

Rebecca Goldberg

Writing Portfolio

www.rebeccagoldberg.net

This portfolio contains the following writing samples, showing a range of the work that I've produced, from conversational essays to detailed procedures manuals.

1. *Photography and Reality*, an academic essay from the pre-Instagram, pre-iPhone era.
2. *Getting Started*, a blog entry for The Field-Seattle, an organization that helps artists of all disciplines in using reflective feedback to develop their work.
3. A fundraising appeal letter for FourPlay, an independent theatrical production celebrating the work of new local playwrights.
4. The program notes for the same production, showing two ways that the goals of the project were presented for different audiences.
5. An excerpt from the *Anchor QEA Company Style Guide*, an instructional manual that was written in collaboration with other technical editors to assist scientists and engineers in writing to English language and company standards.
6. *The Middle of the End of the Beginning*, a personal, conversational entry from my blog **Mondays are for Art**.

1. Photography and Reality

In this age of technology, we are surprisingly awed by the miracles that the simplest advances have wrought. Although we have been capturing photographic images on paper for more than 100 years, we still invest the photograph with a magical power to represent reality. Photography is useful for the purposes of advertising, documentary, and nostalgia because it makes a claim on reality. We want so desperately to believe that these images are real, yet it is clear that they can not be the only understanding of any given scene. The truth is, we don't need an exact replica of reality; we are living in it. What we do need is to evaluate how we choose to see the many possible photographs that we encounter every day. A photograph is a series of choices, each of which changes the reality of what the viewer sees. This is as it should be, for if a photograph does no more than present reality exactly as it appears, when of what use is photography? A photograph should comment on how we see reality.

Perhaps the most common of photograph is the personal snapshot. However, at a family reunion, a person does not pull out a camera to create a duplicate experience, but to create a concrete memory of it. The photographer chooses which memories to validate. Will the pictures be posed or spontaneous? Will they include people or animals or scenery? A snapshot creates a memory on paper, editing out all unpleasantness or any images unnecessary to the photographer's own values and tastes in regard to that event. The images will only be significant to a viewer who was uninvolved with the scene if the photographer is able to make them so.

The same is true with commercial, documentary, and artistic photography. The first and most important choice a photographer makes is what to photograph. If the subject of a photograph is not inherently interesting to an outsider, the photographer must use new perspectives, angles, contrast, and framing of the sight to make it so. A friend of mine recently exhibited photographs of impoverished children of a Guatemalan village where she worked the last summer. These words were straightforward images of poor children appealing to a white American (audience and photographer) for money, attention, and affection, a subject she felt deeply and encountered daily in her work. Yet one of the criticisms she received of her work was that it too closely resembled typical tourist photographs of adorable South American children. Showing the reality of their poverty as she saw it was not enough because we are constantly surrounded with this sort of image in our culture when addressing the Third World. To have the effect that these photographs were taken to accomplish, a different, perhaps harsher, more shocking representation of this reality was needed. To really understand a photograph we must also understand the spirit in which it was made.

Indonesian Dance (Java, 1958) by Dorothea Lange pictures only a woman's sinuous art and hand floating against a light background, yet it conveys in the image of this one gesture, all of the simplicity and grace of this dance. It is a dream-like image, showing no physical background and, except in its title, no indication of time or place. The viewer has no idea

what the dancer looks like, what she wears. We have no way of knowing the cultural conventions of the dance. The open palm of the hand could be either a welcome or a warning to keep one's distance, either of which could be typical of a South Asian attitude to Western imperialism. All of the ambiguities in the photograph create questions that viewers must answer for themselves, leading to a better understanding of the work. We must decide for ourselves how we are to see this image. The hand and arm can be seen as merely a formal arrangement of shape and contrasting light centered in the left half of the frame, yet this arrangement evokes so much more content than is actually pictured. By showing only the most essential element of the visual reality, the image captures the viewer's imagination and creates a total experience that moves beyond our concept of what an Indonesian dancer might really look like.

Photography can be the most effective of the visual arts in interpreting how we see reality because it must always have reality as its basis. The manipulation and arrangement of reality is where its art and purpose lie. Photographs show us how we see the world around us, but this can only be done when unfamiliar subjects are seen in a way that they can hold a place in our reality.

2. Getting Started

I just had an email exchange with a potential Field member who is at the beginning of a project and was concerned about how to use The Field when she doesn't yet have any work that is ready to show. Of course I told her that that was no problem. A lot of work that people present at The Field is rough—and stepping up to present works in progress is a generous act that encourages others to do the same.

But personally, The Field has revolutionized the way that I work, especially in the early stages of a project, and this question got me thinking about why.

