

Analysis/Argument Exercise – When writers are less clear

Many of us have difficulty in our daily casual reading (newspapers, magazines, newsfeeds, blogs) distinguishing a writer's claim from the evidence presented to explain and support that claim. We sense there is a claim but we get tangled up in the examples, expert testimony, and facts the writer presents. The practice of professional writers to depart from established argument format to make their writing less pedantic and more interesting often confuses us and we find ourselves hard pressed to articulate exactly what the writer is saying. Furthermore, the writer may intentionally confuse the reader as a technique to persuade the reader, presenting evidence that is not what it seems to be. This is what bothered Plato so much about the Sophists. Or the writing can make errors in thinking (logical fallacies) that cause us to question our own thinking. And, in many cases, the writer's thinking is not clear, even to the writer, thus increasing the fog.

Good readers disentangle such writing, reconstructing the writer's argument in a more familiar and manageable fashion. To do so requires the reader to take the text apart and recast it. This process can be really hard, especially with unfamiliar ideas and novel ways of presenting these ideas, but with practice – lots of practice – it is not only doable but it becomes nearly automatic.

The rewards of being a good reader are many and realizing this goal is worth the effort. It is one of the distinguishing characteristics of being an educated person as it is the core ability of being in control. And it is one of the skills the AP English Language and Composition exam tests for.

So, how to get started?

First the reader needs to recognize that all arguments consists of three essential elements:

- A claim
- Evidence to support that claim
- A connection between the evidence and the claim

and he or she needs to learn to recognize and identify these elements. This can be complicated because one or more of the elements may not be specifically spelled out and will often require the reader to seek them out.

Further, there are many elements writers use such as getting the reader's attention, providing background and context, summarizing, and employing compositional devices such as transitions and stylistic flourishes, sometimes intermingling them with the claim, evidence, and connectors between evidence and claim.

One effective approach is to try to rephrase what the writer is saying in the reader's own words. Some readers like to employ a model sentence such as "The writer is trying to say that **something is so** [claim] and asks the reader to accept this claim by **presenting** [connecting claim to evidence] these **reasons why** [evidence]." Once the reader has a sense of the claim and the evidence, the next step is to check to see if it's correct. There are several ways to do this.

- One approach is familiar to some who have employed it in close reading; break out the hi-liters and mark up the text, identifying claim, evidence, and connectors between the claim and evidence with different colors. Whatever is not hi-lit is extraneous to the core of the argument.
- A second approach is to look at the compositional structure of the piece of writing, specifically at each paragraph and at the transitions the writer uses to carry the reader from one idea to the next. Generally there will be a topic sentence or phrase that tells the reader what the paragraph is about. The several parts of the paragraph will be distinguished by transitions. Once the reader has this, briefly (in a few phrases) summarize each paragraph. Try to arrange summaries into an “slug” outline of the entire argument.
- A third approach is to identify the evidence provided by the writer, recognizing that the development of evidence can run into several paragraphs. Do this if it's convenient with different color hi-liters. Summarize each piece of evidence. Then determine what the evidence is evidence of and this will lead to identifying the claim. Look for instances where the writer connects the evidence back to the claim.
- A fourth approach is to analyze the argument rhetorically. Identify what the writer is trying to **do** to the reader (purpose) and write that down. Next identify the writer's techniques to accomplish his or her purpose such as using emotional language or using the tools of language to emphasize or deemphasize certain ideas. Classify the kinds of evidence the writer uses – is it all expert testimony or reasoned argument or examples.

A couple of warnings. Often the writer will include material he or she feels the reader needs to know as background or to provide context. Identifying this material for what it is early on in the process can save time and reduce confusion. Further, writers sometimes employ stylistic flourishes. These , usually, are pretty easy to pick out.

Whatever approach (or combination of approaches) is used, the final task is to rewrite the argument in your own words. There are two parts to this task:

1. A narrative describing the thinking as to how you arrived at your version of the argument.
2. Your restatement of the argument itself.

You can use the evidence the writer provides or introduce evidence of your own. You can rearrange the order of the composition, or you can summarize as you wish.

Let's try this....

Read the following essay entitled *Tax Reform That Is Truly Fair* written in early April 2017. Try to state the writers' argument in your own words and see if you can put it into the model sentence format “The writer is trying to say that **something is so** [claim] and asks the reader to accept this claim by **presenting** [connecting claim to evidence] these **reasons why** [evidence].”

Tax Reform That Is Truly Fair - Antony Davies and James R. Harrigan

We spend a lot of the year talking about tax “fairness,” but the discussion dies down come mid-April because, on average, the poor and middle class get more money back from the IRS than they pay in. The familiar refrain that everyone should “pay their fair share” is really nothing more than code that some should pay more so others can pay less.

