



English Society of Maria College ESSAY CRITICISM CONTEST

A DEDICATION 1863

[The words of Abraham Lincoln when he dedicated a cemetery to the men killed in the battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War]

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who have given their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. 5

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. 10 15

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1809-65)

Abraham Lincoln jotted down the Gettysburg

Address on the back of an old envelope while he was going to Gettysburg on the train. (On the contrary: he worked on it for weeks and made corrections in it even *after* it had been delivered.)

(This information explains the discrepancy in different versions.)

BY Rudolf Flesch

DR. RUDOLF FLESCH is a renowned authority on writing improvement, a teacher, a consultant, and the author of many books and articles. His books, among them *The Art of Plain Talk* and *Why Johnny Can't Read & What You Can Do About It*, are nationwide bestsellers and recognized classics in the field of communication.

**The English Society
Maria College
Results of the Essay Criticism Contest**

Clarity, simplicity, getting to the points: these are the criteria to select a winner. We view the Address in the light of modern linguists, not in a pettifogging manner, still more not in the way of doing a research paper on literature. We believe no individual or educational institute has ever done such a detailed analysis and comment.

Figures of Speech

(Sources can be found in 'High School English Grammar' by Wren, 1965, p. 362 -- E. S.)

1. Antithesis (Contrast) -- by Fion L. (\$500)
Remember (l. 9) -- forget (l. 10)
Birth (l. 15) -- perish (l. 16)
2. Hyperbole (Exaggeration) -- by Peter L. (\$500)
It (the world) can never forget. (l. 10) -- Now more than 95% of the world population don't know 'what they did'.
3. Euphemism (Description of a disagreeable thing by an agreeable name) -- by Peter L. (\$500)
Final resting-place (l. 5) -- cemetery.
4. Metonymy (The container for the thing contained -- the whole city (people) went out to welcome the king.) -- Adi Yiu (\$500)
The world (the people) will little note. (l. 9)
5. Climax (Order of increasing importance) -- by G. James. (\$500)
Dedicate, consecrate, hallow this ground (l. 7)
6. Metaphor -- by G. James (\$500)
Conceived (l. 2) -- created
7. Oxymoron (Two words in contrasting meaning, such as the kind cruelty of the surgeon's knife) -- by G. James. (\$500)
Poor power (l. 9) -- 'poor' refers to 'weak'; 'power' refers to 'strength'.
8. Hendiadys (A form of semantic redundancy) -- by G. James. (\$1,000)
Fitting and proper (l. 6) (Figures of speech. '60 Ways to Turn a Phrase' by Davis; Hermagoras Press, 1997, p.16) (Two words complement each other in expressing a single idea with the aim to strengthen the communicative value by such a combination without being regarded as redundancy.)

Emphasis

1. By Inversion of Normal Order (An adjective placed after its noun, 'Manual of English Grammar & Composition' by Nesfield, 1978, p. 166 -- M. C. Yeung, \$500)
The brave men, living and dead. (l. 8)
2. By Repetition -- by G. James (\$500) (Phrases of equal length and same number of syllables)
Of the people, by the people, for the people (l. 15) --
3. By Polyptoton (A kind of repetition of different words from the same root) by G. James (\$1000)
Lives (Noun, l. 5) -- live (verb, l. 6)
Dead (Adjective, l. 14) -- died (verb, l. 14)
4. By the Negative-Positive Restatement -- by C. P. Chan (\$1000) ('New Oxford Guide to Writing' p.152.)
Emphasis is achieved by stating an idea twice, first in negative terms, then in positive.
The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. (l. 9)
5. By Balanced Structure.
(Two parts are equal in length and significance by a pause -- 'New Oxford Guide to Writing'. For example, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. -- by F. John) (\$1000)
'What we say here' (l.9). 'What they did here' (l.10)

Paragraph Coherence (A sense of focus) (C. P. Chan, \$2000)

Every idea relates to the topic in a way to clarify the logic or importance. ('The New Oxford Guide to Writing' by Kane, OUP, 1988, p. 71)

Historical background (l. 1), the cause (l. 2), and effect (l.4) of the War came first, and then the dedication of a cemetery to be the subject (l. 5) followed, and a final sentence with a conviction (l. 6) ended the first paragraph.

