



CHAPTER 4

WRITING A CRITIQUE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to do the following:

Produce a written critique that has these components:

- ☐ An introduction stating the name of the essay being evaluated
- ☐ A brief, objective summary of the essay
- ☐ An analysis of how well the essay achieves its stated purpose
- ☐ A personal response to the essay
- ☐ A conclusion

MindTap

Start with a warm-up activity, and review the chapter Learning Objectives.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN READING CRITICALLY AND WRITING A CRITIQUE

Recall the guidelines for reading critically outlined in Chapter 1. The final step is to evaluate what you have read. **A critique is the written form of an evaluation of a passage or an entire work.** Reading critically is the biggest aid to writing a critique; applying the guidelines for reading critically is a crucial part of preparing to write a critique. You will need to understand not only the purpose of the piece and its central idea but also the writer's main points. Reading critically enriches your understanding of a work and its components, enabling you to focus your critique. So the first step in writing a critique is to read critically and, in the process, to determine your opinion of the piece.

Apply the guidelines detailed in Chapter 1, but especially look for the following: thesis and purpose of the writing, who the likely intended audience is, key ideas or supporting evidence for the thesis, the author's use of language, how well the piece is organized, and how successfully the piece has achieved its stated or implied goal. You may need to read the piece several times before you are clear on your own viewpoint and therefore prepared to write.

MindTap Read, highlight, and take notes online.

WRITING A CRITIQUE

When you write a critique, your goal is to make a formal analysis of and response to a piece of writing, whether a selected passage or an entire essay. Your purpose encompasses both explaining and evaluating a piece of writing. **A critique differs from a summary, which is an objective restatement in your own words of the original material. When you summarize, you leave out your personal or subjective viewpoint. In a critique, you begin objectively but then add your own subjective response to the work.** The components of your critique paper are as follows: introduction, summary, analysis, personal response, and conclusion. Before you begin to draft your critique, you will need to think about each of these components. Prewriting exercises are excellent preparation for the draft stage.

Prewriting

Determine Your Position. To convince an audience that your analysis and response are reasonable or valid, you must convey your views confidently. Thus, before you even begin writing your critique, you must have a clear idea of your own viewpoint on the work. A firm conviction of your own position will help persuade an audience that your critique is sensible and fair.

How do you arrive at your position? You do so by carefully reading and rereading the piece that you are to critique, by thinking seriously about what the piece says and how it says it, and by assessing how persuaded you are as a reader by what the author has said. This stage in the writing process is crucial for helping you formulate and make concrete the points you want to make in the formal assignment.

As with other kinds of writing, any number of tools for generating writing ideas can be used to help you arrive at your position when writing a critique. The following suggestions are variations on those mentioned in Chapter 2, but here they are worded specifically to help you discover your response to a piece of writing that you are to critique.

- **Freewriting.** As soon as you have read the work, write for five to ten minutes on any impressions of any aspect of the piece that occur to you. Write down everything that comes to mind, no matter how jumbled. When your time is up, select a phrase or word that seems important to your purpose, no matter how vague it is, and write a sentence with the phrase or word in it. Put that



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sentence at the top of another blank piece of paper, and repeat the process of writing for another five or ten minutes without thinking very deeply or long about what you are writing. If you do this several times, you should end up with a fairly good idea of the position you want to take in the analysis/assessment part of your paper. If you find that you cannot write very much, go back and reread the piece. It may be that you missed some important points on your first read-through and that a second or even a third reading will greatly clarify your position or view on the work.

