In a Land with no Mirrors
Discussions with an Author/Coauthor of a Public Speaking Text
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W. Clifton Adams

The following discussion is truncated primarily to protect the identity of the Author/Coauthor (my decision; the person may well not care) and to increase the focus on the relevant issues. However, the presentation reflects accurately the essence of the messages.

From: W C Adams [mailto:clifton_adams@yahoo.com]
Sent: Wed 9/12/2007 2:28 PM
To: Author/Coauthor
Subject: on abstraction

Hi Author/Coauthor,
    You're back to the grind here in the states?
   I've been reviewing your public-speaking text. I knew you had one out before I went to Asia; but, of course Asia was all consuming especially with travel there and in Europe during the breaks. Then, since we've been back here I've successfully battled blindness in one eye and cancer. So, forgive my tardiness in these comments.
            The text is impressive! ....
            My one large complaint with your book centers on your presentation of abstraction. …in the discussion you overlook general semantics' great concern with problems produced by "either-or" statements. The abstraction ladder has many more than two rungs. You say "the more concrete your words, the clearer you communicate." However, if you reread Hayakawa in his discussion of abstraction language, you'll see that he has problems with individuals who favor any one level of abstraction over the others. He does discuss problems with abstract language, but then discusses how essential abstract language is. He identifies the most abstract language of mathematics and science as the clearest! But, he does not want us to use any level exclusively. He would probably see your advice as encouraging "dead-level abstraction." He doesn't see dead-level abstracting as good, quite the opposite. Your advice in Chapter X to develop good ideas requires a quality use of less than concrete words! So do all of your chapters on outlining, etc. I have below a couple of quotes from *Language in Thought and Action* so that you need not reread the whole section to have a reminder of the points I make.

Sincerely,
clifton

p 179: It is obvious, then, that interesting speech and interesting writing, as well as clear thinking and consequent psychological adjustment, require the constant

interplay of higher and lower level abstractions, and the constant interplay of the verbal levels with the nonverbal (object) level.

p180 The interesting writer, the informative speakers, the accurate thinker, and well-adjusted individual, operate on all levels of the abstraction ladder, moving quickly and gracefully and in orderly fashion from higher to lower, from lower to higher – with minds as lithe and deft and beautiful as monkeys in a tree.

Response to my letter of 9/12/07

HI Cliff,

Thanks so very, very much for your detailed feedback. I/We am/are working on a new edition and your feedback helps us a lot. I'm traveling at the moment.... When I return I'll take some time to go over your suggestions in much greater detail. Again,
thanks!!!

9/14/07
I wrote:
Author/Coauthor,
        As you are revising the public-speaking text, you might want to checkout Jaffe's treatment of concrete language. At least in her first edition, she avoided casting abstraction in a bad light by focusing on how specific language adds vitality to one's style. Also, in the section on supporting material, in discussing the use of facts, she does indicate that one can use too many facts. Of course, "using too many facts" equates to being overly specific. Whether she recognizes the equivalence or not, it does provide some balance in the consideration of abstraction.
        Jaffe comes across less contradictory in these two sections than most authors. Generally, the student has to maintain clear separation of the two sections, as well as others, or s/he becomes confused quickly!
Cliff

Sept 24, 2007
 Hi Clifton,

 Thanks for your excellent suggestions. It's so good to get concrete, detailed suggestions as we revise our book.

From: W C Adams [mailto:clifton_adams@yahoo.com]
 Sent: Wed 9/26/2007 6:14 PM
 Subject: Other Suggestions

        Okay, that's cute: my concrete suggestions on abstraction were helpful.. Still, I'm sure your get the IDEA (abstract as it is) that the specific suggestions speak to. :-)

Now, since I'm making specific suggests in advance of your revisions: You should also correct your five types of arguments. Yes, I know, your list goes back at least to no lesser person than Bruce Gronbeck, but that doesn't make them correct. Induction and deduction are two parts of a process of reasoning (as your text's examples indicate). We can induct a major premise of any of the five types of argument; or we can deduct from any of the five types. Induction and deduction speak to where in the loop we are. The types of argument speak to the nature of the overall thought involved.

There are five types of argument. Dennis Ehninger, in *Influence, Belief and Argumen*t, has a good treatment of five types of argument that may be of some help. You'd probably have to go to a good logic book that treated five types of syllogisms to see from where the correct five emerge.

