

In Thomas G. Plummer's essay "Diagnosing and Treating the Ophelia Syndrome" students and the general public are persuaded to learn to think for themselves through a variety of means. Plummer uses the character Ophelia, from the play Hamlet, as his example of someone who refuses to think for themselves and instead allows a mentor to think for her. Plummer states that in modern society many people suffer from the Ophelia Syndrome; he believes that students today allow themselves to be told what to think, instead of pushing themselves to form their own opinion. Plummer puts most of his focus on college students, saying, "I worry often that universities may be rendering their most serious students...vulnerable to the Ophelia Syndrome rather than motivating them to individuation." He believes that after years of being told what to think or learn during earlier schooling, most college students still want and expect to be taught without ever having to truly think.

However, Plummer does not think that all students are a lost cause; on the contrary, he thinks every student has the power to overcome the Ophelia Syndrome. He offers six treatments that will help students overcome this problem. In one treatment he suggests that students take classes not for the subject matter but in order to have teachers that force them to think for themselves. Other suggested treatments deal mainly with the individual, including getting to know and trust oneself, learning to see more than one side of an issue, learning to live with uncertainty and letting oneself think idly. The final treatment is to challenge oneself to step out of the bound set forth by teachers. Plummer says, "Only you can decide whether taking control of your education, whether using college as time to achieve individuation, is worth it." He also warns that following his treatments does have its drawbacks; these include tolerating confusion and frustration, getting lower grades and allowing the process to consume a lot of time. He also

warns that learning to think for oneself and following one's own desires may mean going against the advice of loved ones.

Plummer's purpose in writing this essay was to inform students of a problem he believed was of great importance and to give them the means to fix it. He gave this lecture at BYU, in 1989, in an attempt to reach as many college students as possible. Since his main audience for this lecture is college students, making the entire essay easily accessible is very important. Most college students will be more likely to really pay attention if they can easily understand what someone is trying to say. Another important thing for an essay like this is to use strong examples to back up the speakers' logic. When a speaker does this, it reinforces everything they are trying to say. It is also necessary to give students easy-to-follow ways to change the behavior in question. When students' behaviors are questioned, they are less likely to change if they are not given some guidance.

Plummer did an exceptional job of making this essay accessible to the average college student. He not only uses language that is easy to understand, but his purpose is very clear throughout the essay; at no point is it unclear what he is trying to say. By saying things like, "Talk is cheap. It's fine to say, "Learn to think for yourself," and it's quite another to do it," Plummer ensures his meaning is clearly received. He starts the essay by giving a clear example of what the Ophelia Syndrome is and then he clearly lays out his means to solve the problem by suggesting six possible treatments. When college students sit in a lecture they don't want to fight to understand what someone is trying to tell them; by making everything clear and simple, Plummer ensures that students are more receptive of what is being said. By making his purpose clear and his language easy to understand, Plummer only adds to his overall effectiveness of this essay in the given context.

In essays that are trying to persuade their audience to change a behavior, strong examples are needed to reinforce that the behavior in question truly is a problem. Plummer does a decent job of this by providing examples for most of his treatments. When explaining how to foster idle thinking Plummer uses an assortment of activities as examples for how one could begin to think idly. However, some of the examples, like the specific journal entries he sites for treatment two, could have been much stronger. For his suggestion of looking at issues from different points of view, Plummer uses no clear examples. So while the reader understands what Plummer is trying to say the idea is not enforced. With the exception of a few of his suggested treatments, Plummer uses concrete examples; when he suggests that students step out of the given limits he cites a specific example of an experience he had during his lifetime. Overall Plummer's use of examples does help his essay. The treatments that do not have clear examples are still explained therefore they are still very effective, making the essay as a whole effective.

When an essay questions a behavior in a way that almost demands that the reader change the given behavior, it is necessary to give the reader clear directions on how to change. In the case of Plummer's essay, he questions people's ability to think for themselves and gives them six clear-cut ways to learn how begin to think for themselves. Some of the treatments, like seeking out great teachers and practicing idle thinking, are easy, while others, like trying to view situations from other angles and learning to live with uncertainty, may force individuals to go against things that have been enforced for their whole lives. Plummer does give clear instructions on how to change this behavior however some of his treatments may be too time consuming or daring for students to attempt. Some college students will be unwilling to think outside what they are instructed to do, for fear of a bad grade. Plummer says "One of the costs of thinking is time. It means enrolling in courses not relevant to your major or minor because you

want to take some great teacher outside your field. Or it may mean investing more time in discussions with classmates than you want to spare. Thinking takes time.” Despite the lack of accessibility in some of Plummer’s treatments they still greatly increase the effectiveness of his essay simply because it gives a student the sense that fixing this problem isn’t impossible.

Plummer very effectively gets his purpose and meaning across in this essay. He uses easily accessible language and clearly states what he thinks the problem is and how to fix it. This is the main reason his essay is effective; it leaves nothing to guesswork. Although some of his treatments are difficult to execute, and others could use clearer examples, Plummer still manages to give students clear and easy-to-understand ways to change this bad behavior. Overall Plummer’s essay is both effective and entertaining for its intended audience.