

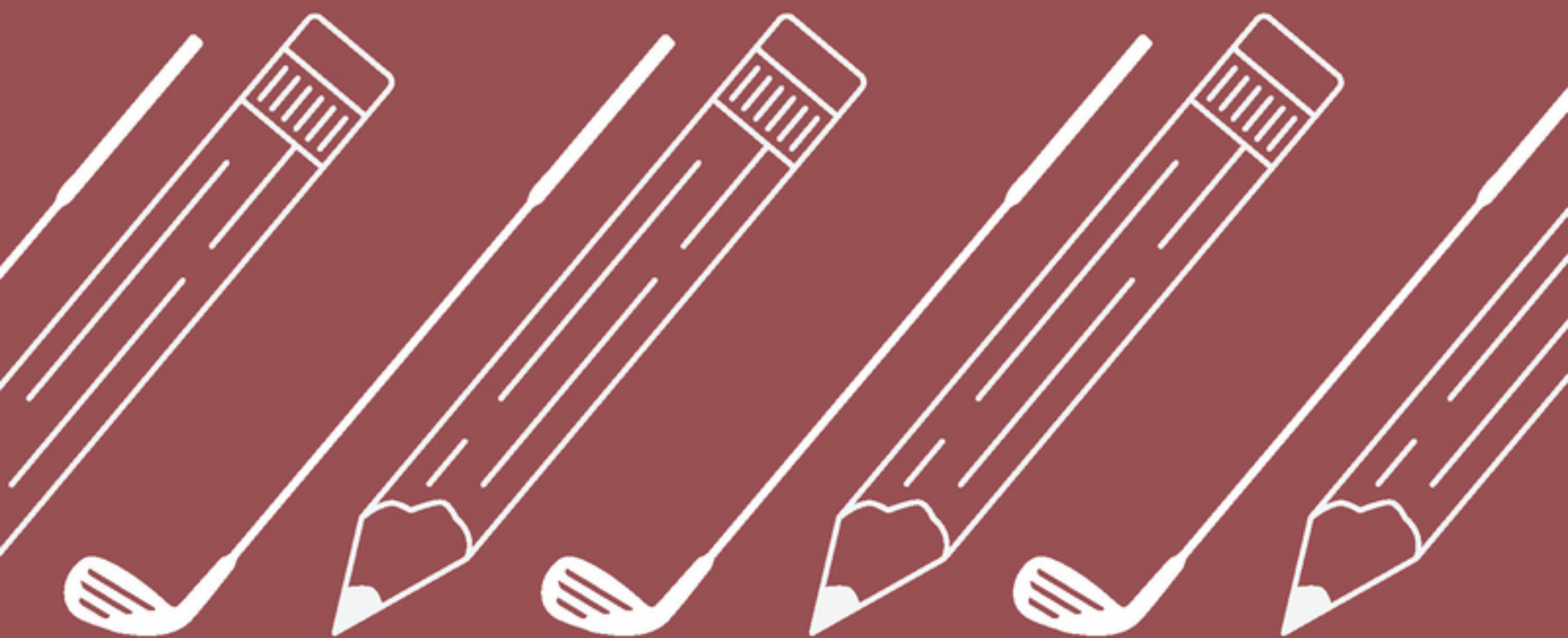
THE

Syntax

OF

Sports

CLASS 3: THE RULE OF THREE



Patrick Barry

Also by Patrick Barry

Books

Good with Words: Speaking and Presenting

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Notes on Nuance

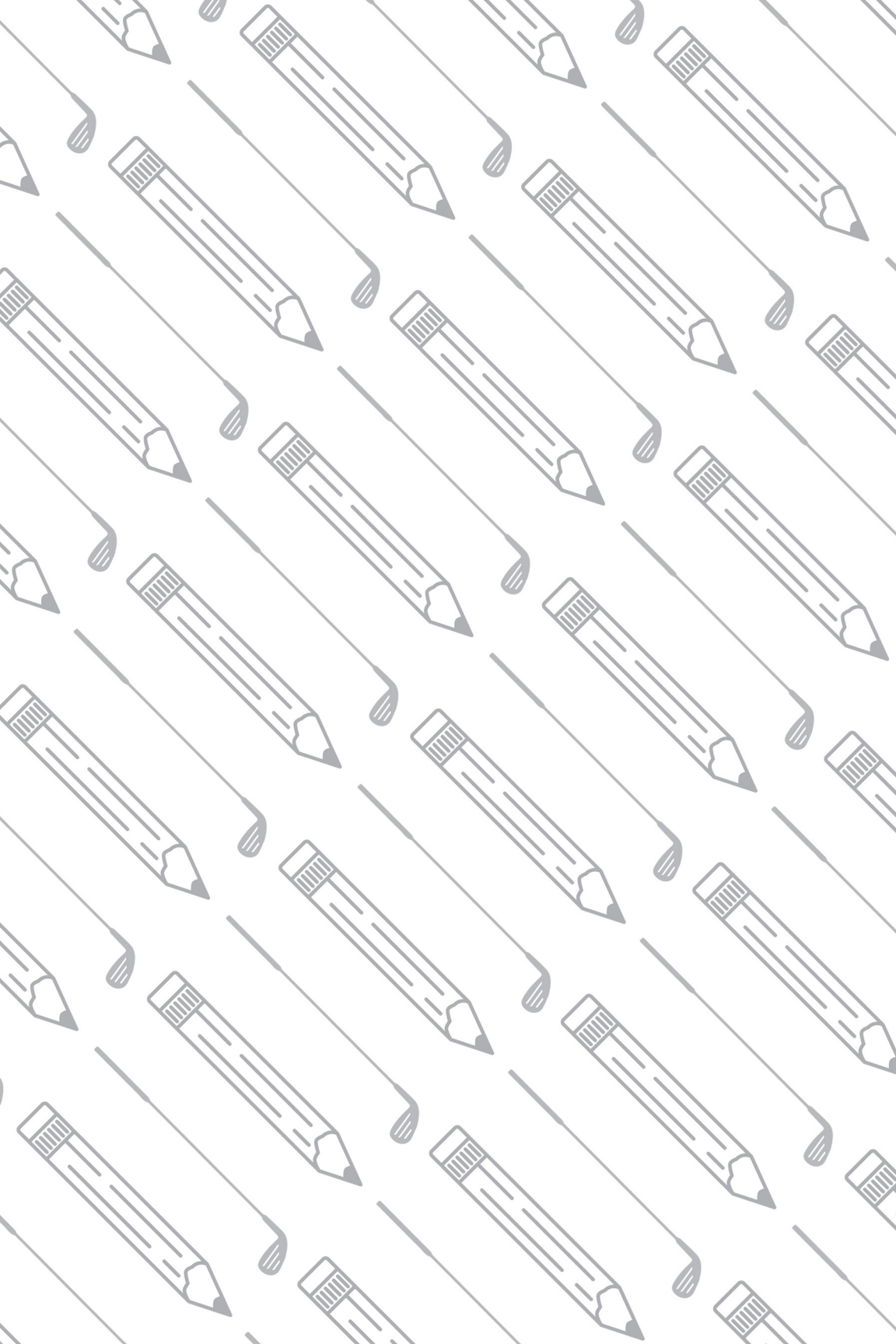
The Syntax of Sports, Class 1: The Words under the Words

The Syntax of Sports, Class 2: The Power of the Particular

Online Courses

“Good with Words: Speaking and Presenting” (Coursera)

“Good with Words: Writing and Editing” (Coursera)





THE



Syntax



OF



Sports

Class 3: The Rule of Three

Patrick Barry

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*For Dan, Devin, and Calleo.
Each is as wonderful a friend as he was a soccer teammate.*

For me, it's just about the sentences and the form. Concentrate, concentrate, concentrate.

—George Saunders,
winner of the 2017 Man Booker Prize,
a MacArthur “Genius Grant,” and
four National Magazine Awards

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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

Pay Attention to the World

Prof. Barry: We ended the last class by talking about Susan Sontag, the author of several novels, plays, poems, and essays, including a very influential piece called “Notes on ‘Camp.’” Incredibly prolific, Sontag was once asked by an audience in South Africa if she had any advice for aspiring writers. Would you please read what she said, Ms. Toth? We’ll use her response both to preview today’s lesson on the Rule of Three and to begin our version of “Previously On.”

Do remember what “Previously On” is?

Ms. Toth: Yeah. It’s where we do a short recap of the previous class before introducing the material for today’s class.

Prof. Barry: Good. So then let’s do a little Previously On now, using what Sontag said about writing. Here’s her first bit of advice.

Ms. Toth: “Love words.”

Prof. Barry: Here’s her second.

Ms. Toth: “Agonize over sentences.”

Prof. Barry: And finally, her third. As we'll soon see, it's probably not an accident that she chose a three-part structure to deliver her advice.

Ms. Toth: "Pay attention to the world."

Prof. Barry: Good. "Pay attention to the world" is the one I want us to focus on. It's a good reminder of what we talked about last class: using the Power of the Particular to enliven our ideas and observations.

Take, for example, the following definition of poetry by the 20th-century writer William Stafford.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a flower in the parking lot of the Pentagon."

Prof. Barry: Isn't that great? Think of all the less vivid ways Stafford could have communicated that thought. He could have written the line this way.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a flower in an urban area."

Prof. Barry: Or this way.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a flower in the parking lot."

Prof. Barry: Or even this way.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a flower in the parking lot of an office building."

Prof. Barry: But instead he wrote?

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a flower in the parking lot of the Pentagon."

Prof. Barry: See how each one of those details adds a little extra value to the sentence? The flower, the parking lot, and especially the Pentagon all give the definition a memorable level of specificity.

Ms. Toth: Yeah. Including the Pentagon was really clever. Same with the parking lot.

Prof. Barry: I agree. But let's not overlook the detail about the flower. That shows something else we talked about last class: the importance of using restraint. Suppose Stafford had picked a specific flower. Suppose he wrote the following.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a rhododendron in the parking lot of the Pentagon."

Prof. Barry: Or this.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a tulip in the parking lot of the Pentagon."

Prof. Barry: Or worse still.

Ms. Toth: "Poetry is a rose in the parking lot of the Pentagon."

Prof. Barry: Wouldn't a rose sound a bit too precious and contrived? Or think if Stafford had included the exact name of one of the parking lots. Think if he wrote "Poetry is a flower in Parking Lot B at the Pentagon."

Overkill, right?

Ms. Toth: Right. Is that even what parking lots are called at the Pentagon? "Parking Lot A"? "Parking Lot B"? "Parking Lot C"?

Prof. Barry: I'm not actually sure. But maybe one of you will take a trip out there the next time you are in Washington, DC. If you do, be sure to bring me back a flower.

2

Look Around. Listen. Feel the Air.

Prof. Barry: The way William Stafford follows up his line about the Pentagon offers an additional chance to do a little Previously On. Would you please read it for us, Ms. Yona? Both it and the Pentagon line appear in a poem of his called, straightforwardly enough, “Poetry.”

Ms. Yona: “Look around, listen. Feel the air.”

Prof. Barry: How many senses does he hit there?

Ms. Yona: Three.

Prof. Barry: So not exactly the “strive for five” we said to shoot for last class. But three out of five ain’t bad, especially considering Stafford uses just six words to capture them: “Look around, listen. Feel the air.”

Let’s return, though, to what we did with the line about the flower in the parking lot at the Pentagon. Remember how we played around with the word choice there?

Ms. Yona: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Well, you can do that with all kinds of writing and other creative material. You can study it unit by unit. You can imagine alternatives. And then you can see how slight changes might alter the original effect.

We even came up with a question last class to help us do this. Anybody remember what it was?

Maybe you, Mr. Dewey? You seem to take good notes.

Mr. Dewey: Sure. It was, “Why is it this way instead of another way?”

Prof. Barry: That’s right: “Why is it this way instead of another way?”

For example, why, Mr. Boh, do we use the term the “Fab Five” to refer to the group of superstar freshmen who led Michigan’s men’s basketball team to the Final Four in 1992? Why don’t we instead refer to them as the “Great Five”?

Mr. Boh: Because “Fab Five” has a nice bit of alliteration.

Prof. Barry: Good. And that’s probably the same reason, Ms. Warsaw, that you and your fellow physicists don’t use the phrase “The Large Bang Theory” to describe how the universe was created, right? Instead, what do you call it?

Ms. Warsaw: “The Big Bang Theory.”

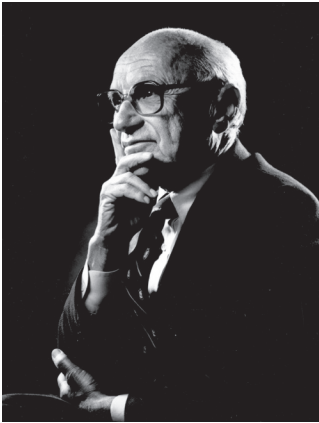
Prof. Barry: Exactly. These are somewhat minor examples, but the practice of asking “Why?” is nevertheless helpful. Don’t just accept the language you inherit. Tinker with the wording. Modify the syntax. Ask questions about whether a better way is possible. Few things in writing are fixed or inevitable.

Consider, for example, that polysyndeton move we learned about during the first class, the one we called the “Gaiman Grab” because the writer Neil Gaiman uses it so often and so well. That’s a perfect



example of a writer strategically tinkering a bit, as I think this next example shows. It comes from Gaiman's 2013 book *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, which won the Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel.

Ms. Warsaw: “The kitten was affectionate and interested and a good companion for someone whose seventh birthday party had consisted of a table with iced biscuits and a blancmange and cake and fifteen empty folding chairs.”



Prof. Barry: We can see the same move in a much different context if we look at an influential essay by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman called “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits.” Addressing the argument that there are situations in which a corporate executive has some individual “social responsibilities,” he could have written the following.

Ms. Warsaw: “But in these respects he is acting as a principal, not an agent; he is spending his own money, time, or energy, not the money of his employers or the time or energy he has contracted to devote to their purposes.”

Prof. Barry: Instead, however, he uses polysyndeton and throws in an extra *or*.

Ms. Warsaw: “But in these respects he is acting as a principal, not an agent; he is spending his own money or time or energy, not the

money of his employers or the time or energy he has contracted to devote to their purposes.”

Prof. Barry: The example I really want to talk about, however, comes from the journalist Susan Orlean, who has written about all kinds of things: orchids, libraries, even the dog Rin Tin Tin. In a profile for the *New Yorker* back in 1993, she set her sights on the world of high school basketball and a phenom named Felipe Lopéz.

We’ll turn to that example now.

3

The Rule of Three

Prof. Barry: Susan Orlean actually went to school at Michigan. I'd like to think what she learned here helped her write the wonderful opening sentence of the magazine profile on Felipe Lopéz I mentioned. Would you please read it for us, Ms. Henrietta? As an aspiring journalist, you might want to steal some of her moves.

Ms. Henrietta: “White men in suits follow Felipe Lopéz everywhere he goes.”

Prof. Barry: Pretty good, huh? It seems to do what first sentences should do: make you want to read the second sentence.

Ms. Henrietta: Right.

Prof. Barry: Let's see if this next example accomplishes something similar. Orlean uses the Gaiman Grab move—or “polysyndeton,” if you prefer the technical term.

The move comes at the end of the sentence, so I am only going to have you read that part, Ms. Henrietta. Orlean has just described Lopez as being as “skinny as a bean pole.”

Ms. Henrietta: “[He] has long shins and thin forearms and sharp, chiseled knees.”

Prof. Barry: See the extra conjunction?

Ms. Henrietta: Yeah. She adds a second *and*.

Prof. Barry: Right. Now read the sentence again but this time without the first *and*.

Ms. Henrietta: “[He] has long shins, thin forearms, and sharp, chiseled knees.”

Prof. Barry: Not quite as good, is it?

Ms. Henrietta: No. It loses some of its rhythm.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. We can see the same move in two additional examples. The first comes from Philip Roth’s *Goodbye, Columbus*, which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1960. The main character, Neil Klugman, is thinking about how good it just felt to run around the local track.

Ms. Henrietta: “It was pleasant and exciting and clean.”

Prof. Barry: The second comes from another winner of the National Book Award: Sherman Alexie, for his book *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

Ms. Henrietta: “We played [basketball] until the moon was huge and golden and perfect in the dark sky.”

Prof. Barry: What I want you to focus on is not just the extra conjunction but also the specific number of units in each description.

Ms. Henrietta: Units?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Alexie describes the moon as being “huge and golden and perfect.” How many units is that?

Ms. Henrietta: Three.

Prof. Barry: How about when Roth describes the post-run feeling as “pleasant and exciting and clean”?

Ms. Henrietta: Also three.

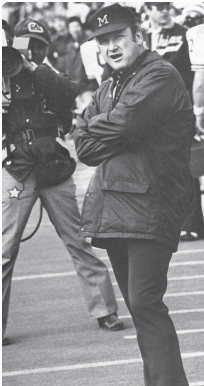
Prof. Barry: And the line we started with, by Susan Orlean: “[He] has long shins and thin forearms and sharp, chiseled knees”?

Ms. Henrietta: Three there, too.

Prof. Barry: Do you think that’s a coincidence? Do you think all these writers just happened to pick three as their organizing structure?

Ms. Henrietta: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Nor do I. We are going to learn in today’s class that there seems to be something almost magical about arranging information in threes. We’ll see this in well-crafted sentences. We’ll see this in well-crafted paragraphs. We’ll see this in all kinds of mediums and messages, from commercials to contracts to comic strips.



We’ll also see, when we return to Orlean’s sentence in a little bit, that this “Rule of Three” has both a straightforward dimension and a dimension that is more subtle. But first I want to talk about some words uttered by someone whose ties to the University of Michigan are even stronger than Orlean’s, someone who is among the most famous figures in the history of the school, or at least the history of the football program: Coach Bo Schembechler.

