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Notes for May 1-7, 2011
Avoid Biases - An Important Soft Skill

All of us have our own preferences, prejudices and biases. Let us first recognize the fact that there is no one who is without bias or prejudice. However, we can have our biases and prejudices under check and not be influenced by these in our deliberations, transaction and decision-making processes. We can train ourselves in such a way that we do not publicly show these biases and prejudices. And through this step we may go to next level of eliminating most of these from our day-to-day living. This needs conscious training and self-discipline.

When we realize that our biases and prejudices can harm others' as well as our own interests, we take the initial step to ultimately keep our biases and prejudices under check. This realization may be imparted to us by our parents, peers, our own reading, religious teaching, and other types of instruction, etc.

Many a time we acquire our biases and prejudices as part of our upbringing. We may have been raised in a social environment which focuses more on our own distinctive features and preservation of our rights and privileges, etc. Caste affiliation, religious sanctions relating to ranking of individuals and communities based on several factors including the professions practiced, levels of education, attire, language or dialect or slang used, dietary preferences and eating habits, etc. Geographical distribution and location of various communities in a town or village also may contribute to the growth

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and practice of biases and prejudices. Actually, there is no limit to the number of things, events, individuals, social groups, etc., which may contribute to the emergence and practice of prejudices and biases.

Political bias, Gender bias, racial or ethnic bias, religious bias and age bias are some of the major biases that get reflected in our language use and inter-personal contacts.

Our textbooks and classroom teaching should do their best to point out these errors and help students and teachers to overcome these biases and prejudices.

Notes for April 22-28, 2011 Achieving Coherence

Effective writing proceeds in some sensible order, each sentence, following naturally from the one before it. Yet even well-organized prose can be hard to read unless it is coherent. To make your writing coherent, you can use various devices that tie together words in a sentence, sentences in a paragraph, paragraphs in an essay.

DEVICES THAT CREATE COHERENCE

Transitional Words and Sentences. You use transitions every day to help your readers and listeners follow your train of thought. ... Many words and phrases specify connections between or within sentences.

Transition Paragraphs. Transitions may be even longer than sentences. In a long and complicated essay, moving clearly from one idea to the next will sometimes require a short paragraph of transition.

Repetitions. Another way to clarify the relationship between two sentences, paragraphs, or ideas is to repeat a key word or phrase. Such purposeful repetition almost guarantees that readers will understand how all the parts of a passage fit together.

Pronouns. Because they always refer back to nouns or other pronouns, pronouns serve as transitions by making readers refer back as well.

Notes for April 15-21, 2011
Abbreviations of Prefix-Titles

Abbreviations

- Abbreviations enable a writer to include necessary information in capsule form. Limit abbreviations to those common enough for readers to recognize, or add an explanation so that a reader does not wonder, "What does this mean?"
- If ever you're unsure about whether to abbreviate a word, remember: when in doubt, spell it out.
- Use abbreviations for some titles with proper names.

Mr. and Mrs. Swaraj Pandey, Dr. Dharani Kumar
Ms. Raji Narasimhan, St. Ramalinga Swamy, St. Thomas

- Write out other titles in full, including titles that are unfamiliar to readers of English, such as M. (for the French Monsieur) or Sr. (for the Spanish Señor).
- Spell out most titles that appear without proper names.
- When an abbreviated title (such as an academic degree) follows a proper name, set it off with commas.
- An academic degree that appears without a proper name can be abbreviated, but it is not set off with commas.

My brother has a BA in economics.

- Avoid repeating different forms of the same title before and after a proper name. You can properly refer to a doctor of dental surgery as either Dr. Ramraj Arasu or Rani Arasi, DDS, but not as Dr. Rani Arasi, DDS.

Notes for April 8-14, 2011
What is My Address?

How do we write our address? Do we follow any systematic presentation? Such as our name (Certainly it is a problem to solve or reconcile, especially with South Indian names: where do our initials go? Before our given name or after our given name? What other elements are included in our personal name?). How about giving our degrees? After all, hard work enabled us to get those high-sounding degrees, and we certainly want these fully exhibited. But should we really have all those diplomas? Presenting these long list of diploma abbreviations after our names may actually leave

little space for our own personal names in a prominent manner! Is there a way we may like to highlight only some of the higher education degrees? But, again, this is a personal decision, especially in India where high-sounding degrees and diplomas seem to have their own niche.

Then, what about our designation (In the US, **designation** is often referred to as **Title**.)? Does the quality of our research actually depend on our designation? There must be several issues. But let us not get into such problems here. Let the writer decide on his or her own what is best for him or her!

Some of us want to announce to the world that we are proud owners of success in some examinations by the UGC (I think) that makes us eligible for a job, hopefully in the near future.

