CLASSROOM ACTIVITY USING PROCESS ANALYSIS

This exercise requires that you work in pairs. Draw a simple geometric design similar to one of the following without letting your partner see your drawing:

With the finished design in front of you, write a set of directions that will allow your partner to reproduce it accurately. Before writing your directions, ask yourself how you will convey the context for your instructions, where you will begin, and how what you write may help your partner or lead your partner astray. As your partner attempts to draw the design from your instructions, do not offer any verbal advice. Let your directions speak for themselves. Once you have finished, compare your drawing to the one your partner has produced. Discuss the results with your partner and, if time allows, with the entire class.

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

1. Write a directional process analysis in which you present your techniques for getting the most enjoyment out of a common activity. For example, perhaps you have a set routine you follow for spending an evening watching television—preparing popcorn, checking the program listings, clearing off the coffee table, finding the remote control, settling into your favorite chair, and so on. Choose from the following topics:
   - How to listen to music
   - How to eat an ice-cream cone
   - How to reduce stress
   - How to wash a dog
   - How to play a sport or game

2. Adler devotes a large portion of his essay to persuading his audience that marking books is a worthwhile task. (Glossary: Persuasion) Write an essay in which you instruct your audience about how to do something they do not necessarily wish to do or do not think they need to do. For instance, before explaining how to buy the best MP3 player, you may need to convince readers that they should buy an MP3 player. Write your directional process analysis after making a convincing argument for the validity of the process you wish to present. (Glossary: Argument)

How to Say Nothing in 500 Words

Paul Roberts

Paul Roberts (1917–1967) was a linguist, a teacher, and a writer at San Jose State College from 1946 to 1960 and at Cornell University from 1962 to 1964. His books on writing, including English Syntax (1954) and Patterns of English (1956), have helped generations of high school and college students become better writers.

“How to Say Nothing in 500 Words” is taken from his best-known book, Understanding English (1958). Although written almost fifty years ago, the essay is still relevant for student writers today. Good writing, Roberts tells us, is not simply a matter of filling up a page; rather, the words have to hold the reader's interest, and they must say something. In this essay, Roberts uses lively prose and a step-by-step process to guide the student from the blank page to the finished essay. His bag of writing strategies holds good advice for anyone who wants to write well.

PREPARING TO READ

How do you feel about writing? Do you find writing difficult? What are some of your most memorable experiences with writing in school or during your free time? How have these experiences affected your current attitude toward writing? Explain.

Nothing About Something

It's Friday afternoon, and you have almost survived another week of classes. You are just looking forward dreamily to the weekend when the English instructor says: “For Monday you will turn in a five-hundred-word composition on college football.”

Well, that puts a good big hole in the weekend. You don't have any strong views on college football one way or the other. You get rather excited during the season and go to all the home games and find it rather more fun than not. On the other hand, the class has been reading Robert Hutchins in the anthology and perhaps Shaw's “Eighty-Yard Run,” and from the class discussion you have got the idea that the instructor thinks college football is for the birds. You are no fool, you. You can figure out what side to take.

After dinner you get out the portable typewriter that you got for high school graduation. You might as well get it over with and enjoy Saturday and Sunday. Five hundred words is about two double-spaced
pages with normal margins. You put in a sheet of paper, think up a title, and you’re off:

**WHY COLLEGE FOOTBALL SHOULD BE ABOLISHED**

College football should be abolished because it’s bad for the school and also bad for the players. The players are so busy practicing that they don’t have any time for their studies.

This, you feel, is a mighty good start. The only trouble is that it’s only thirty-two words. You still have four hundred and sixty-eight to go, and you’ve pretty well exhausted the subject. It comes to you that you do your best thinking in the morning, so you put away the typewriter and go to the movies. But the next morning you have to do your washing and some math problems, and in the afternoon you go to the game. The English instructor turns up too, and you wonder if you’ve taken the right side after all. Saturday night you have a date, and Sunday morning you have to go to church. (You shouldn’t let English assignments interfere with your religion.) What with one thing and another, it’s ten o’clock Sunday night before you get out the typewriter again. You make a pot of coffee and start to fill out your views on college football. Put a little meat on the bones.