4

Schembechler and Ford

Prof. Barry: What do you know about Coach Schembechler, Ms. Bristol?

Ms. Bristol: A lot.

Prof. Barry: I figured. He's a legend here at Michigan.

Ms. Bristol: I also live right across from Schembechler Hall.

Prof. Barry: Really?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: So you've seen the big bronze statue of him?

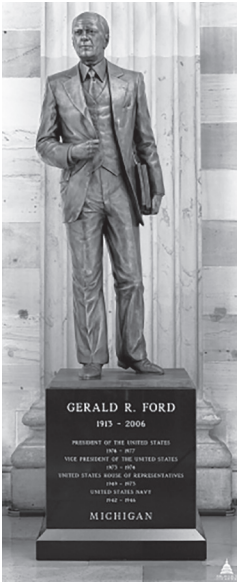
Ms. Bristol: Every morning.

Prof. Barry: Do you know when it was first unveiled?

Ms. Bristol: Like 2015 or something.

Prof. Barry: Close. It was a couple years earlier, in 2013. The sculptor, J. Brett Gill, graduated from the design school here and





also created the statue of President Gerald Ford, another Michigan grad, that appears in the rotunda of the US Capitol Building.

Ms. Bristol: Ford played football at Michigan, right?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Long before becoming president in 1974, he won two national championships as a center, linebacker, and long snapper. One year, the team voted him MVP.

And after he graduated, the Detroit Lions tried to get him to turn pro. So did the Green Bay Packers.

Ms. Bristol: Which team did he pick?

Prof. Barry: Neither. He went to Yale Law School instead.

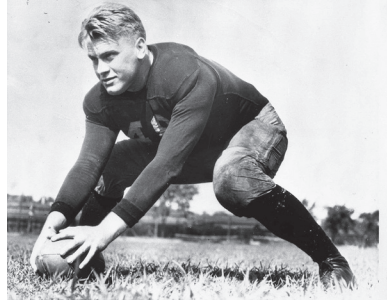
Ms. Bristol: He chose law school over playing in the NFL?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, the NFL wasn't as big a draw then as it is now. As Michael MacCambridge points out in *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation*, many players treated the league as a part-time gig, showing up only on the weekends and getting paid less than \$100 a game. Pittsburgh head coach Johnny Blood even missed a game once because he forgot to put the date on his schedule.

Yet despite never being a full-on professional athlete, Ford still managed to maintain a strong connection to sports throughout his life. He skied. He played tennis. And he often attended Michigan football games. He would also, later in life, occasionally call up Coach Schembechler whenever he was visiting Ann Arbor and ask if he could eat with the players at their training table.

Ms. Burke (jumping in): Did Ford ever play for Schembechler?

Prof. Barry: Nope. Schembechler didn't start coaching until 1969, and Ford's last season on the football team was way back in 1934. By the time Schembechler arrived, Ford was the minority leader of the US House of Representatives, so he was playing a different and, in some ways, much more grueling sport: congressional politics.



5

The Team. The Team. The Team.

Prof. Barry: I mentioned that Bo Schembechler started coaching at Michigan in 1969. Do you know when he stopped?

Ms. Bristol: I think 1989?

Prof. Barry: So 20 years?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: How many Rose Bowls did he take Michigan to?

Ms. Bristol: 10.

Prof. Barry: How many Big Ten Championships did he win?

Ms. Bristol: 13.

Prof. Barry: How about his number of victories overall?

Ms. Bristol: At Michigan or total? He also coached at Miami University in Ohio for a little while.

Prof. Barry: At Michigan.

Ms. Bristol: Close to 200.

Prof. Barry: Has any Michigan coach had more?

Ms. Bristol: Not yet.

Prof. Barry: How about his record against Ohio State? Was it good?

Ms. Bristol: I don't know exactly, but I am pretty sure he won more games than he lost.

Prof. Barry: And why is that important—to beat Ohio State?

Ms. Bristol: Are you serious? You really need me to answer why it is important for Michigan to beat Ohio State?

Prof. Barry: Humor me.

Ms. Bristol: Ohio State is Michigan's biggest rival. My little brothers have "Beat Ohio State" underwear.

Prof. Barry: So I'm guessing they would probably agree with the message of a clever ESPN commercial a number of years ago. It showed an Ohio State fan cuddling with a Michigan fan as the following words appeared on screen: "Without college sports, this wouldn't be disgusting."

Ms. Bristol: Definitely. I think my parents would rather hear that I was failing out of school than that I was cuddling with an Ohio State fan.

Prof. Barry: And there are probably some Ohio State parents who feel the same way—only in the opposite direction.

There was even a story a number of years ago about a little boy from Columbus, where Ohio State is located, naming his cancer "Michigan." The idea was that he would be extra motivated to beat the disease if he could say not just "Beat Cancer" but "Beat Michigan."

Ms. Bristol: I can respect that.

Prof. Barry: Me too. But what’s interesting about the rivalry—and especially the role Schembechler played in it—is that Schembechler actually grew up in Ohio, right, Ms. Bristol?

Ms. Bristol: It pains me to say so, but yes, Schembechler grew up in Ohio.

Prof. Barry: And do you know where one of his first coaching jobs was?

Ms. Bristol: Ohio State.

Prof. Barry: As an assistant to?

Ms. Bristol: Woody Hayes, the coach Schembechler would eventually face when he took the job at Michigan.

Prof. Barry: Yeah. People refer to their decade-long battle as opposing head coaches of Michigan and Ohio State as the “Ten Year War.”

But as far as the beginning of that war goes, was Schembechler an immediate hit with the Michigan players when he first started coaching?

Ms. Bristol: No. A lot of them quit.

Prof. Barry: How many is “a lot”?

Ms. Bristol: I’ve heard as many as 65.

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Schembechler got off to a pretty rough start. But the experience did produce one of Michigan’s most enduring mottos.

Ms. Ida: “Go blue”?

Prof. Barry: Nope. “Those who stay will be champions.” Aware that his grueling practice and training schedule may alienate some

players, he wanted to communicate that all their hard work would eventually pay off.

A sign with the words “Those who stay will be champions” was even put up in the locker room for everyone to see and remember.

Ms. Ida: Did it come true?

Prof. Barry: What do you mean?

Ms. Ida: Did the players who stayed become champions?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, they did. Very quickly, in fact. In Schembechler’s first year, 1969, Michigan won the Big Ten Championship. And over the next two decades, every player who stayed and played for Schembechler for their full four years of eligibility won at least one Big Ten title.

Ms. Ida: That’s pretty cool.

Prof. Barry: I know. And here’s the best part, at least for the topic of today’s class: throughout that entire stretch, Schembechler stressed three things above all. You want to read them for us, Ms. Ida?

Ms. Ida: “The team.”

Prof. Barry: Yup.

Ms. Ida: “The team.”

Prof. Barry: One more.

Ms. Ida: “The team.”

Prof. Barry: Those six words—“The team. The team. The team.”—have come to define the Michigan program, perhaps even more so than “Those who stay will be champions.” You’ll see them on T-shirts. You’ll see them on flyers. You’ll see them on programs and posters and Pinterest.

Mr. Boh (*jumping in*): My mom has a coffee mug that says “The team. The team. The team.”

Prof. Barry: Did she go to Michigan?

Mr. Boh: Yeah. My dad did too.

Prof. Barry: Is that where they met?

Mr. Boh: Yeah. They both played in the marching band.

Prof. Barry: Well, the next time you are home and having breakfast, you can tell them that the words on that mug share an important structural similarity with everything from a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, to a famous song by the jazz musician Benny Goodman, to a key reminder when considering any piece of real estate.

Each employs the straightforward version of the Rule of Three, as we are about to see.

6

Break, Break, Break

Prof. Barry: When I say the “straightforward version” of the Rule of Three, what I mean is the point I mentioned before: we seem to like written and spoken constructions that come in threes. I don’t have a fancy theory for why this might be true. All I know is there is a much nicer rhythm to the three-part statement Coach Schembechler actually made—“The team. The team. The team.”—than there is to the two-part statement he could have made. Read the two-part alternative for us, Ms. Nina.

Ms. Nina: “The team. The team.”

Prof. Barry: That doesn’t sound as good, does it?

Ms. Nina: No. It feels like something is missing.

Prof. Barry: Right. The third “The team” has a way of completing the thought. It makes Schembechler’s words more emphatic, more memorable. Like when real estate agents stress not just “Location . . . Location . . .” but?

Ms. Nina: “Location . . . Location . . . Location.”

Prof. Barry: Or think about the Victorian poet I mentioned earlier, Alfred Lord Tennyson. I’ll give you the first two words in the title of one of his poems: “Break, Break, _____.” Even if you’ve



never read it, I bet you can now figure out the full title.

Ms. Nina: “Break, Break, Break”?

Prof. Barry: Good. Literature is full of this version of the Rule of Three. Remember the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami? We mentioned last class that he is an avid runner.

Turns out he is also an avid user of the Rule of Three, at least judging by the title of a novel he published in 1988. Read it for us, please.

Ms. Nina: *Dansu, Dansu, Dansu.*

Prof. Barry: Now the English translation.

Ms. Nina: *Dance, Dance, Dance.*

Prof. Barry: Or how about this excerpt from Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, a book that is as exquisitely crafted as it is morally troubling.

Ms. Nina: “‘That was my Lo,’ she said, ‘and these are my lilies.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘yes. They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!’”

Prof. Barry: Each of these examples—the one from Tennyson, the one from Murakami, and the one from Nabokov—involves repeating the same word three times in a row. But that’s not the only option. You can also repeat the same sentence three times in a row.

Toni Morrison does that, for example, in *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 1988 and undoubtedly helped Morrison win the Nobel Prize in Literature a few years later. The repetition comes toward the end of the novel in the form of a poem.

Ms. Nina: “You are mine

You are mine

You are mine”

Prof. Barry: That rhythm has a nice musical quality, doesn't it?

Ms. Nina: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Keep that quality in mind as you experiment with your own uses of the Rule of Three. In fact, some of the best examples of the Rule of Three come from the world of music. Have you ever heard of a jazz musician named Benny Goodman?

Ms. Nina: Definitely. He's the "King of Swing." My parents love listening to his old recordings.

Prof. Barry: Great. One of Goodman's most famous pieces has a Rule of Three title. It's not "Sing, Sing." It's?



Ms. Nina: "Sing, Sing, Sing."

Prof. Barry: Exactly. And Goodman isn't the only musician to take advantage of the Rule of Three. Listen to the Beatles. Listen to Beyoncé. Listen to the "Happy Birthday" song and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

You'll find the Rule of Three everywhere there are people thinking carefully about words, rhythm, and structure.

7

Sound and Sense

Prof. Barry: Repeating the same word or phrase or sentence is only one version of the Rule of Three. There is also a more subtle version, a version that takes a pattern established in the first two parts of your list and then varies it in the third part. We can think of this version in two different but related ways. The first follows an overall structure of “short, short, kind of long.” The second reframes that structure a bit—not “short, short, kind of long” but “same, same, kind of different.”

An example might help. Would you mind helping me work through it, Ms. Maat? It involves something you and I talked about in office hours last week: the environment.

Ms. Maat: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. The example is a slogan you might have seen posted around campus, usually near garbage bins that encourage people to sort paper, plastic, glass, and metal from other forms of trash. It’s the “3 Rs” of recycling. Do you know what those are?

Ms. Maat: “Reuse. Reduce. Recycle.”

Prof. Barry: Exactly. The straightforward version of the Rule of Three, which focuses on the pleasing sequence of having a list of three items, explains why we call those words the “3 Rs”

of recycling instead of, say, the “2 Rs” or the “6 Rs” or the “18.59 Rs.”

Ms. Maat: Right.

Prof. Barry: The more subtle version, however, is going to explain something else.

It’s going to explain why we start the list with “Reuse” and “Reduce”—two similar-sounding two-syllable words—and then end with “Recycle,” a somewhat different-sounding *three*-syllable word.



In terms of content, the order of those words doesn’t matter. The arrangement “Reuse, Reduce, Recycle” contains the same information as other arrangements, like the arrangement “Reuse, Recycle, Reduce” or “Reduce, Recycle, Reuse.” Each of these lists communicates the core message of the slogan. Each makes sense.

But as writers, we need to think about more than just *sense*, at least in the narrow definition of that word. We also need to think about *sound*, by which I mean rhythm, melody, pacing—all that good stuff. In writing, sound is a key complement to sense.

Ms. Maat: Sound and sense?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Writing is a combination of sound and sense.

Ms. Maat: Did you come up with that?

Prof. Barry: No. Alexander Pope did.

Ms. Henrietta (*jumping in*): Who’s Alexander Pope?

Prof. Barry: We’re about to find out.

8

The Age of Pope

Prof. Barry: Has anyone ever heard of Alexander Pope?

Mr. Wild (*jumping in*): Wasn't he a poet?

Prof. Barry: Good. During what era?

Mr. Wild: The Romantic Era?

Prof. Barry: Nope. Earlier than that.

Mr. Wild: The Renaissance?

Prof. Barry: Later than that.

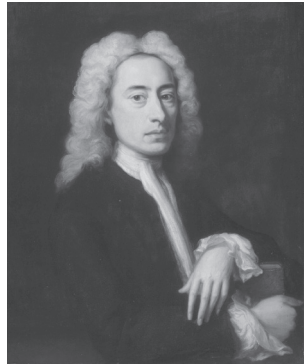
Mr. Wild: What's between the Renaissance and the Romantic Era?

Prof. Barry: The Age of Pope.

Mr. Wild: Really? That's what it's called, "the Age of Pope"?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, at least by some people. Pope was such a powerful literary figure during the first half of the 17th century that the period was labeled "the Age of Pope." Pretty cool for a guy who was only four-and-a-half-feet tall.

But just to clarify: the Age of Pope is more often referred to now as "the Augustan Age" or "the Neoclassical Period." Think Jonathan



Swift, who wrote *Gulliver's Travels* and "A Modest Proposal." Think Samuel Johnson, who combined an astonishing amount of wit with an even more astonishing amount of learning. Think satire.

Mr. Wild: But Pope was the most influential?

Prof. Barry: For a while. Lines of poetry he wrote hundreds of years ago still get quoted in everyday conversation. You know the phrase "To err is human; to forgive, divine"?

Mr. Wild: That's Pope?

Prof. Barry: Yup, that's Pope. Same with "A little learning is a dangerous thing." Both come from a poem he wrote in 1711. And so does the phrase "sound and sense" I mentioned before. Pope uses it as the title for a small section of the poem.

Would you mind reading the opening lines for us, Mr. Wild? They helpfully reinforce the idea that writing is not some miraculous product of random acts of inspiration but rather a skill you can develop, with the proper kind of practice.

Mr. Wild: "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance."

Prof. Barry: And now the next two lines, where the idea of connecting sound and sense gets expressed.

Mr. Wild: "'Tis not enough no harshness
gives offence,

The sound must seem an echo to the
sense."

Prof. Barry: Another poet, Robert Frost, made a similar connection about 200 years later. Here's what he wrote in a letter to his friend John Bartlett in 1913.



Mr. Wild: “I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense.”

Prof. Barry: You can see from that “I alone” statement that Frost, who would eventually win four Pulitzer Prizes, was not immune to moments of megalomania. One prominent literary critic, Helen Vendler, even called him a “monster of egotism.”

Mr. Wild: That doesn’t sound like a compliment.

Prof. Barry: It wasn’t. But keep reading. Frost has other helpful things to say about sound and sense. He thinks understanding the relationship between them is an important part of becoming a writer.

Mr. Wild: “An ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense is the first qualification of a writer, be it of prose or verse.”

Prof. Barry: In a moment, we’ll look at a literary icon who takes a similar view: Joan Didion. But first I want to make sure everyone gets what Frost meant by “prose or verse.”

9

Poetry, Prose, and the Piano I Play by Ear

Prof. Barry: Could you help us explain, Ms. Toth, the difference between *prose* and *verse*?

Ms. Toth: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. Start with *verse*. What's *verse*, at least the way Frost uses the word?

Ms. Toth: It's another way of saying *poetry*.

Prof. Barry: Good. And how about *prose*? What does that include?

Ms. Toth: Everything that's not poetry.

Prof. Barry: Novels?

Ms. Toth: Yup.

Prof. Barry: Journalism?

Ms. Toth: Yup.

Prof. Barry: Books about baseball, botany, or pretty much any other subject?

Ms. Toth: Yup.

Prof. Barry: How about instruction manuals, business memos, and emails?

Ms. Toth: Yeah, all of those things too.

Prof. Barry: So *prose* is a really big category. It covers most of the daily writings we read and produce, right?

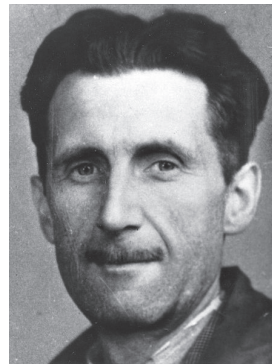
Ms. Toth: Right.

Prof. Barry: And Frost says that the first qualification of a writer of prose—just like the first qualification of a writer of verse—is an “ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense.”

So maybe it is not so surprising that a fantastic writer of prose, Joan Didion, places tremendous importance on this kind of sound. Do you remember Joan Didion, Ms. Toth? We read from her “Why I Write” essay on the first day of class. It’s the one that talked about “the infinite power of grammar.”

Ms. Toth: Yeah, I remember.