But as tax day looms, it is time to think seriously about what a “fair share” really is. And if we are going to do that, we should begin by considering what does happen with taxes every year, not what some of us wish would happen.

If we take an honest look at the history of federal tax revenues, a curiosity emerges. Since 1950, the top marginal income tax rate has ranged from north of 90 percent in the early 1950s to less than 30 percent in the late 1980s. The top capital gains tax rate has ranged from 40 percent in the 1970s to 15 percent in the early 2000s. The effective corporate tax rate (what corporations actually pay after employing beives of accountants and lawyers to reduce their tax burdens) has ranged from a high of 45 percent in 1959 to a low of 20 percent in the mid 1980s.

Remarkably, despite these wild fluctuations in tax rates, the total tax revenue the federal government collected over that same period remained amazingly steady at about 17 percent of GDP. When the government taxed the rich a lot, it collected 17 percent of the economy in taxes. When the government taxed the rich a little, it collected 17 percent of the economy in taxes. When it taxed corporations more, the government collected 17 percent of the economy. When it taxed corporations less, it collected the same 17 percent of the economy.

While it is not clear why this is so, it is very clear that it is so. And this one simple fact should define the tax debate in the United States above all others. Because this long-term trend could be used to simplify the American tax code in the name of fairness, simplicity and cost savings.

If the federal government is destined to collect 17 percent of the economy no matter how Congress tweaks the tax code, then why not simply tax every person and business 17 percent of their incomes? Everyone’s income tax forms would ask just one question, “How much income did you earn this year from all sources combined?” And there would be only one calculation: multiply that number by 17 percent.

The only people who could possibly be against this sort of tax system are the accountants and lawyers who have a vested interest in keeping things complicated, and congressmen who use the complexity of the tax code to hide the fact that they dole out favors to their preferred causes and people.

Part of what makes the tax code complex is Congress’ insistence on a progressive system. We have a shared sense that the poorest among us should get a better deal than the rich where taxes are concerned, which is where all the “fair share” discussion comes from in the first place.

But we could retain the essential feature of a progressive system by doubling the calculations from one to two. We can exempt the first \$20,000 of each household’s income from taxes. Of course, to obtain the same tax revenue, we’d have to increase the tax rate, but not by much. If everyone household’s first \$20,000 of income is tax-free, then we’d have to tax all income above \$20,000 at around 20 percent to obtain the same total tax revenue.

With this very simple plan we could combine our wishes with reality, and make nearly everyone better off in the bargain. And while people seem inclined only to think about these things in April, a sober-minded discussion in May and June would improve the lot of nearly everyone in the country — except accountants, lawyers and congressmen.

Here's another argumentative essay. Once again, state the writers' argument in your own words and see if you can put it into the model sentence format "The writer is trying to say that **something is so** [claim] and asks the reader to accept this claim by **presenting** [connecting claim to evidence] these **reasons why** [evidence]."

When will government admit its #MeToo infractions? | Opinion by Carol Williams

For the past year, we've witnessed dozens of men admit to sexual assault in public and private places of all sorts — in backrooms, bedrooms, and board rooms, and on couches, planes and buses. They are being outed by victims who are, at times, relating incidents from decades past because absolutely no one would listen until now.

But another sexual predator of American women is not an individual — it's our government, through repeated acts of intrusion onto, and into, our bodies. We're being violated in our own chambers; not our bed chambers, but in the chambers of Congress and state legislatures, through hundreds of new statutes, amendments and laws specifically devised to restrict our rights and criminalize our choices. Our most private selves, our reproductive organs, are bound by these laws, which are not based on medical science, best practice or our best interests.

These laws are proposed in the name of "protection," when what women really need is protection from laws that imply that men aren't the y to our x in this equation. But only one set of reproductive organs appear to be liable, pliable and available to be constrained.

For whatever reason, science has failed to develop reliable birth control for men; prophylactics and abstinence remain their only solutions. And when those fail, as they often do, the government steps in and dictates what the woman must or must not do by creating or enforcing laws that are an additional assault on, and an insult to, women.

In the first half of 2017, 431 new state laws were introduced to restrict access to our constitutional right to abortion. Colorado passed a law prohibiting public employees from paying for an abortion with their own health insurance. Mississippi voted to ban abortions past week 15. In Iowa, a bill would outlaw abortion with no exception for rape or incest. Many states require women to have a medically unnecessary ultrasound to "be given the option to look at the image," with mandatory counseling and a 72-hour waiting period. West Virginia hopes to amend the state constitution specifically to ban abortion from Medicaid services.