**WHY COLLEGE FOOTBALL SHOULD BE ABOLISHED**

In my opinion, it seems to me that college football should be abolished. The reason why I think this to be true is because I feel that football is bad for the colleges in nearly every respect. As Robert Hutchins says in his article in our anthology in which he discusses college football, it would be better if the colleges had race horses and had races with one another, because then the horses would not have to attend classes. I firmly agree with Mr. Hutchins on this point, and I am sure that many other students would agree too.

One reason why it seems to me that college football is bad is that it has become too commercial. In the olden times when people played football just for the fun of it, maybe college football was all right, but they do not play football just for the fun of it now as they used to in the old days. Nowadays college football is what you might call a big business. Maybe this is not true at all schools, and I don’t think it is especially true here at State, but certainly this is the case at most colleges and universities in America nowadays, as Mr. Hutchins points out in his very interesting article. Actually the coaches and alumni go around to the high schools and offer the high school stars large salaries to come to their colleges and play football for them. There was one case where a high school star was offered a convertible if he would play football for a certain college.

Another reason for abolishing college football is that it is bad for the players. They do not have time to get a college education, because they are so busy playing football. A football player has to practice every afternoon from three to six, and then he is so tired that he can’t concentrate on his studies. He just feels like dropping off to sleep after dinner, and then the next day he goes to his classes without having studied and maybe he fails the test.

(Good ripe stuff so far, but you’re still a hundred and fifty-one words from home. One more push.)

Also I think college football is bad for the colleges and the universities because not very many students get to participate in it. Out of a college of ten thousand students only seventy-five or a hundred play football, if that many. Football is what you might call a spectator sport. That means that most people go to watch it but do not play it themselves.

(Four hundred and fifteen. Well, you still have the conclusion, and when you retyp e it, you can make the margins a little wider.)

These are the reasons why I agree with Mr. Hutchins that college football should be abolished in American colleges and universities.

On Monday you turn it in, moderately hopeful, and on Friday it comes back marked “weak in content” and sporting a big “D.”

This essay is exaggerated a little, not much. The English instructor will recognize it as reasonably typical of what an assignment on college football will bring in. He knows that nearly half of the class will contrive in five hundred words to say that college football is too commercial and bad for the players. Most of the other half will inform him that college football builds character and prepares one for life and brings prestige to the school. As he reads paper after paper all saying the same thing in almost the same words, all bloodless, five hundred words dripping out of nothing, he wonders how he allowed himself to get trapped into teaching English when he might have had a happy and interesting life as an electrician or a confidence man.

Well, you may ask, what can you do about it? The subject is one on which you have few convictions and little information. Can you be expected to make a dull subject interesting? As a matter of fact, this is precisely what you are expected to do. This is the writer's essential task. All subjects, except sex, are dull until somebody makes them interesting. The writer's job is to find the argument, the approach, the angle, the wording that will take the reader with him. This is seldom easy, and it is particularly hard in subjects that have been much discussed: College Football, Fraternities, Popular Music, Is Chivalry Dead?, and the like. You will feel that there is nothing you can do with such subjects.
except repeat the old bromides. But there are some things you can do
which will make your papers, if not throbbingly alive, at least less
insufferably tedious than they might otherwise be.

Avoid the Obvious Content

Say the assignment is college football. Say that you’ve decided to be
against it. Begin by putting down the arguments that come to your
mind: it is too commercial, it takes the students’ minds off their studies,
it is hard on the players, it makes the university a kind of circus instead
of an intellectual center, for most schools it is financially ruinous. Can you
think of any more arguments just off-hand? All right. Now when you
write your paper, make sure that you don’t use any of the material on this list.
If these are the points that leap to your mind, they will leap to everyone
else’s, too, and whether you get a “C” or a “D” may depend on whether
the instructor reads your paper early when he is fresh and tolerant or late,
when the sentence “In my opinion, college football has become too com-
mercial,” inexorably repeated, has brought him to the brink of lunacy.

