

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE



The Problem of the Problem

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A problem well-put is half solved.

John Dewey

Looking back, I think it was more difficult to see what the problems were than to solve them.

Charles Darwin

The formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old questions from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.

Albert Einstein

THE ESSENTIAL STRUCTURE OF AN INTRODUCTION

1. Common ground.

2. (But) Problem.

a. uncertainty/ignorance/misunderstanding/. . .

(So what?)

b. cost/benefit.

3. Gist/promise of solution.

1. When Corcyra and Corinth disagreed over control of Epidamnus, they both went to Athens to ask for help. The Corinthians appealed to Athens' honor and justice, while the Corcyreans appealed to their self-interest. It was in Athens that Plato and Aristotle first articulated principles of justice, so it would be easy to think that Athens would side with Corinth. **COMMON GROUND**
- 2a. But they sided with Corcyra, revealing that they were motivated by self-interest. **PROBLEM** *So what?*
- 2b. If we don't see why Athens rejected the argument based on justice, we could misunderstand their real motives when they defended some of their cruel actions later when they claimed that they were motivated by justice. **COST/BENEFIT**
3. Athens showed its real values when it sided with self-interest. **GIST/PROMISE OF SOLUTION**

FINDING A PROBLEM WORTH SOLVING AT THREE STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

1. STAGE ONE: WHILE YOU ARE DOING YOUR RESEARCH

Describe and redescribe your task in a way that forces you to articulate both what you do not know and why you want to find it out. You can do this in three steps:

1. The first step names your topic:

Describe your topic with at least a couple of abstract nouns that could be specific verbs. That is, do **NOT** describe your topic like this:

I am working on *stories about the Battle of the Alamo* . . .

but rather like this,

I am working on the *evolution* and *eventual popularization* of the story about the Alamo.

2. The second step describes what you do not know about it:

To that sentence, add the following clause containing an indirect question (pick your own interrogative pronoun):

. . . because I want to find out who/what/when/where/why/how/whether . . .

I am working on the evolution and popularization of the story about the Battle of the Alamo *because I want to find out how the story became part of our national mythology* . . .

3. The third steps provides a rationale for finding out:

Complete that sentence with the following:

. . . in order to understand better how/why/ whether . . .

I am working on the evolution and popularization of the story about the Battle of the Alamo because I want to find out how the story became part of our national mythology *in order to understand better why stories about military defeats come to represent nationalistic values.*

Now change the last verb so that you shift your perspective from yourself to your audience:

I am working on the evolution and popularization of the story about the Battle of the Alamo because I want to find out how the story became part of our national mythology *in order to explain to you* why stories about military defeats come to represent nationalistic values.

<p>NOTE: IT IS UNLIKELY THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO COMPLETE THE LAST STEP AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR PROJECT.</p>
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2. STAGE TWO: AFTER YOU HAVE A *FIRST* DRAFT.

Once you have a draft, you can interrogate it to discover where you began to discover a problem that you did not know existed.

What follows is the most important advice about organization that you will ever receive.

When you are writing on a subject that you do not entirely understand or whose subject matter you cannot recall without referring to whatever you are reading or to whatever data you have assembled, you will almost inevitably begin by summarizing what you know.

THAT IS A GOOD THING TO DO.

The problem is that as you fill up several pages with summary, you are probably only in the process of discovering a Solution to some Problem that you have not yet stated.

YOU HAVE DONE ONLY THE PRELIMINARY WORK, BUT THAT IS IMPORTANT WORK, NONETHELESS.

If you write several pages of summary and then at the end begin to develop your own ideas, you will at that point be doing your most serious thinking. You now have an opportunity to figure out what Problem you have in fact solved and then formulate that Problem at the beginning of your paper.

In other words, you must learn to think backwards, from Solution to Problem. You do that by repeating the three steps just covered, but in a different way.

from a Western Civ paper, the first two and last three paragraphs.

The Church and its Crusades

¹During the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church initiated several Crusades against the Muslims in the Holy Lands. The Pope would usually instigate and call for armament and support for this endeavor. Pope Urban II started the first Crusade in 1096. His predecessor, Gregory VII, had also petitioned to get support for a crusade in 1074 but did not succeed in launching his Crusade. There are written statements from these Popes concerning the Crusades. Pope Urban II in "Speech at the Council of Clermont" in the year 1095 calls for a Crusade and Pope Gregory VII in a Letter to King Henry IV during the year 1074 also proposes a Crusade.

