

3. What does Baldwin suggest the importance of a common language would have been to the slaves who were brought to the United States from Africa?
4. Explain what the purpose of Black English was for the slave in relation to his master.
5. Explain Baldwin's conclusion.

Reading for Writing

1. Select several examples of phrases that have come into the English language that are clearly from an ethnicity other than mainstream America. Write a paragraph on each, identifying them, explaining their origin, and discussing what they mean.
2. Identify a point or two that Baldwin makes in his essay and write a letter to Baldwin agreeing or disagreeing with him. Be sure to quote points that he makes in his essay and respond to them.

LOOK. LISTEN. OVER THERE.

Los Angeles Times Editors

The informality and speed of our modern life has definitely affected not only the way we live, but it has also affected our language. Too busy to form complete sentences or to elaborate an idea, we shorten our words, use acronyms instead of the words themselves, and generally take less time to communicate with others. And when we run across someone who wants to have a conversation with us, we find them annoying, wanting them to get to the point—bottom line—as soon as possible. Not only has language suffered, but so has our ability to communicate in writing because we often want to write the way we speak—short, choppy, disconnected words that do not always add up to sentences. This is also reinforced in many of the pieces we read.

Prereading: Consider the last time you saw someone you knew as you were walking the opposite direction. Did you ask the individual how he or she was and kept walking—Hey, how are you?—not waiting for a reply? Or did you see the person and say, sincerely or otherwise, “Call me sometime” as you walked quickly toward your destination?

Prewriting: Think of the last time you had a conversation that took more than a few minutes with someone and write your feelings about it. Were you happy to spend time with that person and talk or did you feel rushed to go do something else?

Vocabulary: Looking up and understanding the following words prior to reading should prepare you for the author's message. Other words will be defined in the margin.

discourse nuance

Have you noticed? Strangest thing. On TV now. Mainly news. Also promos. Sentence fragments. Like this. Short word bursts. Like this. Colorful verbs. Vanished. Whole sentences. Gone. Intelligent discourse. Poof. How? What's happening? Sure, Americans always hurry. Big-time. We hurry; therefore, we are. Gotta go.

But. Now. More TV reporters talking funny. “*President Bush in Georgia today. Campaigning for Republicans.*” Cool? Hip? Not! “*West Coast ports. Back at work. Choking on cargo.*” Caffeine? New disease? Contagious? Brain burps? Saving cell minutes? Also creeping informality. We've used contractions forever. Slur speech too, dontcha know. Also like abbreviations, acronyms: It's “fax,” “e-mail” and “nuke” 'cause they're faster than “facsimile,” “electronic mail” and “microwave.” Now comes TV Qwik-Speak (QS). QS sounds informed, dramatic, unburdened by elaboration. “*Today. Off the Louisiana coast. An oil slick, miles long. Moving toward shore.*” Affectation? Like torn jeans? Side-ways ball caps? Or just lazy?

Admittedly, communicating in complete sentences with subjects, verbs and objects, also adjectives, adverbs (and parenthetical asides) takes time. And thought, too. Ears hear words; they don't gulp them like a lunch to-go. Ponder this: whole thoughts and complete sentences involve listeners more. They make us think, allow for connections, perhaps even relate and respond to each other. It's the difference between talking *to* or *at* someone.

Careful word choice, apt* alliteration*, clever constructions, metaphors* as warm as the hearth at Grandma's, they all add nuance and lushness to thoughts and ideas. Such exchanges convey beyond words and pictures. They make links, one to one, despite so many rapid, bewildering changes, large and small, all around.

Word bursts jar. They push people away. Impersonal. Superficial. Distant. Like dashing through a gorgeous forest on flagstones*. You can

affectation: a show, pretense

apt: suitable

alliteration: two or more words with the same first sound

metaphors: comparison of two unlike things without the use of the words “like” or “as”

flagstone: flat paving stones

do it. But what's to feel, savor and remember afterward? Life spans lengthen but time's still short. Especially on TV. Our common cultural touchstone. Where time is sliced too thin for thought izzit better to be fast? Or comprehended?

Very tiring, speaking staccato*. Also listening. Reading staccato is worst. Eyes can't gulp either. Must stop. QS: wave of the future? Please. Not.

staccato: very short, quick sounds

Reading for Meaning

1. Look at the title of this editorial. How does it prepare you for the message? Is it effective? Explain.
2. What do complete sentences and whole thoughts do?

Reading Deeper

1. The authors of this editorial suggest something about informality. What is it? Do you agree?
2. The author compares QS to "torn jeans" and "Sideways ball caps." What is the key to the comparisons? What is the author trying to say?
3. The author compares the impersonal superficial way we talk to "dashing through a gorgeous forest on flagstones." Explain the similarities. Do you think he's correct in his comparison? Explain.

Reading for Writing

1. Consider the last time you read a really long book or article in a magazine. Did you skim it or did you take the time to read it word for word? Write a paragraph about the **differences** between reading a long work and a short one. Give specific examples.
2. Go to your local bookstore and look through articles in various kinds of magazines. Look through magazines designed specifically for young adults, those specifically for women, and those for business people. Look at the length of the articles in each of the magazines. Write down the names of the magazines, title of the articles, who wrote them, and their length. Write a **compare and contrast** essay about the length of the articles, their audience, and what conclusions you came to from your investigations.
3. Using the assignment from #2, look at the ads in the magazines you selected. Analyze them for number of words, kinds of words (nouns, verbs, adjectives), and construction of words (alone, in phrases, in sentences). How do the ads convey their message to the consumer

best—through words or pictures? Write a **descriptive, informative** essay discussing how many words were used in different ads (car ads, make-up ads, clothing ads) and where they were found (magazines for young adults, women, business people, music, etc.). You will have to use **division** and **classification** in your prewriting.

FOR COLLEGIATE WRITERS, IT'S A DOGGIE-DOG WORLD

Mike Bower

The evolution of language is not the only problem students have to contend with. Keeping up with the meaning of everyday words that have been in use since we began oral communication also gives some students difficulty. Mike Bower, writer for the Baltimore Sun, August 8, 2001, describes problems that have been reported to him by the U.S. editor of the new Microsoft Encarta College Dictionary. Using negative information from professors in the field who work daily with student writing, Anne H. Soukhanov created a dictionary that should serve the needs of contemporary students as well as the needs of anyone who requires help with contemporary definitions, spelling questions, or other matters concerning proper English. However, even though Microsoft has produced a resource that answers so many questions, how many students will use it if it is available to them?

Prereading: Do you know the difference between "there," "their," and "they're"? Do you use them correctly in sentences? Can you identify other words that give you trouble?

Prewriting: Review the last paper you submitted to your instructor. Which words were circled or marked as incorrect? Find the denotative definition or spelling in a dictionary and write it out. Use the correct word in the sentence that was written erroneously. Edit the paper completely, making all the changes needed.

Vocabulary: Looking up and understanding the following word prior to reading should prepare you for the author's message. Other words will be defined in the margin.

lexicographers

Dictionary offers tips on usage, grammar and other areas to address students' declining writing skills.