From the SelectedWorks of Everett N K Ofori

July 15, 2013

Writing Showcase (July 15, 2013, Vol 5 No 4)

Everett N K Ofori
Variety, it is said, is the soul of pleasure. How true. This may be so in many areas of life: Choice of vacation spots? Clothing? Food?

When it comes to writing, this is no less true. Write dozens of sentences in the same pattern, and your reader begins to fall asleep. When you vary the lengths of your sentences, however, you go one step towards holding the reader’s attention.

Of course, variety does not mean variety for variety’s sake; content matters. Just stringing together a mix of short, medium, and long sentences is not enough to capture your reader’s attention.

First, you ought to have something of worth to write about. And then, you have to ensure that you have presented your material logically. And perhaps, with feeling.

While some writers can effortlessly achieve a fine mix of sentences of varying length, there are many others who can achieve this effect only through painstaking editing.

Good writers read over their work and listen for words and phrases that do not capture the meaning they want to convey. Snip, snip.

Sentences that do not contribute effectively to the overall meaning or effect get cut. Heartless? Perhaps.

Good writers also read and listen for the music in their words and sentences. Discordant phrases get cut. Snip. Snip.

If you have something worthwhile to say, and you do so with a mix of short, medium, and long sentences, you just might hold the reader’s attention.
I have been in Japan almost 21 years. Before arriving here in 1992, I had never taken a train to work...not even once.

In California, I had been driving since I was 16. I drove to high school, to work, and even to the convenience store.

However, in Japan, I have never had personal space after stepping out the front door. We all have to be together, most of the time.

Trains are one example.

So, what can we do on trains? I travel for up to three or four hours per day on trains...and there is only so long you can stare at other people.

My car was a very personal place; it had an awesome stereo, air conditioning and four doors...which allowed me to shut out the world, and have personal breathing space.
Some read, some look at iPhones, some listen to music...and others stare (I am usually the only Westerner on the train).

Twenty years ago, there were even fewer Westerners on the train. When I saw another Westerner on the train, it was like that scene in “Ghost,” where Patrick Swayze sees the other ghost, and they stare at each other...a very weird feeling indeed!

I no longer mind being stared at...as I realized that I do my own fair share of staring too.

One day, I figured out how I could best spend my time on Tokyo trains -- study all the time.

You may have seen the Twilight Zone scene where Burgess Meredith can’t keep his eyes away from printed words - novels, periodicals, anything he could get his hands on.

That is me, exactly. From the moment I start waiting in line, to the time I arrive at my destination, either my earphones are on, and my head is focused on my iPad, or I am buried in a textbook (iPad again).

The only time I cannot possibly study on Japanese trains is during the morning rush...look at the photos above...it is EXACTLY like this!!

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it’s stupid.

- Albert Einstein, physicist, Nobel prize winner
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Last weekend, I attended a lecture on macrobiotics. It was a very interesting lecture. Today macrobiotics is spreading around the world. Especially since the founder of macrobiotics lived in the U.S., the popularity of this approach to diet is gradually spreading in western countries.

I am glad that a Japanese cooking method is spreading around the world. Also, my instructor talked to us about how today’s food is dangerous. In addition, he told a story about something else -- cotton!

Cotton is the main material for our clothes. However, it is not generally known that the cultivation of cotton involves heavy use of agricultural chemicals. According to my instructor, the cultivation of cotton consumes fully 18% of all chemicals used in plant protection worldwide.

Also, genetically modified organisms are used in the cultivation of cotton because cotton producers seek to harvest the cotton crop many times in a year.

In addition, juvenile labor is a very serious problem connected with cotton cultivation in India. Many poor families send their daughters to cotton fields to earn money.

Girls, in particular, have a hard time and often get sick because of their exposure to agricultural chemicals under severe work conditions. We might be satisfied with wearing beautiful clothes without knowing the reality surrounding the cotton industry. In truth, many children sacrifice their health in the cotton production industry.