- **Summarizing.** A summary of the piece is the first main part of your critique, but the act of summarizing can be a key part of your prewriting efforts. If you get stuck on generating ideas by brainstorming, perhaps you do not completely understand the work. This may be the writer's fault, and that criticism may become a part of your critique, but assuming that the piece itself is clearly written, it may be helpful for you to put in your own words what the author says. Doing that may help you discover the position you will take in your critique of the piece.
- **Listing.** Another way to discover your viewpoint is to simply list terms or phrases describing your response to the piece you are critiquing. Then, study your list and group related ideas together. Do you see a pattern? Does one dominant viewpoint emerge from these groupings? If so, write a statement reflecting that pattern or viewpoint. That should give you a sense of your position when it comes to writing your assessment of and response to the work.
- **Asking questions.** Asking questions is a very useful tool for generating ideas, perhaps most useful when thinking about and drafting your response to a piece of writing. The discussion on analysis that follows suggests a number of useful points to consider when assessing the success of a writer's argument, language, evidence, and logic. Turning them into questions in the prewriting stage can help you arrive at your overall response to the work and to discover your own position in relation to that of the writer whose work you are critiquing. Because the response section of a critique expresses your personal, subjective reaction to the work, you will want to ask yourself these questions:
 - Do you agree with the writer's position on the subject? Why or why not?
 - What reasons can you give for supporting or disagreeing with the writer?
 - Are you convinced by the writer's logic, evidence, and language? Why or why not?
 - If you are not convinced, can you give other evidence to counter the arguments or evidence of the writer?

You need not go into great detail in the response section of your paper, but you do need to explain your reasons for your response. **Give careful thought, then, not only to *what* you think of the piece of writing but also to *why* you think that way.** What specific elements of the work influence your reaction to the work? As with freewriting, summarizing, and listing, write out your questions and answers, either on paper or on your computer. Review what you have written and consider whether you have left anything unasked or unanswered.



WRITING A CRITIQUE: PREPARATION AND PREWRITING

- ☐ First read the text carefully, applying the guidelines for reading critically (Chapter 1).
- ☐ Brainstorm, summarize, list, and/or ask questions.
- ☐ Determine the main points, the chief purpose, and the intended audience.
- ☐ Identify arguments that support or develop the main point.
- ☐ Locate evidence used to support the arguments.
- ☐ Determine any underlying biases or unexamined assumptions.

Drafting Your Critique

When you are satisfied with your prewriting activities and feel that you have generated enough ideas to write your critique confidently, you are ready to write your first draft. As with all writing assignments, you will likely write several drafts of a paper before you reach the final version.

COMPONENTS OF A CRITIQUE

The following section lists the components of a formal critique and gives directions for writing each of those components. In general, a written critique includes these components: (1) an introduction; (2) an objective, concise summary of the work or passage; (3) an objective analysis of the author's presentation; (4) a subjective response detailing your opinion of the author's views; and (5) a conclusion.

1. Introduction. The first paragraph of your critique should name the author and title of the work that you are critiquing. Do not neglect this information, as it immediately tells readers the subject of your critique. Then, give a very brief overview of the piece in two to four sentences. Your intent in the introduction is not to summarize the piece but to tell readers its purpose. Generally, stating the thesis or central idea of the piece along with a highlight or two and/or its major conclusion(s) will be enough to convey its essence and provide background for the rest of your paper. Finally, your introduction should state your own thesis. In one sentence, indicate your assessment of the passage or work that you examined. Your thesis statement should be worded to reveal your position to readers before they begin reading the body of your paper.

2. Summary. The first section in the body of your critique should offer an objective summary of the piece. This summary states the original author's purpose and includes key ideas and major points. Where appropriate, include direct quotations that are particularly important to the development of the piece, but quote sparingly: the summary should be largely in your own words. Use direct quotations only when your own words would not do justice to the original. Do not write anything evaluative or subjective at this point. Your purpose here is to give a fair and accurate summary of the intent and main points of the work you are analyzing.



