1813.

The heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, is talking with her aunt about the scoundrel George Wickham.

Ms. Maat: "We both know that he has been profligate in every sense of the word; that he has neither integrity nor honor; that he is as false and deceitful as he is insinuating."

Prof. Barry: Notice how Austen breaks the strict parallel structure there. She uses two adjectives on one side—"false" and "deceitful"—but on the other side?

Ms. Maat: She only uses one adjective.

Prof. Barry: Right: "insinuating."

THE

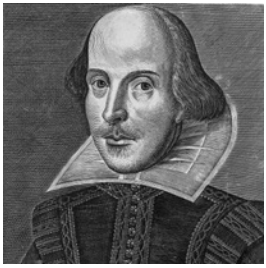
TEMPEST.

Try that switch every once in a while. Don't feel constrained by parallel structure. Don't think you need to follow it precisely. There's room to modify. There's room for variation.

We'll soon see the menu of options further widen when we look at a final example. It comes from a play that was written over a century before Austen or Dickens were even born: *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

34

As Heavy to Me as Odious



Prof. Barry: *The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare's later plays. The first recorded performance was in November 1611, about 30 years after his debut production, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In an earlier play, however, we can see that he was quite aware of how to use the "as" move in its standard form.

Would you mind reading the line for us, Mr. Wild? It's spoken by the queen of the fairies, Titania, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She's paying a compliment to the person she has magically fallen in love with, Nick Bottom.

Mr. Wild: "Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful."

Prof. Barry: The funny part for the audience is that Bottom actually has the head of a donkey, so being "as wise as thou art beautiful" is not really a compliment at all.

But for our purposes, the point is that the line contains the parallel structure we've come to expect from the "as" move. The first part ("Thou art as wise") matches up nicely with the second part ("as thou art beautiful").

You'll notice something a bit different when we move to another example from *The Tempest*. The speaker is a prince named Ferdinand, and he is describing a difficult task that he definitely doesn't want to do.

Mr. Wild: "This my mean task would be as heavy to me as odious."

Prof. Barry: See what Shakespeare does there? See how his use of the "as" move isn't quite the same as what we've seen in our previous examples?

Mr. Wild: Yeah, he clips the parallel structure.

Prof. Barry: By which you mean?

Mr. Wild: He leaves out the second subject and verb.

Prof. Barry: Good. We might have expected to have the version I would now like you to read. I have italicized the second subject and verb you said were missing.

Mr. Wild: "This my mean task would be as heavy to me as *it would be* odious."

Prof. Barry: But instead we get?

Mr. Wild: "This my mean task would be as heavy to me as odious."

Prof. Barry: It's not a huge difference. But it does create a slightly more compressed effect. By forgoing the full symmetry, Shakespeare instead offers a tighter, tidier parallel.

He does a similar thing in Ferdinand's very next lines and then also later in the speech when Prospero, the character whose sorcery drives much of the story, describes the loss of the person Ferdinand has become so enchanted by: Prospero's daughter, Miranda.

We'll start with the follow-up lines from Ferdinand. The "mistress" he refers to is Miranda and "her father" is Prospero.

Mr. Wild: "The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead and makes my labors pleasures. Oh, she is ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed."

Prof. Barry: The contraction "father's crabbed" is the compression I am talking about. "Crabbed," by the way, is the equivalent of "crabby" or "mean" in this context.

Here's how Shakespeare could have written the full line.

Mr. Wild: "Oh, she is ten times more gentle than her father is crabbed."

Prof. Barry: Notice that this particular comparison drops the word "as" altogether. That seems like the right move, don't you think? Otherwise, Shakespeare might have to change the phrase "ten times more gentle" to something like "ten times as gentle."

Mr. Wild: Yeah, I prefer "ten times more gentle."

Prof. Barry: Me too, especially because that leads us to the following insight: the "as" move doesn't actually require the word "as."

35

Mental Representations

Prof. Barry: It may sound weird to hear that the "as" move doesn't actually require the word "as." But I hope that statement highlights two related points. First, these moves are flexible. You can stretch them. You can compress them. You can do all sorts of funky, creative things with them.