Prof. Barry: Well, Didion opens that essay by explaining why she picked “Why I Write” as the title. One reason was to pay homage to George Orwell, who published an essay with the same title about 30 years earlier. The second reason contains her celebration of sound. Read it for us, please.



Ms. Toth: “I like the sound of the words: Why I Write. There you have three short unambiguous words that share a sound, and the sound they share is this: I, I, I.”

Prof. Barry: She then connects this sound to what she considers one of the main goals of writing. She connects sound to sense.

Ms. Toth: “In many ways writing is the act of saying *I*, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying *listen to me, see it my way, change your mind*. It is an aggressive, even a hostile act.”

Prof. Barry: Later in the essay, she offers a tidy way to think about this link between meaning and music, between the mechanics of writing and the melody words can produce.

Ms. Toth: “Grammar is a piano I play by ear.”

Prof. Barry: Isn’t that great? Doesn’t it make studying grammar much more inviting and fun, like it’s a chance to learn an instrument and be creative?

Ms. Toth: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Didion apparently began this kind of approach at a very young age. In a book called *The Year of Magical Thinking*—which is mainly about the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne—she recounts how the interaction of sound and sense is something she discovered early on in life, well ahead of when her writing started appearing in magazines and books. Read the passage for us, please.

Ms. Toth: “As a writer, even as a child, long before what I wrote began to be published, I developed a sense that meaning itself was resident in the rhythms of words and sentences and paragraphs.”

Prof. Barry: So she’s making essentially the same point as Robert Frost and Alexander Pope, isn’t she? She’s saying that sound and sense go together, that they are intertwined and perhaps even symbiotic. They feed off each other. If you add some sound to a sentence, the sense gets better. If you add some sense, the sound gets better. Each enhances the power and effect of the other.

Ms. Toth: Right.

Prof. Barry: Let's keep this interaction in mind as we now return to the subtle version of the Rule of Three. Relying only on sound or relying only on sense won't help us fully understand and ultimately borrow from the moves we are about to see, beginning with one of the most famous phrases in American history: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

10

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Prof. Barry: The phrase “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” comes from which founding document, Ms. Franzoni?

Ms. Franzoni: The Declaration of Independence.

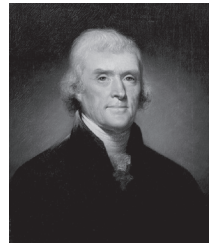
Prof. Barry: Who wrote it?

Ms. Franzoni: Thomas Jefferson.

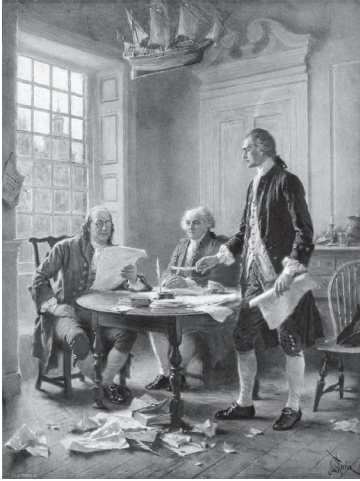
Prof. Barry: And?

Ms. Franzoni: What do you mean “and”?

Prof. Barry: I mean Jefferson had a lot of help. Benjamin Franklin gave him edits. John Adams gave him edits. Other members of the so-called “Committee of Five” gave him edits. And so did Congress. The document was by no means a solo endeavor.



The acclaimed historian Pauline Maier has a nice way of capturing this fact. In *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, she titles a large section “Mr. Jefferson and His Editors.” There’s also a great painting of Jefferson, Franklin,



and Adams by the 19th-century artist Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. They're working on the draft. Jefferson is standing up, Franklin is reading intently, and there are a bunch of discarded pages on the floor. It's a neat moment.

What's interesting, however, about the circumstances of the *real* drafting of the Declaration is that, at first, Jefferson was reluctant to take the job. He wanted Adams to write it.

Ms. Franzoni: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yup—at least according to Adams's version of what happened. Later in life, long after the Declaration had been written, Adams wrote about the experience to a longtime friend of his from Massachusetts, Thomas Pickering. Here's a little bit from the letter.

Ms. Franzoni: "Jefferson proposed to me to make the draft. I said, 'I will not.'"

Prof. Barry: The reasons Adams claims to have given Jefferson are pretty great. And guess how many there are? Not one. Not two. Not four. But—what's been our theme today?

Ms. Franzoni: Three?

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Adams gave three reasons. The Rule of Three. You can't escape it, even way back when our country was founded.

11

Virginia

Prof. Barry: It is worth spending some time with the three reasons Adams gives. They'll tell us a little about the Founding Era as well as a lot about the importance of having writing skills.

Would you mind starting us off with the first reason, Mr. Farnoff?

Mr. Farnoff: Sure.

Prof. Barry: Great. But let's remember that this is just Adams's version of how Jefferson became the primary drafter of the Declaration. Jefferson's version is much different.

Mr. Farnoff: "Reason first: you [Jefferson] are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business."

Prof. Barry: Why do you think that's one of the reasons? Why does Adams insist that the author of the Declaration be from Virginia?

Mr. Farnoff: Wasn't Virginia really important during the Founding?

Prof. Barry: Good. In many ways, Virginia was the center of the colonial universe. The first successful British settlement, Jamestown, was in Virginia. Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death" speech was in Virginia. And many important political figures were born there, including George Washington, George Mason, James Madison, and James Monroe. So there was both

The Syntax of Sports



some symbolic value and some strategic value in having the lead drafter of this key document be from there.

Yet Adams, who was from Massachusetts, provides some additional reasons why Jefferson was the right choice. Let's bring in Ms. Amos to read this one, given that it involves one of Adams's most important—and endearing—psychological traits: self-awareness.

Ms. Amos: “Reason second: I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular.”

Prof. Barry: Isn't that great? Adam admits that he is not just obnoxious and not just suspected. He is obnoxious, suspected, *and* unpopular.

Ms. Amos: The Rule of Three.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. I should point out, though, that in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Adams, the historian David McCullough suggests that all three of the reasons Adams gives in his letter to

Pickering are a bit revisionist. They were more a reflection of Adams's views when he was writing the letter, as a retired ex-president, than a reflection of Adams's actual thoughts and behavior at the time of the American Revolution.

Still, it's a cool, admirably candid thing to have written the words "I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular"—especially because I bet Adams's wife, Abigail, probably would have agreed, at least on certain days, with some of those adjectives.



That's actually one of the many great things about McCullough's biography. You get to read a bunch of the over 12,000 letters John and Abigail Adams exchanged. The same goes for Joseph Ellis's book about their marriage. It's called *The First Family*.

Ms. Ida (jumping in): Was Abigail a good writer?

Prof. Barry: Yes. She was a very good writer. Her letters are funny, they are nuanced—a true delight to read. She had a real knack for being witty and supportive and forceful all at the same time, like when she told her husband in a letter during the spring of 1776 to “remember the ladies” as he and the rest of the Founding Fathers were essentially rewriting the laws of the land. She prodded him to be more generous and favorable to women than lawmakers had been in the past.

Ms. Ida: How did John Adams respond?

Prof. Barry: He sort of dismissed her suggestion as a joke. It's not one of his best moments, which is a shame, because in many other letters Adams is thoughtful, caring, imaginative, and quite forward thinking. And his sentences are, in terms of mechanics, incredibly lively and engaging.

Back in 2001, right around the time McCullough's biography of Adams was being released, McCullough told the *New York Times* that he hoped that if nothing else, the book would make readers understand how strong and engaging a literary stylist John Adams was. And McCullough should know: he's won the Pulitzer Prize not once but *twice*.

Ms. Ida: Did he win it for the Adams book?

Prof. Barry: Yes. And before that, he won it for a book about President Harry S. Truman, a man who, after deciding not to run for reelection in 1952, moved to a small city back in his home state of Missouri named after the very document we've been talking about.

Ms. Ida: The Declaration of Independence?

Prof. Barry: Yup. He and his wife, who was also his high school sweetheart, bought a house in a place called Independence, Missouri. It's where you can visit the Truman Presidential Library.

Ms. Ida: Do you think the Truman library has a copy of McCullough's book?

Prof. Barry: You'll have to visit to find out.

12

Mutilations and Depredations

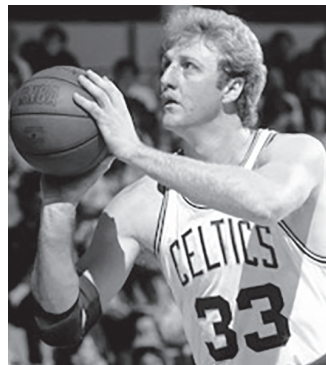
Prof. Barry: We mentioned that John Adams was a really great writer and that one of David McCullough’s goals for his Adams biography was to show people exactly how good with words Adams truly was. All of this makes the third reason Adams gives for having Jefferson draft the Declaration that much more remarkable.

Would you mind reading it for us, Ms. Burke? Since you’re a political science major, you might be particularly interested in the relationship between Adams and Jefferson.

Ms. Burke: “Reason third: you [Jefferson] can write ten times better than I can.”

Prof. Barry: That’s probably my favorite reason of the three. It’s as if basketball legend Larry Bird handed the ball to Steph Curry at the three-point line and said, “Here, take this. You’re more likely to score.”

Yet—and this is key—even a writer as talented as Jefferson benefited from





other people’s input. Remember how I mentioned that Jefferson received detailed feedback from the Committee of Five on his first draft of the Declaration?

Ms. Burke: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Well, some of that feedback came from Benjamin Franklin. Franklin took a phrase that Jefferson had written as “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable” and turned it into a phrase that is cleaner, more compact, and now, world famous. Do you know it, Ms. Burke? Do you know the revision Franklin made to “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable”?

Ms. Burke: “We hold these truths to be self-evident”?

Prof. Barry: Yup. And the editing process didn’t stop there. After incorporating the changes suggested by the Committee of Five, Jefferson submitted a new draft to Congress. Even more changes were made at that stage.

Ms. Burke: How did Jefferson respond?

Prof. Barry: Not well. Congress cut about a quarter of what he’d written. He called some of the edits “mutilations.” Other times, he referred to them as “depredations.”

That said, the scholarly consensus seems to be that the edits Congress made weren’t mutilations or depredations at all. They

were improvements. Unnecessary words were deleted. Clunky sentences were rearranged. The entire document was made more balanced and elegant.

Ms. Burke: I'm guessing that wasn't much consolation to Jefferson.

Prof. Barry: Probably not. It can be hard to have people change and shorten your writing. Perhaps Jefferson even felt the way the writer Ayn Rand apparently did when one of her editors, Bennett Cerf, asked her to cut big chunks of her novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Read it for us, please.

Ms. Burke: "Would you cut the Bible?"

Ms. Ida (jumping in): That's awesome.

Prof. Barry: It gets better. When Cerf told Rand that she would have to give up part of her royalties to keep the manuscript the way it was—Cerf said he would need the money to pay for the extra pages—Rand agreed.

Ms. Ida: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yup. She was determined to preserve what she'd written. Imagine if Jefferson had done that. Every Fourth of July, we'd celebrate a much different-looking Declaration.

13

Short, Short, Kind of Long

Prof. Barry: Now that we have learned a little context about the drafting of the Declaration, let's take another look at one of its most famous phrases: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We said before, Ms. Burke, that it can help us understand the subtle version of the Rule of Three.

Here's what I mean by that. Take a look at the lengths of the three units that make up the phrase. The first unit is?

Ms. Burke: "Life."

Prof. Barry: The second one is?

Ms. Burke: "Liberty."

Prof. Barry: And the third?

Ms. Burke: "The pursuit of happiness."

Prof. Barry: Good. Notice the structure: short unit ("life"), short unit ("liberty"), kind of long unit ("the pursuit of happiness").

We can see the same sequence in a wide range of other examples. Here, for instance, is J. M. Coetzee, who won the Nobel Prize in

Literature in 2003, using the Rule of Three in a letter to another accomplished writer, Paul Auster. Coetzee is talking about how he recently spent an entire day watching a cricket match between Australia, where he lives, and South Africa, where he was born.

Ms. Burke: “I was absorbed, I was emotionally involved, I tore myself away only reluctantly.”

Prof. Barry: Short (“I was absorbed”).
Short (“I was emotionally involved”).
Kind of long (“I tore myself away only reluctantly”).

Or how about this next passage, from Michelle Obama’s memoir *Becoming*. She is describing the adjustment she had to make as an undergraduate at Princeton to the athletic culture there, having grown up on the South Side of Chicago with more traditional sports such as baseball, basketball, and football.



Ms. Burke: “Lacrosse was a thing. Field hockey was a thing. Squash, even, was a thing.”

Prof. Barry: The “short, short, kind of long” structure isn’t quite as pronounced in that example. But you can nevertheless see its influence in the placement of the extra word *even* in the third unit (“Squash, even, was a thing”).

Perhaps my favorite example, however, comes from the documentary series *Last Chance U*. Has anyone seen that series?

Mr. Boh (jumping in): I have.

Prof. Barry: Good. What does it focus on?

Mr. Boh: College football.

Prof. Barry: At big-time Division 1 programs like Michigan?

Mr. Boh: No. At small community colleges.

Prof. Barry: Do you remember where the first couple seasons of the series take place?

Mr. Boh: Yeah. At East Mississippi State Community College.

Prof. Barry: And where exactly is East Mississippi State Community College? What's the name of its surrounding town?

Mr. Boh: Scooba, Mississippi.

Prof. Barry: Population?

Mr. Boh: Oh gosh. At most maybe 800 people.

Prof. Barry: So it's not exactly a bustling metropolis?

Mr. Boh: No. Not at all.

Prof. Barry: It's got more of a small-town feel?

Mr. Boh: Definitely.

Prof. Barry: And perhaps a slight distrust of outsiders?

Mr. Boh: Probably among some of the folks, yeah.

Prof. Barry: That's what I was thinking too. And let me say, I am a huge fan of small towns like that. They often have a wonderful sense of self-sufficiency and pride of place, as well as what I consider to be useful skepticism toward what other people—particularly people from big cities—are selling.

Which may be why I got such a kick out of seeing the camera in the very first episode of *Last Chance U* focus on a lawn sign that contained the following “short, short, kind of long” words.

Mr. Boh: “Private drive: Keep Out. No salesmen. No politicians & very few friends.”

Prof. Barry: J. M. Coetzee, Michelle Obama, and the property-protecting residents of Scooba, Mississippi—the subtle version of the Rule of Three is a tool all sorts of people can use and experiment with.

14

Same, Same, Kind of Different

Prof. Barry: There is another way to think about the subtle version of the Rule of Three. In addition to describing the structure as “short, short, kind of long,” we can also describe it as “same, same, kind of different.”

Take the example from the Scooba sign in *Last Chance U*. Read it for us again please, Mr. Boh.

Mr. Boh: “No salesmen. No politicians & very few friends.”

Prof. Barry: If we describe that sequence as “short, short, kind of long,” what would we focus on?

Mr. Boh: We’d focus on how the first unit (“No salesmen”) has two words, so it’s short, and how the second unit (“No politicians”) has two words, so it’s also short. But then the third unit (“very few friends”) has three words, so it’s kind of long, at least compared to the first two units.

Prof. Barry: Good. How about if we describe it as “same, same, kind of different.” What might you pick up on then?

Mr. Boh: The change in word choice.

Prof. Barry: Explain.

Mr. Boh: The first two units start with “No” and then are followed by a noun. “No salesmen. No politicians.”

Prof. Barry: But the third?

Mr. Boh: That unit starts a different way. Instead of the word “No,” it begins with “very few.”

Prof. Barry: Good. Part of the reason I bring this point up is because there will be times when the length of the units in a Rule of Three structure will be pretty much identical. So it would be weird to describe that structure as “short, short, kind of long.” The better way to think about it is “same, same, kind of different.”

A good example comes in another documentary series on college sports: *UConn: The March to Madness* on HBO. The featured program was the women’s basketball team at the University of Connecticut, which won 110 straight games at one point. The following slogan was painted in big, encouraging letters inside the team’s locker room.

Mr. Boh: “Play hard. Play smart. Have fun.”

Prof. Barry: Do you see how each of those three units is the same length—just two words?

Mr. Boh: Yeah. It’s like “short, short, short.”

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Which is why it’s more helpful to think of the structure as “same, same, kind of different.” The first unit starts with “Play.” The second unit starts with “Play.” Then, however, the third unit switches to “Have.” The rhythm of the Rule of Three is still there. It’s just powered by a different source. Not length but word choice.

Sometimes, of course, both length *and* word choice power the Rule of Three. To see how this works, let’s bring back Ms. Burke and return to the Declaration of Independence.

15

Self-Evident Truths

Prof. Barry: Earlier, Ms. Burke, you helped us see how Thomas Jefferson used the Rule of Three in the Declaration of Independence when he wrote about “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Can you remind us what we said about the unit breakdown in that phrase?

Ms. Burke: We said that the phrase has a short unit (“life”) followed by another short unit (“liberty”) but then ends with a kind of long unit (“the pursuit of happiness”).

Prof. Barry: Good. And when we have a “short, short, kind of long” structure, the long unit always comes last, right?

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: So it would have been weird if Jefferson had written “life, the pursuit of happiness, and liberty.”

Ms. Burke: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: How about if he had written “the pursuit of happiness, life, and liberty”?

Ms. Burke: That’d be worse.

Prof. Barry: Why?

Ms. Burke: Because it might change the meaning of the phrase.

Prof. Barry: Good. You could read “the pursuit of happiness, life, and liberty” as the *pursuit* of three things: happiness, life, and liberty. But that’s not really what Jefferson was going for in the Declaration, was he? Life and liberty aren’t simply things to *pursue*. They are more fundamental than that.