²Both the text preceding Urban's speech and Urban's speech mention several serious problems within the society, both lay and clerical. At the end of his speech, Urban discusses the need for a Crusade. The introductory text, *The Version of Fulcher of Chartres, including His Description of Conditions in Western Europe at the Time*, furnishes some background information about controversies which Urban does not discuss in his speech and he also summarizes and emphasizes the important points in the Pope's speech.

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¹³The concept of using the Crusades not as a purely religious project but as a means of political unity can also be seen in Gregory's letter. One reason he wishes to go on a Crusade is the chance that the Roman and Orthodox Churches might reconcile. They have held different views on the place of the Holy Ghost in the Trinity, and the Eastern Church also did not recognize the Pope's authority. Hopefully, with a successful Crusade, both of these schisms could be rectified. They were to hold a conference to discuss the Holy Ghost and also the Eastern Church would accept the authority of the Roman Pope. Then all of Christianity would be under the guidance of one Church and not two separate Churches.

¹⁴Another subtle coalescence is between the Church and the Empire. The beginnings of the power struggle between the Pope and Emperor occur during the reigns of Henry IV and Gregory VII. The Pope is head of the Church and the Emperor is head of the Empire. When Gregory assures Henry of his affections and says that he will leave the Church under the care of Henry if he, Gregory, goes on the Crusade, this could show that Gregory wishes to prove that the Church and the Empire are still united and should work towards a common goal. Perhaps Gregory wishes to prevent a power struggle between the Pope and Emperor, so his proposal for a Crusade may also be a suggestion that the Church and the Empire unite to fight a common enemy instead of fighting amongst themselves.

¹⁵The Popes, Urban II and Gregory VII, heralded the Crusades as a way to restore the Holy Lands to Christian rule, but in fact, they also used the concept of the Crusades as a means to achieve a form of unity important to them during their pontificate. During Urban's pontificate, he could establish his authority, fight the devil (Muslims), and control fighting amongst the Europeans and direct those energies elsewhere. Gregory VII wishes to achieve unification between the Roman Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. And he also seems to be trying to keep the unity or prevent the breakup of the Church and The Empire. In both cases each Pope tried to unite people in a common cause to fight against the infidels instead of amongst themselves. Therefore the Crusade was not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land and to save God's faith, but it was an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.

Analyzing First Drafts

1. In the first step, state the most important thing that you now know that you did not know when you began. Start with, "The most important thing I found out was that . . ." To finish that sentence, locate the *main claim* of your paper, its central point, its thesis:

As I worked on the motivation of the Popes to initiate Crusades, the most important thing that I found out was that ***the Crusades were not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land , but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.***

The italicized part will feed into and **last** element of your introduction:

1. Common Ground
 2. Problem
 3. Cost
 4. Claim: ***The Crusades were not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land , but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.***
2. In the second step, state what prior uncontested ideas, common knowledge, received wisdom this claim challenges. Begin with "Before I did this research I thought/before they read my paper, my readers thought . . ." Complete that sentence with what it is that your readers think they will have to change, modify, replace after they read your paper.

Before they read my paper, my readers might think that ***the Crusades were motivated by widespread popular religious zeal to liberate Jerusalem and restore it to Christianity.***

The italicized part will be the **first** element of your introduction.

1. Common Ground: Popular belief has it that the Crusades were motivated by widespread popular religious zeal to liberate Jerusalem and restore it to Christianity.
2. Problem:
3. Cost:
4. Claim: The Crusades were not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land , but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.

3. In the third step, state some uncertainty, gap in knowledge, lack of understanding that destabilizes that common ground:

However, the real motives for the Crusades were perhaps not as straightforwardly religious as later historians have tried to portray them.

That sentence will feed into the **second** element of your introduction.

1. Common Ground: Popular belief has it that the Crusades were motivated by widespread popular religious zeal to liberate Jerusalem and restore it to Christianity.
2. Destabilizing Condition: However, the real motives for the Crusades were perhaps not as straightforwardly religious as later historians have tried to portray them.
3. Cost:
4. Claim: The Crusades were not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land , but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.

4. In the fourth step, describe the significance of not answering (2). Start with "Until we understand that (fill in from 2) better, we will not understand the larger question of . . . (Recall that this answers the question *So what?*)

Until we understand better the real motives of the Crusades, we will not understand the larger question of how the Vatican used theological rhetoric to solve pragmatic political problems in early European history.

That sentence will feed into the **third** element of your introduction.

