

## IN-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Describe in detail the way you use the Internet and social media in particular. How many hours a day do you spend on networking and media sites? What, if anything, do you accomplish by being on them? Do you feel addicted to these sites, or is there a real usefulness to them? If you disagree with Trudeau's premise, defend your use of social media to him. If you agree, explain why it is so worrisome.
2. Regardless of your feelings about social media, do you sympathize more with the daughter or the father in this strip? Why? Describe a time when you experienced the kind of generational gap the strip explores. Were you ever frustrated by someone older than you or befuddled by someone younger? How did it feel? Do you ever worry the situation will be reversed?

Mary Katharine Ham

## We Shall Overshare

[*The Weekly Standard*, June 8, 2009]

## BEFORE YOU READ

How much is too much when it comes to talking about your personal life online? How do you feel about people who use social media sites as their private diaries? Are they a nuisance or an inevitable part of a more connected world?

## WORDS TO LEARN

*gulag* (para. 2): a Russian prison camp (noun).

*tiff* (para. 2): a minor fight (noun).

*heretofore* (para. 3): until now (adverb).

*exponentially* (para. 3): at a rapidly increasing speed (adverb).

*detractors* (para. 3): opponents (noun).

*scrutiny* (para. 3): examination (noun).

*spurn* (para. 3): hatefully reject (verb).

*pictorial* (para. 4): a series of related photos (noun).

As a staff writer, Mary Katharine Ham contributes regularly to *The Weekly Standard*. She is also a frequent guest on *The O'Reilly Factor*. A journalist and video blogger (see HamNation), she is a 2002 graduate of the University of Georgia.

*prowess* (para. 4): ability (noun).

*banality* (para. 5): boringness (noun).

*erosion* (para. 5): the destruction of something over time (noun).

*quintessentially* (para. 7): exactly, as the perfect example of (adverb).

*cultivate* (para. 9): acquire and develop (verb).

*ponder* (para. 9): consider deeply (verb).

*dissidents* (para. 10): people who oppose an established political system, religion, organization, etc. (noun).

Allison is "furious. They think they'll break me, but they will only make me fight harder in the end."

Either I've got a friend in a gulag somewhere or I've got one who's tripped over one of the potholes of modern life—the overshare. Given that her message didn't arrive via waterborne bottle or scribbled in the margins of a dusty Russian novel, but via her Facebook update, I think it's safe to say that her little tiff at work hasn't placed her in physical danger.

It has, however, caused her to illustrate the dangers of living a life online. As millions of us have taken to MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter to connect with friends, share stories, and post pictures at a speed and volume heretofore unknown, we've also exponentially multiplied ways to humiliate ourselves. It's perhaps understandable then that the online life has its detractors. Facebook has been dubbed "mind-numbingly dull" and Twitter a service for "people who need to expose as much of their lives to public scrutiny as possible." As an enthusiastic user of both, I concede that these statements are true. Yet I cannot spurn the new social media. As a result, my online life is a balancing act.

Sure, I could settle for a routine in which only traditional social skills are required, but where's the fun in that? I long ago mastered not talking with my mouth full and placing a napkin in my lap, and still felt the world needed people like me—pioneers of electronic propriety—to make tough choices. Is my personal hygiene regimen or lack thereof fit for public consumption? Probably not. What about a pictorial on the proper position for a keg stand? Not a good idea, regardless of my prowess. Does my social circle need to know that the sour cream at Chipotle<sup>1</sup> tastes "a little off"? Tough call. Could be a public health issue.

Sure, I could settle for a routine in which only traditional social skills are required, but where's the fun in that?

<sup>1</sup> Chipotle (para. 4): A popular Mexican fast-food chain.

It's a daily game of public Frogger,<sup>2</sup> hopping frantically to avoid being crushed under the weight of your own narcissism, banality, and plain old stupidity. Just as it took Alexander Graham Bell<sup>3</sup> a couple of tries on the telephone to realize that "Hoy! Hoy!" simply wasn't going to work as the standard greeting, so it took a brave South African man to discover that calling your boss a "serial masturbator" on Facebook will get you fired. There are thousands oversharing online as I write, paying the price with a gradual erosion of their dignity, so you don't have to.

