

## Deplore

**D**eplore is a word I like but seldom use. There are things I deplore, such as my sons' table manners when visiting their grandparents, but it's not the sort of word to throw around lightly. Living in Washington, I've had many chances to admire its subtle use by ambassadors and presidents to express official exasperation, and I've wondered, as an editor, whether I might one day have occasion to deplore something in print. The time has come.

I deplore what computers are doing to writing. I know this sounds as unenlightened as a medieval copyist grumbling about the invention of movable type, but nevertheless, I persist.

Specifically, I deplore the ability of computers to produce manuscripts with unnumbered pages. This approach to writing, which treats ideas as if they had no independent existence, is too much like the new physics for my liking. Words, unlike subatomic particles, are not governed by laws of chance. I doubt that authors realize the risk they take in submitting such manuscripts to editors. Whose ideas are strong enough to be held together by only a paper clip? If a strong wind were to sweep through my office and mix up several of these manuscripts, could I reassemble them relying on threads of logic or continuity?

Further, I deplore the proliferation of manuscripts pro-

duced on dot matrix printers. All those little dots work fine on TV, but a dot pattern on paper does not a true letter make. Reading such manuscripts is like standing too close to a pointillist painting. My eye is not fooled; it is irritated. More than the eyestrain this causes, I deplore the fact that dot matrix printing forces humans to adjust to a machine's shortcomings. Surely we don't want our eyes to evolve into something more machine friendly.

I deplore the ability of computers to give bad writing a flawless physical appearance, like a tasteless meal beautifully presented. Bad enough that books are falsely marketed by their covers. Weak sentences shouldn't look good on paper. Personal computers have achieved the goal of my Palmer Penmanship teacher—perfect-looking papers. No matter that they are content free.

I deplore the fact that computers give writers ironclad control of spelling and hyphenation. This discourages use of the dictionary, and I believe that writers who do not consult, read and enjoy dictionaries improve slowly if at all.

What does all this have to do with training? A lot, I suspect. Might not some of my objections to computerized writing apply to technologized training programs? In writing, I prefer the old Newtonian idea of order beneath apparent chaos, rather than the new physics idea of chaos beneath apparent order.



*Editor*