These laws are a metaphor for the kind of abuse women already experience in everyday life, millions of examples of which have been reported in #MeToo messages. They are done on a "law-on-women" basis, touching us in places, and in ways, we do not want to be fondled and groped. Like sexual harassment, these laws are demeaning. Like dark alleys, they are threatening. Like porn, they are everywhere. They are discriminatory, like sexual discrimination. They propose that our bodies, for nine months, essentially be under state surveillance. These laws strip away our rights the way a pervert would strip off our clothing, imagining us morally naked, in need of the wisdom of law to clothe us. Our anatomy is exposed, for all to casually peruse in publications and legal briefs.

The challenge to *Roe vs. Wade* is coming, sooner rather than later. Meanwhile, it feels like a creepy sex offender has been let loose in our country; only this time, the law rides by his side with an armed posse.

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As economy changes, hold the regulations

BY ANTONY DAVIES AND JAMES R. HARRIGAN

The world utterly and irreversibly changed when automobiles replaced horses and buggies. That one invention destroyed tens of thousands of jobs — jobs like horse breeders, teamsters, leathersmiths, blacksmiths, and street sweepers. Thankfully, the government didn't protect any of those occupations, because the new jobs motor vehicles brought with them were safer, cleaner, more productive, more numerous, and far more lucrative. Beyond that, the world that the automobile ushered in was simply better.

This economic transformation was nothing new. Technology has always displaced workers, and even entire industries. The invention of online streaming forced Blockbuster to shutter a staggering 9,000 video stores. Online vendors like Amazon and eBay are causing retailers to close thousands of physical stores. Photo developing booths, travel agents, telephone operators, and typewriter repairmen have also disappeared, and are not particularly missed. But in their places are jobs that didn't exist 10 years ago, like app developers and cloud computing engineers, with billion-dollar companies that didn't exist five years ago, like Udacity, Lyft, and Snapchat.

Economic transformation not only creates new and previously unimagined jobs, it also fells mighty corporations. Western Union, Compaq, and AT&T (the original, not the wireless carrier) are just three once-giant companies that have either ceased to exist or are shadows of their former selves. Everywhere one looks, one sees once-dominant companies, jobs, and ideas replaced by better ones thanks to technological advances and economic transformation.

But somewhere along the way, governments started taking it upon themselves to “protect” certain favored industries and workers that came under disruptive fire. The latest examples are Uber and Airbnb, two companies that not only undermined the status quo technologically, but also upset the political applecart.

Uber and Airbnb benefit customers at the expense of politically well-connected businesses. And when government shows itself willing to intervene in markets, entrenched businesses find it more profitable to curry favor with politicians than with customers. But can government ever hope to keep up with a cat that is so clearly out of the bag?

The Uber case is instructive. In city after city, local governments have done their best to keep the ride-sharing business out so as to maintain a profitable grip on the taxi industry. Of course, the refrain is that regulators are acting in the interest of “public safety” — as if they were more concerned with people's safety than the people are themselves.

The reality is that politicians and bureaucrats have their own interests in mind, and an established taxi-cartel wields more political clout than does a handful of upstart Uber drivers. But not only has Uber thrived despite government efforts to scale it back, it has continued to innovate, recently putting driverless cars on the road in a growing number of American cities. This new technology will present an irresistible target for government regulators. But if government stays out of the way, the move to driverless cars will be at least as transformative as the move from horses to automobiles.

Rather than many people owning cars that sit idle for 95 percent of their lives, fewer people will own cars and those who do will rent them out — just like people rent out their idle living spaces through Airbnb. Driver-less cars will patrol American cities. When you need a ride, you'll summon one.

But there's more. Driverless cars will revolutionize the car loan industry — currently the third largest behind only home and student loans. Both it and the parking industry will become a good deal less profitable. The construction and retail industries will change as garages and parking lots become space-wasting memories.

According to the Earth Institute at Columbia University, driverless cars will also have a positive impact on the environment. Impaired driving fatalities will become a thing of the past — and that will mean major transformations to the legal, social services, and law enforcement industries that have sprung up around DUI laws. And as the technology finds its way to the trucking industry, goods will be brought to market cheaper and more quickly.

But that's really just the beginning. No one can predict where the technology will lead — not even government regulators. And that's exactly why they should regulate less.

Children need a digital diet, not iPhones
by Naomi Schaefer Riley, For Philly.com, 01/07/2018

According to a recent survey by the toy company Melissa & Doug, 70 percent of parents want their children to spend less time watching electronic media and 62 percent want them to spend less time on electronic devices. They are right. After all, studies show that screen time is associated with higher levels of [obesity](#), shorter [attention spans](#), and more [psychological problems](#), including higher rates of [depression](#).

