

## A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

### Specific Information about the Subject

My readers tell me the people do not come alive.

- Describe a physical feature, a mannerism, or an emotional reaction that will help readers imagine or identify with the person.
- Include speaker tags that characterize how people talk.
- Paraphrase long, dry quotations that convey basic information.
- Use short quotations that reveal character or the way someone speaks.
- Make comparisons.
- Use anecdotes or action sequences to show the person in action.

My readers say the place is hard to visualize.

- Name objects in the scene.
- Add sensory detail — sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, temperature.
- Make comparisons.
- Consider adding a visual — a photograph or sketch, for example.

### Specific Information about the Subject

My readers say there is too much information and it is not clear what is important.

- Prioritize based on the perspective and dominant impression you want to convey, cutting information that does not reinforce the perspective.
- Break up long blocks of informational text with quotations, narration of events, or examples.
- Vary the writing strategies used to present the information: Switch from raw factual reporting to comparisons, examples, or process descriptions.
- Consider which parts of the profile would be more engaging if presented through dialogue or summarized more succinctly.

My readers say visuals could be added or improved.

- Use a photo, a map, a drawing, a cartoon, or any other visual that might make the place or people easier to imagine or the information more understandable.
- Consider adding textual references to any images in your essay or positioning images more effectively.

## A Clear, Logical Organization

My readers say the narrative plan drags or rambles.

- Try adding drama through dialogue or action sequences.
- Summarize or paraphrase any dialogue that seems dry or uninteresting.
- Give the narrative shape: Establish a conflict, build tension toward a climax, and resolve it.
- Make sure the narrative develops and has a clear direction.

My readers say my topically arranged essay seems disorganized or out of balance.

- Rearrange topics into new patterns, choosing the structure that makes the most sense for your subject. (Describe a place from outside to inside or from biggest to smallest; describe a process from start to finish or from cause to effect.)
- Add clearer, more explicit transitions or topic sentences.
- Move, remove, or condense information to restore balance.

My readers say the opening fails to engage their attention.

- Consider alternatives: Think of a question, an engaging image, or dialogue you could open with.
- Go back to your notes for other ideas.
- Recall how the writers in this chapter open their profiles: Cable stands on the street in front of the mortuary; Thompson awakens in the lettuce fields, his break over.

## A Clear, Logical Organization

My readers say that transitions are missing or are confusing.

- Look for connections between ideas, and try to use those connections to help readers move from point to point.
- Add appropriate transitional words or phrases.

My readers say the ending seems weak.

- Consider ending earlier or moving a striking insight to the end. (Often first drafts hit a great ending point and then keep going. Deleting the last few sentences often improves papers.)
- Consider ending by reminding readers of something from the beginning.
- Recall how the writers in this chapter end their profiles: Cable touches the cold flesh of a cadaver; Coyne watches a mother bleed after being punched by her son.

My readers say the visual features are not effective.

- Consider adding textual references to any images in your essay or positioning images more effectively.
- Think of other design features — drawings, lists, tables, graphs, cartoons, headings — that might make the place and people easier to imagine or the information more understandable.

## The Writer's Role

My readers say the spectator role is too distant.

- Consider placing yourself in the scene as you describe it.
- Add your thoughts and reactions to one of the interviews.

My readers say my approach to participation is distracting.

- Bring other people forward by adding material about them.
- Reduce the material about yourself.

## A Perspective on the Subject

My readers say the perspective or dominant impression is unclear.

- Try stating your perspective by adding your thoughts or someone else's.
- Make sure the descriptive and narrative details reinforce the dominant impression you want to convey.
- If your perspective is complex, you may need to discuss more directly the contradictions or complications you see in the subject.

## A Perspective on the Subject

My readers don't find my perspective interesting.

- An "uninteresting" perspective is sometimes an unclear one. Check with your readers to see whether they understood it. If they didn't, follow the tips above.
- Readers sometimes say a perspective is "uninteresting" if it's too simple or obvious. Go back through your notes, looking for contradictions, other perspectives, surprises, or anything else that might help you complicate the perspective you are presenting.