When I walked into my first Field session more than 2 years ago, I literally had no idea what I was going to do next or what I planned to work on. I had just ended an intense (and inspiring) year-long acting program and all I knew is that I wanted to keep my creative momentum going. For the first few sessions, I brought scraps of past plays and essays. And then one night, right before that week's meeting, I had a dream that haunted me all day. I considered scribbling the whole thing down on a napkin and bringing that to present even though I'd already dug up another bit of something to read that night. I didn't, but the idea stayed with me. Over the next week, I wrote three pages of text, and by the end of the 8-week session I had a rough—very rough—draft of my first solo show.

It can feel like an act of bravery to show work to other people that doesn't feel "ready"—and it is! But the benefits of taking that leap are enormous:

- It gives me a weekly deadline to create something—anything—to show. Because participants comment on your work at face value, there is no need to make excuses if it's not perfect yet, which is great for the state of vulnerability that I live in at the beginning of a project.
- It allows me to see if my embryonic ideas are on track. Because reflective feedback tells us what others see in our work, it makes a great reality check at a time when my thoughts and ideas are most fluid.
- It gives me a way to consider new ideas that haven't yet occurred to me. I often find that I'm not really telling the story that I first set out to tell, and hearing another version of that story can help me make connections and clarify thoughts that are lurking below the surface, deepening my original intent. Usually I find that I'm a lot smarter than I think I am!
- And most importantly for me, it takes the isolation out of the creative process. Sharing my work right away—in whatever sketchy elemental form—gives it a life and energy that it doesn't have when it's all me and my laptop. All art eventually needs an audience and introducing the other into the creative process early on can be invigorating.

3. Fundraising Letter for FourPlay, Produced by Jesse Putnam and Eclectic Theatre

Dear Friend,

This letter comes to you because we know you are someone who cares about good theatre. And for good theatre, you need good plays. For good plays, you need playwrights. And good playwrights need audiences.

Theatres of all sizes, like many in this economy, are struggling. Producers are cautious and make safe choices, producing work they think will bring in audiences. Often that means work that has been staged many times over, plays written by recognized writers. But where does a budding David Mamet, Paula Vogel, or Tony Kushner come from? How does a new writer get heard and develop relationships with theatres? How will audiences get the thrill of discovering something new?

FourPlay is a new and exciting project in Seattle that intends to save the endangered playwright by producing four short plays by four new writers. And our work has already begun! Four new plays have already been selected and teamed with four directors. Actors will soon be cast. Costumes will be bought, sewn, or found. Lights will be set. Posters and press releases will be issued, audiences will arrive at the theatre, and four new writers will be launched into the theatre scene!

But we need your help. To save the endangered playwright, we need people like you, who support our lofty vision, to make a contribution. Our budget is rock bottom and every dime we receive helps to put these new works of art on their feet. Just think: you can help spawn the birth of tomorrow's playwright by making a financial contribution today.

Here's what your donation will do:

\$250 covers production costs for one of the four works to be presented!

\$120 pays for 15 hours of rehearsal space!

\$50 lets us print 500 postcards to help bring in an audience!

\$20 helps a writer cover the costs of photocopying so she may send her plays out to literary managers all across the country!

We know that there's a lot in the world that needs fixing right now and the dilemma of the endangered playwright may not be your first concern. But consider what the world would be without good theatre, without new stories told by fresh voices. And know that any contribution you make to our project will have a significant impact to each playwright

whose work we will soon produce. By contributing to our project you not only help our theatre community grow, you renew the hope of writers everywhere.

Please support the endangered playwright by contributing to FourPlay today.

4. Program Note for FourPlay, Produced by Jesse Putnam and Eclectic Theatre

There is nothing like directing new work to remind me that theatre is a collaborative art. The four playwrights whose work you see here tonight have given us words and stories that are in their own very different ways funny, insightful, thoughtful, and innovative and I thank them, and all of the other playwrights who submitted work to this project, for taking on the daunting and often thankless task of writing for theatre. I also want to thank the actors who took their words seriously and gave them life and truth. I want to thank our stage manger, our designers, our producers Jesse Putnam and Eclectic Theatre, and all of our funders who gave us the means to show you the worlds that these playwrights created. Finally, I want to thank each and every person in the audience because you, my friends, are the final piece of the puzzle. These plays are real because you are watching them. There are many plays out there—good plays—that will never see the light of the stage and when you consider the number of people, the time, the energy, and the money that went into even this modest project on this tiny stage, you start to see why that might happen. A thousand thank yous for the part that you are playing right now to bring these four short plays to life. May they go forth and multiply.

5. Excerpt from *Anchor QEA Company Style Guide*¹

Lists

Many commonly used style guides approach the format, capitalization, and punctuation of lists in a variety of ways. The standards described here are adopted for consistency in Anchor QEA documents and were chosen to make list organization as clear as possible for the reader.

Avoid using bulleted and numbered lists in a report section without an introductory sentence.

Bulleted Lists

Use bullets when there is an unordered list; do not enumerate each one. If you need to refer to the items in nearby text, use a numbered list instead of a bulleted list.

