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Apr08

[Mike](#)

[An open letter to bloggers \(and wroggers\) everywhere](#)

I've been following, with some amusement, the reaction to my recent *Democrat and Chronicle* essay, in which I introduced a term—wrogging—to describe high-quality writing on a blog—a word that, I predict, will be in the dictionary before the turn of the century. (Note to bloggers: j o k i n g.)

Here's a sampling:

[jane](#), responding to a [post](#) by Seth Hopkins, at [Cup O' Books](#), queries:

“do you suppose saffran considers himself a blogger or a wrogger?”

Well, duh, I.j. (that's “lowercasing jane” for the uninitiated), *of course* I consider myself a *wrogger*. What would you expect??

It may surprise you, though, that after reading his post, I also count Seth among the wroggers of the world—for although he takes issue with some of my points, he does so in a thoughtful, well-written manner. In fact, some of our views aren't that far apart. For example, I wholeheartedly agree with him about poorly written blogs:

“I would argue that the flaw exists in the writer, not the technology.”

Other reaction:

In response to the title of my *D&C* [essay](#), “Yes, even bloggers must mind their grammar and spelling,” [Munir Umrani, The Blogging Journalist](#), asks:

“I wonder who has been arguing that [they] shouldn't.”

Um, that's really not the point, Munir. Though I'm unaware of anyone advocating *bad* writing, there's no shortage of bloggers practicing it. But, props to Munir for this:

“I proof read before I post. Nevertheless, our errors can make some readers not want to read our posts.”

I, too, ‘admit’ to proofreading, and I ‘confess’ (get ready for this) to a preference for reading good writing (astounding, I know).

That startling revelation brings us to Ken, at [The Fretful Porpentine](#), who, regarding my coinage of wrogging, searched my [essay](#) for “signs of satire or sarcasm with negative results.” Apparently, Ken failed to notice the word “facetiously” (it's right there, in some of the black ink he says the *D&C* wasted).

But, Ken concedes, “Maybe he struck a little too close to home?”

You think?

In any case, to all bloggers who, on account of my words, felt incensed, oppressed, enraged or aroused, I say:

L i g h t e n u p!

(It's kind of ironic, actually.)

Also, allow me to clue you in to a couple things about newspaper op-eds:

1. They're *intended* to be provocative (just try getting one published that's not)—that's one reason they're called *opinion*-editorials.
2. Writers often have agendas. In my case, in addition to wanting to share my views on blog writing (a true desire), an ulterior motive was to drive readers to our new Web log. So, thanks to jane, Seth, Munir and Ken for doing their part.

As for wrogging, go ahead and [Google](#)

it. You'll see it's already on its way to legitimacy by the turn of the century—with more than 93 years to go, it has gained stature as a word on the “fringe,” according to the [Double-Tongued Word Wrestler](#).

One final admonition: Don't take this newfound status on the fringe—or this blog post—too seriously. (After all, both might be on the [Lunatic Fringe](#).)

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1. [Mike Saffran](#)
Apr11

For a different perspective on my *D&C* essay (different from those of Ken, Munir, Seth and jane, that is), see [The Ignatian Perspective](#) (scroll down to “Second Update” under the March 31 entry). Kudos to my fellow wrogger, Amadeo.

2. [Amadeo](#)

Apr 15

Hi, Mike: Thanks for the link. English is a second language to me. And it took great pain and effort, and time too, to arrive at a place where I can write English decently and be understood by a host of readers coming from different backgrounds. And the learning continues to this day. It comes as a surprise then to read that other writers of English, where it is the native tongue, would pose any question at all with your proposition that correct grammar and usage should be a standard in blog writing. Beyond just being understood easily and properly, I personally find that the habit of using English properly can lead to a better mastery of the language. In this instance I subscribe to the cliché that practice makes perfect. On another, but sadder, note, I am reminded of the old homeland where endemic poverty has not made possible the more universal usage of computers. Instead, they have the cheaper cell phones which they use essentially as their communicating tool. So instead of emails or blogwriting, many resort to sending texts to each other in packets of a few hundred characters. Most educated citizens are bi-lingual and English is the second language, though it is the medium of instruction in most schools. Sad, because in their texting in English, they have somehow created an entirely new vocabulary designed primarily to save characters and speed up the process. And thus, to the uninitiated, they come out like coded messages. Missing vowels. Spelling based solely on how the word sounds. Lowercasing. Sentences interspersed with the dialect. Etc. In effect, the process is mangling whatever English is learned in school because this corrupted form is now seeping into formal communication. Pretty soon, it could become second nature and reflexive.