Be against college football for some reason or reasons of your own.
If they are keen and perceptive ones, that’s splendid. But even if they
are trivial or foolish or indefensible, you are still ahead so long as they
are not everybody else’s reasons too. Be against it because the colleges
don’t spend enough money on it to make it worthwhile, because it is
bad for the characters of spectators, because the players are forced to
attend classes, because the football stars hog all the beautiful women,
because it competes with baseball and is therefore un-American and
possibly Communist inspired. There are lots of more or less unused rea-
sons for being against college football.

Sometimes it is a good idea to sum up and dispose of the trite and
conventional points before going on to your own. This has the advan-
tage of indicating to the reader that you are going to be neither trite nor
conventional. Something like this:

We are often told that college football should be abolished because it
has become too commercial or because it is bad for the players. These
arguments are no doubt very cogent, but they don’t really go to the heart
of the matter.

Then you go to the heart of the matter.

Take the Less Usual Side

One rather simple way of getting interest into your paper is to take the
side of the argument that most of the citizens will want to avoid. If the
assignment is an essay on dogs, you can, if you choose, explain that dogs
are faithful and lovable companions, intelligent, useful as guardians of the
house and protectors of children, indispensable in police work— in short,
when all is said and done, man’s best friends. Or you can suggest that
those big brown eyes conceal, more often than not, a vacuity of mind and
an incongruity of purpose; that the dogs you have known most inti-
mately have been mangy, ill-tempered brutes, incapable of instruction;
and that only your nobility of mind and fear of arrest prevent you from
kicking the flea-ridden animals when you pass them on the street.

Naturally, personal convictions will sometimes dictate your approach.
If the assigned subject is “Is Methodism Rewarding to the Individual?”
and you are a pious Methodist, you have really no choice. But few
assigned subjects, if any, will fall in this category. Most of them will lie
in broad areas of discussion with much to be said on both sides. They
are intellectual exercises and it is legitimate to argue now one way and
now another, as debaters do in similar circumstances. Always take the
side that looks to you hardest, least defensible. It will almost always
turn out to be easier to write interestingly on that side.

This general advice applies where you have a choice of subjects. If
you are to choose among “The Value of Fraternities” and “My Favorite
High School Teacher” and “What I Think about Beetles,” by all means
plump for the beetles. By the time the instructor gets to your paper, he
will be up to his ears in tedious tales about the French teacher at
Bloombury High and assertions about how fraternities build character
and prepare one for life. Your views on beetles, whatever they are, are
bound to be a refreshing change.

Don’t worry too much about figuring out what the instructor thinks
about the subject so that you can cuddle up with him. Chances are his
views are no stronger than yours. If he does have convictions and you
oppose them, his problem is to keep from grading you higher than
you deserve in order to show he is not biased. This doesn’t mean that you
should always cantankerously dissent from what the instructor says; that
gets tiresome too. And if the subject assigned is “My Pet Peeve,” do not
begin, “My pet peeve is the English instructor who assigns papers on ‘my
pet peeve.’” This was still funny during the War of 1812, but it has sort of
lost its edge since then. It is in general good manners to avoid personalities.

Slip Out of Abstraction

If you will study the essay on college football . . . you will perceive that
one reason for its appalling dullness is that it never gets down to partic-
ulars. It is just a series of not very glittering generalities: “football is bad
for the colleges,” “it has become too commercial,” “football is a big
business,” “it is bad for the players,” and so on. Such round phrases
thudding against the reader’s brain are unlikely to convince him,
though they may well render him unconscious.
If you want the reader to believe that college football is bad for the players, you have to do more than say so. You have to display the evil. Take your roommate, Alfred Simkins, the second-string center. Picture poor old Alfie coming home from football practice every evening, bruised and aching, agonizingly tired, scarcely able to shovel the mashed potatoes into his mouth. Let us see him staggering up to the room, getting out his econ textbook, perching desperately at it with his good eye, falling asleep and falling the test in the morning. Let us share his unbearable tension as Saturday draws near. Will he fail, be demoted, lose his monthly allowance, be forced to return to the coal mines? And if he succeeds, what will be his reward? Perhaps a slight ripple of applause when the third-string center replaces him, a moment of elation in the locker room if the team wins, of despair if it loses. What will he look back on when he graduates from college? Toil and torn ligaments. And what will be his future? He is not good enough for pro football, and he is too obscure and weak in econ to succeed in stocks and bonds. College football is tearing the heart from Alfie Simkins and, when it finishes with him, will callously toss aside the shattered hulk.