1. Common Ground: Popular belief has it that the Crusades were motivated by widespread popular religious zeal to liberate Jerusalem and restore it to Christianity.
2. Problem: However, the real motives for the Crusades were perhaps not as straightforwardly religious as later historians have tried to portray them.
3. Cost: Until we understand better the real motives of the Crusades, we will not understand the larger question of how the Vatican used theological rhetoric to solve pragmatic political problems in early European history.
4. Claim: The Crusades were not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land , but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.

5. Now assemble all this into an introduction:

Popular belief has it that the Crusades were motivated by widespread popular religious zeal to liberate Jerusalem and restore it to Christianity. But the real motives for the Crusades were perhaps not as straightforwardly religious as later historians have tried to portray them. Until we understand better the real motives of the Crusades, we will not understand the larger question of how the Vatican used theological rhetoric to solve pragmatic political problems in early European history. The Crusades were in fact not just a fight against the Muslims to recapture the Holy Land, but an effort to save the Church and Europe from the dissensions which were tearing it apart.

A Fundamental Rhetorical Stance: Naming Topics vs. Posing Problems

First year Humanities Assignment: Compare and contrast the rhetorical appeals of Corcyra and Corinth in their speeches about Epidamnus in order to show us something about Athenian values.

1. In 433 BC, the cities of Corcyra and Corinth became involved in a dispute over which would rule Epidamnus. Because they could not settle the dispute themselves, they sent representatives to Athens to appeal for assistance. After hearing their speeches, the Athenians decided to support Corcyra. The two speeches differ in many ways, but the most important is the reasons each side gives to support its appeal for help because the appeals that Athens accepted and rejected tell us about Athenian values. To show these values, I will first discuss the Corcyrean speech and then the Corinthian speech.
2. Before the Peloponnesian War, Corcyra and Corinth disputed who should rule Epidamnus, so they appealed to Athens. The Corinthians appealed to their sense of justice and tradition, while the Corcyreans appealed to their self-interest. The Athenians finally sided with Corcyra's appeal, because the Athenians knew war was coming and they would need Corcyra's power. When we understand the appeals that the two sides made and which one the Athenians accepted and rejected, we can recognize Athens' real values and motives.
3. When Corcyra and Corinth disagreed over control of Epidamnus, they both went to Athens to ask for help. The Corinthians appealed to Athens' honor and justice, while the Corcyreans appealed to their self-interest. It was in Athens that Plato and Aristotle first articulated principles of justice, so it would be easy to think that Athens would side with Corinth. But they sided with Corcyra, revealing that they were motivated by self-interest. If we don't see why Athens rejected the argument based on justice, we could misunderstand their real motives when they defended some of their cruel actions later when they claimed that they were motivated by justice. Athens showed its real values when it sided with self-interest. Which of these three would you predict would get the lowest grade? The highest?

Parnell and deValera Crises: Two Challenges to the Irish Consensus

During their time, Charles Stewart Parnell and Eamon de Valera were at one point the most powerful men in Ireland. By leading the Irish consensus, which involved the relationship between the Leader, the Party, and the Bishops, Parnell and deValera were able to develop constitutional states in Ireland. In 1890, Parnell attempted to undermine the consensus he created when his role as Leader was threatened. In 1921, de Valera tried to disrupt the consensus he led when it was evident that the Irish Republic was jeopardized by the Treaty with Great Britain. The Party and the Bishops were not only able to bring down their leaders in both cases, but also the Irish consensus was able to reconstruct itself after each constitutional crisis.

To understand the Parnell and de Valera crises, we must understand the consensus Parnell constructed between 1880 and 1890. Then Parnell's challenge to the constitutional system and the Irish Parliamentary Party he built must be examined, as well as the survival of the Irish Party up to 1918. The rise of Sinn Fein under de Valera during and after 1918 and the Anglo-Irish war up to the Treaty will also be investigated. After the Treaty, de Valera's challenge to the Irish consensus and the resulting Irish civil war will be scrutinized. Finally, the survival of the Irish consensus and the evolution of a more democratic Irish political system will be developed.

Francisco Bulnes: Counter-Revolutionary Polemicist

My attitude is not one of enmity toward the Mexican Revolution. . . But when the people who revolt lack the necessary reactionary power to reconstruct their country, they perish as a nation . . . I am not an enemy of the revolution, but I do look with horror upon its progress, because Mexico is my native land and from the final, supreme test of the revolution may result in the loss of its independence

With this statement, Francisco Bulnes prefaces *The Whole Truth About Mexico*, a critique of the Mexican Revolution which testifies to the culpability of the United States in seeking to implant in Mexico an Anglo-Saxon notion of liberty that lacks logical basis or understanding of the Mexican people. According to Bulnes, such a program orchestrates the demise of Huerta and nurtures the "de facto anarchy" and despotism of Caranza. To change US policy, Bulnes went on to construct a caustic but confusing polemic that some critics think is merely one more Mexican nationalist. Others have claimed that while Bulnes' critical re-thinking of the Porfiriato was visionary, it represented only a crisis of Nineteenth Century Positivism.

