American Presidents as Writing Heroes

Julie A. Oseid
University of St. Thomas School of Law
Minneapolis, MN
jaoseid@stthomas.edu
Heroes
... more heroes
Writing Heroes
Another Set of Writing Heroes

Jefferson – Metaphor

Madison – Rigor

Lincoln – Brevity

Grant – Precision

Roosevelt – Passion
Biography – the story of a life

- Character
- Detail
- Goal
- Motive
- Obstacles/Struggles

Kendall Haven, *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story*
Stories about a small part of life
Each “story” about a President’s Writing

- Who
- What – quality
- When – influence on the President
- Where – examples
- How – habits
- Why
WHO

Jefferson – Metaphor

Madison – Rigor

Lincoln – Brevity

Grant – Precision

Roosevelt – Passion
WHAT

Essential qualities for effective legal writing
WHAT

Essential qualities for effective legal writing

Mark Wilson, Getty Images
Answering the other journalism questions for my five Presidents

- WHEN – influence
- WHERE – writing examples
- HOW – writing habits of the President
Thomas Jefferson – Metaphor
WHEN
Jefferson as Classical Scholar
WHERE –
“building a wall of separation between Church & State”
HOW – Jefferson’s Habits

- Drafted a response
- Asked for advice
- Considered audience
James Madison – Rigor
WHEN
Madison as Legislator
WHERE
Three Madison Writings

Memorial and Remonstrance
Against Religious Assessments

Federalist #10

Letter to Jefferson
HOW – Madison’s Habits

- Considered audience
- Thorough preparation
- Thought practically and institutionally
Abraham Lincoln – Brevity
WHEN – Lincoln as Lawyer
WHERE
The First Inaugural - March 4, 1861
The Gettysburg Address – November 19, 1863

“Startlingly brief for what it accomplished”

The Second Inaugural –
March 4, 1865
HOW – Lincoln’s Habits

- Started writing early
- Visualized audience
- Ruthlessly edited
I write to you, to say that, so far the Convention does seem preferable in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of having to take or reject propositions organized by others not specially chosen for the purpose, and which might be forced upon them to which they never would have assented.

I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution has passed the House of Representatives, to the effect that the federal government shall never sell, for the benefit of the state, or for the private advantage of any person, the property or services of what I have seen. I expect from my own experience to speak of particular measure of worth, as far as is paid for, paying such a premium to never be adopted. Constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express and inviolate.

The third is more fully dealt with in a letter sent me by an able and competent judge of the law, who is not a lawyer. He wrote me to say, "It is not the object of the law, but the law is the object of the law."
Ulysses Grant – Precision
WHEN Grant as General
“When I put my pen to the paper I did not know the first word that I should make use of in writing the terms. I only knew what was in my mind, and I wished to express it clearly, so that there could be no mistaking it.”

**Appomattox Court House, April 19, 1865**
(recollection in Grant’s Autobiography)
Feb. 16, 1862
General S. B. Buckner,
Confederate Army.

SIR: Yours of this date, proposing armistice and appointment of Commissioners to settle terms of capitulation, is just received. **No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted.** I propose to move immediately upon your works.

I am, sir, very respectfully,
Your ob’t se’v’t,
U.S. Grant,
Brig. Gen.
WHERE

“Lee’s army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will also go.”

Grant’s written order to Meade (April 9, 1864)
The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant
HOW – Grant’s Habits

- Considered Audience
- Scrupulously honest/objective/accurate
- Valued order/organization
- Determination
Theodore Roosevelt – Passion
WHEN Theodore Roosevelt as T.R.
HOW – T.R.’s Habits

- To be determined
Habits of Writing Heroes

- Consider audience
- Start writing early
- Prepare
- Consider practical implications
- Ruthlessly edit
Consider Audience
Start writing early
Prepare
Practical Implications
Ruthlessly Edit
WHY – PERSUASION

Metaphor
Rigor
Brevity
Precision
Passion
The LAST Slide

J. ALWD (Legal Communication & Rhetoric: JALWD) – absolutely fantastic publishing experience!

Your questions and comments.

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR ATTENDING!!

Julie