How about our departmental name? Why should one really type out **Dept.** instead of **Department**? Do we really save space and time by adopting this abbreviation which may perhaps confuse scholars from other countries as to its real reference. Some of us go one step further. We simply abbreviate the name of our department/s or subject/s dealt with. For example, HHS. Perhaps it is crystal clear for those working in that particular institution. But, for others, and for readers from other places, states and nations, should we not clearly give the full name so that we get some credit and others recognize our specialization?

Now, what is the name of our college, university, institute, or school, etc.? Does the whole world already know the name of our institution when some of us indulge in economy, I mean, presenting the abbreviation of our institution? Suppose we expand the abbreviations, will it not give us as well as our institution some recognition and notice? We are used to refer to institutions around us with brief phrases or letters, etc. However, many may not recognize such names.

Then, let us consider the street name. Perhaps here brevity in the form of abbreviations may help or may not create much problem. If there is not proper order of presentation such as the door number, street name, the place name followed immediately by the pin code, and then the name of the district or the major post office and then the state name, there may be some problem for others to figure out what our full address is. Why is it that some of us do not bring in any order in these aspects? Why even after the introduction of the system of pin code for each town/village which has a primary post office more than two decades ago, some of us still use the age-old numbers, not the actual pin code introduced?

Then there is the question of keeping and presenting several e-mail addresses under our names. It is a personal preference. But readability and memorability are ensured if we stick to one or two addresses so that free storage is still ensured and easy access is maintained!

Notes for April 1-7, 2011

Form and Function of Imagination in Creative Writing

Recently, Mr. N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu newspaper said about a great modern Tamil writer R. Chudamani that she "remained reclusive and could not go out like other writers, Graham Greene, for instance, and pick up material for writing, [and] relied overwhelmingly on her imagination." He further added, "In literature, the highest form of writing is that which comes out of the imagination. Creativity, philosophical ideas, progressive thoughts, shocking views and outrageous thoughts make great literature."

What role does imagination play in creating great literature, readable and enjoyable literature? Will imagination by itself result in great literature? What other elements must be incorporated in writing fiction?

Indian Writing in English versus Indian Writing in Indian Languages

A well-known Tamil author, Indira Parthasarathy, had this to say about the remarks of Salman Rushdie and growing influence of Indian Writing in English: "Mr. Parthasarathy ... described as "arrogant" the observation of Salman Rushdie that "the writing of Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen recognized languages of India, the so-called vernacular languages."

Mr. Parthasarathy declared further: "Indo-Anglian writers always keep in mind readers abroad and, in the process, miss the cultural and linguistic nuances. Their writing will not evolve as naturally as that of a vernacular writer."

How does it feel to read a great novel both in its original version in an Indian language and in its translated version in English? Does not the reader's background

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play a role in determining which version is better and for what reasons? For readers, even in India, who do not have any reading experience in Indian languages, Indian Writing in English is emerging as the only platform to enjoy good Indian writing.

As for the quality of the products in Indian Writing in English, how do we ensure that Indian experience in all spheres of life and among all classes of people and creation is creatively and imaginatively incorporated in Indian Writing in English?

A Capital Idea!

Writing in Indian languages have several advantages. For example, we don't have to use any capital letter at all. Perhaps even the notion of capital letters is a foreign notion for Indian languages. On the other hand, the other Indian language, English, depends heavily on the correct use of capital letters.

Students and teachers need to know the nuances of using capital letters, if we want our writing to be accepted.

- Capitalize proper names and adjectives made from proper names.
- Capitalize a title or rank before a proper name. Academic degrees should be capitalized.
- Capitalize a family relationship only when it is part of a proper name or when it substitutes for a proper name.
- Capitalize the names of religions, their deities, and their followers.
- Capitalize proper names of places, regions, and geographic features. We need not capitalize north, south, etc. But when these are part of a proper name, these should be capitalized. South Kolkata, North Kolkata, South Chennai, etc.
- Capitalize days of the week, months, and holidays, but not seasons or academic terms.
- Capitalize historical events, periods, and documents.
- Capitalize the names of schools, colleges, departments, and courses.
- Capitalize the first, last, and main words in titles. Generally speaking all substantive words in titles may be capitalized. Do not capitalize articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. But you need to capitalize these if these occur as the first word in the title.
- Capitalize the first letter of a quoted sentence.

There are other conventions as well. Look for these and use these conventions consistently.

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E-mail addresses

1. Avoid underscore in your e-mail address, because when an e-mail address is cited it is underlined and the underscore does not appear in the address clearly.
2. Choose an address that is easy for others to identify your name with your address.
3. Some use their father's or husband's name as their e-mail address. Some use their favorite expressions as their e-mail address. Some use their religious slogans part of their e-mail address. Some use political slogans as part of their e-mail address. Some add their year of birth in their e-mail address. Some follow numerology predictions. If easy and readable communication is your goal, it is better to have a simple e-mail address, using your own name. True, sometimes our names are already taken as e-mail address by someone else. Find a way to still keep your full name while adding additional elements to your address. It is your personal e-mail and so it should present direct and adequate descriptive identity.

Please make it a point to check your e-mails on a regular basis!