Make each item in the list grammatically parallel, and capitalize the first word of each item in the list. If the list contains complete sentences, put a period at the end of each sentence and, for consistency, make sure that the each bulleted item in that list has a period at the end of each statement. For incomplete sentences, do not use semicolons, periods, commas, or any other type of punctuation at the end of each item.

Example
Impacts to aquatic resources from the proposed dock widening, elevated walkway, and overhead loading structures were quantified using the following sources of information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site-specific survey data• Data from three intertidal walking surveys during low tide• Data from a SCUBA survey• Published and unpublished literature• Best professional judgment• Local, state, and federal laws

Anchor QEA's report template defines a style for subbullet lists (also called nested bullet lists) to be used when an item in a bullet list contains several subsidiary bullet items. If possible, avoid using nested bulleted lists to a third level. Try to restructure your information instead.

¹ © Anchor QEA, LLC, 2011. All Rights Reserved.

Numbered Lists

Use a numbered list when the order of the items is important, if there is a series of procedural steps to complete in a particular order, or when you need to refer to the items separately in accompanying text. Follow the rules outlined in Section 6.1 for capitalization and punctuation.

In-text Lists

Sometimes, the construction of a list in paragraph text is numbered to show order or rank of the items or because the information is so complex that separation of each item is necessary to enable reader comprehension. If this is the case, consider whether the information might better be presented as a bulleted or numbered list. You might also consider if the items can be listed more clearly using serial commas or semicolons to separate the items. If you choose to keep the numbered list in paragraph format, the following standards should be applied:

- Use a colon before the first numbered item
- Follow each number with a closing parenthesis
- Keep each list item in lower case
- Separate each item with a semicolon
- Add the words “and” or “or” before the final numbered list item

Examples
Before performing CPR: 1) ensure that the victim is unconscious and not breathing; 2) call 911; and 3) clear the mouth of any obstructions.
If you choose to keep the numbered list in paragraph format, the following standards should be applied: 1) use a colon before the first numbered item; 2) follow each number with a closing parenthesis; 3) keep each list item in lower case; 4) separate each item with a semicolon; and 5) add the words “and” or “or” before the final numbered list item.

6. The Middle of the End of the Beginning

When you're trying to tell a story, sometimes the hardest part is knowing where to begin. It's even harder when you're still in the middle of the story. You could say the beginning was last summer when I went to New York. You could definitely make a case for 3 years ago when I dedicated myself to 9 months of intensive acting training. Or birth. There is always that.

Snapshot: it's November of last year. I've just co-founded a theater company and am in the middle of directing and producing our first production at the same time that the deadline of the biggest project in 11 years at my job is approaching. Opening night and the deliverable due date are within 2 weeks of each other...just enough time that if I live at the theater and then switch to living at work when the play opens, I can maybe make it all work out. Oh, and my stepdad has just lost his battle with cancer so I've travelled back and forth to my hometown twice in the past month. There's some other stuff too, mostly complications with all of the above, but I'll leave out the details in the interest of protecting the privacy of others.

My annual review is scheduled somewhere in the middle of this. My company has an intense 360° review process where you get a whole bunch of comments and ratings from a whole bunch of people, in addition to rating yourself and setting goals. Lovely in theory, but a ton of work.

And it's especially hard because I am my own worst critic. I've taking on more and more management tasks over the last year and I'm pulled in so many directions. My team is understaffed. I can't even respond to all my email anymore. Basically, I feel like I'm barely keeping it together. I try to put an optimistic spin on things, but the self review that I barely remember writing last month is depressing. And none of this is reflected in any of the other reviewers. There are a few nuggets of constructive criticism, surrounded by generously glowing support. This should make me feel better. I know that I'm appreciated. I know that my stress isn't affecting my work. I know that I'm not a failure.

But it makes it worse.

Because if I'm struggling this much, shouldn't it show at least a little bit? And if I'm succeeding at this through sheer force of will, what exactly am I getting out of it? Yes, there are rewards, but not rewards that actually matter to me. And what if this energy was going towards something that does matter to me? What if I struggled towards something that feeds my soul? What if I dared to fail? And so at the end of my review, I tell my boss that I have an expiration date at the company and essentially give him my 5(ish)-month notice.

The way that I'm telling this story makes it sound like an impulse, but it wasn't. I've been headed in this direction for a while (since last summer...since 3 years ago...since birth). I didn't want to do it in my review meeting, but that's how the timing worked out. So here I

am with that expiration date (sometime in April) fast approaching and very few concrete plans for what comes next.

When I used to fantasize about doing this, it always seemed like a huge leap...like I would dive and SPLASH I would thrash around for a while and then I'd be swimming. But what I realized not too long ago is that I've been slipping into these waters for a while now, toe by ankle by thigh, and now the cold water is lapping at my waist and splashing at my eyes and there's nothing to do but stick my head under and wait for the cold to become normal.

I am scared. I'm exhilarated. I'm poised right here at the beginning of the end, at the brink of the beginning, and in the middle of a journey.