3. Analysis. Once you have summarized the work by stating its purpose and key points, begin to analyze the work. Your goal is to examine how well the author has achieved the purpose and to consider the validity or significance of the author's information. Do not try to look at every point the author makes; rather, limit your focus to several important aspects of the piece. Remain as objective as possible in this section, saving your personal opinion of the author's position for the response section of your critique. Different purposes for writing—persuasive, expository, and expressive—require application of different criteria to judge a writer's success in achieving the intended purpose. In general, however, certain considerations help in the assessment of any piece of writing. **Questions about validity, accuracy, significance, and fairness help you evaluate any author's success or failure.**

Assess Persuasive Writing. Recall that in Chapter 2 argumentative writing is defined as a mode of persuasion in which the goal is either to convince readers of the validity of the writer's position (argument) or move readers to accept the author's view and perhaps even act on it (persuasion). This means that the writer must supply evidence or proof to support his or her position in such a way as to convince readers that the position is valid, whether they agree with the position. If the purpose is to persuade, the supporting evidence or proof must be so convincing that readers adopt the position themselves. Chapter 5 is devoted to a fuller discussion of writing an argument, so you may want to look at that chapter. In any event, when assessing the success of another writer's argument, you should gauge how well that writer has used the standard strategies for argumentation. Furthermore, pay attention to the writer's use of language. Finally, assess the validity of the argument by examining the evidence the writer presents to support his or her position and the logic of his or her conclusions.

Look Closely at a Writer's Language. In particular, make sure that the writer defines any words or terms that may be unclear, abstract, or ambiguous. Ask yourself whether the writer's language seems intended to intimidate or confuse readers or whether the writer attempts to manipulate readers by relying on emotionally loaded words. Does the writer make sarcastic remarks or personal attacks? Ultimately, examine a writer's evidence to evaluate credibility and fairness. Good writers do not rely on manipulative language, unclear terms, or loaded or sarcastic words to achieve their purposes.

Examine a Writer's Use of Appeals. Appeals are persuasive strategies that support claims or assertion or that respond to opposing arguments. They call upon logic, ethical considerations, or emotion to convince. An appeal to reason or logic uses statistics, facts, credible authority, expert testimony, or verifiable evidence to support claims in a reasoned, unemotional way. Karen Sternheimer in "Do Video Games Kill?" (Chapter 8) relies on statistics to counter the claim that there is a causal relation between video games and the impulse to commit murder. Ethical appeals call upon shared values or beliefs to sway readers or motivate them to act. Jeff Corwin in "The Sixth Extinction" (Chapter 15) calls upon shared beliefs and the common good to urge individuals to become socially responsible for ultimately ensuring the future of mankind by taking care of all living creatures on Earth, not just humans. Emotional appeals use heavily charged language to evoke feelings of pity, awe, sympathy, or shock, for instance, rather than intellectual responses not tied to the



feelings. Mike Rose uses emotional appeal in the brief excerpt from his book *Why School?* (Chapter 10) with his example of the man with a disability who has struggled to learn to read and write in order to create a better world for himself and his family. A balance of these three kinds of appeals makes the best arguments. As you examine a writing for the appeals used, determine how balanced they are. If a writer relies heavily on one kind of appeal to the exclusion of the others, especially if the main appeal is to emotion, the argument is probably weak.

Evaluate a Writer's Evidence. A writer should support any generalizations or claims with ample, relevant evidence. As a critical reader, consider the kinds of evidence used and the value or significance of that evidence. Evidence may take many forms, including hard fact, personal observation, surveys, experiments, and even personal experience. In evaluating evidence, ask how well the writer provides a context or explanation for the evidence used. Consider whether the writer establishes the significance of the evidence and how it is relevant to the thesis or central point. For instance, factual evidence may be supplied in the form of statistics, facts, examples, or appeals to authorities. Statistics can be manipulated to conform to the needs of the person using them, so make sure that they are based on a large and representative sample; the method of gathering the statistics yields accurate results; and the statistics come from reliable sources. Look closely at statements of facts as well; they should give accurate, complete, and trustworthy information. Examples are specific instances or illustrations that reveal a whole type, and they should give believable, relevant, reliable, and representative support for an author's thesis. Finally, authorities are people who have the training or experience needed to make trustworthy and reliable observations on matters relating to their areas of expertise. In completing a critique, make sure, as far as possible, that the piece under study appeals to believable and credible authorities.