Second, their use is not governed by some central authority. For example, do you think, Mr. Wild, that Shakespeare was following a rigid set of instructions when he came up with the phrases "as heavy as odious," "ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed," or the one Prospero says later in the play—"as great to me as late"? Do you think he was trying to strictly comply with some statute-like style guide?

Mr. Wild: No.

Prof. Barry: Neither do I. I don't think he had the Elizabethan-era equivalent of *The Elements of Style* spread out on his desk as he crafted his plays.

But what I think he did have—and the same is true of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and all the other skilled writers we have looked at today—is something that ties back into this idea of "deliberate practice" from Anders Ericsson that we've been learning about.

Would you please read the term for us?

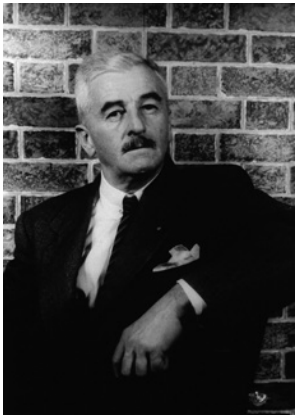
Mr. Wild: "Mental representations."

Prof. Barry: Yup. A key part of becoming an expert, Ericsson suggests, is developing mental representations of your particular domain. Expert chess players, he says, have mental representations of how a series of moves may unfold. Expert pilots have mental representations of how an emergency landing is supposed to go. And expert musicians can, just by looking at a piece of music, know what it will sound like even before they play a note.

Mr. Wild: So you want us to have mental representations of what—sentences?

Prof. Barry: Sentences, phrases, various writing moves and structures. At some point, you might even graduate to having mental representations of whole paragraphs and chapters, or maybe even of an entire book, legal brief, or business plan.

Ericsson himself talks about how he and his coauthor used mental representations of what their book might become to guide them through the writing process. He says mental representations are not just an aspect of deliberate practice but perhaps its central feature.



Mr. Wild: You think Shakespeare used mental representations?

Prof. Barry: I think all great writers do, in one form or another. The level of detail will certainly vary. William Faulkner, for example, claimed to have a very specific image in mind when he conceived of perhaps his most famous novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. Read his account of its origins for us please, Mr. Wild.

Mr. Wild: "It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below."

Prof. Barry: For other writers, however, the initial picture is a bit blurrier. Among those is E. L. Doctorow, whose many works of historical fiction earned him a lifetime achievement award from the Library of Congress in 2014.

Mr. Wild: "I tell [people that writing is] like driving a car at night. You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way."

Prof. Barry: Regardless of whether you think your own approach will be closer to Faulkner's or to Doctorow's, I really encourage you to try to develop this kind of internal vision. Just as skilled chess players see patterns and combinations that novices don't, so do, in their own way, skilled writers—thanks to years of careful reading and attention to language.

In fact, that is part of my hope with these Notes on Nuance lessons of ours. I want you all to begin to recognize the sometimes-hidden mechanics Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens, and many others use to add style and sophistication to the way they string written words together. Social media has only accelerated the ways in which we all must learn to use our words to connect, compete, and create—sometimes all at once. Yet there are features of the English language that many of us haven't taken full advantage of yet. So each week, little by little, we'll try to change that.

For now, though, I want to return to *The Tempest*, because the play gives us a chance to close today's class with a story about how I once saw a performance of it outside, in Ann Arbor, seated 20 feet from the president.

36

Shakespeare in the Arb

Prof. Barry: Don't get too excited. By "the president," I don't mean the president of the United States. I mean the president of our university at the time. He was sitting in a lawn chair.

Mr. Wild: To watch *The Tempest*?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Any guesses why? Where do you think the performance took place?

Mr. Wild: Was it on campus?

Prof. Barry: Yeah.

Mr. Wild: Was it on the diag?

Prof. Barry: Nope.

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): The football stadium?

Prof. Barry: Nope, though that would have been cool.

Mr. Farnoff (*jumping in*): Rick's?

Prof. Barry: No. It was not at Rick's, Mr. Wild. I don't think the president of the university typically hangs out at bars that serve drinks called "Shark Bowls."