Response to the above on 9/26/07

Hi Clifton,

Thanks again for your logical (I'm being cute again), detailed and helpful ideas. It's always a challenge when writing an introductory text to capture the nuances of the mature, detailed scholarship and thought and communicate those ideas to the typical audience who will read the book. In addition to the perspective you share, some approaches that look at logical arguments distinguish induction and deduction as frameworks that fall on the probability-certainty continuum. We get one more shot at our manuscript before it's typeset (our current draft is at the publishers, but we'll be reviewing copy edited manuscript in a few weeks).

From: W C Adams [mailto:clifton_adams@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thu 9/27/2007 7:12 AM

Subject: RE: Other Suggestions

Author/Coauthor,
My perception was that your were at the beginning of the revision. Had I understood that the revised ms was already at the publisher, I'd kept my mouth closed! (Certainly, I could have better used the time constructing drafts of my own!)
I think I began my first offering of a suggestion with (something to the extent of),"... you are wise to keep it simple for the beginning student.... " and that you'd done an impressive job. However, you can appreciate how difficult it is to reeducate students when they have seen in print a list that lacks coordination. Certainly, I did not mean (at any level of abstraction) to suggest that you mix (or even discuss different) definitions of induction/deduction. My last suggestion was simply to be consistent in your list of types of arguments with the definitions you chose to use.

Really, students are capable; they are more capable of processing a consistent set of five concepts, even given a related list of two, than an inconsistent (thus confusing) discussion of five.

Reply on 9/27/2007
Hi Clifton,

Although we're at the tail end of the revision process I nonetheless DO highly appreciate your suggestions and we'll still have an opportunity to touch our words and move them around a bit to make the manuscript the best it can be. So again, Thanks!!!

And you are right in that when we write a textbook we have to be mindful of what both instructors and students already know (or think they know) so we try to build on those perceptions as well as correct them. Your comments and feedback are most helpful and give me reason to ponder how to work with that dialectic. I'll look at our prose and see what we can do. Of course, our main objective in the book is not to teach logic per se, but to teach public speaking. So we look at what level of detail is needed from a pedagogical perspective to achieve the larger goal. As I look at what we can do to clarify our ideas within the space limitations we have (our editors want us to cut rather than add any time we do a new edition), I may want to visit with you by phone to make sure I'm completely understanding your suggestions.

Again, thanks for your logical, concrete, well-reasoned ideas and suggestions (ah, there are those puns again).

Wishing you all the best,

My reply of 9/27/2007
Author/Coauthor,
… time is better served to move forward to more specific suggests…. You say there are three types of argument; but, then present four. Fortunately, from a space utilization, the four your present are all of different types, and you provide examples of the most relevant and simplest four. So, you may be able to improve the treatment within bounds that will keep the publisher from being too unhappy.
One potential way of doing it would be to start with a preview in which you say that reasoning has two parts: induction and deduction. Within the reasoning process there are various types of arguments and that you will illustrate induction and deduction within four of these types of arguments.
Then you could start with classification and use the example you have under induction, showing the induction part (phase). Then you could say that the conclusion could then be a major premise to begin the induction phase. Once you set up the dimensions of a syllogism in one example, you might be able to be

more concise in the next three, or, for clarity, you might be allowed to illustrate each type argument with its three major parts. Don't know, given you think this system will work, how many new terms you'd want to introduce. However, you might consider (reasoning to)GENERALIZATION within classification. You already have ANALOGY with similarity. SIGN goes with your contingency (now under deductive). I don't have one for cause (it's just plain and simply overgeneralization, but don't tell anyone I said that!) I put in "reasoning to" above; but, if'n I had my way, you wouldn't dress up these induction phases by labeling them as arguments.

Hope this helps and does muddy the waters more!
clifton

The message ofSept. 28, 2007

Hi Clifton,

Thanks yet again for your thoughtful and helpful suggestions. I've been traveling this week and I'm just getting back. I'll probably dig in and turn my attention to sorting all of this out once I get through a couple of other deadlines that are breathing down my neck. I'm not sure when [we/I] have to get final, final manuscript revisions back to the publisher, but probably a few more weeks.

So, thanks. This new suggestion may help sort things out in terms of space limitations. I'll bounce some of these ideas off other P.S. teachers I know to see what they think. The key thing I've learned in writing textbooks is that I write them not for me, but for others to use.
With all best wishes,

At this point it became clear that the Author/Coauthor would not make changes to better reflect scholarship of the past 60-70 years. And indeed, the current edition of the text retains the same problems of the one I reviewed in 2007 (see the relevant papers in the Papers Section of this site). The system – appeasing others -- was more important than the quality of the work. That's when I wrote the following story and sent the person a copy. There was no reply to the story.