Ironically, the antidote I've found for my own tendency to overshare online is more sharing online. Everything on my Facebook and Twitter pages is openly available. It's amazing how reasonably you act when everyone you know (and many you don't) is watching you.

I make a conscious decision to broadcast my life every day, and I accept the consequences. In a way it's a quintessentially conservative formula: The extent to which you take personal responsibility for your actions dictates the risks and benefits of your online existence.

For me, the weird ("Will you send me a picture of your feet?") and embarrassing (thank you to whoever uploaded the middle-school band photos) is outweighed by the rewarding (getting to see my cousins more than once a year). Facebook is such a natural extension of my daily life that it became a fitting public place to memorialize my grandmother with a simple picture when she passed away. What others would do at a gravesite, I did on Facebook.

There's another attitude I've resolved to cultivate. Even though the new social technologies are built to feel like they're all about you, it helps to remember they're not. When pondering another photo shoot for my profile picture the other day, I couldn't help recalling the Facebook users who raised \$800,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital only last week.

Similarly, when I'm tempted to post self-pitying status updates that sound like I'm in prison instead of my condo, it occurs to me that Twitter and Facebook also host actual dissidents. Their status updates were a frightening enough breath of freedom that Iran blocked Facebook

<sup>2</sup> Frogger (para. 5): A popular arcade video game from the early 1980s, in which a player must direct frogs to hop out of the way of oncoming traffic.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Graham Bell (para. 5): (1847–1922) The inventor of the telephone. He originally planned "Hoy! Hoy!" as the proper greeting when picking up the phone, but it was quickly replaced by "Hello."

last week, only to lift the ban days later as Ahmadinejad<sup>4</sup> distanced himself from the unpopular crackdown. Every new technology needs its pioneers. Many are banal, but some are truly brave.

They make me think of other pioneers. The historian Donald Jackson recounts that Lewis and Clark<sup>5</sup> "wrote constantly and abundantly, . . . legibly and illegibly, and always with an urgent sense of purpose." So do I, and almost always in 140 characters or less.<sup>6</sup>

#### VOCABULARY/USING A DICTIONARY

1. Ham describes oversharers as "being crushed under the weight of [their] own narcissism, banality, and plain old stupidity" (para. 5). What is a *narcissist*? What are the origins of the word?
2. What does it mean to *broadcast* one's life, in the sense that Ham uses it when she says she makes a "conscious decision to broadcast" (para. 7) her life every day? From what field does the word come?
3. What does Ham mean when she says she plans to "cultivate" an attitude (para. 9)? What does *cultivate* mean, and what is its origin?

#### RESPONDING TO WORDS IN CONTEXT

1. Look up the literal meaning of the word *erosion*. In what sense is Ham using it in paragraph 5 of her essay?
2. Ham writes that more online sharing is, "ironically, the antidote I've found for my own tendency to overshare online" (para. 6). What does *antidote* mean, literally? How is Ham using it here? What does its use imply about oversharing?
3. What are the connotations of the word *pioneer* (para. 10) as Ham uses it?

#### DISCUSSING MAIN POINT AND MEANING

1. Why does Ham say her Facebook and Twitter pages are highly public (para. 6)? What effect does this have on the way she uses them? What is

<sup>4</sup> Ahmadinejad (para. 10): Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran as of 2010, considered by many in the West to be a corrupt dictator. In the summer of 2009, the Iranian government cracked down on protesters, who kept their message alive on Twitter and other social media sites.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis and Clark (para. 11): The team of explorers who surveyed the vast Louisiana Purchase in the early nineteenth century, making careful records and maps along the way.

<sup>6</sup> 140 characters or less (para. 11): The maximum length of a post (or "tweet") on Twitter.

she implying she might do if she had a smaller audience reading her contributions to social media?