This is no doubt a weak enough argument for the abolition of college football, but it is a sight better than saying, in three or four variations, that college football (in your opinion) is bad for the players.

Look at the work of any professional writer and notice how constantly he is moving from the generality, the abstract statement, to the concrete example, the facts and figures, the illustration. If he is writing on juvenile delinquency, he does not just tell you that juveniles are (it seems to him) delinquent and that (in his opinion) something should be done about it. He shows you juveniles being delinquent, tearing up movie theatres in Buffalo, stabbing high school principals in Dallas, smoking marijuana in Palo Alto. And more than likely he is moving toward some specific remedy, not just a general wringing of the hands.

It is no doubt possible to be too concrete, too illustrative or anecdotal, but few inexperienced writers err this way. For most the soundest advice is to be seeking always for the picture, to be always turning general remarks into seeable examples. Don’t say, “Sororities teach girls the social graces.” Say, “Sorority life teaches a girl how to carry on a conversation while pouring tea, without sloshing the tea into the saucer.” Don’t say, “I like certain kinds of popular music very much.” Say, “Whenever I hear Gerber Spinkittle play ‘Mississippi Man’ on the trombone, my socks creep up my ankles.”

Get Rid of Obvious Padding
The student toiling away at his weekly English theme is too often tormented by a figure: five hundred words. How, he asks himself, is he to achieve this staggering total? Obviously by never using one word when he can somehow work in ten.

He is therefore seldom content with a plain statement like “Fast driving is dangerous.” This has only four words in it. He takes thought, and the sentence becomes:

In my opinion, fast driving is dangerous.

Better, but he can do better still:

In my opinion, fast driving would seem to be rather dangerous.

If he is really adept, it may come out:

In my humble opinion, though I do not claim to be an expert on this complicated subject, fast driving, in most circumstances, would seem to be rather dangerous in many respects, or at least so it would seem to me.

Thus four words have been turned into forty, and not an iota of content has been added.

Now this is a way to go about reaching five hundred words, and if you are content with a “D” grade, it is as good a way as any. But if you aim higher, you must work differently. Instead of stuffing your sentences with straw, you must try steadily to get rid of the padding, to make your sentences lean and tough. If you are really working at it, your first draft will greatly exceed the required total, and then you will work it down, thus:

It is thought in some quarters that fraternities do not contribute as much as might be expected to campus life.

Some people think that fraternities contribute little to campus life.

The average doctor who practices in small towns or in the country must toil night and day to heal the sick.

Most country doctors work long hours.

When I was a little girl, I suffered from shyness and embarrassment in the presence of others.

I was a shy little girl.

It is absolutely necessary for the person employed as a marine fireman to give the matter of steam pressure his undivided attention at all times.

The fireman has to keep his eye on the steam gauge.

You may ask how you can arrive at five hundred words at this rate. Simply. You dig up more real content. Instead of taking a couple of obvious points off the surface of the topic and then circling warily around them for six paragraphs, you work in and explore, figure out
the details. You illustrate. You say that fast driving is dangerous, and then you prove it. How long does it take to stop a car at forty and at eighty? How far can you see at night? What happens when a tire blows? What happens in a head-on collision at fifty miles an hour? Pretty soon your paper will be full of broken glass and blood and headless torsos, and reaching five hundred words will not really be a problem.