Judge a Writer's Logic. Argumentative or persuasive writing must portray a logical, reasonable, and accurate reasoning process supplemented by relevant, sensible supporting proofs. You will be in a good position to evaluate a writer's reasoning process if you are mindful of any pitfalls that undermine the success of the argument. Evaluating the writer's logic is part of the process of critiquing a work. *For a discussion and examples of common flaws or fallacies, see the section on assessing evidence in Chapter 5.*

WRITING A CRITIQUE: QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

- ☐ Has the author clearly stated or implied a thesis, main idea, or position?
- ☐ Has the author written to a clearly identifiable audience?
- ☐ What rhetorical strategies in the development and organization of the essay does the writer use? Is the development appropriate to the purpose?
- ☐ Is the essay logically and clearly organized?
- ☐ If the writing is an argument, does the author use verifiable facts or convincing evidence?



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- ☐ If the essay seeks to explain, define, describe, or accomplish some other purpose, has the writer supplied enough details to clearly achieve the stated or implied purpose?
- ☐ Are language and word choice accurate, imaginative, correct, and/or appropriate?
- ☐ Does the text leave any unanswered questions?

4. Response. In this part of your critique, express your own position relative to that of the writer of the piece and give reasons why you believe as you do. You may find yourself in total agreement or absolutely opposed to the author's position, or you may place yourself somewhere in between. You may agree with some points the author makes but disagree with others. No matter what position you take, you must state your viewpoint clearly and provide reasons for your position. These reasons may be closely linked to your assessment of key elements of the paper, as laid out in your assessment section, or they may spring from ideas that you generated in your prewriting activities.

5. Conclusion. The final paragraph of your critique should reiterate in several sentences your overall assessment of the piece, the conclusions you have drawn from your analysis, and your personal response to the work. This section is not the place to introduce new material; rather, it is an opportunity to provide an overall summary of your paper. You want your readers to feel that you have given them a thorough and thoughtful analysis of the work under consideration and that you have brought your comments to a satisfying close.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A CRITIQUE

- ☐ **Begin with an introduction.** The introduction familiarizes readers with the work under discussion, provides a context for the piece, and states your thesis. State the author's name and the title of the piece.
- ☐ **Summarize main points.** The summary tells readers what major points the writer makes to support his or her position.
- ☐ **Analyze how well the writer has achieved the purpose of the piece.** The analysis tells readers what aspects of the work you have examined. In general, assess the overall presentation of evidence, judging its validity, accuracy, significance, and fairness.
- ☐ **Explain your response to the piece.** The response section tells readers your personal viewpoint by explaining the extent to which you agree or disagree with the author and why.
- ☐ **Conclude with your observations of the overall effectiveness of the piece** and your personal views on the subject. The conclusion summarizes for readers the results of your analysis and your overall judgment of the piece.



HANDLING SOURCE MATERIAL

Verb Tenses, Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing Sources. As you draft your critique, keep in mind the following notes about verb tense and handling source material:

- **Verb tense.** Whenever you write about or refer to another person's work, use the present tense: "Lane Wallace *argues* . . ." or "Wallace *asserts* that. . ." Use the past tense only to refer to something that happened before the time span of the essay: "Wallace offers a 'cautionary tale' by relating the experiment that Bell Telephone made in 1952 to expand their managers' education . . ." (par. 7).
- **Handling quotations and paraphrases.** When writing a critique, you will often want to quote a passage directly or paraphrase it. In either case, you must cite the source where the original appears and use **attributive tags (words that identify the source)** to give credit to the source. At the first mention of the author's name, use full name; thereafter, use just the last name (or a pronoun when the antecedent is clear).
- Full details about handling source material appear in Chapter 6, with further examples in Chapter 7, but here are examples of quotations from Lane Wallace's "Liberal Arts and the Bottom Line," reprinted later in this chapter.

Quoting part of a sentence:

Wallace refers to Friedman's philosophy of the bottom line as "the almighty measure of success" (par. 2).