Here’s a more complete picture of the passage. It gives us a chance to notice two things. First, we’ll see the “self-evident” truths Jefferson was identifying. Second, we’ll see Jefferson doing something really clever: wrapping a Rule of Three inside another Rule of Three.

Ms. Burke: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Prof. Barry: Did you catch the Rule of Three wrapped in another Rule of Three? The phrase “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is a Rule of Three move on its own, and it also creates, when taken together, the third unit in another Rule of Three sequence:

1. “That all men are created equal”
2. “That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights”
3. “That among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”

Ms. Burke: Right.

Prof. Barry: Add this wrapping tactic to your Rule of Three tool kit. You can use it with “short, short, kind of long.” You can use it with “same, same, kind of different.” And you can use it when both of those structures mix together.

You can also do something else: combine the Rule of Three with alliteration. We’ll learn how to do that now.

16

Life and Liberty

Prof. Barry: You and I talked about alliteration last class, Mr. Wild. Could you please remind us what it is?

Mr. Wild: Sure. It's when words that are near each other start with the same sound.

Prof. Barry: Good. Can I get some examples? These can come from anybody. Just shout 'em out.

Ms. Bart (*jumping in*): Fantasy football.

Prof. Barry: Nice.

Ms. Warsaw (*jumping in*): Bunsen burner.

Prof. Barry: Good.

Mr. Farnoff (*jumping in*): *King Kong*.

Prof. Barry: The movie?

Mr. Farnoff: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Good. Movie titles often rely on alliteration. Think of everything from *Dirty Dancing*, to *Willy Wonka*, to *The Fast and the Furious*.

It also shows up in all kinds of other titles: television shows, songs, books, restaurants, companies. If you want to make something stick in people’s minds, alliteration can be a really useful tool.

In a little bit, we’ll even see examples of titles that combine alliteration with the Rule of Three. But first, let’s return to the Declaration of Independence. Where do you notice alliteration there, Mr. Wild—or at least in the part of the document we’ve been looking at?

Mr. Wild: At the beginning of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Prof. Barry: Yup. The words *life* and *liberty* both start with the same *l* sound. But then the pattern breaks. The third unit in that phrase—“the pursuit of happiness”—starts with a different letter and sound.

Mr. Wild: Yeah. It’s the structure “same, same, kind of different.”

Prof. Barry: Exactly. *L* word (“life”). *L* word (“liberty”). Not *l* word (“the pursuit of happiness”).

Same. Same. Kind of different.

Mr. Wild: Right.

Prof. Barry: Ward Farnsworth, who teaches at the University of Texas Law School, has a helpful way of describing this kind of pattern break. He says that in these circumstances—well, I’ll let you read it, Mr. Wild.

Mr. Wild: “The ear welcomes the relief.”

Prof. Barry: Isn’t that a nice way of capturing the effect? Another *l* word after “life” and “liberty” might have been overkill.

Mr. Wild: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: We should actually be careful about overkill in general with the Rule of Three. When overused, the Rule of Three can quickly become the Rule of Annoying.

But for now, let's look at an additional space where people seem to find it useful. It's the same space we previously identified as a common spot for alliteration: titles.

17

Paper #1

Prof. Barry: Titles are valuable real estate. They're often the first thing readers see, which means they offer a great opportunity for writers to communicate important information—about their subject matter, about their style and sensibility, about all kinds of things.

Too many students fail to understand this point when turning in their own work. Here, for example, is the title used by 17 out of 18 students for the first paper I assigned during one of my initial college classes here at Michigan. Read it for us, please, Ms. Henrietta. Given your background in journalism—where snappy, specific headlines reign supreme—I think you'll get a kick out of its blandness.

Ms. Henrietta: “Paper #1.”

Prof. Barry: Seriously. I counted: 17 out of 18 used “Paper #1” or something similar.

Ms. Henrietta: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. It was a pretty revealing moment. I remember announcing, “Okay, please raise your hand if the title of your submission was ‘Paper #1.’” The first few students who raised their hand did so without any hesitation. But then, as it quickly became

clear almost everybody was raising their hand, a helpful bit of group embarrassment surfaced.

Ms. Cawlow (*jumping in*): I've definitely used "Paper #1" as a title.

Prof. Barry: I imagine we all have, at some point. School often fosters a reactive approach to writing. It takes time to learn that everything from titles, to paragraph structure, to punctuation marks presents opportunities to shape how readers experience our words and ideas. Skilled authors—just like the skilled painters and sculptors you study, Ms. Cawlow—take full advantage of these compositional choices. Novices don't.

It can also be the case that the lack of something like a title signals larger issues with a writing project. I sometimes work with academics on articles and books they hope will either land them a job or get them promoted. Why do you think I get very nervous when the draft they send me doesn't have a title?

Ms. Cawlow: Because it probably means they haven't yet figured out what they're really saying.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. I understand, of course, that a title may change throughout the drafting process. We mentioned last class that *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen was originally called *First Impressions* and that *The Great Gatsby* had a whole bunch of initial titles, including *The High-Bouncing Lover*, *Trimalchio in West Egg*, and *Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires*.

We could add to this list *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee—which was at some point just *Atticus*—and also *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller. That started out as *Catch-11*.

Ms. Cawlow: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. There are lots of examples of these kinds of changes. *War and Peace* wasn't always *War and Peace*. *Gone with the*

Wind wasn't always *Gone with the Wind*. Nor was 1984 always 1984. George Orwell started with the title *The Last Man in Europe*.

But at least he started with something. Which is why I want us to spend at least a little time talking about titles. You're going to need them for papers. You're going to need them for presentations. You're also going to want to keep them in mind every time you write an important email, whether here at Michigan or when you graduate and get a job.

Lord help us if the first email you send your boss shows up in her inbox with the following subject line.

Ms. Cawlow: "Email #1."

18

Freakonomics

Prof. Barry: Let's start our discussion of titles by looking at one from the world of books: *Freakonomics* by the economist Steven Levitt and the journalist Stephen Dubner. It's become a big hit, and you can now see the title everywhere. There's a podcast called *Freakonomics*. There's a movie called *Freakonomics*. And there are tons of other book titles that pay homage to its structure. *Soccer-nomics*. *Womenomics*. There's even an *Emotionomics*.

But early reviewers weren't always kind. Many criticized it. Some mocked it. Nor was the publisher a big fan. Here's a story Levitt and Dubner have told about the initial feedback they received.

Let's have you read the Dubner half of the conversation, Ms. Ida, given that you and he share an interest in journalism. And let's have Mr. Dewey read the Levitt part, since we learned in our first class that you grew up in Hyde Park, which is where Levitt teaches.

Mr. Dewey: He teaches at the University of Chicago?

Prof. Barry: Yup. He has a position in the economics department and at the business school. But the conversation about the title begins with Dubner speaking. So, Ms. Ida, you start us off.

Ms. Ida: “Levitt, do you remember the publisher’s response to the title *Freakonomics*?”

Mr. Dewey: “Oh, they hated the title *Freakonomics*. I mean, I think what they said to us was, ‘We gave you way too big an advance to call this book *Freakonomics*.’”

Ms. Ida: “I dug up some old emails. Let me read you a couple. So this is one. It’s from our editor at the time.”

Prof. Barry: The email says that the editor presented the book to the sales department and got an enthusiastic reaction about the content but that people were “uneasy” about the title.

I highlight the word *uneasy* because Levitt then explains what the editor really meant.

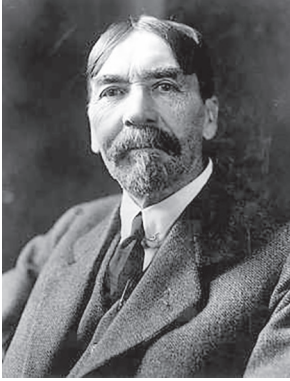
Mr. Dewey: “Now the funny thing about that is when she says they were ‘uneasy,’ that means they hated it more than anything. Because no one in publishing will ever tell you the truth. I’ve never heard one word of bad news conveyed honestly in publishing.”

Prof. Barry: Isn’t that interesting? A title that is now recognized around the world—that has become its own kind of brand—was originally hated by a whole bunch of people, including folks involved in publishing the book. The editor even asked Levitt and Dubner to submit an entirely new list of possibilities. Here’s one they sent along, after consulting with the person who came up with the initial title, Levitt’s sister Linda.

Ms. Ida: *Economics Gone Wild*.

Prof. Barry: Here’s another.

Ms. Ida: *Dude, Where’s My Rational Expectations?*



Prof. Barry: And there is also this next one, which references both the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* and the economist who coined the term *conspicuous consumption*—Thorstein Veblen.

Ms. Ida: *Bend It Like Veblen.*

Prof. Barry: Compared to these alternatives, the title *Freakonomics* starts to look a heck of a lot better.

19

SuperFreakonomics

Prof. Barry: As nervous as Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner’s editors were about the title *Freakonomics* before the book came out, they seem to have become much more comfortable with the choice once the book became a *New York Times* best seller. Here, for example, is the title of the sequel, which came out in 2009, four years after the release of the original.

Ms. Ida: *SuperFreakonomics*.

Prof. Barry: Read the subtitle as well. It will help us start to see where the Rule of Three fits in.

Ms. Ida: *SuperFreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes, and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance*.

Prof. Barry: See the Rule of Three?

Ms. Ida: Yeah. “Global Cooling.”

Prof. Barry: Short.

Ms. Ida: “Patriotic Prostitutes.”

Prof. Barry: Short.

Ms. Ida: “And Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance.”

Prof. Barry: Kind of long.

Ms. Ida: Right.

Prof. Barry: Now try this next title by the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. The book devotes a lot of time to your major.

Ms. Ida: Journalism?

Prof. Barry: Yup.

Ms. Ida: *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism.*

Prof. Barry: Good. I have one more for us. Let's have Ms. Bart read it because the book comes from the world of business. Have you heard of Sheryl Sandberg, Ms. Bart, the chief operating officer of Facebook and author of *Lean In*?

Ms. Bart: Of course.

Prof. Barry: Here's the full title of that book. It combines the Rule of Three with a string of alliteration.

Ms. Bart: *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead.*

Prof. Barry: You think that was an accident?

Ms. Bart: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Neither do I. There are certain structures that skilled writers consistently rely on to clearly and compellingly communicate their ideas.

20

Attract and Announce

Prof. Barry: The Rule of Three subtitles used by *SuperFreakonomics*, *The Bully Pulpit*, and *Lean In* are not meant to be used indiscriminately. You might decide that having both a title and then a Rule of Three subtitle gets a little too long and cumbersome. I often think that myself.

Ms. Henrietta (*jumping in*): Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Three of the most cited articles in the world of law have elegantly short, straightforward titles: “The Problem of Social Cost” by Ronald Coase, “The Path of the Law” by Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., and “The Right to Privacy” by Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren. No subtitle. No Rule of Three.

That said, what the subtitle approach offers is a chance to simultaneously achieve two different but complementary goals: you get to attract readers with a catchy phrase—*Freakonomics*, *The Bully Pulpit*, *Lean In*—and you also get to more fully announce the subject of your book, paper, or presentation.

Consider, for example, a very influential book on social capital published in 2000 by the political scientist Robert Putnam. Would you mind reading it for us please, Ms. Henrietta?

Ms. Henrietta: *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.*

Prof. Barry: See how Putnam attracts readers with a catchy phrase—“Bowling Alone”—and then more fully announces what the book is actually about by using a subtitle?

Ms. Henrietta: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: The psychologist Dan Ariely does the same thing in one of his own popular and influential books. Read the full title for us please.

Ms. Henrietta: *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions.*

Prof. Barry: Finally, there is Robert Cialdini, one of the foremost experts on the science of persuasion. Last I checked, the following book of his had sold over three million copies.

Ms. Amos: *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion.*

Prof. Barry: So keep this “attract and announce” approach in mind as you start to craft your own titles. Browse Google Scholar. Pick up the *Michigan Law Review*. You’ll see that many journal articles and research papers adopt it.

But I want to reiterate something: this approach is not the only approach. You don’t always have to “attract and announce.” Sometimes you can just attract. Other times you can just announce. And you can certainly do something else entirely.

Ms. Amos: We have options.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. You have options. As additional proof, let’s now talk about a technique we saw back on the first day of class, when Mr. Boh and I were talking about the great 2013 *Detroit Free Press* headline from when the University of Michigan men’s

Patrick Barry

basketball team made it all the way to the NCAA championship game. Do you remember the headline, Mr. Boh?

Mr. Boh: I think so.

Prof. Barry: Good. We are about to revisit it.

21

Culture Kick

Prof. Barry: So tell us, Mr. Boh: What was the headline in the *Detroit Free Press*? This was back in 2013. John Beilein was the head basketball coach at Michigan. Trey Burke was one of his stars. And after an incredible run in the NCAA tournament, the team came up a little bit short against Louisville in the final game.

Mr. Boh: Wasn't it something like "Hail NCAA Runner-Up"?

Prof. Barry: You forgot a "Hail."

Mr. Boh: Right. "Hail, Hail NCAA Runner-Up."

Prof. Barry: Good. And what did that "Hail, Hail" refer to?

Mr. Boh: The Michigan fight song.

Prof. Barry: Yup. The song is officially called "The Victors," but the famous refrain keeps coming back to the word *Hail*.

Mr. Boh: Right.

Prof. Barry: So by referencing that "Hail," what was the *Detroit Free Press* doing, Mr. Boh? What rhetorical move was the paper using? There's a name for it we've talked about before.

Mr. Boh: I think the first time you asked me, I said, "It's an illusion."

Prof. Barry: Yeah. You did. But that's not quite the correct term. You need to change a letter.

Mr. Boh: Right. The correct term is *allusion*.

Prof. Barry: With an *a*?

Mr. Boh: Yeah. With an *a*.

Prof. Barry: Do you remember the other term we said we might use? It's actually two words. The first is *culture*. The second is?

Mr. Boh: *Kick*?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. A *culture kick*. Like all the terms we have introduced, you certainly don't have to use it if you don't want to. But past students seem to have found it a bit more helpful than *allusion*, in part because you are not the only one, Mr. Boh, to confuse *allusion* with *illusion*.

Plus, using the term *culture kick* has a way of communicating the jolt of recognition and extra meaning the embedded reference in something like "Hail, Hail NCAA Runner-Up" provides. It could be a song. It could be a book. It could be a movie, person, event, or idea. It simply needs to be a particular aspect of culture, something shared and familiar. That's what you are harnessing when you use a *culture kick*. That's what you are getting to do additional rhetorical work.

Take the title of the ESPN documentary about the 1999 US Women's World Cup soccer team. Close to 40 million Americans watched that team beat China in the final match, on penalty kicks. Mia Hamm was the most famous of the players. But the documentary also features Julie



Foudy, Carla Overbeck, Brandi Chastain, and goalkeeper Briana Scurry. Has anyone seen it?

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): I have.

Prof. Barry: Do you remember the title?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah. It's called *The 99ers*.

Prof. Barry: And what do you think that's a reference to? What other sports team does it call to mind?

Ms. Bristol: The San Francisco 49ers.

Prof. Barry: Good. It's not meant to be the most profound reference. It's not drawing on Shakespeare or Proust or Einstein's theory of relativity. But do you see how even just the sound of *The 99ers* adds a little extra resonance and meaning to the title?

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: The same is true in another soccer example. Remember how we talked a few times about the Dutch national team? We mentioned Johan Cruyff and Wiel Coerver in our first class and then also the midfielder Edgar Davids when we were looking at Roddy Doyle's nuanced use of the word *even*.

Well, in the 1970s, the Dutch team earned the nickname "Clockwork Orange" for the precise, dependable way the players passed the ball up and down the field. Any idea what that is a reference to?

Ms. Bristol: Their orange uniforms?

Prof. Barry: That's certainly part of the reference. The Dutch orange has become an iconic presence in European and international soccer. But there is something else as well. *A Clockwork Orange* is the name of a famous novel by Anthony Burgess that eventually became an even more famous movie directed by Stanley Kubrick. Has anyone seen it?

Mr. Leigh (*jumping in*): I have. I love Kubrick.

Prof. Barry: Do you know when the movie came out?

Mr. Leigh: Early seventies?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, 1971. Which is right around the time the Dutch team started to get really good. They ended up making it all the way to the final of the 1974 World Cup, even though they hadn't played in the tournament since 1938.

Mr. Leigh: Did they win?

Prof. Barry: No. They lost to the host country, West Germany.

Mr. Leigh: *West Germany?*

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Remember how we said last class that during the Cold War there were actually two Germanys? One was called West Germany, the other East Germany. We were talking about



the speech by Ronald Reagan when he said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

Mr. Leigh: Right.

Prof. Barry: Well, that wall divided West Germany from East Germany. It’s one of the landmark moments of Reagan’s presidency.



But it’s not—and this is a kind of fun fact—why the father of Cristiano Ronaldo, the famous soccer player, named him after Ronald Reagan.

Ms. Bristol (jumping in): Wait, what?

Prof. Barry: Ronaldo’s dad was a big fan of Ronald Reagan. So he named his son Ronaldo.

Ms. Bristol: Was his dad really into politics?

Prof. Barry: No. He was really into movies, particularly westerns. Reagan, years before he became president, was his favorite actor.

22

Tesla, Lincoln, and Cadillac

Prof. Barry: In a way, Ronaldo's name is a kind of culture kick. Packing extra content into a word, it signals a connection to some other reference point while at the same time paying a form of tribute. Think of how many people name their children Moses, or Mary, or Muhammed. Think of the Spanish name Jesús.

Mr. Dewey (*jumping in*): So if I'm named after somebody else in my family, is that a culture kick?