A media diet is just like a regular diet. If you're not consistent in the first few weeks and months, you will fail. You can lay out a couple of exceptions for your kids ahead of time — car rides longer than two hours, trips to the emergency room. But if you start with no screen time on school nights, and then you make an exception because you need to do some work, you should expect that your kids will ask you for screens the next night and the one after that. If you let them play on your phone in the line at the supermarket, they will take note and expect you to supply them with screens when they are forced to wait anywhere for anything. They know how to wear you down.

But keep in mind, you cannot simply remove the devices and offer nothing in return. As any nutritionist will tell you, deprivation is not sustainable; substitution is. When you take away phones and tablets, you have to give your kids other things — more time outside, more low-tech toys, or more time with you.

A significant temptation of technology is its portability. In a widely read [rant](#) in the Washington Post, Amanda Kolson Hurley wrote about our culture of “snackism” for kids: “We walk around with trail mix and Sun Chips stuffed in our bags like we’re mobile, no-fee vending machines.” The same is true of our digital devices. Kids used to sit too long in front of the TV. But at least once you got them out of the house, that was the end of it. Now the TV can be on perpetually and parents can dispense movies and video games like mobile, no-fee theaters and arcades. Snackism means children eat when they’re not hungry; on-demand screen time is no better for them.

Too often our diets are ruined by impulse buys. If we go to the grocery store with a list and stick to it, everything goes well. But confronted with a plate of hors d’oeuvres or brownies, we give in. When we dole out the devices after planning our kids’ screen time and thinking carefully (and even researching) how much time and what kinds of activities our children should be engaged in on screens, things go well. But when we feel pressured into handing over a phone or granting permission to watch or play something on the fly, they don’t.

You shouldn’t give your kids their own phone lightly, or for the sake of convenience. The McDonald’s drive-through is a more convenient option than cooking at home, but that doesn’t make it a good choice. A recently formed group called [Wait Until 8th](#) is suggesting parents hold off on kids’ phones until they’re in the eighth grade — and even then offering a flip phone, not a smartphone. The group points to research suggesting that having a cellphone interferes with

sleep (parents confirm that 9-year-olds are regularly texting into the night) and the formation of relationships (taking phones away for even a few days seems to increase children's abilities to read facial cues accurately). Along with all the other negatives, mobile phones are a distraction from schoolwork. And that's not even considering the potential content that kids can be exposed to — cyberbullying and pornography.

One pediatrician told me that a number of parents have given their children phones simply because they've bought a new phone for themselves and, hey, what else are they going to do with the old one? Some parents just want to make sure their children are tethered to them at all times — “What if my daughter gets upset at a birthday party and needs to come home?” the mother of one 9-year-old with an iPhone asked me. Parents don't have to be Uber. Kids can be given a watch and a time to meet after swim practice or gymnastics. If they need to leave an event early, kids can ask the adult present to contact you. This has the added advantage of teaching them independence and responsibility.

It's OK to be a hypocrite about your own phone use vs. theirs. Yes, we can all use a little less time on our screens — adults included — but rules can be legitimate, even if they aren't the same for you and your kids. You don't give your kids alcohol or the keys to the car. Why should they have the same access to devices you do?

Most adults know what they should be eating and they don't substitute candy bars for vegetables. They also know the pleasure of shutting off distractions to read a good novel or to focus on the company of friends and family. But if you never experience getting lost in a good book all afternoon or enjoying time outside without worrying about checking your phone, will you be able to create these experiences as an adult? Kids would no doubt prefer a Milky Way to a salad for dinner, just as they'd like to do and see what they want on your phone or better yet, their own. Don't budge.

Naomi Schaefer Riley's latest book is the just-published “Be the Parent, Please: Stop Banning Seesaws and Start Banning Snapchat.”

This really is a different kind of weather

by **Tim Dillingham**, Philly.com, 01/07/2018

Hunkered down at home, under a “state of emergency” declared by Governor Christie, there’s something serious to be said about the weather we experienced this week. The media coverage is all over the “[bombogenesis](#)” happening outside my window, the “[bomb cyclone](#)” forecast to “explode” and “[monster nor’easter](#)” tackling the entire East Coast, bring [temperatures “colder than Mars.”](#)

While the phrase “bomb cyclone” might sound hyperbolic, we are not experiencing the same weather our parents did when they were our age and they trudged through uphill — both ways! — five miles, in the snow just to get to school. This was not your father’s snowstorm — and because of climate change, we may be in for more like it.

Individual snow storms (no matter how big) are rarely cataclysmic, but it is not fear-mongering to appreciate the existential impact of climate change: We really are altering the fundamental mechanics of the planet (and in particular, the oceans). As a consequence, individual event frequency and intensity are changing. Some storms are bigger and more frequent, but in some places there is less rainfall – increasing drought.