Mr. Farnoff: I thought that might at least explain why he was in a lawn chair.

Prof. Barry: Fair point. But the correct answer is that he was in a lawn chair because the performance was in Nichols Arboretum, that great park on the eastern edge of campus. There are trees. There are hills. And every June, there is an amazing peony garden in full bloom.

Ms. Maat (*jumping in*): Was that when the performance was? In June?

Prof. Barry: It might have been June, but late June, or maybe early July. The peak of the peonies was gone by that point. The focus was the play—or at least my focus was the play. It was part of the university's "Shakespeare in the Arb" series. I went because one of my friends was playing the part of Alonso.

He is a really interesting guy. He teaches here at the law school, and he has both a JD and a PhD.

Ms. Maat: What's his PhD in?

Prof. Barry: Psychology.

Mr. Dewey (*jumping in*): And he acts in plays by Shakespeare?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. His range of interests is actually why I brought him up. I want you to be like him.

Mr. Dewey: You want us to be JD/PhDs who also act in plays by Shakespeare?

Prof. Barry: Not exactly. But I do want you to experiment with different ways of thinking and problem-solving, to take on new roles and projects. I want you to be, in a phrase, "radically inclusive."

We'll see if we can sneak in a quick lesson about that concept now, with our final minutes of class.

37

Radically Inclusive

Prof. Barry: The phrase "radically inclusive" is used by military strategist Lin Wells to describe how, when tackling complex problems—humanitarian relief, economic development, national defense—you can't rely on any one approach, dogma, or discipline. You need to instead take the following step. Would you mind reading it for us, Ms. Burke?

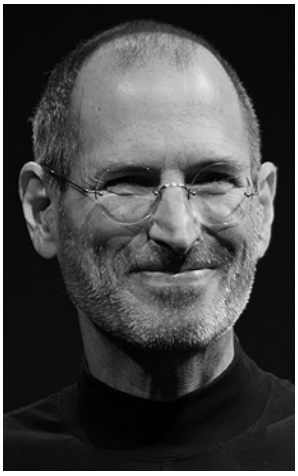
Ms. Burke: "[Bring] into your analysis as many relevant people, processes, disciplines, organizations, and technologies as possible—factors that are often kept separate or excluded altogether."

Prof. Barry: Those words come from *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman in *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*. Friedman claims Wells has had a big influence on his own thinking, and he suggests that geopolitics is an arena in which being radically inclusive is essential. Here's a little more from the book.

Ms. Burke: "The only way you will understand the changing nature of geopolitics today is if you meld what is happening in computing with what is happening in telecommunications with what is happening in the environment with what is happening in globalization with what is happening in demographics. There is no other way today to develop a fully rounded picture."

Prof. Barry: Steve Jobs articulated a similar approach during his reign as the CEO of Apple. Would you please read for us how Jobs summarized the company's philosophy back in 2011, Ms. Cawlow?

As an art history major, you might appreciate the importance he places on the humanities.



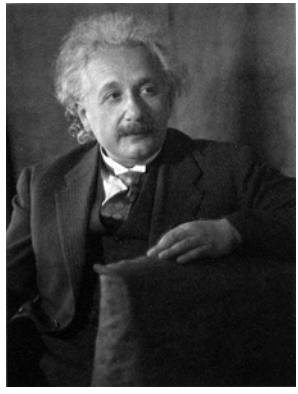
Ms. Cawlow: "It is in Apple's DNA that technology alone is not enough—it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing."

Prof. Barry: Jobs gets a little more specific in an observation quoted in Walter Isaacson's best-selling biography of him.

Ms. Cawlow: "The reason Apple resonates with people is that there's a deep current of humanity in our innovation."

Prof. Barry: Keep reading.

Ms. Cawlow: "I think great artists and great engineers are similar, in that they both have a desire to express themselves. In fact some of the best people working on the original Mac were poets and musicians on the side. In the seventies computers became a way for people to express their creativity. Great artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were also great at science."