Prof. Barry: Maybe. I mean let's be clear: *culture kick* is just a term I made up to help students understand how allusions work. It's not a precisely defined category, or certainly a commonly used one.

Mr. Dewey: Got it.

Prof. Barry: But, yeah, I could see how being named after, say, your uncle or your grandfather could be a kind of culture kick. The culture would be local. It's your family. But the effect is similar.

The name, we might say, brings with it a desirable kind of baggage. It evokes something positive that's worth remembering. Entrepreneurs do this all the time when they name their companies. Take Tesla, for example.

Mr. Dewey: The car company?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Do you know why the founders of the company named it Tesla?

Mr. Dewey: No.

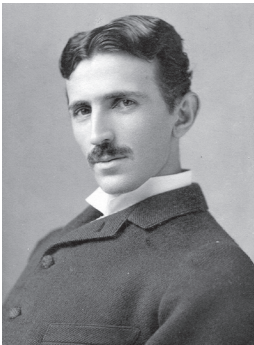
Prof. Barry: Anybody know? Where are our science and engineering majors? Mr. Boh? Mr. Carlos? Ms. Maat? Ms. Warsaw? What does Tesla refer to?

Ms. Warsaw (*jumping in*): A person.

Prof. Barry: What kind of person?

Ms. Warsaw: An inventor.

Prof. Barry: Good. Tesla was a Serbian American inventor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Do you know his full name?



Ms. Warsaw: Isn't his first name Nikola—so Nikola Tesla?

Prof. Barry: Good. And what innovation did Nikola Tesla bring to the world of electricity?

Ms. Warsaw: Alternating current.

Prof. Barry: Which is?

Ms. Warsaw: How a lot of electricity is still consumed today.

Prof. Barry: Even though he developed it way back when—do you know?

Ms. Warsaw: Early 1900s?

Prof. Barry: A little before that. He developed it in the 1880s. He worked for and then became a rival of Thomas Edison, whose Menlo Park laboratory is now preserved at the Henry Ford

Museum about 45 minutes from here, in Dearborn. Has anyone been there?

Mr. Boh (*jumping in*): I have.

Prof. Barry: It's pretty cool, right? Especially the "Greenfield Village" part, where Edison's laboratory and a bunch of other historic re-creations are located.

Did you see, for example, the Logan County Courthouse while you were there? It's the one in which Abraham Lincoln supposedly tried cases as a lawyer before he got into politics.

Mr. Boh: I think so. Isn't it near the Menlo Park exhibit?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. Ford included the courthouse because he loved Lincoln. To Ford, Lincoln was the prototypical self-made man.

Mr. Boh: Isn't the chair Lincoln was assassinated in also at the museum?

Prof. Barry: The one from Ford's Theater in Washington, DC?

Mr. Boh: Yeah.

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): Wait, was Ford's Theater, where Lincoln was shot, named after Henry Ford?

Prof. Barry: No. That's a different Ford. Henry Ford was only three years old when Lincoln was shot. He bought the chair around the same time that he also bought the Lincoln Motor Company.



Ms. Ida: He didn't come up with that name himself?

Prof. Barry: No. A different Henry did, Henry Leland. He, like Henry Ford, was also a big fan of Lincoln apparently. But then

Leland went bankrupt and had to sell the company in the early 1920s. That's how Ford got it. It was a luxury brand from the start. Ford needed one of those, having just seen his rival General Motors acquire Cadillac, another company Henry Leland helped start.

Ms. Ida: Leland helped start Lincoln *and* Cadillac?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. And like the Lincoln Motor Company, the Cadillac Motor Company is also named after someone famous, at least in terms of the history of Detroit. Anybody know whom I am talking about?

Ms. Burke (jumping in): The first mayor of Detroit?

Prof. Barry: Nope. Think back to before there even was a Detroit. Think back to the first explorers. In 1701, a French adventurer named Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit, which would eventually become the modern-day city of Detroit.

Ms. Burke: And that's why the car company is called Cadillac? After Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac?

Prof. Barry: Yup. That's why the car company is called Cadillac. American engineering with a little French branding. It's a nice automotive combination.

Warby Parker

Prof. Barry: Tesla, Lincoln, and Cadillac are pretty explicit about their culture kicks. Other organizations, however, are a bit more subtle. They use these kinds of references as a more indirect, playful homage to particular people or ideas.

Consider the eyeglasses company Warby Parker. Has anyone in here ever shopped there? They're the ones who give you frames to try on at home.

Ms. Carroll (*jumping in*): I have.

Prof. Barry: Great. Any chance you know where the name "Warby Parker" comes from?

Ms. Carroll: No, I don't think so.

Prof. Barry: Two fake baseball players, each created by the writer Jack Kerouac.

Ms. Carroll: Really?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. When Kerouac was young, years before he wrote his famous novel *On the Road*, he made up his own fantasy baseball game based on fictional players. He named one of the players "Warby Pepper"; he named another "Zagg Parker." The founders of Warby Parker simply put the two names together.



They rejected something like 2,000 other possible names for the company. But now the words “Warby Parker” really seem to fit the brand’s ethos. New employees even get a copy of Jack Kerouac’s novel *Dharma Bums* as a welcoming gift.

Not every culture kick turns out so well, however. Do you remember the massive explosion and oil spill at Deepwater Horizon in 2010?

Ms. Carroll: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: The name of the project site was “Macondo.”

Ms. Carroll: Macondo?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Any chance you know what that is a reference to?

Ms. Carroll: Another book?

Prof. Barry: Yup.

Ms. Carroll: By Kerouac?

Prof. Barry: Nope. By a Colombian—perhaps the most famous Colombian author ever.

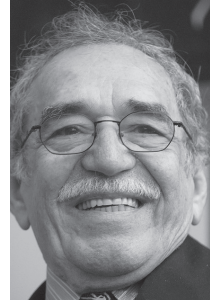
Ms. Carroll: I don’t think I know any Colombian authors.

Prof. Barry: Maybe you know, Ms. Yona? This seems like the kind of question for a comparative literature major.

Ms. Yona: Is it Gabriel García Márquez?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Macondo is the name of a town in García Márquez’s most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

British Petroleum, the company that operated Deepwater Horizon, had a contest among its employees to name the project site. The person who won picked Macondo.



Ms. Yona: That's unfortunate.

Prof. Barry: I know. Great book. Great fictional town. But not exactly the association I imagine García Márquez would have wanted. Magical realism, which is the genre he helped establish, has come to mean many things. I doubt, however, he would have liked it linked to an environmental disaster.

24

The Weathermen

Prof. Barry: Let's look at one more example of a culture kick, in part because it will help us transition to the darker side of what has been our main focus today: the Rule of Three.

The example comes from a terrorist group with roots in an unlikely place—right here in Ann Arbor, at the University of Michigan. I don't know the exact history, but I do know that at least one of the principal leaders was a student here. He majored in what you are majoring in, Mr. Farnoff.

Mr. Farnoff: American Studies?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. This was back in 1969 when a bunch of college campuses were erupting in student protests. A group of charismatic, well-educated activists on the extreme left of the political spectrum splintered off from something called the Students for a Democratic Society and decided that violence was an appropriate response to what they viewed as unjust governmental policies and programs, particularly in Vietnam.

Mr. Farnoff: What kind of violence?

Prof. Barry: Mostly bombings. They bombed the US Capitol. They bombed the Pentagon. And they bombed a statue in Chicago. Twice.

Mr. Farnoff: Why twice?

Prof. Barry: Because after they bombed the statue the first time, the city rebuilt it. So the group bombed it again.

Mr. Farnoff: Was anybody killed?

Prof. Barry: Not in the Chicago bombing.

Mr. Farnoff: How about in the others?

Prof. Barry: In the beginning, no. The group initially focused only on empty buildings and apparently sent messages warning people to stay away. But three people did die in an explosion in New York's Greenwich Village in 1970. A set of bombs intended to detonate at a military ball and at Columbia University went off prematurely. The victims, however, were actually members of the group. They were the ones making the bombs.

As for the name of the group, let's see if you can guess it, Mr. Farnoff. I mentioned that the name is another example of a culture kick, that it contains some sort of artistic, political, or historical reference. I'll even narrow it down for you. The reference involves a Bob Dylan song called "Subterranean Homesick Blues." It's a phrase in the song itself. Here are your options: "the Wind," "the Whirlpool," or "the Weatherman."

Mr. Farnoff: None of those sounds very terrorist-y.

Prof. Barry: But if you had to guess?

Mr. Farnoff: "The Wind"?

Prof. Barry: Try again.

Mr. Farnoff: "The Weatherman"?

Prof. Barry: Good. That's the right answer—but the group made the phrase plural.

Mr. Farnoff: “The Weathermen”?

Prof. Barry: Yup. The Weathermen. Later, when the members decided to go into hiding, the name changed to the Weather Underground. But the link to Dylan’s song persisted.

25

KKK

Prof. Barry: Let's turn to a much more notorious domestic terrorist group. This one didn't start in Ann Arbor, but I am guessing all of you have heard of it. It is known by three letters—or rather one letter repeated three times: KKK.

Can anybody tell us what those letters stand for? Maybe you, Ms. Franzoni. Perhaps you've studied the group in one of your history classes?

Ms. Franzoni: Sure. KKK stands for Ku Klux Klan.

Prof. Barry: Notice anything about the structure?

Ms. Franzoni: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: What?

Ms. Franzoni: The Rule of Three.

Prof. Barry: Plus?

Ms. Franzoni: Alliteration.

Prof. Barry: Good. We said on the first day of class that nobody has a monopoly on effective language, right? We might now expand that idea to note that there can be an ugly side to things like the Rule of Three. Here, for instance, are some of the most infamous



words spoken during the civil rights movement. They come from the inauguration speech of Governor George Wallace of Alabama, who vehemently—and often quite violently—fought efforts to integrate the South.

Ms. Franzoni: “Segregation now. Segregation tomorrow. Segregation forever.”

Prof. Barry: Or how about this next example. It’s from a famous document in the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, a debacle that ended up costing taxpayers over \$130 billion.

Ms. Franzoni: “The weak, meek, and ignorant are always good targets.”

Prof. Barry: Taken from a tip sheet used to help salespeople unload risky bonds and other financial products, it encouraged a culture of unscrupulous, even predatory, lending and selling. People lost their savings because of these bonds. They lost their homes. And a number of banks had to shut down entirely. It was a painful preview of the 2008 Great Recession.

Or consider an infamous memo written by Breckinridge Long, the assistant secretary of state during World War II. In it, he outlined a plan to block Jewish refugees from immigrating to the US as they tried to escape Nazi persecution. The passage you are about to read ends with Long combining the straightforward version of the Rule of Three with some polysyndeton—that move where you add an additional *and* or other coordinating conjunction.

Ms. Franzoni: “We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants into the United States. We could do this by simply advising our consuls to put every obstacle in the way and to require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative devices which would postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of the visas.”

Prof. Barry: Estimates are that, as a result of the postponement policy that Long proposed, something like 90 percent of visas available to Jews living in Europe were not awarded during the war. That works out to be about 190,000 people who could have escaped Hitler's rule and sought safety in the US. Effective language, as we've been saying, can be used to achieve some pretty terrible ends.

In fact, Hitler himself used the Rule of Three. Here's part of a speech he gave in Munich on February 24, 1941, right around the time Germany beefed up its forces in North Africa. Read it for us, please, Ms. Warsaw. Hitler is insulting journalists who keep wrongly predicting he'll fail.

Ms. Warsaw: "And so they kept on fixing new dates for our downfall, and now, in wartime, they are doing exactly the same thing. And why not? They are the same people, the same prophets, the same political diviners who prophesied the future so wonderfully when they were here."



Prof. Barry: It can be discouraging to see these writing moves used to spread nefarious ideas. But I don't think that is a reason not to use them. I don't think the appropriate response is silence.

I'm not naïve about the power of words and their limits. I know they can't block bullets, that they didn't turn off the gas in Auschwitz. But I do agree with a statement attributed to Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, one of the more famous and eloquent survivors of the Holocaust. Read it for us, please.

Ms. Warsaw: "Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds."

Prof. Barry: Think about Winston Churchill's "Finest Hour" speech to the House of Commons in 1940 or the speeches Susan B. Anthony gave on women's suffrage in 1873, right after she was arrested for

voting in a presidential election. Before 1920, it was illegal for women to vote in national elections. Anthony's speeches helped change that.

Or think about the Emancipation Proclamation and the Magna Carta, documents that had not only great legal and political significance but also great symbolic significance. Gandhi's "Quit India" speech in 1942 is another one, as is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963.

We could even go back to ancient Greece and talk about Pericles's "Funeral Oration" or the speech Socrates gave at his trial in 399 BCE. All of these have injected into the world not just ideas but ideals. They have provided people, movements, and sometimes whole governments with phrases that continue to inspire and inform—decades, centuries, even millennia after they were first composed. Among these is a piece of writing that we have already looked at today and will return to in a moment: the Declaration of Independence.

Ms. Franzoni (*jumping in*): Are we going to talk about Thomas Jefferson again?

Prof. Barry: In a way, yeah. But first I want to highlight another aspect of the Rule of Three. It can be used not only *within* sentences but also *between* sentences.

26

William Finnegan, August Wilson, and Ta-Nehisi Coates

Prof. Barry: An example of the Rule of Three appearing between sentences comes in *Barbarian Days*, William Finnegan’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book on surfing. Read it for us, please, Ms. Bristol.

Ms. Bristol: “Nobody bothered me. Nobody vibed me. It was the opposite of my life at school.”

Prof. Barry: See how the Rule of Three works there? It’s the subtle version, where you vary the third item in the list.

Ms. Bristol: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Good. Talk us through each part.

Ms. Bristol: It starts with “Nobody bothered me” and “Nobody vibed me.”

Prof. Barry: So which part is that in the “short, short, kind of long” structure?

Ms. Bristol: That’s the “short, short” part.

Prof. Barry: Right. Or I guess we could call it the “same, same” part of “same, same, kind of different.” What, for example, do you notice about “Nobody bothered me” and “Nobody vibed me”?

Ms. Bristol: They start with the same word.

Prof. Barry: And?

Ms. Bristol: Have the same syntax.

Prof. Barry: Good. “Nobody bothered me” starts with a *subject* (“Nobody”), moves on to a *verb* (“bothered”), and then closes with an *object* (“me”). And we can see the exact same structure in “Nobody vibed me.”

Ms. Bristol: Right.

Prof. Barry: What about the syntax of “It was the opposite of my life at school”?

Ms. Bristol: That’s a little different.

Prof. Barry: And what about its length, compared to “Nobody bothered me” and “Nobody vibed me”?

Ms. Bristol: It’s a little longer.

Prof. Barry: So?

Ms. Bristol: It fits well as the last part of both “short, short, kind of long” and “same, same, kind of different.”

Prof. Barry: Even though that structure stretches over multiple sentences.

Ms. Bristol: Yeah. The rhythm is the same, but the delivery is a bit more extended.

Prof. Barry: Good. To reinforce the move’s versatility, let’s take a look at another instance of the multi-sentence version of the Rule of Three. It comes from August Wilson’s acclaimed play *Fences*,

which is part of a series of productions sometimes referred to as “The Century Cycle.” Also known as “The Pittsburgh Cycle,” this series consists of 10 plays set in 10 different decades of the 20th century, all of which take place in Pittsburgh and chronicle some aspect of being Black in America.

Fences is the play in the cycle about the 1950s.

Mr. Leigh (jumping in): Didn’t *Fences* get turned into a movie?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. A very good movie, starring Viola Davis and Denzel Washington. They both won a bunch of awards for their performances. I think Davis even won an Oscar for hers.

The passage, however, comes from the character Denzel played, a former Negro League baseball player named Troy who, now middle aged, remains bitter that his athletic career ended before he wanted it to. “Bring your army,” he says, taunting the imaginary Grim Reaper he thinks he’ll soon fight. “Bring your sickle. Bring your wrestling clothes.”

Do you see the Rule of Three structure?

Mr. Leigh: Yeah. He intentionally puts “Bring your wrestling clothes” at the end.

Prof. Barry: Because?

Mr. Leigh: Because that sentence is a bit longer and structurally different from “Bring your army” and “Bring your sickle.”

Prof. Barry: Good. You’ll see this kind of thing happen in marketing slogans a lot. Here’s an ad for Uber I remember seeing in a Las Vegas elevator when the company was first trying to get traction.

Mr. Leigh: “No card. No cash. No hassle.”

Prof. Barry: And here’s one from a business a little closer to home—the Costco off of Airport Road, in Ann Arbor.

Mr. Leigh: “No hassle. No headaches. Just savings.”

Prof. Barry: But perhaps the most interesting example comes from an article on mass incarceration by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Coates, who won a MacArthur “Genius Grant” the same year this piece was published, interviewed a number of folks in Detroit for the article. One of them, a woman named Tonya, had recently finished serving a 20-year sentence for murder and a gun charge.

Here’s how he describes the circumstances that led to Tonya’s crime, after sharing that her childhood was filled with foster homes and abuse, including getting a cigarette put out on her nose.

Mr. Leigh: “Tonya began using crack. One night she gathered with some friends for a party. They smoked crack. They smoked marijuana. They drank. At some point, the woman hosting the party claimed that someone had stolen money from her home. Another woman accused Tonya of stealing it. A fight ensued. Tonya shot the woman who had accused her. She got 20 years for the murder and two for the gun. After the trial, the truth came out. The host had hidden the money, but was so high that she’d forgotten.”