The world is definitely unequal.

We might not pay attention to how cotton is cultivated using juvenile labor. Also, we are generally not aware of the quantity of chemicals that are used to produce the clothes that we wear in our daily life.

It is said that the production of each T-shirt requires the equivalent of a bottle of milk in chemicals! We wear T-shirts which are “soaked” in agricultural chemicals under colorful designs. Of course, we do not notice how much pollution is associated with the cotton industry and the sad fact of child labour in developing countries.

In Japan, it may seem that we are far removed from the realities of the cotton industry. However, we need to support the production of organic cotton and fair trade, as well as fight to stop juvenile labor. We have to consider how we can contribute to the improvement of the cotton industry in exchange for the satisfaction of wearing good clothes.
It takes a great deal of time to build up, but it takes very little time to lose. I feel that recent remarks of Toru Hashimoto, mayor of Osaka City, are a typical example that demonstrates the importance of trust.

He had originally been a popular lawyer who often appeared on TV shows. One day, he suddenly decided to run for governor of Osaka prefecture, and successfully won the election. His policies were accepted over the conventional ones being promoted by the Osaka government in those days. Furthermore, he also succeeded in launching a new political party, “the Japan Restoration Party.” These actions promoted the expectation that he could break through the rigid political structure in Japan; soon he began to gain in popularity as a politician.

Recently, however, he has been losing his popularity. Regarding the issue of ‘comfort women’ linked to Japan’s military past, Hashimoto mentioned that such a system was necessary during the war.

The remarks became the target of criticism by many media and Diet members in Japan. Even now, the backlash over his remarks hasn’t diminished, and his party, the Japan Restoration Party suffered a major defeat in the recent election for the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly. He has lost the people’s trust. Given the size of the impact of his remarks, he should not have dealt with such a sensitive topic even if it is his theory.

I believe that trust is the most important element to keep on good terms with others, including family members or friends. This is because trust is an indicator of how much we believe in something or someone and an indicator of our willingness to do something for others. If you don’t inspire trust in others, nobody will help you both in your business and private life.

However, perhaps not only I but also many Japanese tend to prefer putting an emphasis on trust. I think that this is one of the elements of Japanese character. If so, this is the reason why Japanese usually like to keep up with others and avoid conflict. In that sense, it would take a great deal of time for Mr. Hashimoto to be recognized for high performance again and as a great leader. Because he must re-build the trust that many Japanese people had in him.
The Changing Japanese Woman is a playful book but it captures one of the most important social changes in Japanese society: the embracing of Western values and the apparent loss of some traditional Japanese values.

Read The Changing Japanese Woman: From Yamatonadeshiko to YamatonadeGucci and decide for yourself whether Japanese women are still wedded to the nostalgic values of yesteryear or the excitement and possibilities of the modern era.

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A wise person does not seek to learn everything in life through direct experience. While we are often enriched by our experiences, good and bad, there are times when we profit most from learning from others. Through the experiences of others, we can chart a better course through life by avoiding the clear and present dangers that others have marked out. We can also keep our eyes on the markers of success that have been placed along life’s highway so that we do not get lost on bypaths and deadends. Pick up powerful personal and professional insights from *Prepare for Greatness: How to Make Your Success Inevitable*.

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This newsletter offers an opportunity for English learners around the world to share their thoughts and experiences and get some writing practice in the process. In many areas of life, most people would readily agree that quality is more important than quantity. This is no less true when it comes to writing. To get to the point where you can produce quality writing on a consistent basis, however, you may have to get into the habit of writing regularly knowing that much of what you produce might win no prizes for excellence. As you keep on writing and thinking, however, who knows what hidden gems might emerge? 

*Writing Showcase* is published on a bimonthly basis (every two months). If you are interested in contributing to it, please contact the editor, Everett Ofori.

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**Writing Showcase Publication Schedule 2013**

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* Maximum number of words = 300 (exceptions occasionally made)