2. What are the advantages of social media and social networking as Ham describes them? What specific examples does she give, and how does this add to her main idea that the danger of these media is overuse?
3. What is the relationship between Ham's general point about the narcissism of oversharing online and her example of the Twitter revolution in Iran? How does she transition between these two points, and how does the organization of her essay accommodate both a slightly playful and a serious argument?

#### EXAMINING SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS, AND ORGANIZATION

1. What is the significance of the title of Ham's essay? (Hint: Look up "We Shall Overcome" online.) How does this playful title add to the humor and irony of the essay?
2. Why does Ham start with an example? What is particularly effective about the example she chooses? What does Ham mean by her opening remark ("Either I've got a friend in a gulag somewhere . . .") and how does it combine with paragraph 1 to set the tone for the essay?
3. Discuss the use of juxtaposition—putting together two dissimilar things—in Ham's essay. How does she juxtapose the present use of social media and the ways people communicated in the past? What is the meaning of her sentence comparing Alexander Graham Bell and the unfortunate South African in paragraph 5?

#### THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Do you agree that the example Ham gives in paragraph 1 is automatically an overshare? Does context matter, or is the category of tweet she is highlighting always a bit ludicrous? Where is the line between sharing something important and serious, and offering too much information?
2. What are the major positive uses of Facebook and Twitter? Give two examples besides those Ham offers.
3. Can social-networking sites really have the sort of political impact Ham describes in paragraph 10? Does hosting dissidents mean that dissent will be more meaningful or effective? Why or why not?

#### IN-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Look up *The Weekly Standard*—what kind of magazine is it and what are its politics? How does Ham claim her argument fits into *The Weekly Standard's* mission? (See paragraph 7.) Do you agree? Is there a political dimension to the use of social-networking sites?

2. Give a few examples of oversharing online, either from your experience or your imagination. They might be from Twitter, Facebook, a blog, or any other depository of emotions and narratives you've run into on the Internet. How does oversharing make you feel? Do you greet it as silly but harmless, or do you think it's a real problem? Why?
3. Explain the analogy Ham draws between Twitter users like herself and Lewis and Clark (para 11). Look up more information on the explorers if necessary. To what extent is she being sincere about the analogy and to what extent facetious? Do you think Lewis and Clark might have been oversharing?

Brent Baughman (student essay)

## Growing Older in the Digital Age: An Exercise in Egotism

[*The Berkeley Beacon*, Emerson College, February 25, 2010]

#### BEFORE YOU READ

Is Facebook making us all more egotistical? Are increased opportunities for advertising ourselves making us self-obsessed? How do you react to birthday invitations on Facebook and Twitter? Are they over-the-top?

#### WORDS TO LEARN

*festers* (para. 2): becomes worse, like a sore (verb).

*collective* (para. 2): belonging to all the people in a group (adjective).

*interface* (para. 4): the computer system a user uses (noun).

*mitigate* (para. 5): make less bad (verb).

*codependence* (para. 5): mutual reliance between people (noun).

*antique* (para. 6): an object held over from a previous age (noun).

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Brent Baughman graduated from Emerson College in 2010. He now lives in Washington, D.C., where he works for National Public Radio.

I turned 22 last week. Someone told me it's like Bode Miller<sup>1</sup> from here on out: all downhill. And it might be true. Twenty-two is the last birthday most of us will see in college. The only milestone left to look forward to is qualifying for Social Security, and even that won't exist by the time I'm 65, unless Bill and Melinda Gates<sup>2</sup> get seriously bored.

Twenty-one: Now there's a milestone. There's a mischief to turning 21. Everyone makes twinkle-eyed jokes about getting drunk and hitting bars, where all the city's sexual energy apparently festers. There's a cultural connotation, a collective unspoken smirk, that to be a freshly knighted 21-year-old means you can finally be out scoring. It's magnetic, this idea. We pay attention to people turning 21. We wonder what they're doing, where they're going, how they'll celebrate.