[We know that the 10 warmest years \(on average, for the earth\) have occurred since 1997 and evidence gathered by organizations such as NOAA indicate that the warming trends seen over the 19th and 20th centuries is unprecedented over the past 1,000 years.](#) Scientific models also indicate the likelihood of more extreme or unusual weather. Storms such as Sandy and this most recent event could very well be symptoms of climate change because they are unusual, extreme and fueled by an ocean that is far warmer than what would have been considered normal for this time of year not too long ago.

Straightforward science describes the relationship between snow and climate change.

Warmer temperatures cause more water to evaporate, and warmer air holds more water. The warming creates supersaturated air, bringing (when cold enough) heavy and intense snowfall.

Ironically, climate change is bringing shorter, warmer winters but is also increasing the intensity of snowstorms when it gets cold enough to snow – which it will still do, although within a smaller “winter window.” Additionally, rising sea levels increase base water levels so that, when a coastal storm occurs, we will experience greater and more widespread flooding.

Professor Anthony Broccoli of Rutgers University takes it to the basics. “The maximum amount of water vapor that can be present increases with increasing temperatures. That’s just a consequence of the laws of physics,” Broccoli said.

Dr. Kevin Trenberth, head of the Climate Analysis Section at [the National Center for Atmospheric Research](#) draws the big picture. “There is a systematic influence on all of these weather events now-a-days because of the fact that there is this extra water vapor lurking around in the atmosphere than there used to be say 30 years ago. It’s about a 4% extra amount, it invigorates the storms, it provides plenty of moisture for these storms and it’s unfortunate that the public is not associating these with the fact that this is one manifestation of climate change. And the prospects are that these kinds of things will only get bigger and worse in the future.”

In a few days, the media will turn to the wrap up: damages to property (and hopefully not lives or limbs), economic costs because of missed work, inconvenience or trashed travel plans due to flight cancellations or delays, post storm flooding as the snow melts. The cost will pinch, but not be cataclysmic.

But in the not-so-distant future, when we are standing in line for milk or wrestling our neighbor for the last loaf of Wonder Bread, and it occurs to us that this is getting to be a regular occurrence, maybe we will devote a few thoughts to how – today – we might minimize or mitigate the impacts of climate change. There are readily available actions, both personal and policy, although we seem to be headed in all the wrong directions as a nation.

In New Jersey, nongovernmental organizations, scientists and businesses have come together to form the [New Jersey Climate Adaptation Alliance](#). They have lots of ideas, found on their website hosted by Rutgers University.

We should take advantage of the snow, curl up with our laptops, and think beyond the hyperbole about the serious issues building up in drifts around us.

Tim Dillingham is the executive director of the American Littoral Society.

Regulation is no solution

by **David Ignatius**, For the Washington Post
Philadelphia *Inquirer*, Currents, April 15, 2018

A word of advice for Congress as it ponders new schemes for internet regulation after the “perp walk” this week of Facebook tycoon Mark Zuckerberg: Don’t do it.

Zuckerberg is a very tempting target. His serial apologies show how Facebook became so entangled in its corporate mission to “bring the world closer together” that it stopped putting the customer first.

Facebook is paying for its mistakes in loss of customer trust — its main asset — and this market punishment has only just begun. It’s obvious to users now that Facebook’s business model isn’t about making the world better, but obtaining information about its customers and profiting from it.

The social-media site illustrates the buzz phrase: “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” Meaning, Facebook has been giving us a free service because it can monetize our data. We’re the product it’s selling. If we don’t like that, then Facebook can charge us money for its service, as Zuckerberg testified Tuesday.

Facebook will make changes to recover its reputation. Users will have better control over their privacy, perhaps by having to opt in before their data is shared. Zuckerberg outlined other needed reforms: The company will restrict the data it shares with app developers, increase its security and require political advertisers to confirm their identity.

Would more government regulation make things better? Federal oversight might nominally increase transparency and accountability, but it would mainly make work for lobbyists and lawyers. This is a case where angry customers and newly skeptical investors will be the best cops.

What worries me about the internet is something else. Is the underlying “marketplace of ideas” experiencing market failure? My business of journalism is predicated on the idea that in the unregulated competition of ideas, the truth will eventually prevail. But this process seems to be breaking down, as the internet fosters a “post-truth” era. The public doesn’t want its biases to be challenged these days, but affirmed.

The corruption of information technology was debated last weekend at a conference at Princeton on “Defending Democracy.” Vint Cerf, who helped build the internet, reminded the audience that it was created to be open, borderless and unregulated. When the web’s founders thought about “bad behavior,” they had in mind rowdy graduate students. A world where Russia’s

Internet Research Agency could feed fake news to Facebook was unimaginable — or at least unimaginable.