3. [ken](#)

Apr 15

Haha! Well, touché, Mike, perhaps my reading comprehension isn't quite up to snuff either. But still. You imply that your op-ed was provocative, yet your stated opinion--that bloggers should employ good writing--was anything but. What provoked my [semi-coherent ram](#) was the D&C's decision to run your essay in the first place. To me, it seemed little more than a ham-handed effort to portray the blogosphere as being run by a bunch of illiterate degenerates wearing pajamas (so maybe I'm projecting a bit here, but you get my point). Please excuse me if I get a little grumpy when blogs are singled out as the epitome of poor writing. Your op-ed's ulterior motive of drawing more readers to Tiger Beat is more compelling. Here, in this blog, where you have the space to expand upon your ideas of good writing, you are able to do some good. Truly. I applaud your efforts here. Happy to help.

4. [Mike Saffran](#)

Apr 16

Ah, but Ken, the proof is in the postings. The fact that my [D&C op-ed](#) provoked responses from you, Jane, Seth, Munir and Amadeo (along with a few others, including one handwritten letter delivered via U.S. mail--thus, it's viewable only outside my office where it's *literally* posted) proves that my essay *was* provocative. Ironically, though, I'm with you in this respect: I truly didn't anticipate that my essay would provoke such a clamor. In fact, I find it peculiarly fascinating that I can skewer big-media radio ownership in two previous *D&C* op-eds ("Handing media reins to a few grabs power from the public," *D&C* May 30, 2003; and "Broadcasters are obliged to use airwaves to serve public good," *D&C* April 23, 2004) without hearing so much as a whimper; but, by daring to suggest that more bloggers strive to write well, some readers vilified me. Let me clarify: *I don't* consider bloggers to be "a bunch of illiterate degenerates wearing pajamas." Heck, I'm one of you now (and, for the record, I'm wearing jeans and a sweatshirt--although presently neither shoes *nor* slippers; but it's the weekend). And, in fact, many bloggers are very good writers (wrogers, if you will). But it's funny you should mention bloggers in pajamas--because, believe it or not, that image is kind of what sparked my [D&C essay](#) in the first place. We already had a lively discussion ongoing here about [writing vs. blogging](#); then, one Sunday morning on "The Chris Matthews Show," I heard Matthews suggest that Howard Dean didn't win the 2004 Democratic nomination for president--despite his popularity with bloggers--possibly because not enough of his supporters changed out of their PJs and slippers to actually *go out and vote!* That prompted me to think, *ÁÁÁ* Gee, speaking of those bloggers, maybe I can spin some of my thoughts on blogs into a *D&C* op-ed? *ÁÁÁ* So, after finishing my pancakes, I did just that (that's the story-behind-the-story of a partly-pancake-inspired op-ed.) I appreciate your thoughtful and well-written remarks, Ken, along with your compliment on what we're attempting to achieve here. Thanks for your contribution to the discourse, and please check back again.

5. [ken](#)

Apr 17

Thanks, Mike. I get the sense that we may be talking past each other to some extent, but here I go again anyway: You say, "by daring to suggest that more bloggers strive to write well, some readers vilified me." I can't speak for others, but my beef is not in the suggestion itself, but in the underlying premise that bloggers are somehow inherently inclined to produce bad writing. The heart of the issue may be the degree to which we disagree on what actually constitutes good writing. On that subject, I'll just leave this here ten-foot pole lying by my side undisturbed.

6. [Mike Saffran](#)

Apr 18

To the contrary, Ken, in my [D&C essay](#) (as well as posts here), I've explicitly (and intentionally) referred to "some blogs" (three times, by my count) and "certain blogs"--so *not* to imply inherent shortcomings in bloggers (after all, if all bloggers were "inherently inclined to produce bad writing," there would be no purpose in my coinage of wroging). I agree with you, however, that reaching a consensus on what constitutes good writing would be problematic. The cause of the dilemma, it seems to me, is the lumping together of all blogging under a single term (a point I've made here before). We know that blogs (like many things) are not all created equal; rather, the blogosphere is filled with the good, the bad and the unreadable. Now, I've conceded that each has its proper place and purpose; but, the lack of standards, I believe, tends to foster guilt by association. It would seem that good writers (yourself included) would embrace distinguishing the good from the brain dump--for doing so may help us all avoid painting with a broad brush. But, as I've also stated previously, I recognize that it's early.

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