Prof. Barry: The relationship goes in the other direction as well. Great scientists like Albert Einstein and Richard Feynman were really into artistic endeavors, music in particular. Einstein played the

violin and piano, and Feynman was often inseparable from his set of bongos.

Ms. Cawlow: Bongos?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Particularly as Feynman got older, those bongos became a big part of his life.

Even more revealing: a study done by researchers at Michigan State showed that elite scientists were almost twice as likely to have an artistic hobby than average scientists.

Ms. Warsaw (*jumping in*): How did the study define "elite scientists"?

Prof. Barry: Being inducted into a prestigious scientific society. In the US, that's the National Academy of Scientists. In Britain, it's the Royal Society. Both are a kind of hall of fame for scientists.

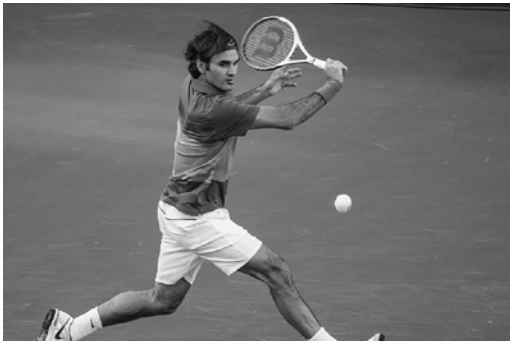
Ms. Warsaw: And so the scientists in those societies are almost twice as likely to have an artistic hobby?

Prof. Barry: That's what the study found. It also found an even stronger correlation for scientists who had won a Nobel Prize. They were almost three times as likely to have an artistic hobby than average scientists.

This finding doesn't mean, of course, that every science major should go out and buy some bongos. But perhaps it does mean that you should consider getting out of the lab once in a while—not just physically but mentally. As helpful as specialization and focused study can be, a lot of evidence suggests that innovation often comes through cross-pollination, through the transfer of ideas from one discipline to another.

David Epstein, the author of *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, has noted that part of how the amazing performers in Cirque du Soleil train is by learning the basics of other performers' disciplines. The creativity of the entire group goes up when each person samples a little bit of what everybody else is doing.

Epstein also points out that perhaps the best—and certainly one of the most creative—tennis players of all time, Roger Federer, experimented with a lot of sports growing up. Here's the list Epstein gives.



Ms. Warsaw: "Federer dabbled in skiing, wrestling, swimming, and skateboarding. He played basketball, handball, tennis, table tennis, badminton over his neighbor's fence, and soccer at school."

Prof. Barry: Now, read the final sentence in that paragraph.

Ms. Warsaw: "He would later give credit to the wide range of sports he played for his athleticism and hand-eye coordination."

Prof. Barry: Or think back to the very beginning of the semester, when we talked about Daniel Kahneman. Remind us what is so notable about him, Ms. Amos. I believe you helped introduce him.

Ms. Amos: He won the Nobel Prize in Economics, even though he is not actually an economist.

Prof. Barry: Right. His background is in psychology. And it is precisely that different perspective that helped him generate his most important ideas. Here's the official notation from the Nobel committee.

Ms. Amos: "For having integrated insights from psychological research into economic science, especially concerning human judgment and decision-making under uncertainty."

Prof. Barry: Notice the focus on "integration." That's an important part of being radically inclusive. I'm not asking you to become intellectual dilettantes. The point isn't to simply fill your brain with a random assortment of trivia. The point is to synthesize information—to make useful connections, to bring together different modes of thought, to create new knowledge.

How Kahneman himself learned to do that is nicely captured in a wonderful book called *The Undoing Project: A Friendship That Changed Our Minds* by Michael Lewis. I often use a key insight from it to teach my law students about persuasion and advocacy. Would you mind reading it for us, Ms. Amos?

Ms. Amos: "People don't choose between things. They choose between descriptions of things."

Prof. Barry: Good. That observation is central to Kahneman's overall approach to human judgment. And by this point in the semester, its core message should be familiar to you: the words you choose can change the decisions people make.

But there is something else that I want to call your attention to as well. Notice the two-part structure of the observation: "People don't choose between things. They choose between descriptions of things." It's a kind of parallel structure, right?