The information space doesn't need more government intervention but less, especially in places like Russia and China. But watching Zuckerberg being grilled Tuesday, it was obvious that this market can be better protected by the companies, so that hidden incentives don't skew it toward extremism and toxicity.

Zeynep Tufekci, a professor at the University of North Carolina, noted at the Princeton conference that algorithms push YouTube viewers toward ever-more-intense content. If you keep clicking on videos about running, you'll eventually get ultra-marathons, she noted. Similarly, if you like Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton videos, algorithms will push you toward more extreme content on the right and left.

It's not a conspiracy; the algorithms are just maximizing the number of ads they display to users. Social media companies could address this problem by making their algorithms more transparent.

As we think about Facebook's failures in combating Russian meddling, we should recall America's history of overreacting to external threats. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 sought to combat French political meddling; McCarthyism began with legitimate fear of Soviet espionage but led to blacklists and purges. The cure is sometimes worse than the disease.

The market will correct most of Facebook's problems. What should concern us, beyond fake news, is fake reality — images of events that never happened, voice prints of speeches that were never delivered, phone calls that were never made, texts that were never sent. The term for these all-too-feasible digital manipulations of audio and video content is "deep fakes."

A DARPA media-forensics team is creating tools that, in theory, can automatically detect when video or audio images have been altered. I'd be happier if the reality-detection system were operated by private companies. I fear we're heading toward a world where a future national security adviser, in response to Russian or Chinese deep fakes, might ask: If "they" can shape our reality, do "we" need to be able to shape theirs?

Zuckerberg looked so uncomfortable Tuesday in his coat-and-tie contrition costume, you almost felt sorry for him. He made us realize that the weak link in the internet system isn't a lack of government oversight, but our own gullibility.

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The privacy test

by **Staci D. Kramer**, For the Washington Post
Philadelphia *Inquirer*, Currents, April 15, 2018

While Facebook chairman and CEO Mark [Zuckerberg was boasting](#) to Congress about how much Facebook is doing to protect privacy for its billions of users, I set up a new Facebook account to test what he was saying.

I wish the result were a welcome surprise.

Instead, here's everything that was public or turned on by default: My friends list. My profile, which could be indexed by search engines. I could be tagged in any post, even if I hadn't reviewed it first. The site would suggest that my friends tag me in images. Ad targeting would allow Facebook to sell marketers the ability to find me based on my relationship status, employer, job title, education, and interests. And Facebook would use my app and browser activity to decide which ads to show me.

Those are just a few of the settings I allowed automatically by clicking "Create Account." It could be a lot worse: Many defaults, like who can see future posts or who can see posts I'm tagged in, are set to "friends."

As a Facebook member since 2007 and a journalist covering tech and media, I know how to look for these settings and update them. But what did Facebook do to prepare me as a new 2018 user? Precious little.

Some of that onus for being prepared rests on the consumer. After all, Facebook warns: "By clicking Create Account, you agree to our Terms and that you have read our Data Policy, including our Cookie Use." Unlike some developers, Facebook doesn't even require you to click a link after scrolling through the terms and data policy.

It's legal. But it's not even close to enough.

Despite what you find when you sign up for his service, Zuckerberg apparently agrees. Wednesday morning, he told the House committee: "I think that a lot of people probably just accept terms of service without taking the time to read through it. I view our responsibility not as just legally complying with laying it out and getting that consent but actually trying to make sure that people understand what's happening throughout the product."

During questioning by Rep. Michael Burgess (R., Texas), Zuckerberg added: "It's contextual. You want to present people with the information about what they might be doing and give them the relevant controls in line at the time that they're making those decisions, not just have it be in the background sometime or up front to make a one-time decision."

Yet, that's precisely what Facebook asks new users to do. As a former publishing executive, I get it: Setting default permissions — making users opt out of settings instead of choosing them — is the fastest way to bring a new member on board, and the most efficient way to create critical mass for advertisers.

Opt-in, though, is the best way to ensure people understand what they are choosing to share. Facebook uses it frequently, but only after a member is on the platform, as Zuckerberg repeated often during his testimony. For instance, the permission settings are next to the “post” button when I'm ready to publish.

The Cambridge Analytica reveal that brought Zuckerberg to Capitol Hill sent me on a dive into my own account, where I was reminded how many times I connected to a site or app with Facebook.

After some repair work — limiting permissions to the bare minimum in most cases, deleting some apps or connections completely — I signed into my dad's more recent account to check the privacy landscape when someone who didn't pay any attention joined Facebook. It wasn't pretty. Here is some the info my father, now deceased, allowed friends to share with third-party apps: his biography, birthday, family and relationships, posts, hometown, current city, education and work, activities and interests, and app activity.