That sort of attention, however deviant, is what the modern birthday is all about. But with technology in the mix, we're seeking 21-level attention at 22 and beyond. Too far beyond. The modern birthday is a fantasy of attention. On a single day, all the sacred technology we turn to for deliverance from solitude finally makes good on its promises. Birthdays are the one day of the year when compulsive e-mail checking finally pays off — every five minutes the latest note, e-card, or jotting of affection is waiting there in Gmail bold.<sup>3</sup> We never love technology like we do when we see that bold type. It's like being one of those Japanese men who date robots and take them to movies.<sup>4</sup>

And Facebook. Oh, Facebook! The trick is setting Facebook updates to arrive in your e-mail. Here's the beauty of it: Your inbox becomes an Eden of wall updates and messages from Zuckerbergland.<sup>5</sup> You click in and out of these messages like candy, each one sweet in its own way. And

Birthdays are the one day of the year when compulsive e-mail checking finally pays off.

<sup>1</sup> Bode Miller (para. 1): An American Olympic alpine ski racer.

<sup>2</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates (para. 1): A famous American husband and wife team of philanthropists; Bill cofounded Microsoft in 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Gmail bold (para. 3): New messages in Google's popular e-mail service appear in bold type.

<sup>4</sup> Japanese men . . . movies (para. 3): A recent trend reported in Japan saw men "dating" robotic dolls.

<sup>5</sup> Zuckerbergland (para. 4): Mark Zuckerberg (b. 1984) founded Facebook in 2004.

then — even after you've exhausted your supply of that magic bold — you can still read the same messages on Facebook. It's here they become new again, where all those tokens of affection — even the most impersonal comma-free "Happy Birthday Brent!"s — glisten with new promise in Facebook's interface.

Twitter, on the other hand, presents a challenge. It's more difficult to mask a call for attention in 140 characters. Maybe you mitigate by narrating plans instead of announcing your birthday outright: *Ducking homework. Duck confit and great friends for birthday dinner at Chez Henri.* See? I've publicized my birthday, but I'm not explicitly asking you to acknowledge it. Twitter is cute this way — it lets us project an image of independence upon a screen of codependence. The Twitterverse requires both Tweeters and Followers, but none of the former want to be seen as desperate for the latter.

We usually let birthday calls roll into voicemail because the phone call is an antique that violates the virtues of our favorite medium, the text message. It's our modern letter. It allows us to remain sovereign in our own world, while still achieving a degree of connection with someone else. Not too close, not too far, but just right. The joy we feel when our phones light up with the receipt of a new message is a micro-burst of the joy we feel when we open the mailbox to discover we've received a letter. It's a joy of ego.

But there's a problem with all this egotism. And no, it's not that we'll drive ourselves to self-worship, into a fire hydrant, and then to sex rehab. It's just generally lame for the people around us who are more than digital strangers. The birthdays we remember are ones that were made special by surprise parties or a perfect gift or a real show of love or friendship. We're missing the point if the first thing we look forward to on our birthday is an over-flowing inbox.

But if technology is your biggest priority on your birthday, I have the perfect gift for you. It'll take about two weeks to get here. I'll have to order it from Japan.

#### VOCABULARY/USING A DICTIONARY

1. Look up *interface* (para. 4) and provide a thorough definition. Give an example of an interface.
2. What does *mitigate* mean (para. 5)? What is the origin of the word?
3. Define *egotism* as Baughman uses it in paragraph 7 of his essay. What language does it come from, and what is the meaning of its root?

#### RESPONDING TO WORDS IN CONTEXT

1. What is a *smirk*? How is it different connotatively from similar expressions? What does Baughman mean when he refers to "a collective unspoken smirk" (para. 2)?