Passage Cohesion (Flowing from old to new)

('Style' by Williams, Longman, 1997, p.105 -- C. Jacky, \$2000)

Ago (l.1 - Past), now (l.2 --Present), shall not (l.16 -- Future)

Rhythm (Clustered Stresses) (Alfred Lau, \$2000)

Three or more stressed syllables occur successively to show an idea with considerable importance.

e. g. The ^X Big [/] Bull [/] Market [/] was ^X dead. ^X ('The New Oxford Guide to Writing', p. 153)

'Work which they have [/] thus [/] far [/] so ^X nobly ^X advanced' (l. 11).

The Lead (Peter L., \$3000) ('On Writing Well' by Zinsser, 1998, p.56)

The lead must cajole the reader with freshness, or novelty, or an unusual idea to nudge his curiosity, and tug at his sleeves.

'Fourscore', a reviving archaic word, brings us a sense of resurrection -- the new birth of freedom, the theme of the Address.

'Fourscore' has a novel outlook to nudge the curiosity of the newer generation.

'Fourscore and seven years ago' cajoles some readers with an accounting mind to do a little mental calculation.

'Fourscore and seven years ago' has the double advantages of number and time compared with the famous lead having only the time but not a figure.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. -- The Bible.

The Ending (Fion L., \$3000) ('Write to the Point' by Stott, Columbia U. Press, 1991, p. 62)

A circular ending means to begin and end at the same point -- repeating the beginning in the same words: ○

But better still, the 'kicker', a version of what journalists call, lets a little air into the end of the Address to open up the subject to the world.

'Not perish' (l. 16) echoes 'brought forth' (l. 1);

'continent' (l. 1) is open to the 'earth'. (l. 16)

The ending comes like this: ○

Demerits (\$3000 for each)

1. **Breach of Writing in Harmony** (Repeating a Similar Word in a Sentence)

('English Rhetoric', The Commercial Press, 1982, p. 24, -- Alfred Lau)

The first devotion (l. 13) qualified by 'increased' is object of v.t. 'take'; the second devotion without any qualifying adjective is object of preposition 'of'. Both do not have a single feature in common, so this is not a variation of repetition.

2. **Ineffective Repetition of 'Here'** ('Harper's English Grammar' by Opdycke, p. 258 -- Alfred Lau)

Three here's in lines 8, 9, 10 are all put behind finite verbs. Hence a force of repetition looms up, but it turns weak when 'here' is put behind an infinitive (l. 10), and still weaker when inserted inside the infinitive (l. 12). Finally, the force goes flat when 'here' is put behind 'we' in line 14.

3. **Overuse of Impersonal Pronoun 'It'** ('Correct English' by Phythian, 1998, p. 136, M. C. Yeung)

'Consecrated it' -- (l. 8). 'It can never' -- (l. 10). 'It is for' -- (l. 10).

The first 'it' has no instant clarity; the second 'it' means the world; the third one is an indefinite pronoun. If we replace the second 'it' with 'she' to have a personal touch, the structure becomes clear, vivid, and colorful.

Others (\$2000 for each)

1. 'That that nation might live' (l. 6) ('High School English Composition' by Martin, 1965, p. 44, -- Fion L.)

The first 'that' is a subordinate conjunction used with 'might' to introduce an adverb clause of purpose with the following functions:

a. This clause is subordinate to the adjective clause 'who have given their lives'.

b. It modifies the finite verb 'have given'. (This is the most important function -- E.S.)

c. It displays a wish or a desire in subjunctive mood.

The second 'that' is a determiner, or a demonstrative adjective, or an attributive adjective with the following functions:

a. It is used attributively to qualify the noun 'nation'.

b. It qualifies only a noun in singular number.

2. '-- that from those honoured dead ... the earth' (lines 12 - 16)

('The New Oxford Guide to Writing', p. 144 -- Alfred Lau)

The dash sets up an important idea delayed for emphasis. Lincoln used four co-ordinate noun clauses linked by three semi-colons as four small tasks to amplify and form one great task. As in 'bread and milk is his only food', we need both to make the content of food complete.