

Delivered-To: bmorse@harborside.com
From: Annemeek@aol.com
Date: Sun, 13 Apr 2003 10:00:57 EDT
Subject: Re: Sticking neck out! :-)!
To: bmorse@harborside.com

Bette,

I downloaded your story about Jessica, and it has much to recommend it. It is vivid, heartfelt, and offers readers an authentic success story as well as descriptions of techniques they can use in their classrooms and their work. Should make you feel like a success as a teacher!

You can send it in to Ed Leadership as is, and if Marge decides to use it, she can direct the editors to shape it to fit the space. My word count function said it's more than 2,900 words, and Marge will not likely allow a teacher memory that much space. More likely, she will suggest 1,500 words. That means cutting the story by half.

However, don't do that yet.

If you do decide to sharpen the focus and the story yourself, I would say to go over the pages and ask yourself questions about what parts of what anecdotes are essential. Your opening is dramatic.... then you explain the technique of the mailbox.... then you explain class meetings... the use of compliments.... the use of project teams, etc. You are working the pivotal and personal story of Jessica into all these classroom strategies.

I would suggest that you evaluate rigorously and vigorously how each paragraph relates to your main points. For example, the inclusion of your son's influence is NOT essential, and your reflections are NOT essential ("another reason I enjoyed....") because the story is about Jessica. You don't need to give your career info, such as when the school chose computers over your position.... that's not important. What is important is the development of Jessica through your savvy classroom strategies and good heart. See the strategies down at the end of this message.

Now, the story about when Jessica unloads her load doesn't have enough dramatic prominence. You need to give this resolution of the opening drama equal weight in terms of its effects.

There are a couple of strategies you can use with yourself, if you want to polish and refine your basically good structure before you submit the manuscript to Ed Leadership. One is to read your story aloud, either to yourself or to another person. Somehow our ears tell us much about the logical flow of language.... what we can do without and what needs polishing. So "use your ears." Be your own audience.

Another strategy is to ask yourself to summarize the story in two sentences.... or one long sentence. Is your story about Bette's career transitions or about recommending strategies to other teachers who will have their own Jessica's in their classrooms? Is your story about seeing those strategies in action? This strategy will give you focus.... and help you to see what is NOT needed.

Another strategy is to expand your subheads. First, let me say HURRAH for you for recognizing the sections of a manuscript. Using subheads indicates you have passed the novice stage of writing.... So far, you have used plain ol' nouns for subheads. Try putting verbals with the nouns, such as "Compliments Create Caring" or "How Project Teams Extend Group Work" or "Using Class Meetings Effectively." See what I mean? Sometimes, when an author puts verbals or verbs with plain ol' nouns, the "action words" indicate more closely exactly what you had in mind. The subheads are like signposts on a road toward a destination. How do your subheads help the reader get to the destination? How do they clarify your important points?

Once you've expanded your subheads, you can do a better job of assessing the overall flow of the story... Does it start well, describe the action vividly, end conclusively, etc.? Are the sections logically related? Are there transitions between the sections to guide the reader along from signpost to signpost?

Hope this helps.... Good luck!

Your friendly reader,
Anne