**STUDENT WRITER AT WORK****Brent Baughman**

On Writing “Growing Older in the Digital Age:  
An Exercise in Egotism”



**RA.** What was your main purpose in writing this piece?

**BB.** To highlight an aspect of life I think is under-thought-about by people my age. There’s an argument that technology is warping our ability to communicate intimately with each other, and I hope it’s clear that I don’t agree with that. But I do think it distracts from certain ways we interact socially, and that we need to be conscious about it so we can lessen those distractions before our frontal lobes fuse to the microprocessors in our iPhones. So there’s a constant struggle for balance we all face.

**RA.** Have you read or seen other work on this topic that has interested you?

**BB.** There’s a lot of talk now about how technology is affecting our cranial motherboards. Nicholas Carr wrote an article last summer for *The Atlantic* called “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” that set off more of a mainstream discussion about things, and he’s coming out with a book about the same subject matter. I’m interested and pay attention to this sort of thing as well as I can. People seem to be considering it more thoughtfully as we become more wired, and I find that encouraging.

**RA.** How long did it take for you to write this piece? Did you revise your work? What were your goals as you revised?

**BB.** Like most of my columns, I wrote this over the course of a few days. During that time I’d revisit the text, make changes, insert ideas or revisions I’d thought of during off-hours. During revisions I’m looking mostly to make arguments clear, pace my sentences, and be super critical about whether I’m just spewing nonsense. I’d write a sentence and then imagine I was reading it in the paper myself and that I’d never heard of the writer. If it didn’t feel true, I’d revise it.

**RA.** What topics most interest you as a writer?

**BB.** The way our social brains work, issues of science and technology, literature, and relationships. We’d probably have to sit down for coffee to parse out the Freudian foundation for my interest in these topics.

**RA.** Are you pursuing a career in which writing will be a component?

**BB.** I’ve recently started working at National Public Radio in Washington, D.C. Public radio is really a combination of journalism and creative writing, because they broadcast stories that often require a keen sense of pacing, language, voice,

character, and plot. I’ll be doing a lot of writing, yes, so I’m thankful for the practice I got in college.

**RA:** What advice do you have for other student writers?

**BB:** Actually, I find kind of it comforting to believe that most of us, at this age, are going to be not-very-good for quite a while, and that it just takes patience and practice to become kind-of-good. During my freshman year, I had a fiction professor say something like, “The guy who can lock himself in a room alone for the longest will be the best writer.” Trying to emulate the writers you most admire can also work the necessary muscles, I think.

**Elizabeth Stone****Grief in the Age of Facebook**

[*The Chronicle Review*, March 5, 2010]

**BEFORE YOU READ**

How have Facebook and other social-networking sites changed the way we mourn when we lose a friend or loved one? It seems beyond argument that these sites will have a lasting effect on the way we communicate—will they (and should they) also change the way we grieve?

**WORDS TO LEARN**

*dogged* (para. 1): highly determined (adjective).

*whimsical* (para. 1): full of imagination (adjective).

*markedly* (para. 5): with clear indications (adverb).

*solace* (para. 5): comfort after a loss (noun).

*spontaneous* (para. 6): sudden and without a direct cause (adjective).

*equestrian* (para. 8): related to horseback-riding (adjective).

*penchant* (para. 8): tendency (noun).

*uncharted* (para. 9): not on a map (adjective).

*via* (para. 9): through (preposition).

*exuberance* (para. 9): intense happiness (noun).

*prescription* (para. 11): piece of advice (noun).

*reverberates* (para. 12): echoes (verb).

*A professor of English, communications, and media studies at Fordham University, Elizabeth Stone is the author of a memoir, A Boy I Once Knew: What a Teacher Learned from Her Student (2002).*

On July 17 last year, one of my most promising students died. Her name was Casey Feldman, and she was crossing a street in a New Jersey resort town on her way to work when a van went barreling through a stop sign. Her death was a terrible loss for everyone who knew her. Smart and dogged, whimsical and kind, Casey was the news editor of the *The Observer*, the campus paper I advise, and she was going places. She was a finalist for a national college reporting award and had just been chosen for a prestigious television internship for the fall, a fact she conveyed to me in a midnight text message, entirely consistent with her all-news-all-the-time mind-set. Two days later her life ended.