Prof. Barry: It’s an unsettling story, and Coates does a nice job telling it as he tries to grapple with the complex moral, political, and economic issues mass incarceration presents. Those of you interested in the criminal justice system might enjoy checking out the full article after class. It was published in the *Atlantic* in 2015.

But right now, I want to call everyone’s attention to the three sentences Mr. Leigh read after “One night she gathered with some friends for a party.” Would you mind repeating them, Mr. Leigh?

Mr. Leigh: “They smoked crack. They smoked marijuana. They drank.”

Prof. Barry: Good. Taken together, they show us our next variant: the Rule of Three *in Reverse*.

The Rule of Three in Reverse

Prof. Barry: When I say “the Rule of Three in Reverse,” what I mean is that instead of the structure being “short, short, kind of long,” it’s “long, long, kind of short.” The example from Ta-Nehisi Coates that Mr. Leigh read for us illustrates that shift.

The first two sentences—“They smoked crack. They smoked marijuana”—are not shorter than the third sentence (“They drank”). They’re longer. We get three words, three words, two words rather than what we might expect: two words, two words, three words. It’s a nice bit of inversion, isn’t it?

Mr. Leigh: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Do you think it’s possible not just between multiple sentences but within a single sentence?

Mr. Leigh: Probably.

Prof. Barry: To find out, let’s look at a book called *The Writing Life*. The author is a woman named Annie Dillard, and she has published everything from fiction, to memoir, to poetry, to literary criticism. She also taught for over two decades at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

The Writing Life is her effort to share what it's like to devote your career to filling blank pages with your own ideas and sentences.

Mr. Leigh: “The page is jealous and tyrannical; the page is made out of time and matter; the page always wins.”

Prof. Barry: See what Dillard does there? She starts with two kind of long clauses that have a similar structure: “the page is jealous and tyrannical” and “the page is made out of time and matter.” Then she ends with a short clause that has a somewhat different structure: “the page always wins.”

And all of that happens within the same sentence.

Mr. Leigh: Because of the semicolons.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Because of the semicolons.

Ms. Cawlow (*jumping in*): So is the Rule of Three in Reverse still “same, same, kind of different”?

Prof. Barry: What do you think?

Ms. Cawlow: I think it is. The order isn't really what we are used to, but “long, long, kind of short” is still “same, same, kind of different.”

Prof. Barry: Good. That's a key insight. Seeing structures within other structures is an important part of becoming a better writer, as is something else we can take from Annie Dillard: falling in love with sentences.

Do You Like Sentences?

Prof. Barry: We'll get to Dillard's love affair with sentences in a moment. They'll provide a nice preview of a topic we will be focusing on in future classes: editing.

But first, let's look at Dillard's thoughts on why it can be good to wait to edit until you have finished a full draft. Read them for us, please, Ms. Toth. They appear in the book we've been talking about, *The Writing Life*.

Ms. Toth: "The reason not to perfect a work as it progresses is that . . . original work fashions a form the true shape of which it discovers only as it proceeds, so the early strokes are useless, however fine their sheen."

Prof. Barry: Keep going.

Ms. Toth: "Only when a paragraph's role in the context of the whole work is clear can the envisioning writer direct its complexity of detail to strengthen the work's ends."

Prof. Barry: Yet Dillard also points out that the opposite approach can work as well, if you are inclined to edit while you write.

Ms. Toth: "The reason to perfect a piece of prose as it progresses—to secure each sentence before building on it—is that original writing

fashions a form. It unrolls out into nothingness. It grows cell to cell, bole to bough to twig to leaf; any careful word may suggest a route, may begin a strand of metaphor or event out of which much, or all, will develop.”

Prof. Barry: Finish the thought, please.

Ms. Toth: “Perfecting the work inch by inch, writing from the first word toward the last, displays the courage and fear this method induces.”

Prof. Barry: My favorite part of *The Writing Life*, however, is when Dillard shares the following story. It’s the one about falling for sentences.

Ms. Toth: “A well-known writer got collared by a university student who asked, ‘Do you think I could be a writer?’”

Prof. Barry: Read the writer’s response.

Ms. Toth: “Well, I don’t know. . . . Do you like sentences?”

Prof. Barry: Now read what happens next.

Ms. Toth: “The writer could see the student’s amazement. *Sentences? Do I like sentences? I am 20 years old and do I like sentences?*”

Prof. Barry: Dillard concludes that if the student had liked sentences, he could have become a writer right away.

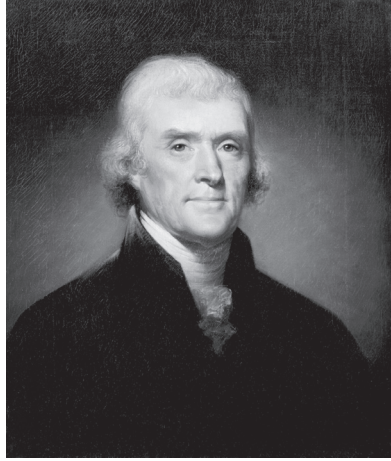
Ms. Toth: That’s all it takes?

Prof. Barry: Kind of. Because if you like sentences, you’ll put in the time to try to produce some good ones. You’ll commit years, even decades, to learning how to string words together in a clear, effective way. Think back to our discussion of the Declaration of Independence and Thomas Jefferson. He certainly did that. His daily routine included an extended period of letter writing. “From sun-rise to one or two o’clock, and often from dinner to dark,” he

once explained to John Adams, “I am drudging at the writing table.” That’s how he was able to produce over 20,000 individual letters during his lifetime.

Ms. Toth: 20,000?

Prof. Barry: Yeah, 20,000. And we’re not talking quick, email-type notes. We’re talking multi-page, exquisitely crafted treatises in some cases. Many of the letters he received required elaborate



research to address and needed to be answered with what Jefferson called “due attention and consideration.” He wasn’t cranking these out with his thumbs while waiting in line at Starbucks.

Nor did he just sit down and pump out the Declaration of Independence in one day. As we said before, that document went through several rounds of editing. And although Jefferson certainly wasn’t pleased with all the changes made by others at various points, at least he was mature enough not to let his pride prevent those changes from being adopted.

Which brings us to an interesting question: Does anyone know how old Jefferson was when he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Youth Is Not Wasted on the Young

Prof. Barry: So who wants to take a shot at our question? Who thinks they know how old Jefferson was when he wrote the Declaration of Independence? Or maybe I should say “how young”?

Ms. Ida (*jumping in*): 57?

Prof. Barry: Younger.

Mr. Wild (*jumping in*): 54?

Prof. Barry: Come down a couple decades.

Mr. Wild: 34?

Prof. Barry: Now come down another year.

Mr. Wild: 33?

Prof. Barry: Yup.

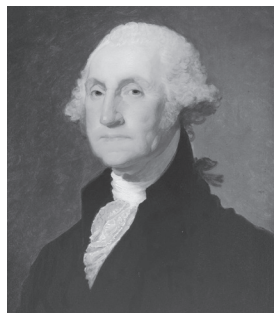
Ms. Burke (*jumping in*): Really? 33? Jefferson was only 33 when he wrote the Declaration of Independence?

Prof. Barry: Kind of crazy, I know. But yeah, he was only 33. And as a group, the Founding Fathers were actually a relatively young

bunch. Over a dozen of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were, like Jefferson, under the age of 35.

Remember David McCullough, the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Adams we talked about earlier today? Here's how he summed up how we see the Founders, in a speech in 2005.

Ms. Burke: “We tend to see them as much older than they were, because we’re seeing them in portraits by Gilbert Stuart and others when they were truly the Founding Fathers—when they were president or chief justice of the Supreme Court and their hair, if it hadn’t turned white, was powdered white. We see the awkward teeth. We see the elder statesmen. At the time of the revolution, they were all young. It was a young man’s/young woman’s cause.”



Ms. Franzoni (jumping in): But 33? Jefferson was really only 33 when he wrote the Declaration? That’s crazy.

Prof. Barry: I know. But there is something really encouraging about the youthfulness of the Founders. It means you can be pretty young, as Jefferson was, and still develop a reputation as a great writer, as someone people can trust to use words, positively, to change the world.

Consider, more recently, the speechwriter Jon Favreau. He was only 25—just a little older than all of you are now—when Barack Obama asked him to join his 2008 election campaign. Favreau would eventually become the second youngest person in the history of the White House to be named head presidential speechwriter.



Ms. Burke (jumping in): Who was the youngest?

Prof. Barry: A guy named James Fallows, who now frequently writes for the *Atlantic*. After college, Fallows went to Oxford for a couple of years as a Rhodes Scholar. He then did short stints at both the *Washington Monthly* and *Texas Monthly* before becoming Jimmy Carter's head speechwriter. Like Favreau, he was still in his early twenties.



Ms. Burke: That's really young.

Prof. Barry: I know. But so were a lot of other kinds of writers when they first produced quality work. Mary Shelley, for instance, started writing the book she is best known for, *Frankenstein*, when she was around 18.

Ms. Burke: That's younger than I am.

Prof. Barry: That's younger than a bunch of you, I'm guessing.

Which is a good reminder of something important: you don't have to wait to be a writer. You don't have to wait to make an impact, with your words, on the world.

To take another example, in 2012, the journalist Sara Ganim—who was actually born near here, in Detroit—was the first to break the story that Penn State football coach Jerry Sandusky sexually abused over 50 children over a 15-year span. The team of reporters Ganim worked with at the *Patriot-News*, a local newspaper in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, ended up winning a Pulitzer Prize for their coverage of the scandal.

Guess how old she was at the time?

Mr. Wild (jumping in): 25?

Prof. Barry: Younger. 24. And then there is a woman named Jackie Crosby. She was part of a two-person team at the *Macon*

Telegraph News that won a Pulitzer back in 1985. They did a special series on athletics and academics at two major universities: Georgia and Georgia Tech. Crosby was just 22 when the series went to print.

Or perhaps some of you have read the novel *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, the 19th-century author we said last class was a standout baseball player at Syracuse. There's also, in the 20th century, *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer—not to mention, in the 21st century, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith and *Everything Is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer.

Each of these highly acclaimed books was written before its author turned 26.

Ms. Ida: Really?

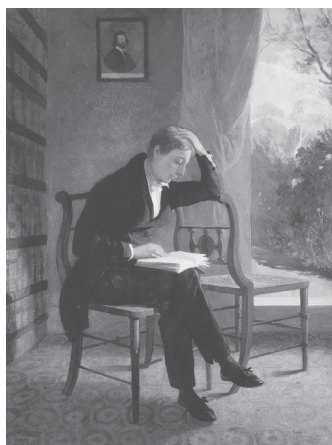
Prof. Barry: Yeah. But perhaps the most striking example is John Keats. Remember him from the first day of class? We mentioned that one of the pioneers of the environmental movement, Rachel Carson, used two lines from a Keats poem to create the title to her masterwork, *Silent Spring*. Ms. Maat, I think, was the one who read the specific lines for us.

Keats wrote that poem before he turned 26. In fact, he wrote *all* his poems before he turned 26. And all his plays. And all his letters. Everything Keats ever wrote, he wrote before he turned 26.

You know why, Ms. Maat?

Ms. Maat: No.

Prof. Barry: Because before Keats turned 26, he died.



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Expressive Writing

Prof. Barry: We haven't yet mentioned one of the more consequential examples of someone who, at a very young age, didn't think she had to wait to be a writer.

The person I am thinking of was only 13 when she started writing words that I am pretty sure everybody in here has read, or at least heard of.

Ms. Henrietta (*jumping in*): Malala Yousafzai?

Prof. Barry: That's a good answer. A courageous advocate for female education—particularly in her home country of Pakistan—Malala is definitely an example of someone taking seriously, at a very



young age, the idea that you don't have to wait to be a writer. Her memoir, *I Am Malala*, came out when she was just 16.

But the person I am thinking of never actually knew that what she wrote would eventually become a book. Nor that it would be translated into over 60 languages. Nor that it would lead to an award-winning play and movie. Nor, of course, that it would inspire people

all over the world. She was just filling out, as best she could, a notebook her parents gave her for her 13th birthday.

Here's a hint: that birthday fell on June 12, 1942, right in the middle of World War II.

Ms. Yona (*jumping in*): Is it Anne Frank?

Prof. Barry: Yup. Frank had apparently seen the notebook in the window of a store a few days before her birthday and pointed it out to her father. It was covered in red and white checkered cloth and had a small lock on the front. She started writing in it immediately.



One of the earliest entries documents the limitations put on Dutch Jews like her and her family by the occupying Nazi forces. Jewish people couldn't use streetcars or ride in cars. They couldn't go to movies or the theater. And everywhere they went, they had to wear yellow stars as a humiliating and degrading kind of identification.

A later entry, after she had been living for nearly two years in that now famous Amsterdam annex, is further support for one of the themes of this course: writing is a superpower. The simple act of putting words onto a page, the entry shows, can make you a little more resilient, a little more hopeful, a little more human—even in the worst of circumstances.

Read the entry for us please, Ms. Yona.

Ms. Yona: “When I write, I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears; my spirits are revived.”

Prof. Barry: A similar point has been made by Julia Alvarez, a Dominican American writer who lived for almost a decade under

the reign of the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Talking about the power of writing, Alvarez shares something important she learned from her mother. Here's the line in Spanish.

Ms. Yona: “El papel aguanta todo.”

Prof. Barry: Now in English.

Ms. Yona: “The paper holds everything.”

Prof. Barry: What do you think that means?

Ms. Yona: I guess that writing things down can be therapeutic, that it can be a way to cope with and unload a good deal of suffering.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. There are actually a bunch of studies that support what you just said. Soldiers use writing to help deal with PTSD. Children use writing to help deal with losing a parent. And victims of all kinds use writing to try to make sense out of what they have experienced and to help move along their process of recovery.

Here's the title of a book by the psychologist who pioneered this research, James Pennebaker of the University of Texas.

Ms. Yona: *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal.*

Prof. Barry: Here's another.

Ms. Yona: *Writing to Heal.*

Prof. Barry: What's interesting is that when Pennebaker switched up the potentially therapeutic expressive activity—when he asked people to dance or sing instead of write—the participants in the study didn't reap the same benefits. There seems to be something important about using words to cope.

A similar effect has been observed in students trying to manage their stress before an exam. Has anybody read the book *Choke* by the psychologist Sian Beilock?

She was the director of the Human Performance Lab at the University of Chicago before becoming the president of Barnard College in New York, and she has done a lot of research on everything from why professional golfers blow easy putts, to why executives botch high-stakes presentations, to why certain high schoolers underperform on the SAT.

Ms. Amos (*jumping in*): I think we read an article by her in my positive psychology class.

Prof. Barry: Was it in the journal *Science*?

Ms. Amos: Maybe. She and some other psychologist wrote it.

Prof. Barry: Gerardo Ramirez?

Ms. Amos: I think so, yeah. It was about students taking math tests.

Prof. Barry: College students?

Ms. Amos: Yeah. If I am remembering correctly, the findings of the study are pretty wild.

Prof. Barry: Want to share them?

Ms. Amos: Sure. Two groups of students were asked to take a high-stakes math test.

Prof. Barry: What made it high stakes?

Ms. Amos: The students were told that they would be videotaped and that a group of math teachers would review their answers.

Prof. Barry: And?

Ms. Amos: They were also told that their answers would be part of a team effort and that other students would be depending on them to do well.

Prof. Barry: Anything else?

Ms. Amos: The students would get paid if they earned a high score.

Prof. Barry: So what happened?

Ms. Amos: One group was told that before the test began they could spend 10 to 15 minutes with a notepad. They could write down any fears they had about their likely performance.

Prof. Barry: How about the other group?

Ms. Amos: They weren't given that opportunity. They were the control group.

Prof. Barry: Who performed better on the test?

Ms. Amos: The students who wrote down their fears beforehand.

Prof. Barry: By how much?

Ms. Amos: About 15 percent.

Prof. Barry: That's a whole letter grade.

Ms. Amos: I know. It can make a big difference.

Prof. Barry: Do you think Anne Frank somehow knew about all this when she opened the lock on her diary each day and made time to write in it? Do you think she knew about the power of expressive writing?

Ms. Amos: Probably not.

Prof. Barry: Nor do I. But I am glad all of you do now.

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Teen Spirit

Prof. Barry: Anne Frank might not have known about “expressive writing,” at least the way psychologists now think of the term. But what she did know, even at the age of 13, was that the ability to write is a real gift. That’s what she called it in the same diary entry Ms. Yona read for us a little while ago: a “gift.”

Would you please read a little more from it, Ms. Yona?

Ms. Yona: “I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people, even those I’ve never met. I want to go on living even after my death. And that’s why I’m so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to express all that’s inside me!”

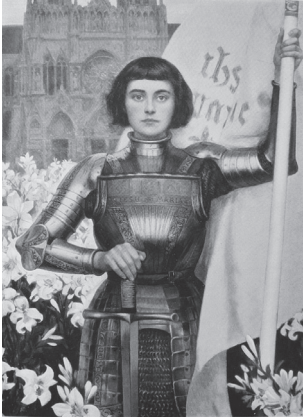
Prof. Barry: Thanks to the diary, she has definitely lived on after her death. She’s probably one of the most famous teenagers in history.

Anybody know some others?

Ms. Yona: Famous teenagers?

Prof. Barry: Yeah.

Ms. Franzoni (*jumping in*): Joan of Arc? Wasn’t she a teenager when she took on the British?



Prof. Barry: Good. Joan of Arc was, I think, 17 or 18 when she led the French Army to victory over the British at the Battle of Orleans. There is also, staying within France, Louis Braille. Blind since the age of three, he developed what would become known as the “Braille” language when he was 15 so that he and other people who had trouble seeing could still read and write.