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In The Land of No Mirrors
W. Clifton Adams

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ONCE ON A MODERN TIME in The Land of No Mirrors, the Emperor wanted to educate his people about fashion. He had a grand idea. They would

have a fashion parade. The theme of the parade would be "Dressing to Impress Others."

So the Emperor decreed that there would be a fashion parade. Then, the Emperor called in his chief tailor, Screwtape, to make the most elegant outfit for the Emperor to wear in the parade. His apparel would be a model for his subjects.

The parade was such a success that the Emperor decided to make the event an annual affair. The Emperor was very pleased because he could see from his ivory tower that, on special occasions, his people were dressing better.

Screwtape was also happy. No one had told the Emperor that his eloquent suit left his rear exposed. After all, he was the Emperor. No one in court dared to suggest his appearance wasn't regal. The common subjects didn't know fashion anyway. Fashion was, indeed, what the Emperor was teaching them.

Screwtape took great care to secure the royal garments. The Emperor appreciated Screwtape's service in locking them away, out of sight, from year to year. So, for six years, the Emperor wore the outfit in the fashion parade.

Of course, the parade was successful in teaching the subjects about high fashion. Whenever they had an occasion among themselves, they would model, as best they could, the Emperor's dress. The men, one by one, began to leave their rears exposed. Of course, theirs was never a full exposure. They left the full exposure to the Emperor. Still, the custom was established.

In time, after the sixth parade, a fashion consultant, who had been working in foreign kingdoms, returned home. On learning of the new development in men's formal attire, he was not totally surprised. He had seen exposed rears in other lands.

However, he was surprised when he learned that the Emperor's theme was "Dress to Impress Others." The exposed rump wasn't impressive. In other regions, the rear gap was for convenience. Surely the Emperor did not think the effect was to impress others.

Although the consultant worked primarily with the lower class, he had on one occasion consulted with the Emperor. The Emperor had been very young, planning to attend his first ball. The consultant had helped the Emperor's first admission into the elite class of fashion. "Perhaps," thought the consultant, "he will remember me."

So, the consultant wrote the Emperor. Of course, the Emperor consulted Screwtape.

"Oh, there are several theories about the fabric of the rear panel. Does he want us to have a different fabric than the one we now use?" asked Screwtape.

So, the Emperor replied to the consultant.

"No," the consultant wrote back. "You can stay with the same fabric, just close the gap."

Again, the Emperor consulted Screwtape. He told the Emperor, "The parade is about fashion, not about the manner in which one drapes his rear."

So, the Emperor wrote back to the consultant.

The consultant was dejected, but made one last attempt to tell the Emperor that he really should cover his butt.

Again, the Emperor discussed the issue with Screwtape. Screwtape said, "We are too near the time of the parade to make alterations now even if they were needed."

However, this time, the Emperor wasn't convinced that some small alterations might not be possible. So, he wrote the consultant saying he might be open to suggestions.

The consultant was excited. Perhaps he could help the Emperor. By helping the Emperor, he might save himself many hours of explaining to the people, one at a time, that leaving one's butt exposed wasn't dressing to impress. If the Emperor summoned him to the castle, he would be prepared to give more detailed suggestions. So, he wrote a modest proposal for adjusting, quickly, the Emperor's garments.

The Emperor took the consultant's proposal to Screwtape. Screwtape said, "The parade is about dressing to impress others. Before you make any changes, don't you think you need to check with your court? Perhaps they like the status quo. After all, it's their parade, not yours and certainly not the subjects or some lofty ideals about fashion or taste."

So, again, the Emperor wrote to the consultant.

The consultant did not know how to respond. The consultant knew adapting to audiences did not mean telling them what they wanted to hear. If it were, his messages to the Emperor would have been different.

If the Emperor wanted to teach his subjects how to dress to impress, he would need to recognize that audience adaptation meant saying and doing what one believes is correct in such a way as to have the greatest possibility of gaining acceptance with the audience.

"Perhaps," thought the consultant, "I could tell him a story about a boy who put his thumb in a dam to save his village. Only when the town's people saw what he had done, they did not praise him. Instead, they said, 'All that is fine and good, but we are too busy irrigating our crops to worry about that old dam. Besides, that hole has been there for years and really doesn't seem to be getting any bigger. Also, we like the way the water is increasingly gushing out of the hole, very much like a fountain.'"

To be continued… or The End?