I found out about Casey's death the old-fashioned way: in a phone conversation with Kelsey, the layout editor and Casey's roommate. She'd left a neutral-sounding voice mail the night before, asking me to call when I got her message, adding, "It's OK if it's late." I didn't retrieve the message till midnight, so I called the next morning, realizing only later what an extraordinary effort she had made to keep her voice calm. But my students almost never make phone calls if they can help it, so Kelsey's message alone should have raised my antenna. She blogs, she tweets, she texts, and she pings. But voice mail? No.

Paradoxically it was Kelsey's understanding of the viral nature of her generation's communication preferences that sent her rushing to the phone, and not just to call boomers<sup>1</sup> like me. She didn't want anyone to learn of Casey's death through Facebook. It was summer, and their friends were scattered, but Kelsey knew that if even one of Casey's 801 Facebook friends posted the news, it would immediately spread.

So as Kelsey and her roommates made calls through the night, they monitored Facebook. Within an hour of Casey's death, the first mourner posted her respects on Casey's Facebook wall, a post that any of Casey's friends could have seen. By the next morning, Kelsey, in New Jersey, had reached *The Observer's* editor in chief in Virginia, and by that evening, the two had reached fellow editors in California, Missouri, Massachusetts, Texas, and elsewhere — and somehow none of them already knew.

In the months that followed, I've seen how markedly technology has influenced the conventions of grieving among my students, offering them solace but also uncertainty. The day after Casey's death, several editorial-board members changed their individual Facebook profile pictures. Where there had been photos of Brent, of Kelsey, of Kate, now there were photos of Casey and Brent, Casey and Kelsey, Casey and Kate.

<sup>1</sup> boomers (para. 3): Short for Baby Boomers, a term for the generation born right after World War II.

Now that Casey was gone, she was virtually everywhere. I asked one of my students why she'd changed her profile photo. "It was spontaneous," she said. "Once one person did it, we all joined in." Another student, who had friends at Virginia Tech when, in 2007, a gunman killed 32 people, said that's when she first saw the practice of posting Facebook profile photos of oneself with the person being mourned.

Within several days of Casey's death, a Facebook group was created called "In Loving Memory of Casey Feldman," which ran parallel to the wake and funeral planned by Casey's family. Dozens wrote on that group's wall, but Casey's own wall was the more natural gathering place, where the comments were more colloquial and addressed to her: "casey im speechless for words right now," wrote one friend. "i cant believe that just yest i txted you and now your gone . . . i miss you soo much rest in peace."

Though we all live atomized lives, memorial services let us know the dead with more dimension than we may have known them during their lifetimes. In the responses of her friends, I was struck by how much I hadn't known about Casey — her equestrian skill, her love of animals, her interest in photography, her acting talent, her penchant for creating her own slang ("Don't be a cow"), and her curiosity — so intense that her friends affectionately called her a "stalker."

This new, uncharted form of grieving raises new questions.

This new, uncharted form of grieving raises new questions. Traditional mourning is governed by conventions. But in the age of Facebook, with selfhood publicly represented via comments and uploaded photos, was it OK for her friends to display joy or exuberance online? Some weren't sure. Six

weeks after Casey's death, one student who had posted a shot of herself with Casey wondered aloud when it was all right to post a different photo. Was there a right time? There were no conventions to help her. And would she be judged if she removed her mourning photo before most others did?

As it turns out, Facebook has a "memorializing" policy in regard to the pages of those who have died. That policy came into being in 2005, when a good friend and co-worker of Max Kelly, a Facebook employee, was killed in a bicycle accident. As Kelly wrote in a Facebook blog post last October, "The question soon came up: What do we do about his Facebook profile? We had never really thought about this before in such a personal way. How do you deal with an interaction with someone who is no longer able to log on? When someone leaves us, they don't leave our memories or our social network. To reflect that reality, we created

the idea of ‘memorialized’ profiles as a place where people can save and share their memories of those who’ve passed.”