Or think about the world of sports. Pelé was only 17 when he played in his first World Cup, scoring six goals—including two in the final—to help Brazil become champions. There’s not really an age requirement when it comes to changing the world.



Another good example is the gymnast Nadia Comaneci. At an age even younger than Pelé—14—she earned seven perfect 10s in the 1976 Olympics. Up until then, no gymnast had ever even earned one perfect 10, let alone seven of them.



The best part of the story is that because no Olympic gymnast had ever received a perfect 10 before, her first one caused the scoreboard to malfunction. Here’s how an article in *Sports Illustrated* tells

the story. Would you mind reading it for us, please, Ms. Bristol?

Ms. Bristol: “Nadia Comaneci broke onto the world’s stage by breaking the usual workings of the summer Olympics. She

achieved the first perfect 10 in Olympic gymnastics history at the 1976 Games in Montreal. As silence fell over the Montreal Forum after the teenage Romanian spun flawlessly around the uneven bars, the scoreboard seemed baffled by the performance. It flashed a 1.00.”

Prof. Barry: Now read how Comaneci remembers reacting.

Ms. Bristol: “One is not a very good score, so I was like, ‘I think something is wrong with the scoreboard.’”

Prof. Barry: Keep reading. This next part explains the glitch.

Ms. Bristol: “The company that manufactured the Olympic gymnastics scoreboards had previously inquired about the possibility that a gymnast may score a 10—an extra digit would need to be allotted on the board—but the International Gymnastics Federation dismissed the worry. Call it poor planning.”

Prof. Barry: Earn a perfect 10. Break a scoreboard. And win a gold medal. Not bad for someone who was still two years away from even being old enough to drive.

Air Maclean

Prof. Barry: We've been touting the power of teenagers in particular and young people in general. We could add a number of other writers to our list of examples. Jane Austen started *Sense and Sensibility* when she was 19. Charles Dickens finished *The Pickwick Papers* when he was 25. And Sylvia Plath published dozens of poems and short stories before even applying to college.

But let's be clear: none of these precocious beginnings means that you *have to* be young to create something valuable, especially when it comes to writing. The world has been helped out much more by late bloomers than it has by child prodigies.

Take Toni Morrison and George Eliot. They were each about to turn 40 when they published their initial full-length novels. Same with Edith Wharton, the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Literature. In fact, Wharton had already turned 40 by the time her first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, was published.

Mr. Wild (jumping in): How old was she when she won the Pulitzer?

Prof. Barry: 60. She won it for a novel called *The Age of Innocence*. Perhaps some of you have seen the movie version. It was directed by Martin Scorsese and featured Michelle Pfeiffer, Winona Ryder, and Daniel Day-Lewis. I think it was even nominated for a few Oscars.

Mr. Wild: Did it win any?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. It won for a category Wharton, who was really into fancy clothes, would have been proud of: Best Costume. Here's the opening line of a book called *Edith Wharton and the Making of Modern Fashion* that combines an analysis of the role clothes play in the lives of her characters with interesting biographical details about Wharton's own involvement in the garment industry in Paris during World War I.



Mr. Wild: “Edith Wharton liked to dress up.”

Prof. Barry: Isn't that pretty good? I love the idea of this elegant, stylish older woman winning the Pulitzer Prize at an age when a lot of people would probably be thinking about retirement. “Not me,” Wharton might tell them, outfitted in the latest French couture. “I'm just getting started.”

That said, Wharton isn't the only writer to really blossom in her fifties and sixties. Miguel de Cervantes was 58 when the first volume of *Don Quixote* came out, and Laura Ingalls Wilder was even older when she started the series *Little House on the Prairie*. She was 63.



But that's still over a decade younger than Norman Maclean was when he published *A River Runs Through It*, a wonderful novella about fly-fishing. He didn't begin working on that book until he retired from teaching at the University of Chicago, where one of his students was actually John Paul Stevens, the future Supreme Court justice.

Eventually, that book got turned into a movie too, starring Brad Pitt. And in 1998, a line from it was added to a statue outside one of the city of Chicago's iconic sports venues. Anybody know which one?

Ms. Bristol (*jumping in*): Wrigley Field? Is it the Ernie Banks statue?

Prof. Barry: Nope. Maybe giving you the quote will help. Here it is.

Ms. Bristol: “He stood before us, suspended above the earth, free from all its laws like a work of art, and I knew, just as surely and clearly, that life is not a work of art, and that the moment could not last.”

Prof. Barry: Focus on the part about being “suspended above the earth.” Who is a Chicago athlete associated with spending time in the air? Not “Air Banks” or “Air Ditka”—but “Air ____”?

Ms. Bristol: Jordan.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Outside the United Center, where the Chicago Bulls play, there is a statue of Michael Jordan flying through the air to dunk a basketball. The quotation appears along the base of it.

I wish I could say that Maclean wrote it, but the quotation actually comes from the movie version of *A River Runs Through It*, not Maclean's novella. Still, it's nice to remember that the underlying work was written by someone who had his first literary success when he was well into his seventies.

In the same way that Jordan himself accomplished a lot at the end of his career—remember that three of his championships with the Bulls came in the years *after* when he initially stopped playing basketball in 1993—so did Maclean. In a strange sense, the two make a good pair. Air Jordan and Air Maclean.

Saul Bellow and Philip Roth

Prof. Barry: Given that Norman Maclean didn't publish his first book of fiction until he was 75, it's probably no surprise that he kept writing into his eighties, just like another novelist with strong ties to the University of Chicago. Please read his name for us, Mr. Dewey.



Mr. Dewey: Saul Bellow.

Prof. Barry: Good. The winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature, Bellow taught at Chicago for over 30 years. Has anyone read his books—or at least heard of one?

Mr. Wild (jumping in): Didn't he write *The Adventures of Augie March*?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. That's probably his most famous book. It won a National Book Award in 1954 and has since been named to a number of lists of top novels written in the English language.

Here is how Philip Roth, who is often compared to Bellow, describes the novel's wonderfully packed sentences.

Mr. Wild: "There are sentences in the book whose effervescence, whose undercurrent of buoyancy leave one with the sense of so much going on, a theatrical, exhibitionistic, ardent prose tangle that lets in the dynamism of living without driving mentalness out."

Prof. Barry: Keep reading.

Mr. Wild: "This voice no longer encountering resistance is permeated by mind while connected also to the mysteries of feeling. It's a voice unbridled and intelligent both, going at full force and yet always sharp enough to sensibly size things up."

Prof. Barry: If you are interested in learning more about Bellow, I recommend checking out Roth's full review. It's called "Rereading Saul Bellow."

But we're actually going to use the piece for a different purpose. We're going to use it to close class with another installment of "Notes on Nuance," that segment we started last week where we look at specific ways writers add an extra bit of style and sophistication to their sentences.

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Notes on Nuance: Review

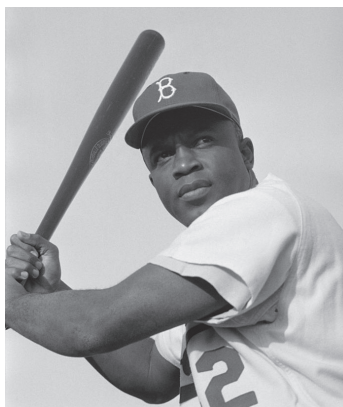
Prof. Barry: Do you remember the first two nuance moves we learned, Ms. Maat? I think you said last week that you really liked them.

Ms. Maat: Yeah, I remember them.

Prof. Barry: What were they?

Ms. Maat: One of them was the word *even*.

Prof. Barry: Good. Let's review how it works using an example from a biography of Jackie Robinson by Arnold Rampersad, who taught in the English department at Stanford for many years and also helped tennis great Arthur Ashe write a memoir. Rampersad is describing Robinson's emergence as a star player in high school.



Ms. Maat: “Before the summer of 1935, he had established himself as the most versatile of the Muir Terriers. He also sang in the glee club, but sports were his mainstay. Light but nimble at 135 pounds and with excellent, even uncanny, hand-to-eye coordination, that

spring he nailed down a spot on the baseball team as a shortstop in what one enthusiast called an ‘exceptionally good’ infield.”

Prof. Barry: Rampersad uses the same move later on in the book when describing the humiliation Robinson and his wife, Rachel, had to endure while trying to meet up with the rest of the Brooklyn Dodgers at training camp in Pensacola, Florida. Denied seats on a plane out of Jacksonville because of their race, the couple had to take a segregated bus all the way across the state. At one point, right after being startled awake by the driver and ordered to move to the very last seat on the bus, Rachel broke down and cried.

Ms. Maat: “She was crying more for Jackie than for herself, but in the end she was crying for them both. She saw how Jim Crow customs sought to strip her black husband of his dignity and turn him into a submissive, even shuffling creature.”

Prof. Barry: See the role *even* is playing there? It’s gesturing toward a slightly more extreme categorization. The word *submissive* gets pushed to *shuffling*. Just like how, in the first example, the word *excellent* gets pushed to *uncanny*: “with excellent, even uncanny, hand-to-eye coordination.”

It’s similar to what happens with the second bit of nuance we learned. What was that one?

Ms. Maat: The word *almost*.

Prof. Barry: Good. To refresh our brains a little, let’s turn to an example from *Shoe Dog*, a memoir by the longtime CEO of Nike, Phil Knight. He’s describing his former running coach at the University of Oregon, Bill Bowerman, as Bowerman delivered the eulogy for legendary track star Steve Prefontaine in 1975. A mythic figure in his own right, Bowerman helped Knight found Nike in the early 1960s and led Oregon to four NCAA titles. Here’s the sentence.

Ms. Maat: “As Bowerman finished, as he stepped from the podium, I thought he looked much older, almost feeble.”

Prof. Barry: Notice the similarity to *even*. We could actually switch the two words and not lose much meaning. Read the sentence about Bowerman again—but with *even* instead of *almost*.

Ms. Maat: “As Bowerman finished, as he stepped from the podium, I thought he looked much older, even feeble.”

Prof. Barry: It’s not an exact fit. I think *almost* is the better choice for that sentence. But I hope the comparison at least shows you that you have some options.

Which is kind of the whole point of our Notes on Nuance lessons.

Ms. Maat: To give us options?

Prof. Barry: Yeah. I want to fill your brain with helpful alternatives to worn-out modes of expression. I want to create a larger set of writerly tools for you to experiment with and make your own. I want to, in short, put you in a position to do more with the words and ideas you send out into the world.

Ms. Maat: So do we get a new nuance move today?

Prof. Barry: Yup. And what, given today’s theme, do you think this particular one will be really good at generating?

Ms. Maat: The Rule of Three?

Prof. Barry: Exactly.

35

Notes on Nuance: “Un-” and “To”

Prof. Barry: We'll get to the nuance move involving the Rule of Three in a moment, taking as an example a sentence from that Philip Roth review “Rereading Saul Bellow.” But first I want to talk about another move Roth uses. It's one we actually talked about last class.

We didn't attach the “nuance” label to it at the time, but I often do when teaching it to law students. Perhaps you remember the move I am referring to, Mr. Farnoff? I think you're the one who helped us introduce it. The essay it appeared in was the “How to Write about Africa” piece by Binyavanga Wainaina, if that helps jog your memory at all.

Mr. Farnoff: Yeah. I remember the move. It's the one where you attach the prefix *un-* to words it normally doesn't get attached to.

Prof. Barry: Good. Do you remember how Wainaina used it?

Mr. Farnoff: He put it in front of the word *particular*.

Prof. Barry: To form?

Mr. Farnoff: *Unparticular*.

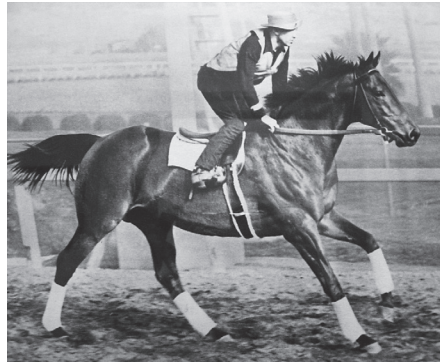
Prof. Barry: Right. It's not every day you see the word *unparticular*, is it?

Mr. Farnoff: No.

Prof. Barry: Nor is it every day that you see the word *unloveliness*, which is a separate example we can look at. It appears in a 2017 essay about the tennis player Roger Federer. The author, Peter de Jonge, is describing a practice session in which Federer was messing around with different types of strokes. Read the sentence for us, please.

Mr. Farnoff: “At one point, he even tried a two-handed backhand, comically exaggerating its inherent cramped unloveliness and producing the kind of stroke someone might try in a crowded elevator.”

Prof. Barry: But perhaps even more striking is when you see two uses of *un-* in the same sentence. Laura Hillenbrand does that in *Seabiscuit*, her award-winning account of one of the greatest racehorses of all time. Here's the sentence I am talking about.



She's describing a petulant horse named Hasting who used to ram into and try to attack other horses while they raced. Apparently, he never grew out of this behavior.

Mr. Farnoff: “Hasting went to his death unreconstructed and unloved,” wrote Peter Chew in *American Heritage* magazine, ‘having left his mark literally and figuratively on many a stablehand.’”

Prof. Barry: Notice that Hillenbrand is using the words of another writer, Peter Chew, in that passage. In the next passage, however,

the words are her own. Describing the wide range of businesses that tried to cash in on Seabiscuit's celebrity, the sentences also helpfully introduce our nuance move for today: using the preposition *to* when you want to bring together a diverse set of examples.

Mr. Farnoff: "All kinds of businesses from hotels to laundries to humor magazines were using Seabiscuit's likeness in their ads. The horse even had his own parlor game, the first of at least nine."

Prof. Barry: See how that works? The word *to* lets Hillenbrand efficiently communicate the breadth of businesses that used Seabiscuit in its marketing.

Mr. Farnoff: Right.

Prof. Barry: Notice how many examples she includes, as well as the structure of those examples: "from hotels to laundries to humor magazines." How many items are in that list?

Mr. Farnoff: Three.

Prof. Barry: Yup. And what's the structure, at least in terms of syllables?

Mr. Farnoff: Short, short, kind of long.



Prof. Barry: Good. This *to* move and the Rule of Three often go together. Here's another example. It comes from Jon Krakauer's *Where Men Win Glory*, a book that follows former NFL strong safety Pat Tillman as he joins the Army after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and is eventually killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan.

Mr. Farnoff: "Jingas are five-ton diesel rigs, ubiquitous throughout South Asia, used to transport everything from rice to firewood to opium."

Prof. Barry: Krakauer doesn't go with the "short, short, kind of long" structure of the subtle version of the Rule of Three. But he still picks three examples.

A similar choice is made by the writer Dave Eggers, whose tutoring organization 826 National actually has an office in Ann Arbor a few blocks away from here. The sentence appears in an essay he wrote back in 2015 about the clothing company Hollister. Notice that, like many people using the *to* move, Eggers includes some alliteration to add an extra rhetorical punch.

Mr. Farnoff: "Fifteen years ago, the word 'Hollister' meant little to anyone. Now it's hard to walk around any city, from Melbourne to Montreal to Mumbai, without seeing it stitched on someone's shirt or hoodie."

Prof. Barry: But although connecting three items is a common choice with the *to* move, it's not the only choice. In a piece about the video game *Football Manager*, the journalist Hua Hsu connects four items: two in one pair, two in another.

Mr. Farnoff: "There are no rewards for dexterity or reflexes. Instead, it's about management, from contracts to advertising deals, scouting to training regimens."

Prof. Barry: Which brings us back, finally, to Philip Roth's "Rereading Saul Bellow." When Mr. Farnoff reads the example sentence for us, you'll see that, structurally, Roth's use of *to* follows Hsu more than it follows Eggers, Krakauer, and Hillenbrand—by which I mean that Roth pairs his items together in a two-part package, instead of linking them in a three-part chain.

I hope you catch something else as well. Toward the middle of the sentence, Roth sneaks in a good use of *un-*.

So we're going to get two nuance moves at once. I don't always recommend that approach. An important component of good

writing is, we've been stressing, restraint. Roth, however, is someone who can pull off this kind of combination.

But I'm going to warn you. There is a lot going on in the sentence, beyond just the two nuance moves. I don't expect you to catch all the references, but perhaps it will help to know a couple of things. First, by "Swift" and "Brobdingnag," Roth means the 18th-century writer Jonathan Swift and the land of giants called Brobdingnag that Swift created in his classic novel *Gulliver's Travels*.



Second, the painter Hieronymus Bosch that Roth alludes to is known for some pretty dark images and themes: sin, corruption, demons, half-human animals—those kinds of things.

Third, Augie is Augie March, the protagonist of Bellow's novel *The Adventures of Augie March* that Mr. Wild mentioned before.

With that bit of context, please read the sentence for us, Mr. Farnoff. You might want to take a big breath before you start. Roth is not exactly a graduate of the Ernest Hemingway School of Sentence Construction.

Mr. Farnoff: "From Chicago to Mexico and the mid-Atlantic and back, it's all Brobdingnag to Augie, observed, however, not by a caustic, angry Swift but by a word-painting Hieronymus Bosch, an American Bosch, an unsermonizing and optimistic Bosch, who detects even in the eeliest slipperiness of his creatures, in their most colossal finagling and conspiring and deceit, what is humanly enrapturing."

Prof. Barry: That's a bit of a mouthful, huh?

Mr. Farnoff: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Well, once you recover your breath, keep the twists and turns of this sentence in mind when, later in the semester, we talk about right-branching sentences. Roth is a master of those.

For now, though, let's close class with a quick look at another way the *to* move might be useful: it can help you land a job.

