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■ In my opinion

## Lesson on lengthy language

A lesson in lengthening language  
Welcome, students, to your first Tuesday of classes. Hopefully, you're reading this newspaper in class instead of listening to the professor drone on. A professor who probably possesses a sharp mind but cannot get to the point.

Most professors I've had can't make an argument or explain anything without some serious circumlocution. Talking around topics like a dog walking around a sun-warmed spot in the grass before lying down is ludicrous. What you and I can say in a few short words requires a mind-numbing display of obfuscatory jaw-flapping from most professors.

For those of us who love the English language for its wide and subtle vocabulary, the abuse instructors impose on the tongue causes some concern.

It seems that in academia, vagueness of language is prized over precision. After a decade or two of reading and listening to their peers, even the most eloquent professors fall prey to academic gibberish. Doctoral degrees almost uniformly confer the tongue and pen with a bastard breed of English, branding the holder as an academic with the certainty of a scarlet letter.

When one reads a piece in a magazine from an unfamiliar author, one can almost unfailingly tell within the first few pages whether the writer holds a doctorate. The following example is from an article on the state of books in the Arab world:

"Koolaid's" is an attempt to weave a narrative that make (sic) sense in this post-modernist labyrinth, and to construct a self out of the shreds of



CHUCK SLOTHOWER  
TAKING ISSUE

representation by the other and one's own self-presentation."

The author is Fadia Faqir, a professor at England's Durham University, writing in a British journal. Besides a blatant grammatical error, the quotation shows how to use 33 words to say absolutely nothing. Telltale signs of academia are easy to spot: using the phrase "post-modernist labyrinth" or the word "self" as something that is constructed. And, of course, no academic discourse would be complete without employing the word "other" to denote something foreign.

Professors at this university are no better. In the political science department, professors use the word "problematic" like a kid who's just learned his first obscenity. Professors say it when they mean to call something fallacious, unworkable, nonsensical or just plain wrong but don't have the capacity to say it. It's like fingernails on a chalkboard.

This language mixes pomposity and cowardice. Professors often use language to set themselves apart — they need a way to justify why they stand at the lectern drawing a salary and you sit in desks paying them. The best professors do this by impressing students with penetrating

intelligence and a lifetime of accumulated knowledge. Several such professors exist at this university. Others, however, take on airs.

The cowardice is the result of vague language used to sugarcoat bold statements, usually of opinion. Every professor has opinions, and how they deal with them generally falls into four categories: Some come out openly with their opinions but give other views a fair shake. Others try to hide their opinions but can't and end up shortchanging students by ignoring alternative views or the justifications. A small minority of professors succeed in hiding their opinions. Then, of course, a few professors advance a viewpoint without giving others a fair shake or justifying their stands. You'll find professors who deal honestly with their opinions usually deal honestly with language.

Why does a professor's writing and speaking abilities matter? Universities provide a forum to sound ideas and learn. Ideas and learning take shape through language, and vague language leads to vague ideas and missed chances to learn. George Orwell recognized, in his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," that "... the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

We live in a time that demands clear and precise thought, especially from those who quite literally think for a living. That can only occur with clear and precise language.

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■ Guest commentary

## Death of friend brings perspective, puts a real face on Iraq violence

Two months ago, a close friend of mine from high school died. Kenny Leisten Jr. was killed in action in Taji, Iraq, July 28 when an explosion was detonated near the Humvee he was driving. Leisten, who was 20 years old, was remembered as a soldier and a war hero at his memorial Aug. 9.

However, before he received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star medals, before he fought for his country and became a war hero, before he even enlisted in the Oregon National Guard, Leisten touched my life and the lives of the few people he was close to. Under the camouflage jacket and dog tags, Leisten was a pretentious teenage boy who listened to Korn, loved computers and perfected his practical jokes. His laugh was contagious and his smile could turn anyone's day around. Most importantly, under all of his many faces, Kenny was a compassionate human being.

