Keeping My Readers Awake

As a student I have learned a lot this quarter. The most important lesson was the idea that practicing a certain skill everyday can make a big difference in my educational experience. I am by no means perfect, and my essays are not either. But when reviewing, the obvious progress is what helps me to feel successful. As a result of learning concision and the concept of point/illustration/explanation (P.I.E.) my writing has improved and become easier to read.

One of the main problems I have noticed in my writing was being too wordy. I would cringe when reading my papers to another person because I could tell they were getting bored, while I got out of breath. Dealing with word count limits was a good exercise, because it forced me to look back through my essays and see what was truly necessary to prove a point. When I originally wrote the personal narrative essay, I went over the word count by 91 words and yet didn’t focus on the outcome which was a major requirement of the essay. My original draft ended as follows: “I felt new and clean. I was moving forward and away from the person I had become. The wheels on the road represented hope, and I was ready for the good fight. I was going to push and struggle and keep going until I became the woman I was supposed to be” (pg.3&4). My paper had no clear end. I had addressed the fact that I wanted to change, but didn’t address the change itself. In my revised draft I was able to keep that part but ended it by saying: “Every positive step or accomplishment helped my self confidence and gave me the self
respect had lost. After my first year in Washington I decided I was ready to go back to college. It was terrifying, but a great decision; now I believe I have a bright future and only the sky is the limit” (pg.4). If it weren’t for the fact that I learned to use concision, I would have exceeded the word count even further when I added the missing element in my revision.

I went through and cut unnecessary words from my paper in numerous places. For example I originally wrote, “[r]umors had spread at the laboratory I worked at that I was coming to work under the influence of drugs, and I quit for fear I would be drug tested and fired” (pg.2). Using concision as a tool I changed that sentence to “[r]umors had spread at work that I was showing up while under the influence of drugs, so I quit for fear I would be drug tested and fired” (pg.1). I cut out four words and didn’t change the meaning. The change was subtle, but when done throughout the paper it really trims it down. Reading the essay becomes easier when the paper is edited and has a better flow to it. Overall I was able to add an entire paragraph (186 words to be exact) addressing my personal outcome in the essay and only going over the limit by an additional six words. Without using concision, this would not have been possible.

Learning to use point/illustration/explanation (P.I.E.) drastically improved my writing. After reviewing my grade for the expository essay it was apparent that my essay was missing many essential elements. In reflection I had no clear plan regarding structure when sitting down to write it. When it came time to revise this particular essay for my portfolio, I decided it was best to completely rewrite it. Using P.I.E. as a tool I could better address the thesis of my essay and include the necessary elements. In the first draft I wrote, “Many visitors came to see the barn as Stafford worked. They too felt nostalgia
for the barn and wanted a piece of it to build something of their own. As a result of these characters Stafford further illustrates the theme of appreciation for the old. Stafford tells us: "neighbors came by in little groups or alone to leave with me some story about the barn, and seek some scrap of it to carry away." and that he too "shared their nostalgia for a shape in the air." First, in paragraph eleven three young boys and their father come to visit seeking scrap to build a tree house. Second, in paragraph fourteen a cold gentlemen visits looking for lumber to repair his deck. Third, in paragraph seventeen the neighbor \( (p. 3) \) woman asks for mason jars found in the barn." Although I chose good examples, this section and this particular paragraph in its entirety was to long and without the structure provided by using P.I.E., my writing lacked focus.

In my rewrite I changed my thesis, used P.I.E., and was able to address the issue of the visitors in a more concise manner: "In the second subsection Stafford begins salvaging what he can from the barn. He is visited by "...neighbors [who] came by in little groups or alone to leave with [him] some story about the barn, and to seek some scrap of it to carry away." This supports the theme of the life cycle because almost every visitor wanted to use a piece of the barn to create something new. The pieces of the barn \( (p. 2) \) can live on, in many different forms, even if the barn itself is gone." This paragraph was more focused and as a result easier to read because I wasn't rambling.

As a result of learning concision and the concept of point/illustration/explanation (P.I.E.) my writing has improved and become easier to read. Using concision in my essay revisions made a major difference in length, flow, and allowed me to include more information without boring my readers. In addition, once I learned P.I.E. and applied it to my writing; I was able to address the required elements in my paper. In addition, I
explained the point with a clear focus. I look forward to using these techniques in my
writing in the future, so that I may have more confidence when trying to express my
thoughts, opinions, and ideas.