The **quoted material is attributed** to Wallace, with quotation marks around words taken directly from the source. The paragraph number in parentheses locates where the material appears in the article.

Paraphrasing (putting in your own words) some of Wallace's main points:

Wallace offers a "cautionary tale" by relating the experiment that Bell Telephone made in 1952 to expand their managers' education and thereby better equip them to make sound business decisions (par. 7).

The words *cautionary tale* are Wallace's, so you must use quotation marks around them. The rest of the sentence paraphrases what Wallace says in her article.

Quoting a passage that is in quotation marks in the article:

Wallace begins her essay with a reference to economist Milton Friedman's often quoted observation that "the business of business is business" (par. 1).

The single mark within the double indicates that the material is in quotation marks in the original. Do not insert a space between the single and double quotation marks.

Quoting material but leaving a word out to make the sentence grammatically correct:

In contrast, she says, the liberal arts student learns to be "a good global citizen, . . . balancing the numbers with more intangible metrics of success" (par. 14).



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The **three spaced periods (ellipsis points)** indicate where the word appears in the original.

Adding an explanatory phrase, using brackets to indicate that the addition is yours:

Wallace writes of the current interest in solving “the growing number of ‘wicked’ problems confronting [business executives]” (par. 4).

The words *business executives* do not occur in this passage from paragraph 4, so the word *them* is replaced with the bracketed information. Note also that “wicked” is in quotation marks in the original, hence the single quotation marks around it.

One of your primary obligations in any writing that incorporates the words or ideas of other authors is fairness to those you borrow from. Along with that is the obligation to be as clear and accurate as possible for your readers. Quoting and paraphrasing your sources and using attributive tags help you realize those obligations.

Citing Source Material

You have several options for citing source material, depending on the assignment. If the assignment is for everyone in the class to critique the same reading in your textbook and that reading is your only source, your instructor may tell you that it is not necessary to give a page number or to construct a separate “Work Cited” entry at the end of your paper. You must always name the author and title of the work you are critiquing in your opening paragraph, so that information is clearly stated from the beginning. It is quite useful for you to identify which paragraph your paraphrase or quotation is taken from, however, especially if the assignment is to critique a reading in this textbook, as paragraphs are numbered.

Even if everyone is critiquing the same reading, your instructor may want you to cite the source anyhow, just to get in the habit of citing sources. You will certainly want to cite your source if the assignment is to choose any reading in this textbook to critique and students are all doing different readings. In the case of the Lane Wallace reading that follows, and if your paper uses only that source, this is how you would cite it:

Work Cited

Wallace, Lane. “Liberal Arts and the Bottom Line.”

Perspectives on Contemporary Issues: Reading across the

Curriculum. 8th ed., edited by Katherine Anne Ackley,

Cengage, 2018, pp. 59–63.

The heading “Work Cited” is singular because there is only one source named. This format identifies the specific reading, beginning with the author, last name first, followed by the title of the reading. Next comes the name of the book in which the article appears. The edition number follows the name of the book, and that is followed by the name of the editor, preceded by the words *edited by*. A shortened title of publisher and the date of publication follow. The inclusive page numbers identify specifically which



pages in the book the article is on. Note the punctuation between each component of the citation.

If you supplement your critique with readings from other sources, then you will need to create a Works Cited list, with the word *Works* made plural because more than one source is listed. The list is alphabetical. Here is a hypothetical Works Cited list that includes the Wallace reading and additional sources:

Works Cited

Davis, Wes. "The 'Learning Knights' of Bell Telephone."

Nytimes.com, 16 June 2010, [www.nytimes](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/16/opinion/16davis.html?_r=0)

[.com/2010/06/16/opinion/16davis.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/16/opinion/16davis.html?_r=0).

Neem, Johann. "The Liberal Arts, Economic Value, and

Leisure." *Insidehighered.com*, 23 Oct. 2012, [works](http://works.bepress.com/johann_neem/16/)

[.bepress.com/johann_neem/16/](http://works.bepress.com/johann_neem/16/).