Call a Fool a Fool

Some of the padding in freshman themes is to be blamed not on anxiety about the word minimum but on excessive timidity. The student writes, “In my opinion, the principal of my high school acted in ways that I believe every unbiased person would have to call foolish.” This isn’t exactly what he means. What he means is, “My high school principal was a fool.” If he was a fool, call him a fool. Hedging the thing about with “in-my-opinion’s” and “it-seems-to-me’s” and “as-I-see-it’s” and “at-least-from-my-point-of-view’s” gains you nothing. Delete these phrases whenever they creep into your paper.

The student’s tendency to hedge stems from a modesty that in other circumstances would be commendable. He is, he realizes, young and inexperienced, and he half suspects that he is dopey and fuzzy-minded beyond the average. Probably only too true. But it doesn’t help to announce your incompetence six times in every paragraph. Decide what you want to say and say it as vigorously as possible, without apology and in plain words.

Linguistic diffidence can take various forms. One is what we call euphemism. This is the tendency to call a spade “a certain garden implement” or women’s underwear “unmentionables.” It is stronger in some eras than others and in some people than others but it always operates more or less in subjects that are touchy or taboo: death, sex, madness, and so on. Thus we shrink from saying, “He died last night” but say instead, “passed away,” “left us,” “joined his Maker,” “went to his reward.” Or we try to take the tension with a lighter cliché: “kicked the bucket,” “cashed in his chips,” “handed in his dinner pail.” We have found all sorts of ways to avoid saying mad: “mentally ill,” “touched,” “not quite right upstairs,” “feeble-minded,” “innocent,” “simple,” “off his trolley,” “not in his right mind.” Even such a now plain word as insane began as a euphemism with the meaning “not healthy.”

Modern science, particularly psychology, contributes many polysyllables in which we can wrap our thoughts and blunt their force. To many writers there is no such thing as a bad schoolboy. Schoolboys are maladjusted or unoriented or misunderstood or in need of guidance or lacking in a continued success toward satisfactory integration of the personality as a social unit, but they are never bad. Psychology no doubt makes us better men or women, more sympathetic and tolerant, but it doesn’t make writing any easier. Had Shakespeare been confronted with psychology, “To be or not to be” might have come out, “To continue as a social unit or not to do so. That is the personality problem. Whether ’tis a better sign of integration at the conscious level to display a psychic tolerance toward the maladjustments and repressions induced by one’s lack of orientation in one’s environment or——” But Hamlet would never have finished the soliloquy.

Writing in the modern world, you cannot altogether avoid modern jargon. Nor, in an effort to get away from euphemism, should you salt your paper with four-letter words. But you can do much if you will mount guard against those roundabout phrases, those echoing polysyllables that tend to slip into your writing to rob it of its crispness and force.

Beware of the Pat Expression

Other things being equal, avoid phrases like “other things being equal.” Those sentences that come to you whole, or in two or three doughy lumps, are sure to be bad sentences. They are no creation of yours but pieces of common thought floating in the community soup.

Pat expressions are hard, often impossible, to avoid, because they come too easily to be noticed and seem too necessary to be dispensed with. No writer avoids them altogether, but good writers avoid them more often than poor writers.

By “pat expressions” we mean such tags as “to all practical intents and purposes,” “the pure and simple truth,” “from where I sit,” “the time of his life,” “to the ends of the earth,” “in the twinkling of an eye,” “as sure as you’re born,” “over my dead body,” “under cover of darkness,” “took the easy way out,” “when all is said and done,” “told him time and time again,” “parted the best of friends,” “stand up and be counted,” “gave him the best years of her life,” “worked her fingers to the bone.” Like other clichés, these expressions were once forceful. Now we should use them only when we can’t possibly think of anything else.

Some pat expressions stand like a wall between the writer and thought. Such a one is “the American way of life.” Many student writers feel that when they have said that something accords with the American way of life or does not they have exhausted the subject. Actually, they have stopped at the highest level of abstraction. The American way of life is the complicated set of bonds between a hundred and eighty million ways. All of us know this when we think about it, but the tag phrase too often keeps us from thinking about it.