What makes this even more frustrating is that Facebook's privacy check does a decent job of walking members through the various ways they can protect their data, as Zuckerberg suggested on the Hill. (If you're on Facebook and haven't already done it, make the time. Now. Then repeat for Google and Oath — the Verizon subsidiary that owns Yahoo, HuffPost, and AOL — and check for the option at other sites.) It could be better.

Rep. Joe Barton (R., Texas) told Zuckerberg, “You can pretty well set up your Facebook account to be almost totally private, but you have to really work at it.” Facebook is already updating and streamlining its Terms of Service, which haven't been changed in three years, and promising more clarity on privacy. But the brief comment period for those updates ended April 12.

Sweeping retroactive fixes for existing members are difficult enough. There's no excuse for baking problems in for newcomers. Requiring new users to make privacy repairs that could be avoided at sign-up shouldn't be the default. At the very least, the welcome email and screen message should include a privacy check link.

Maybe, now that he's done meeting and greeting in Washington, Zuckerberg should set up a test account, too.

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Commentary: The NEA's calling for artists to give back

Elizabeth Mosier

Last week, I took a break from reviewing grant applications to read George Will's column about abolishing the National Endowment for the Arts. "We subsidize soybean production," he declares, "but at least we can say what soybeans are."

Though we share an Illinois birthplace, a love of baseball, and a preachy American prose form inherited from Emerson, our conflicting opinions on this issue are immediately obvious in the questions we pose.

He asks: "Are NEA enthusiasts serene about government stipulating, as it must, art's public purposes that justify public funding? Or do they insist that public funds should be expended for no defined public purpose?"

I ask, "How is the artist making meaning, preserving culture, provoking thought, perceiving beauty, or inventing something?"

As a judge for another state's arts council, I can say with certainty what I'm looking for: artists engaged in original work that sets out to illuminate human experience. I'd argue that a grant in support of such work - a "gift" categorically separate from work-for-hire or payment-for-goods - is indivisible from the gift the artist gives in return. My own career is evidence.

Twenty-three years ago, I received a \$5,000 fiction fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. That initial gift of faith allowed me to write my first novel, but it also inspired an obligation to promote literacy, a debt I'm still paying back - gladly, gratefully - through public service.

Like most non-famous artists I know, I do other work to earn my living, and build my life around nonprofit endeavors - offering my time and talent for no (or low) pay to schools, libraries, community centers, arts organizations, and

publications, some of which are publicly supported by local, state, or national funding. I donated money earned from sales of my novella, *The Playgroup*, to literacy councils in several cities. For seven years, I volunteered at Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park archaeology lab, helping to tell the story of our country's colonial past.

Whether or not artists should donate their work is another question, one particularly pertinent to women, who are disproportionately exploited in professions regarded as callings. For me - as a writer, teacher, mother, citizen - not doing the math to calculate my hourly wage is how I keep investing in this gift economy, in which we are all indebted to one another.

True, doing so isn't without its costs and risks. Gift-giving (or receiving) creates relationships; any bond with others threatens independence. But freedom, for the working artist, is a philosophical and pragmatic matter; the market economy can pose a bigger threat than "free money," even if a grant stirs a sense of civic responsibility. Apply one's talent to truth telling . . . or to advertising? Rush the work in order to cash in on current trends and tastes . . . or dig deeper for understanding that transcends the topical? By definition and necessity, artists are shrewd judges of the difference between work that merely panders to the market and work undertaken and offered with the hope that it will be meaningful.

As Lewis Hyde writes in *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*: "A market exchange has an equilibrium or stasis: You pay to balance the scale. But when you give a gift there is momentum, and the weight shifts from body to body." What Hyde describes so cogently, Charles Dickens dramatized in works such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol*, in which the potential of the gift economy is unknown and incomprehensible until one is overwhelmed by grief or generosity.

As a past recipient of a grant from the PACA (funded by state appropriation and the NEA), I

am one of what Will calls "myriad entities with financial interests in preserving the NEA." Though he's against the agency, he's not anti-art; rather, his belief is based in conservative principles of limiting governmental power and protecting citizens' liberty by discouraging their demands. But regardless of whether or not you think our government should support the arts, the NEA is a force that sustains a very real and vibrant gift economy that is rarely apparent until it clashes with the market economy.

As it did a month ago, when President Trump visited St. Andrew Catholic School in Orlando, Fla. When teachers and students thanked Trump "for serving America," they were expressing their school's principle of "serving God by serving others." Trump responded in the language of the marketplace, advising a student who wants to be an entrepreneur: "You're going to make a lot of money, right? But don't run for politics after you do." Trump accepted a handmade certificate from the class and offered a photo with himself to "make you famous."