Wallace, Lane. "Liberal Arts and the Bottom Line."

Perspectives on Contemporary Issues: Reading across the

Curriculum. 8th ed., edited by Katherine Anne Ackley,

Cengage, 2018, pp. 59–63.

GUIDELINES: HANDLING SOURCE MATERIAL IN A CRITIQUE

- ☐ Use present tense when referring to what the writer says in the work.
- ☐ Use past tense only to refer to events that happened before the article was written.
- ☐ When quoting directly, use exact words and cite the source of material.
- ☐ Use attributive tags, such as *the author says*, *comments*, *points out*, *observes*, *argues*, or similar words and phrases.
- ☐ When quoting directly, use brackets to enclose anything that you have added and ellipses to indicate where you have omitted words.
- ☐ When paraphrasing, use your own words and cite the source of material.
- ☐ The first time you mention the author, use his or her full name. Thereafter, use last name only. Never use first name only to refer to an author.
- ☐ If you use more than one source in your critique, alphabetize the sources in a separate list labeled "Works Cited" at the end of your paper.
- ☐ If you use one source, list it as a "Work Cited" or, if everyone is critiquing the same reading and your instructor agrees, omit that page.



EXERCISE

Read Lane Wallace's "Liberal Arts and the Bottom Line" and prepare for class discussion by considering how you would critique the piece. Your instructor may ask you to write your critique and hand it in or use it in a small group discussion of the article.

**LIBERAL ARTS AND THE
BOTTOM LINE**

LANE WALLACE

Lane Wallace, columnist for The Atlantic and editor for Flying Magazine, has written six books for NASA on flight and space exploration. She has also worked as a writer and producer on a number of television and video projects. Her book Unforgettable (2009) is a collection of some of her best adventure tales; her latest book, Surviving Uncertainty: Taking a Hero's Journey (2012), explores positive ways to handle life's unexpected adventures. She is an honorary member of the United States Air Force Society of Wild Weasels and won a 2006 Telly Award for her work on a documentary of the experimental aircraft X-3 crash, Breaking the Chain. This piece was published in The Atlantic.

The popularity of the late economist Milton Friedman's philosophy among business people has never surprised me much. After all, telling business people that "the business of business is business" is rather like telling people that eating dessert is actually good for you. It tells your audience what they want to believe, and relieves their guilt feelings about doing what they want to do anyway. No need to worry about pesky issues like employee welfare, environmental impact (unless required), or improving the social fabric of the community. No need to weigh the intangible costs to others of moving a business overseas, closing a factory for a quick profit, or paving roads through the Amazon to extract and export the oil.

By concentrating on the bottom line as the almighty measure of success, Friedman's philosophy also tends to focus employees on numbers as a measure of their own success. That focus, of course, encourages employees to work harder to

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increase those numbers. Which, in turn—surprise, surprise!—improves the company's bottom line even more. It's an incredibly convenient system that offers the appeal of neat and clean boundaries, and maximum profit for the company. Really . . . what's not to like?

What's not to like, of course, is an uneasy feeling that sets in, periodically, that perhaps the world isn't as neat as Friedman's economic model suggests. That by focusing exclusively on their own bottom lines, businesses can do extraordinary harm. (See: recent economic meltdown and the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.)

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As a result of some of those recent disasters, as well as increasingly complex global markets and a growing belief that today's business executives need what investment icon Charlie Munger calls a "lattice-work of frameworks" to solve the growing number of "wicked" problems confronting them, a movement has begun to change what business students learn. At undergraduate and graduate business schools across the country—including Wharton, Harvard, Stanford, Yale and a host of other big names—curricula are being changed to include a greater focus on multi-disciplinary approaches, ethics, critical and integrative thinking, and even, in some cases, history and literature.