So with many another phrase dear to the politician: “this great land of ours,” “the man in the street,” “our national heritage.” These may prove our patriotism or give a clue to our political beliefs, but otherwise they add nothing to the paper except words.
Colorful Words
The writer builds with words, and no builder uses a raw material more slippery and elusive and treacherous. A writer's work is a constant struggle to get the right word in the right place, to find that particular word that will convey his meaning exactly, that will persuade the reader or soothe him or startle or amuse him. He never succeeds altogether—sometimes he feels that he scarcely succeeds at all—but such successes as he has are what make the thing worth doing.

There is no book of rules for this game. One progresses through everlasting experiment on the basis of ever-widening experience. There are few useful generalizations that one can make about words as words, but there are perhaps a few.

Some words are what we call "colorful." By this we mean that they are calculated to produce a picture or induce an emotion. They are dressy instead of plain, specific instead of general, loud instead of soft. Thus, in place of "Her heart beat," we may write "Her heart pounded, throbbed, fluttered, danced." Instead of "He sat in his chair," we may say, "He lounged, sprawled, coiled." Instead of "It was hot," we may say, "It was blistering, sultry, muggy, suffocating, steamy, scorching."

However, it should not be supposed that the fancy word is always better. Often it is as well to write "Her heart beat" or "It was hot" if that is all it did or all it was. Ages differ in how they like their prose. The nineteenth century liked it rich and smoky. The twentieth has usually preferred it lean and cool. The twentieth-century writer, like all writers, is forever seeking the exact word, but he is wary of sounding feverish. He tends to pitch it low, to understate it, to throw it away. He knows that if he gets too colorful, the audience is likely to giggle.

See how this strikes you: "As the rich, golden glow of the sunset died away along the eternal western hills, Angela's limpid blue eyes looked softly and trustingly into Montague's flashing brown ones, and her heart pounded like a drum in time with the joyous song surging in her soul." Some people like that sort of thing, but most modern readers would say, "Good grief," and turn on the television.

Colored Words
Some words we would call not so much colorful as colored—that is, loaded with associations, good or bad. All words—except perhaps structure words—have associations of some sort. We have said that the meaning of a word is the sum of the contexts in which it occurs. When we hear a word, we hear with it an echo of all the situations in which we have heard it before.

In some words, these echoes are obvious and discussable. The word mother, for example, has, for most people, agreeable associations. When you hear mother you probably think of home, safety, love, food, and various other pleasant things. If one writes, "She was like a mother to me," he gets an effect which he would not get in "She was like an aunt to me." The advertiser makes use of the associations of mother by working it in when he talks about his product. The politician works it in when he talks about himself.

So also with such words as home, liberty, fireside, contentment, patriot, tenderness, sacrifice, childlike, manly, bluff, limpid. All of these words are loaded with favorable associations that would be rather hard to indicate in a straightforward definition. There is more than a literal difference between "They sat around the fireside" and "They sat around the stove." They might have been equally warm and happy around the stove, but fireside suggests leisure, grace, quiet tradition, congenial company, and stove does not.

Conversely, some words have bad associations. Mother suggests pleasant things, but mother-in-law does not. Many mothers-in-law are heroically lovable and some mothers drink gin all day and beat their children insolently, but these facts of life are beside the point. The thing is that mother sounds good and mother-in-law does not.

Consider the word intellectual. This would seem to be a complimentary term, but in point of fact it is not, for it has picked up associations of impracticality and ineffectuality and general dopiness. So also with such words as liberal, reactionary, Communist, Socialist, capitalist, radical, schoolteacher, truck driver, undertaker, operator, salesman, huckster, speculator. These convey meanings on the literal level, but beyond that—sometimes, in some places—they convey contempt on the part of the speaker.

The question of whether to use loaded words or not depends on what is being written. The scientist, the scholar, try to avoid them; for the poet, the advertising writer, the public speaker, they are standard equipment. But every writer should take care that they do not substitute for thought. If you write, "Anyone who thinks that is nothing but a Socialist (or Communist or capitalist)" you have said nothing except that you don't like people who think that, and such remarks are effective only with the most naieve readers. It is always a bad mistake to think your readers more naive than they really are.