But those views underestimate his role as a seminal transitional thinker and as the deeply philosophical and influential polemicist that he was. We believe that his writings were an attempt to adjust to an intellectual perspective more attuned to Twentieth Century modernity. He provides an unexpected link between the late Nineteenth Century Cientifico program and the post-Revolutionary, Twentieth Century organization of Mexican political and social life. While we may marvel at Bulnes' visionary ability to predict programs implemented by the "institutionalizing" forces of Revolutionary Mexico, it would be a mistake to overlook his contribution to the modern Mexican state, because there is evidence that Bulnes was widely read and debated in the later literature of the 30's, and 40's, evidence suggesting that he may have influenced later policy-makers, as well.

This paper will clarify three areas of Bulnes interpretation of the Mexican Revolution: the agrarian question, the collapse of the Porfiriato, and U.S./Mexican relations, in order to explain how Bulnes elucidated a connection between the Porfiriato and the formation of the modern Mexican State and hinted at ways in which various sectors could maximize social and political restructurings to advance Mexican development.

The Neutral and Natural Effects of Love and War in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is a novel which carefully and concisely blends the themes of love and war, and other themes based on this grand scale of love and death. The main themes of love and war and the bliss and tragedy in both originate, develop, and intermix, often coinciding and coexisting in certain sections of the novel, depicting life as it is. The result of this intermixing necessitates a fusion of the idyllic or comic, and the tragic or disturbing which is certainly affected by the impending doom of the war. *A Farewell to Arms* is a story about the love of two people affected by the disastrous events that happen during this period of war. It is a narrative which, with meticulous care, follows the development of the psychological characteristics of the two lovers, Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry, as they encounter tragic and idyllic settings, thus developing their relationship amidst the unstable, insecure surroundings of a country at war. Hemingway writes the story of the two lovers as they represent average human beings in their emotions, thoughts, and actions in a natural and neutral world of love and war. In *A Farewell to Arms* Hemingway describes the story of the lovers as they stand on unstable ground during this uneasy period, coupled with and comforted by the neutral territory they always seem to find amidst the natural instability of their surroundings as a whole.

Two Tickets to Sacrifice: Racism and Activism in O'Connor's Short Stories

In 1959 Flannery O'Connor was invited to meet with James Baldwin but declined the offer. She explained in a letter that his visit to Georgia "would cause the greatest trouble, disturbance and disunion". After reading this, a reader could conclude that O'Connor was racist. But did she refuse to see Baldwin because he was black? In a 1964 letter, she hinted at the real reason:

About the Negroes, the kind I don't like is the philosophizing prophesying pontificating kind, the James Baldwin kind. Very ignorant but never silent. Baldwin can tell us what it feels like to be a Negro in Harlem but he tries to tell us everything else too. King I don't think is the age's great saint but at least he's doing what he can do & has to do . . . (Letters, 580)

O'Connor disliked Baldwin not because he was black, but because of his overbearing approach to race. Although she supported the idea of racial equality, she denounced Baldwin's means of achieving it.

But the ambiguous treatment of race here and throughout her work remains a difficult subject for her harshest critics and most ardent admirers. In her Introduction to *The Habit of Being*, Sally Fitzgerald describes O'Connor's puzzling presentation of race as the product of "an imperfectly developed sensibility" (Letters, xvi). She believes that the author's "will was never in danger on the score of racism," but qualifies this by saying that "large social issues as such were never the subject of her writing".

Fitzgerald's analysis, however, is only half true. Large social issues were not the subject of O'Connor's writing, but her attitudes concerning race were far from the product of an imperfectly developed sensibility. They were well-developed and firmly based intellectually in her religious beliefs. For her, racism was not a social issue but the symptom of a larger spiritual and religious crisis. To O'Connor, to treat racism as a social problem is to misunderstand it. Analysis of her best known short stories shows that her treatment of racism as a spiritual crisis was more sympathetic to racial equality than is apparent and, far from indicating that racism was an aberration in her life, they suggest that O'Connor had an understanding of racism that set her apart from liberals of her time.