Roger Martin, the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, has said openly that he's trying to create the first "liberal arts MBA." And when I asked David Garvin, a professor at the Harvard Business School and co-author of the recently published *Re-thinking the MBA: Business Education at a Crossroads* what he thought about that, he answered, "Is business education becoming more like the liberal arts? If the question is, 'are we trying to teach more about how to be a well-rounded human being who happens to be practicing business,' the answer is absolutely, 'yes.'"

On one level, these changes are an effort to assuage society's concerns about bloodthirsty and uncaring business executives bringing down economies or risking the destruction of an entire coastline in the name of profit. But on another level, they reflect a growing belief that the kind of complex, critical thinking and ability to look at problems in larger contexts and from multiple points of view that a liberal arts education instills (at least in theory) actually leads to better decision-making skills in business executives.

It's a viewpoint I actually endorse. Quite enthusiastically, as a matter of fact. But I recently came across a bit of history (in a New York Times article) [Davis, Wes. "The 'Learning Knights' of Bell Telephone." New York Times 16 June 2010: A31.] that offered a bit of a cautionary tale on this front—at least in terms of businesses buying into the goal of making managers more well-rounded human beings.

In 1952, the president of Bell Telephone of Pennsylvania apparently became concerned that his managers, most of whom had purely technical backgrounds, did not have the broader knowledge they required to make superior business decisions. "A well-trained man knows how to answer questions," the Bell executives were reported as reasoning. "But a well-educated man knows what questions are worth asking."

Bell paired up with the University of Pennsylvania to offer a 10-month immersion course in the Humanities and Liberal Arts for up-and-coming Bell managers. The managers studied history and architecture. They read classics like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and poetry by Ezra Pound. They toured art museums and attended orchestral concerts. They argued philosophy from multiple points of view.

At the end of the 10 months, the managers were reading far more than they had before—if, in fact (as the article's author pointed out), they'd even *read* before. They were far more curious about the world around them. And in the polarized world of the early 1950s, at the height of McCarthyism, the Bell managers now "tended to see more than one side to any given argument." As hoped, they were far more equipped to make better and more thoughtful decisions, and to figure out what questions were worth asking.

By all appearances, the program was a rousing success, as well as a ringing endorsement of the benefits of a liberal arts education. There was, however, an unexpected twist in the program's impact on the Bell managers. After learning about how much more there was in life than business, one of the questions they apparently decided was worth asking was, "why am I working so darn hard?" As the article put it, "while executives came out of the program more confident and more intellectually engaged, they were also less interested in putting the company's bottom line ahead of their commitments to their families and communities."

Within a few years, Bell had discontinued the program.

It's an interesting and—when you think about it—completely reasonable outcome. Aside from developing the ability to think critically and approach subjects from multiple perspectives and disciplines, the idea of a liberal arts education is to develop—as Professor Gavin said—a more well-rounded person. And being a workaholic is antithetical to a well-rounded person's psyche.

The current movement to make business students “more well-rounded human beings who happen to practice business” will almost assuredly create managers who think more about long-term consequences, impact on external audiences, being a good global citizen, and balancing the numbers with more intangible metrics of success. They may also be far more agile and creative thinkers who find successful middle ground between entrenched or polarized camps, generate more innovative solutions to sticky problems, and devise ingenious ways to responsibly benefit both their companies and the communities they serve.

But these more well-rounded managers may also go home earlier, or choose options—for themselves or for their companies—that put some other value above maximizing profit for the company or its shareholders. [As] Adam and Eve discovered, a little knowledge can be a very dangerous thing.

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The question will be, somewhere down the line, what businesses or shareholders think of all that. For all the lip service we pay to wanting more well-rounded managers and responsible corporations, are we prepared to back that when it's our own income, stock or profit that's affected by those more balanced and responsible decisions? Or will we gravitate once more to Friedman's far less conflicted philosophy that—whatever else can be said about it—conveniently aligns the numbers-oriented thinking and motivation of managers with the best interests of their employers?



indTap Reflect, personalize, and apply what you've learned.

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