Ms. Amos: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: It's not perfect. It's not a one-for-one relationship like some of the examples we've looked at. Instead, it's got a slight

twist to it, one very similar to the twist in a slogan HBO used for a number of years.

Ms. Amos: "It's not TV. It's HBO."

Prof. Barry: Or take a look at the following pronouncement by Conor McGregor, the champion UFC fighter, after a series of wins by him and his Irish countrymen.

Ms. Amos: "We're not here to take part. We're here to take over."

Prof. Barry: Starting to see the pattern?

Ms. Amos: I think so.

Prof. Barry: We'll do one more. Perhaps someone in here has actually heard or said it themselves during a breakup.

Ms. Amos: "It's not you. It's me."

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): Is there a name for this pattern?

Prof. Barry: There is.

Ms. Ida: Are you going to tell us what it is?

Prof. Barry: I am.

Ms. Ida: Now?

Prof. Barry: Nope.

Ms. Ida: When?

Prof. Barry: Next class, when we also talk about how to use rhetorical repetition.

See you then.

Acknowledgments

"Praise the bridge that carried you safe over."
—George Colman, *The Heir at Law* (1797)

I'm very lucky. Pretty much every day, a wide range of thoughtful, generous people help me become a better writer and teacher. The principal way this happens is through the insightful edits and suggestions I receive from my wonderful team of research assistants. Those who worked on this book in particular are: Julia Adams, Tamar Alexanian, Jonathan Blaha, Taylor Brook, Tyler Berndt, Nick Cagle, Will Case, Alice Choi, Aiyana Chopra, Jonathan Concepción, Sarah Fallon, Joe Fiorile, Thomas Frashier, Becca Garfinkle, Michael Goldenberg, Gabriela Hindera, Amanda Ibrahim, Dalia Ibrahim Myles Johnson, Saket Kulkarni, Jack Igoe, Peter Loderup, Julian McIntonsh, Nick Moen, Jose Peralta, Matt Preston, Darien Perry, Kiana Shin, Zach Suggs, Danielle Therese Abrenica, Jessica Trafiomow, Sage Wen, Sam Williams, and Justin Wotten.

Special thanks also goes to Barb Vibbert. Her official title, "Faculty Assistant," doesn't begin to capture the indispensable role she plays in producing a book like this. A better, more accurate choice would be "Faculty Savior."

I am similarly grateful to have been able to partner with Jason Colman, Sean Guynes, and Amanda Karby at Michigan Publishing. We've now produced seven books together. I hope there will be many, many more.

Notes

Chapter 1

2 **"Both have 'Westminster'"** Churchill makes playful use of the Westminster connection in the opening of his speech: "I am very glad indeed to come to Westminster College this afternoon, and I am complimented that you should give me a degree from an institution whose reputation has been so solidly established. The name 'Westminster' somehow or other seems familiar to me. I feel as if I have heard of it before. Indeed, now that I come to think of it, it was at Westminster that I received a very large part of my education in politics, dialectic, rhetoric, and one or two other things. In fact we have both been educated at the same, or similar, or, at any rate, kindred establishments." Winston Churchill, The Sinews of Peace ("Iron Curtain Speech") (Mar. 5, 1946).

3 **"our 33rd president"** Citing the collection *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* edited by Mitford Matthews, the website for the Truman Library notes an interesting connection between poker and the "The Buck Stops Here" phrase:

> The saying "the buck stops here" derives from the slang expression "pass the buck," which means passing the responsibility on to someone else. The latter expression is said to have originated with the game of poker, in which a marker or counter, frequently in frontier days a knife with a buckhorn handle, was used to indicate the person whose turn it was to deal. If the player did not wish to deal he could pass the responsibility by passing the "buck," as the counter came to be called, to the next player. *"The Buck Stops Here" Desk Sign*, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/trivia/buck-stops-here-sign. See also A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles, I, 198–99 (Mitford M. Mathews ed., 1951).

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>
> The faint rose-colour that had briefly enlivened the overcast heavens was faded now, and there reigned the colourless, soulless, melancholy transition-period that comes just before the onset of night.
>
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