Experience and Expertise

Prof. Barry: When I say that the *to* move can help you land a job, I am specifically thinking about how you might use it in a résumé or cover letter. Here, for example, is a section of a cover letter one of my law students put together. Hoping to land a job as a congressional aide, she is describing her interest in and familiarity with the legislative process. Read it for us, please, Ms. Burke.

Ms. Burke: “My interest in the craft of legislative advocacy started when, as an undergraduate at USC, I helped draft and lobby for a bill in the California House of Representatives. I found every part of the process exhilarating—from researching the topic, to reaching out to the community for input, to advocating for the bill with individual committee members.”

Prof. Barry: See what the *to* move does there? It allows the student to signal that she has a broad range of relevant experience as well as a helpful fluency with the kind of work she is applying to do.

We can see something similar in this next example. It comes from the résumé of a student who was trying to capture, in a single bullet point, the many lawyerly things she did while helping a client appeal his case.

Ms. Burke: “Handled all aspects of the appeal, from client counseling, to the brief, to doing the oral argument.”

Prof. Barry: Or how about the online biography of Jeff Fisher, a Michigan Law graduate who is now one of the most accomplished Supreme Court advocates in the country. The *to* move gives him a way to tidily package the impressive span of his experience and expertise.

Ms. Burke: “Fisher has argued 32 cases in the Supreme Court, on issues ranging from criminal procedure to maritime law to civil and human rights.”

Prof. Barry: With the rise of LinkedIn and other professional networking platforms, you’ll all have more and more opportunities to compellingly—and concisely—describe your own skills, interests, and past positions. I am certainly not recommending you always rely on the *to* move to do that, but I am glad you now know it’s an option.

37

Green Cards, Nudges, and Winston Churchill

Prof. Barry: There is an additional thing to notice about the *to* move: sometimes people decide to include a comma, sometimes they don't.

You can see an example of this choice in an application for a green card that the Human Trafficking Clinic here at the University of Michigan Law School filed on behalf of a client a few years ago. But before we read it, can anyone tell us what a green card does and why getting one might be a big deal?

Maybe you, Mr. Marshall. Have you learned about green cards in any of your law courses?

Mr. Marshall: Don't they let you stay in the US if you are an immigrant?

Prof. Barry: Good. For how long?

Mr. Marshall: Permanently, right?

Prof. Barry: Right. A green card signals that you have been given what's called "lawful permanent resident status." You get to live in the US. You get to work in the US. You can even join the military.

You can also, importantly, petition to get the same lawful permanent resident status for certain family members. Imagine how life-altering that might be, especially for clients in the Human Trafficking Clinic, some of whom don't feel safe returning to the country from which they were trafficked. Here's an example involving a green card for a woman who was in that exact situation.

Mr. Marshall: “She would also be in danger of being harmed once again by her ex-boyfriend—not to mention whatever the cartel did to her once they found her. This harm could range from making her work for them, to beating her up, to making her disappear.”

Prof. Barry: See why it might be good to have commas there? See how they separate out and highlight the harms the client might face?

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. Without the commas, you might rush through the sentence.

Prof. Barry: Right. Try reading it this way, without the commas.

Mr. Marshall: “This harm could range from making her work for them to beating her up to making her disappear.”

Prof. Barry: That reads a bit too fast, doesn't it?

Mr. Marshall: Yeah. It bunches all the harms together.

Prof. Barry: Exactly. The reader, who in this case would be an important decision-maker, might not give each of the harms sufficient attention. That's where the commas help. They're like little speed bumps. They slow down the mental traffic.

Of course, not every sentence benefits from that kind of delay. Here, for example, is a sentence that seems to work really well without commas. It appears in the best-selling book *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler.

Mr. Marshall: “Skeptics might object that if we permit information campaigns that encourage people to conserve energy, a government propaganda machine will move rapidly from education to outright manipulation to coercion and bans.”

Prof. Barry: And here’s another one from a little later in the book. It discusses a different kind of information campaign: government-led antismoking policies.

Mr. Marshall: “Here we have gone from modest warning labels to much more aggressive information campaigns to high cigarette taxes to bans on smoking in public places.”

Prof. Barry: Do you see how commas might unnecessarily impede that sentence? Do you see how speed bumps might get in the way?

Mr. Marshall: Yeah.

Prof. Barry: Did you also see how many items Sunstein and Thaler included in that list?

Mr. Marshall: Four?

Prof. Barry: Good. The first item they list is “modest warning labels.” The second is “much more aggressive information campaigns.” The third is “high cigarette taxes.” And the fourth is “bans on smoking in public places.” Remember what we said about the Hua Hsu sentence we looked at earlier, the one about the video game *Football Manager*: you don’t always have to go with three items.

You can even go with two if you want. One of the more famous examples of that might actually be a good one to end class with today. It was used by Winston Churchill during his famous speech at Westminster College in 1946, just as the Cold War with Russia was starting to take shape. It’s the sentence where Churchill introduces the ominous idea of an “Iron Curtain.” Take a shot at it, Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Marshall: “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

Prof. Barry: See? Churchill only uses two items: “Stettin in the Baltic” and “Trieste in the Adriatic.” Yet he still manages to create the sense that a lot of ground is being covered.

You know what helps him do that? It’s something we stressed all of last class.

Mr. Marshall: Being particular?

Prof. Barry: Exactly. Stettin in the Baltic. Trieste in the Adriatic. Neither of those is a generic, made-up place. Both are very particular. Churchill’s specificity is a big reason why the Iron Curtain line was so effective and memorable.

But there’s another reason as well, one we’ll spend more time on next class: Churchill’s expert use of parallel structure.

See you then.



Notes

Chapter 1

- 1 **“Notes on ‘Camp’”** Susan Sontag, *Notes on “Camp,”* 31 *PARTISAN REV.* 515, 515–30 (1964).
- 2 **“Pay attention to the world”** SUSAN SONTAG, *AT THE SAME TIME: ESSAYS AND SPEECHES* 210 (Paolo Dilonardo & Anne Jump eds., 2007).
- 2 **“flower in the parking lot of the Pentagon”** WILLIAM STAFFORD, *EVERY WAR HAS TWO LOSERS: WILLIAM STAFFORD ON PEACE AND WAR* 98 (Kim Stafford ed., 2003).

Chapter 2

- 5 **“Big Bang Theory”** The phrase *Big Bang* was actually coined by someone very critical of the theory, the English astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, during a radio lecture for the BBC on March 28, 1949. For more on that lecture and the role the phrase played in it, see SIMON MITTON, *FRED HOYLE: A LIFE IN SCIENCE* 127–29 (2011). Other well-known phrases that didn’t start out as compliments but later became a kind of badge of honor include *Impressionism*, *muckrakers*, and *Puritans*. Labels meant to dismiss and deride can, in certain circumstances, develop into a source of bonding and pride. A sports example is *Dem Bums*, a term embraced by fans of the 1950s Brooklyn Dodgers after the sports cartoonist Willard Mullin turned a question asked by his cab driver—“So how did those bums do today?”—into a beloved moniker. See, for example, MICHAEL SCHIAVONE, *THE DODGERS: 60 YEARS IN LOS ANGELES* 4 (2018).
- 6 **“affectionate and interested and a good companion”** NEIL GAIMAN, *THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE* 12–13 (2013).
- 6 **“own money or time or energy”** Milton Friedman, *The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits*, *N.Y. TIMES* (Sept. 13, 1970, § SM [Magazine]), at 17.
- 7 **“orchids”** SUSAN ORLEAN, *THE ORCHID THIEF: A TRUE STORY OF BEAUTY AND OBSESSION* (1998).
- 7 **“libraries”** SUSAN ORLEAN, *THE LIBRARY BOOK* (2018).
- 7 **“Rin Tin Tin”** SUSAN ORLEAN, *RIN TIN TIN: THE LIFE AND THE LEGEND* (2011).

Chapter 3

- 8 **“White men in suits”** Susan Orlean, *Shoot the Moon*, NEW YORKER (Mar. 22, 1993), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1993/03/22/shoot-the-moon-2>.
- 8 **“long shins”** *Id.*
- 9 **“pleasant and exciting and clean”** PHILIP ROTH, GOODBYE, COLUMBUS: AND FIVE SHORT STORIES 73 (1959).
- 9 **“huge and golden and perfect”** SHERMAN ALEXIE, THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN 230 (2007).

Chapter 4

- 12 **“part-time gig”** MICHAEL MACCAMBRIDGE, AMERICA’S GAME: THE EPIC STORY OF HOW PRO FOOTBALL CAPTURED THE NATION 8 (2015).
- 12 **“training table”** Associated Press, *Clumsy Image Aside, Ford Was Accomplished Athlete*, BALTIMORE SUN (Dec. 28, 2006, 3:00 AM), <https://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/bal-sp.ford28dec28-story.html>.

Chapter 5

- 14 **“Big Ten Championships”** *Bo Schembechler: Career Highlights and Records*, MICH. ATHLETICS (Nov. 17, 2006), https://mgoblue.com/news/2006/11/17/bo_schembechler_career_highlights_and_records.aspx.
For a more general look at Schembechler’s time and influence at Michigan, see generally BO SCHEMBECHLER & MITCH ALBOM, BO: LIFE, LAUGHS, AND LESSONS OF A COLLEGE FOOTBALL LEGEND (1989) and BO SCHEMBECHLER & JOHN U. BACON, BO’S LASTING LESSONS: THE LEGENDARY COACH TEACHES THE TIMELESS FUNDAMENTALS OF LEADERSHIP (2007).
- 15 **“Beat Michigan”** The courage and resilience of the little boy, whose name is Grant Reed, inspired both sides of the rivalry. Brady Hoke—the Michigan head coach at the time—for example, invited Grant and his family to watch the 2013 Michigan–Ohio State game in Ann Arbor, since it was being played there that year. Sadly, though, Grant eventually died in February 2019 at the age of 18, after multiple surgeries and close to seven years of treatment. Edward Sutelan, *Grant Reed | 2000-2019: Ohio State Fan Battling Childhood Tumors Named Cancer “Michigan,”* COLUMBUS DISPATCH (Feb. 11, 2019), <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190211/grant-reed--2000-2019-ohio-state-fan-battling-childhood-tumors-named-cancer-michigan>.
- 16 **“Woody Hayes”** Richard Johnson, *Bo’s First Game*, MICH. ALUMNUS (2019), <https://alumni.umich.edu/michigan-alumnus/bos-first-game/>.
- 17 **“locker room”** *Id.*

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Chapter 6

- 20 **“beautiful, beautiful, beautiful”** VLADIMIR NABOKOV, *LOLITA* 40 (Random House 1997) (1955).
- 20 **“You are mine”** TONI MORRISON, *BELOVED* 251 (Alfred A. Knopf 2006) (1987).

Chapter 8

- 25 **“To err is human”** Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), POETRY FOUNDATION (Oct. 13, 2009), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69379/an-essay-on-criticism>.
- 25 **“A little learning”** *Id.*
- 25 **“move easiest”** *Id.*
- 25 **“echo to the sense”** *Id.*
- 26 **“I alone”** Letter from Robert Frost to John Bartlett (July 4, 1913), in *THE LETTERS OF ROBERT FROST, VOLUME 1: 1886–1921*, 122 (Donald Sheehy et al. eds., 2014).
- 26 **“monster of egotism”** Jennifer Schuessler, *The Road Back: Frost’s Letters Could Soften a Battered Image*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 4, 2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/05/books/volume-of-robert-frosts-letters-renews-debate-about-his-character.html>.
- 26 **“An ear”** Letter from Robert Frost to John Bartlett (July 4, 1913), in *THE LETTERS OF ROBERT FROST, VOLUME 1: 1886–1921*, 123 (Donald Sheehy et al. eds., 2014).

Chapter 9

- 28 **“infinite power of grammar”** See Joan Didion, *Why I Write*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 5, 1976), <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html>; see also PATRICK BARRY, *THE SYNTAX OF SPORTS: CLASS 1: THE WORDS UNDER THE WORDS* 135 (2019) (also available at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429b77j>).
- 28 **“I, I, I”** Joan Didion, *Why I Write*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 5, 1976) <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html>.
- 29 **“a hostile act”** *Id.*
- 29 **“play by ear”** *Id.*
- 29 **“As a writer”** *Id.*

Chapter 10

- 31 **“Mr. Jefferson and His Editors”** PAULINE MAIER, *AMERICAN SCRIPTURE: MAKING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE* 97–153 (1997).
- 32 **“Jefferson proposed”** Letter from John Adams to Timothy Pickering (Aug. 6, 1822), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-7674>.

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Chapter 11

- 33 **“Reason first”** DAVID McCULLOUGH, JOHN ADAMS 119 (1st ed. 2001).
34 **“Reason second”** *Id.*
35 **“a reflection of Adams’s”** *Id.* at 119–20.
35 **“remember the ladies”** *Id.* at 104.
35 **“dismissed her suggestion as a joke”** *Id.* at 105.

Chapter 12

- 38 **“mutilations”** CARL L. BECKER, THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE: A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL IDEAS 172 (1922).
38 **“depredations”** *Id.* at 208.
38 **“edits Congress made”** See PAULINE MAIER, AMERICAN SCRIPTURE: MAKING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 143–45 (1997); JOSEPH J. ELLIS, AMERICAN SPHINX: THE CHARACTER OF THOMAS JEFFERSON 71 (1996); GARRY WILLS, INVENTING AMERICA: JEFFERSON’S DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 66 (2018).
39 **“Would you cut the Bible?”** ANNE CONOVER HELLER, AYN RAND AND THE WORLD SHE MADE 279 (2010).

Chapter 13

- 41 **“I was absorbed”** PAUL AUSTER & J. M. COETZEE, HERE AND NOW: LETTERS 2008–2011 30 (2014).
41 **“Squash, even, was a thing”** MICHELLE OBAMA, BECOMING 73 (2018).
43 **“Private drive”** *Last Chance U*, Season 1, Episode 1 at 2:12, NETFLIX (2016).

Chapter 14

- 45 **“Play hard”** *UConn: The March to Madness* (HBO 2017).

Chapter 15

- 47 **“We hold these”** THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE para. 2 (U.S. 1776).

Chapter 16

- 49 **“welcomes the relief”** WARD FARNSWORTH, FARNSWORTH’S CLASSICAL ENGLISH RHETORIC 71 (2010).

Chapter 17

- 52 **“Pride and Prejudice”** LUCY WORSLEY, JANE AUSTEN AT HOME: A BIOGRAPHY 121 (2017).
52 **“Great Gatsby”** DAVID S. BROWN, PARADISE LOST: A LIFE OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD 152 (2017).
52 **“To Kill a Mockingbird”** CHARLES J. SHIELDS, MOCKINGBIRD: A PORTRAIT OF HARPER LEE 114 (2006).

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- 52 **“Catch-22”** TRACY DAUGHERTY, *JUST ONE CATCH: A BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH HELLER* 216 (2011).
- 52 **“War and Peace”** A. N. WILSON, *TOLSTOY: A BIOGRAPHY* 245 (2001).
- 53 **“Gone with the Wind”** DARDEN ASBURY PYRON, *SOUTHERN DAUGHTER: THE LIFE OF MARGARET MITCHELL* 280 (1991).
- 53 **“1984”** DORIAN LYNKEY, *THE MINISTRY OF TRUTH: THE BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE ORWELL’S 1984* 167 (2019).

Chapter 18

- 54 **“podcast”** *Freakonomics Radio Archive*, FREAKONOMICS, <http://freakonomics.com/archive/>.
- 54 **“movie”** FREAKONOMICS (Magnolia Pictures 2010).
- 54 **“early reviewers”** Cass R. Sunstein, *Super Freak*, *NEW REPUBLIC* (July 25, 2005), <https://newrepublic.com/article/62891/super-freak>. (“Readers of *Freakonomics* should not be misled by the book’s slick packaging and stupid title.”)
- 55 **“publisher’s response”** *How Did “Freakonomics” Get Its Name? (Ep. 108)*, FREAKONOMICS (Jan. 3, 2013, 9:44 AM), <http://freakonomics.com/2013/01/03/how-did-freakonomics-get-its-name-full-transcript/>.
- 55 **“bad news conveyed honestly in publishing”** I have modified the quote slightly to make what Levitt said out loud read a little better as text. Here’s the original version: “Now the funny thing about that is, in publishing speak, when she says they were uneasy, that means they hated it more than anything. Because no one in publishing will ever tell you the truth. I’ve never heard one word of bad news conveyed honestly in publishing.” *Id.*

Chapter 20

- 60 **“back on the first day of class”** PATRICK BARRY, *THE SYNTAX OF SPORTS: CLASS 1: THE WORDS UNDER THE WORDS* 36 (2019) (also available at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429b77j>).

Chapter 21

- 62 **“an illusion”** PATRICK BARRY, *THE SYNTAX OF SPORTS: CLASS 1: THE WORDS UNDER THE WORDS* 36 (2019) (also available at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429b77j>).
- 64 **“our first class”** *Id.* at 144, 146 (also available at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429b77j>).
- 64 **“midfielder Edgar Davids”** PATRICK BARRY, *THE SYNTAX OF SPORTS: CLASS 2: THE POWER OF THE PARTICULAR* 126 (2020).
- 65 **“two Germanys”** *Id.*

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In a paper titled “Collaboration and Creativity,” sociologists Brian Uzzi of Northwestern University and Jason Spiro of Stanford offer compelling evidence that consistently high-performing teams in the world of Broadway musicals often have a particular composition. “These teams had some old friends,” Uzzi explained in an interview for the *New Yorker*, “but they also had newbies. This mixture meant that the artists could interact efficiently—they had a familiar structure to fall back on, but they also managed to incorporate some new ideas. They were comfortable with each other, but they weren’t too comfortable.”

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