From where I sit, the future looks hopeful, filled with skillful people making meaning and things. I could only spare 10 minutes - about \$2 of my judging fee - for Will's well-reasoned, familiar argument against the NEA, before I had to return to reading grant applications, discerning art from the proverbial soybean.

I have applied (unsuccessfully) for an NEA grant every year I've been eligible, which sometimes seems like a futile chore. But evaluating the plans of these artists reminds me that it's always useful to try, though the chances of being awarded are increasingly slim. The regular opportunity to critically examine what I have done, to articulate clearly what I will do, is a very good way to hold myself accountable and to justify my life.

The NEA is a government frill that should be shorn

By George F. Will

WASHINGTON -- Although the National Endowment for the Arts' 2016 cost of \$148 million was less than one-hundredth of 1 percent of the federal budget, attempting to abolish the NEA is a fight worth having, never mind the certain futility of the fight.

Let's pretend, counterfactually, that the NEA no longer funds the sort of rubbish that once immersed it in the culture wars, e.g., "Piss Christ" (a photo depicting a crucifix immersed in a jar of the artist's urine) and "Genital Wallpaper" (don't ask). What, however, is art? We subsidize soybean production, but at least we can say what soybeans are. Are NEA enthusiasts serene about government stipulating, as it must, art's public purposes that justify public funding? Or do they insist that public funds should be expended for no defined public purpose?

Government breeds advocacy groups that lobby it to do what it wants to do anyway -- expand what it is doing. The myriad entities with financial interests in preserving the NEA cloyingly call themselves the "arts community," a clever branding that other grasping factions should emulate, e.g., the "military-industrial community." The "arts community" has its pitter-patter down pat. The rhetorical cotton candy -- sugary, jargon-clotted arts gush -- asserts that the arts nurture "civically valuable dispositions" and a sense of "community and connectedness." And, of course, "diversity" and "self-esteem." Americans supposedly suffer from a scarcity of both.

The NEA was created in 1965 as a filigree on the Great Society. In 1995, Republicans

won control of the House of Representatives and said the NEA was a frill the federal government should be shorn of. Twenty-two years later, it survives, having mastered adaptive evolution, government-style: It defines art democratically and circularly. Art is anything done by anyone calling himself or herself an artist, and an artist is anyone who produces art. An NEA report issued under Bill Clinton said "art includes the expressive behaviors of ordinary people," including "dinner-table arrangements" and "piecrust designs." As Walt Whitman neglected to say, "I hear America singing and everyone's singing is above average." Populist pandering is nothing new in Washington. Neither is this utilitarian calculus: Policies are good that provide the greatest self-esteem for the greatest number.

David Marcus, artistic director of a Brooklyn-based theater project and senior contributor to *The Federalist*, says the NEA produces "perverse market incentives" that explain why many arts institutions "are failing badly at reaching new audiences, and losing ground":

"Many theater companies, even the country's most 'successful,' get barely 50 percent of their revenue from ticket sales. Much of the rest comes from tax-deductible donations and direct government grants. This means that the real way to succeed as an arts organization is not to create a product that attracts new audiences, but to create a product that pleases those who dole out the free cash. The industry received more free money than it did a decade ago, and has fewer attendees."

Furthermore, the NEA's effects are regressive, funding programs that are, as Paul Ryan's House Budget Committee said, "generally enjoyed by people of higher income levels, making them a wealth

transfer from poorer to wealthier." A frequently cited study purporting to prove otherwise was meretricious: It stressed income levels of ZIP codes where NEA-funded *institutions* are, inferring that institutions *located* in low-income areas are serving low-income people.

Defense contractors spread weapons systems' subcontracts across the nation like butter across toast; 50 states and perhaps all 435 congressional districts get NEA funds. And here is another reason for the immortality of government programs: If a program is a major expense, its spending generates so many dependent clients that legislators flinch from eliminating or even substantially trimming it. And if a program is, like the NEA, a minor expense, legislators wonder: Why take the trouble, and experience the pain (the NEA's affluent clients fluently articulate their grievances and sense of entitlement), for a trivial gain?

Americans' voluntary contributions to arts organizations ("arts/culture/humanities" institutions reaped \$17 billion in 2015) dwarf the NEA's subventions, which would be replaced if those who actually use the organizations -- many of them supported by state and local government arts councils -- are as enthusiastic about them as they claim to be. The idea that the arts will wither away if the NEA goes away is risible. Distilled to its essence, the argument for the NEA is: Art is a Good Thing, therefore a government subsidy for it is a Good Deed. To appreciate the non sequitur, substitute "macaroni and cheese" for "art."

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