Colorless Words
But probably most student writers come to grief not with words that are colorful or those that are colored but with those that have no color at all. A pet example is nice, a word we would find it hard to dispense with in casual conversation but which is no longer capable of adding much to a description. Colorless words are those of such general meaning
that in a particular sentence they mean nothing. Slang adjectives, like cool ("That's real cool.") tend to explode all over the language. They are applied to everything, lose their original force, and quickly die.

Beware also of nouns of very general meaning, like circumstances, cases, instances, aspects, factors, relationships, attitudes, eventualities, etc. In most circumstances you will find that those cases of writing which contain too many instances of words like these will in this and other aspects have factors leading to unsatisfactory relationships with the reader resulting in unfavorable attitudes on his part and perhaps other eventualities, like a grade of "D." Notice also what "etc." means. It means "I'd like to make this list longer, but I can't think of any more examples."

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE TEXT

In this essay, Roberts points out certain features, positive and negative, found in the work of many writers. Does your writing exhibit any of these features? How would you rate your writing with respect to each of these features?

QUESTIONS ON SUBJECT

1. What, for you, is the most important advice Roberts has to offer?
2. According to Roberts, what is the job of the writer? Why, in particular, is it difficult for college students to do this job well? Discuss how your college experience leads you to agree or disagree with Roberts.
3. The author offers several "tricks" or techniques of good writing in his essay. What are they? Do you find them more useful than other techniques? Explain.
4. If, according to Roberts, a good writer never uses unnecessary words, then what are the legitimate ways a student can reach the goal of the five-hundred-word essay?
5. According to Roberts, how has modern psychology made it more difficult to write well?

QUESTIONS ON STRATEGY

1. What is Roberts's thesis in this essay? (Glossary: Thesis)
2. Make a scratch outline of Roberts's essay. What are the similarities between his organization of material and the process analysis he outlines for students? (Glossary: Organization) Explain.
3. What kind of information does the title of Roberts's essay lead you to expect? (Glossary: Title) Does the author deliver what the title promises? Why do you think he chose this title?
4. What are Roberts's main points? How do his examples help him explain and clarify his main points? (Glossary: Illustration)
5. Roberts's writing style is well-suited to his student audience; he includes examples that would be familiar to many students. How would you describe his writing style? What are some of the ways he uses narration and illustration to make the process analysis easy to follow? (Glossary: Illustration; Narration)

QUESTIONS ON DICTION AND VOCABULARY

1. Roberts wrote this essay almost fifty years ago, and at some points the facts he cites indicate this; he gives the population of the United States as 180 million (paragraph 32), whereas today it is over 300 million. Is there anything in his diction or word choice that makes Roberts's writing seem dated, or does it sound contemporary? Choose examples from the text to support your answer. (Glossary: Diction)
2. What does Roberts mean by "colorful words," "colored words," and "colorless words"?
3. What is Roberts's tone in this essay? What words does he use to create this tone? Explain how the tone affects you as a reader. (Glossary: Tone)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY USING PROCESS ANALYSIS

Before class, find a how-to article that interests you on the Web site for Wikihow at http://www.wikihow.com/Main-Page. Bring a copy of the article to class and be prepared to discuss why you think the article is incomplete or inaccurate and how you might revise it.

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

1. In paragraph 16, Roberts explains how a brief but good essay on college football might be written. He obeys a major rule of good writing—show, don't tell. Thus, instead of a dry lump of words, his brief "essay" uses humor, exaggeration, and concrete details to breathe life into the football player. Review Roberts's strategies for good writing. Then choose one of the dull topics he suggests or one of your own, and following the steps he lays out, write a five-hundred-word essay.
2. Roberts's essay was first published in 1958—before personal computers and word processing programs became ubiquitous. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the process of writing an essay on a typewriter and on a computer. (Glossary: Comparison and Contrast) How is the process similar? How is it different? What equipment and supplies does each require? Which do you prefer? Why?