

THE COLLEGIATE VOICE

One of the main purposes for attending a college or university is to learn what you must to be successful in a particular career path. However, attending college is also for learning what is deemed professional behavior, even professional language (that is, how to talk and write like a professional).

For years, many have considered the collegiate voice (in both oral and written forms) to be intelligent and sophisticated. And, consequently, for centuries, individuals have gathered at colleges and universities for the chance to attain this ability to speak and write clearly, purposefully, and persuasively, an ability which is not usually inherited and/or easily attained.

GRAMMATICAL DISCIPLINARIANS

In achieving the collegiate voice in writing, many guidelines exist which can help us to learn to access such a voice. We attend English composition courses to learn and understand these guidelines. While in class, we talk and write papers. And, most of the time, we live under the idea that the professor is a strict disciplinarian guarding the college gates from those who would tarnish its elitist language and its linguistic complexity.

Oftentimes, people envision college English professors as a breed of cut-throat, intimidating individuals who cringe at the sight of a misspelled word or out of place comma. I, myself, upon introducing myself to others a party find people tend to limit communication with me after they realize my chosen profession. However, while this conception is oftentimes reasonable, it is not entirely accurate.

In English composition, there are basically two categories of grammarians (two types of writing instructors): The Prescriptivists and the Descriptivists. Like a pharmacists or a doctor, the Prescriptivists will insist that you take the medicine that they provide to you; they insist that writing demands rigorous understanding of rules of grammar and style. Meanwhile, the Descriptivists only hope that you understand when the medicine is appropriate and when it is not; they insist that you know the rules and when they are appropriate.

In other words, some instructors really prefer a top-notch usage understanding of grammar and style, while others only prefer that you can write to be understood while being aware of the rules. The difference is using the rules all the time versus using the rules when it is acceptable to do so.

Yet, regardless of what college you attend, you are bound to find a slight mix of the two teaching styles, with the majority of professors on the prescriptivist side.

Therefore, undertaking a study of learning the rules of grammar and the guidelines (e.g. traditions) of style is essential. Furthermore, learning how to construct a proper argument is another crucial skill that you must master, since those students without such skills do not normally survive the hectic intellectual politics of college, no matter how much money they pay.

THE REAL WORLD

Honestly, I tell my students that college is like a black and white ball. If you show up in a tuxedo or an appropriate evening gown, you are permitted to enter and enjoy the party. If you show up in less than formal attire, you cannot even make it passed the door oftentimes. Security will stop you in your tracks.

The real world is very similar. There are places of prestige which are locked to those without the money or the power to enter. And, sadly, language (expressed orally and in written forms) is one of the only criteria people use to judge each other.

Learning to write with the "Collegiate Voice" is important, since it tends to opens doors in the academy rather than close them. Moreover, learning how to write within the collegiate voice helps to "pre-professionalize" your writing. In sum, you want to make sure to learn as much as you can about communicating while you attend college; your career might depend on it.