Casey’s Facebook page is now memorialized. Her own postings and lists of interests have been removed, and the page is visible only to her Facebook friends. (I thank Kelsey Butler for making it possible for me to gain access to it.) Eight months after her death, her friends are still posting on her wall, not to “share their memories” but to write to her, acknowledging her absence but maintaining their ties to her—exactly the stance that contemporary grief theorists recommend. To me, that seems preferable to Freud’s prescription, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” that we should detach from the dead. Quite a few of Casey’s friends wished her a merry Christmas, and on the 17th of every month so far, the postings spike. Some share dreams they’ve had about her, or post a detail of interest. “I had juice box wine recently,” wrote one. “I thought of you the whole time :( Miss you girl!” From another: “i miss you. the new lady gaga cd came out, and if i had one wish in the world it would be that you could be singing (more like screaming) along with me in my passenger seat like old times.”

It was against the natural order for Casey to die at 21, and her death still reverberates among her roommates and fellow editors. I was privileged to know Casey, and though I knew her deeply in certain ways, I wonder—I’m not sure, but I wonder—if I should have known her better. I do know, however, that she would have done a terrific trend piece on “Grief in the Age of Facebook.”

#### VOCABULARY/USING A DICTIONARY

1. What is the meaning of *paradoxically* (para. 3)? What part of speech is it? To what word is it related, and what does that word mean?
2. Stone says that with Casey gone, she was “virtually everywhere” (para. 6). What are two meanings of the word *virtually*? Which meaning is Stone using here? (Or could she be using both?)
3. Define *atomized* (para. 8). What is the origin of this word?

#### RESPONDING TO WORDS IN CONTEXT

1. Stone writes that Kelsey’s “understanding of the viral nature of her generation’s communications preferences” caused her to call her professor rather than e-mail or text (para. 3). What does *viral* mean in this context? Where does the word come from, and what has it come to mean in communications?
2. Define *colloquial* as Stone uses it in paragraph 7 of the essay. What is a possible antonym of *colloquial*? Give an example of something colloquial and its opposite.

3. What does Stone mean when she refers to an “*uncharted* form of grieving” (para. 9)? What is the origin of the word *uncharted*, and how is it used here?

#### DISCUSSING MAIN POINT AND MEANING

1. Stone does not come out and say whether she thinks Facebook grieving is a good or bad thing. Which way do you think the essay leans? What is its tone? Give examples from the text.
2. What are two dangers to Facebook mourning that Stone mentions?
3. How did Stone get to know Casey after her death in a way that might not have been possible in another era?

#### EXAMINING SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS, AND ORGANIZATION

1. Why does Stone mention Casey’s “all-news-all-the-time mind-set” in paragraph 1 of the essay? What is the importance of this detail to the essay as a whole?
2. What is the effect of reproducing Casey’s friend’s “colloquial” wall post exactly as the friend wrote it in paragraph 7? Why does Stone go to the trouble to preserve the poster’s syntax and spelling?
3. How is Stone’s essay organized? Is it more of an argument or a narrative? Why did she arrange it this way?

#### THINKING CRITICALLY

1. What does Stone say Freud’s “prescription” for grief was, and what kind of grief does she suggest Facebook mourners are evincing? What do you think is the better, healthier way to express sorrow after a loss—remembrance, detachment, or some combination of the two?
2. How do you feel about Facebook’s policy of maintaining the pages of members who pass away as memorials? Does it cheapen the mourning process to do it online, or do Facebook and other sites allow wider access to memorials and expand opportunities to express grief?
3. Discuss the way the essay ends. What is a “trend piece,” and why does Stone feel Casey would have written a good one with the same title as her own essay?

#### IN-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Have you ever witnessed the phenomenon Stone describes? Have you known someone who died whose friends set up a memorial online? If so, describe what it was like. Did the use of the Internet and social media make you feel closer to the person you lost, or give you any sense of closure? If you haven’t had the experience, imagine what it might be like.