I'm not a big supporter of the war in Iraq, but up until now it was all just a bunch of numbers to me. It's unfortunate that so many people have died,

but my emotions never went much deeper than pausing to sympathize for the day's nameless faces on the front page of the newspaper. However, when I heard about Leisten from one of my high school friends who was in the 2nd battalion, 162nd infantry with him, the face of the soldier on the front page of the newspaper now had a name, and a life full of people whose lives he changed.

My opinions of the war are no longer just political and factual. I realize that the people fighting this war are people I stayed out late with, toilet-papered neighbors' houses with and went to concerts with. These soldiers are peers with whom I shared answers to math homework, friends whom I called when I needed advice.

The war is no longer just a heated topic of discussion between my liberal and conservative friends. I don't know if the war is right or wrong. What I do know is that obsessing over a bad hair day and being irritated by a \$15 parking ticket seem a little less important

now, and keeping in touch with the people I really care about is at the top of my list of priorities.

I didn't get a chance to write to Leisten while he was in Iraq, but I thought about him a lot. I expected him to come home safely because I didn't realize how very real the war is. Despite differing political opinions and viewpoints, I encourage everyone to remember the soldiers fighting for our country.

As I prepare for fall classes, I have friends my age fighting for my freedom on the other side of the world. And I have more friends waiting to be deployed, friends who won't be home for two years. When I think of them, and when I think of Leisten, I am grateful to be a part of a generation with such courageous young people. I am lucky to know so many heroes.

Sabrina Gowette, a junior majoring in journalism, is a classified advertising associate and freelance writer for the Emerald. This submission originally ran in *The Oregonian*.

■ Editorial

## Poor ASUO accounting makes rule a necessity

Kudos are in order for ASUO President Adam Petkun for doing the right thing this summer by banning University graduate Dean Neiwert, husband of ASUO Accounting Coordinator Jennifer Creighton-Neiwert, from performing contracted work for the ASUO.

The decision was prompted by concerns about the appearance of nepotism under his administration, Petkun told the Emerald in a September interview — and we can't say we blame him.

In July 2003, Neiwert was paid \$500 in incidental fee funds to update the ASUO Controllers' Web site, and at least \$350 in April 2004 to work on the ASUO's rental Web site, according to ASUO purchase orders. The contracts were first brought to Petkun's attention when he took office in May, he said.

While the whole incident has pretty much blown over, thanks to Petkun's swift action, there is still no procedure or regulation in place for dealing with this sort of problem. We commend Petkun for putting a hold on Neiwert's contracts, but he needs to push for new regulations that explicitly ban conflicts of interest resulting from family-member favoritism.

It's not that we don't trust Petkun. Actually, for the first time in a long while, we have a pretty good feeling about the intentions of the ASUO Executive, but let's face it — despite its sheer office walls in the EMU, this is an elected office with a history for being notoriously opaque and nebulous in its political motivations and dealings.

It's important to realize that if anyone is in the right here, it's Petkun, and if anyone should be blamed, then equal responsibility should be placed on both the previous executive administration and on Creighton-Neiwert.

Since taking on the title of ASUO accounting coordinator in 1997, Creighton-Neiwert has been involved in several questionable incidents where, as one of the most seasoned veterans of the ASUO, she should have acted differently.

Last year, 15 members of the ASUO charged \$2,250 to Creighton-Neiwert's credit card for a trip to Washington, D.C. The ASUO claimed it as a loan and then-president Maddy Melton went begging to the Student Senate for more student money to pay Creighton-Neiwert — an ASUO employee — back.

She also ran into some controversy earlier last year when a typographical mistake made in the 2002-03 ASUO election packet promised senators a stipend of \$175 per month when only \$125 per month was available. Creighton-Neiwert's name was included in a resolution that sought to ensure those responsible for the error, but since her official duties did not include the elections packet, her name was dropped.

As of this moment, there's nothing illegal about hiring a significant other to do ASUO grunt work. For the future good of the University, Petkun should bite the bullet and realize that in less than one year, he'll be gone, and the only way to ensure this doesn't happen again is to create regulations forbidding it.

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