

reported an article in the *University of Wisconsin–Madison News*. High schools should not support this distorted mind-set by explicitly requiring public service; rather, they should allow authentic enthusiasm and encourage service projects of the students' own choosing.

Second source supporting the topic sentence. The writer integrates quotations into her own sentences.

Topic Sentence #3 raises a counterargument.

Proponents of mandatory service learning programs may argue that whether a student chooses it for himself or not, the spirit of service is important to learn and to teach. The Dalton School, a small private high school, phrases it hopefully in the mission statement, which speaks of “empowering” students and “situating our moral center.” It continues on to argue (rather ominously) that “we must engage in community service because . . . we need our communities to survive.” The strong goals stated in this argument are certainly attractive, but their loftiness seems far removed from

The opening clause is a concession to the counterargument.

The last two sentences refute the counterargument.

what a student might practically aim to achieve. In this regard, the Dalton School's teaching goals are admirable but impractical because they seem to forget the individual student. And as Prueter's case demonstrates, individual interest and personal investment are essential for service experiences to truly last.

On both sides of the debate, we should agree that the ultimate goal of “service learning” is precisely that—teaching an experience that will last. Even the Dalton School admits to the reality of school as a stop along the way to what happens when “an individual goes out in the world.” The issue thus concerns not just how to get students started volunteering, but how to maintain that desire to serve. At thirteen, John Prueter already knows that “his dream job . . . is working where he volunteers now.” His story, along with the data supporting “free choice” in service projects, proves that the surest way to have students volunteer in the future is to allow them experiences that are personally valuable. Those experiences will come not from any heavy-handed school requirement, but from support and, most important, the freedom of choice.

The conclusion opens with common ground.

The writer returns to two of her sources to emphasize the importance of choice in community service activities.

The concluding paragraph answers the “so what?” question. The writer goes beyond simple repetition of the thesis. Note that the writer returns to the terminology—“service learning”—from the opening paragraph.

Culminating Conversation

The Dumbest Generation?

Students today live and learn in a world with vastly more complex technology than that of previous generations. Many people see this new technology as a way to expand and distribute knowledge. They call it the information age. Others lament

the constant distractions that accompany this onslaught of information. But, of course, there is a long tradition of critics bemoaning the harmful effects of technological change on younger generations. In his best-selling book *The Dumbest Generation*, social critic and professor Mark Bauerlein claims that — as his book's title suggests — those under age thirty constitute the “dumbest” generation in modern history. In his explanation of why he wrote the book, Bauerlein says, “I’ve noticed in the last ten years that students are no less intelligent, no less ambitious, but there are two big differences: Reading habits have slipped, along with general knowledge. You can quote me on this: You guys don’t know anything.”

Carefully read the following eight sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least three of the sources, and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that evaluates the claim that those under age thirty are “the dumbest generation.”

Make sure that your own argument is central; use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source 1, Source 2, and so on, or by putting the author’s name in parentheses.

Sources

1. Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation*
2. Sharon Begley, *The Dumbest Generation? Don't Be Dumb*
3. Mizuko Ito et al., *Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project*
4. Nicholas Carr, *Is Google Making Us Stupid?*
5. R. Smith Simpson, *Are We Getting Our Share of the Best?*
6. Steven Johnson, *Your Brain on Video Games*
7. Clive Thompson, *The New Literacy*
8. Roz Chast, *Shelved* (cartoon)

1. *The Dumbest Generation*

MARK BAUERLEIN

The following is excerpted from a 2008 book about the effects of digital media on young people by Mark Bauerlein, an English professor and researcher at Emory University.

This is the paradox of the Dumbest Generation. For the young American, life has never been so yielding, goods so plentiful, schooling so accessible, diversion so easy, and liberties so copious. The material gains are clear, and each year the traits of worldliness and autonomy seem to trickle down into ever-younger age groups. But it’s a shallow advent. As the survey research shows, knowledge and skills haven’t

kept pace, and the intellectual habits that complement them are slipping. The advantages of twenty-first century teen life keep expanding, the eighties and nineties economy and the digital revolution providing miraculously quick and effortless contact with information, wares, amusements, and friends. The mind should profit alongside the youthful ego, the thirst for knowledge satisfied as much as the craving for fun and status. But the enlightenment hasn't happened. Young Americans have much more access and education than their parents did, but in the 2007 Pew survey on "What Americans Know: 1989–2007," 56 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds possessed low knowledge levels, while only 22 percent of 50- to 64-year-olds did. In other words, the advantages don't show up in intellectual outcomes. The mental equipment of the young falls short of their media, money, e-gadgets, and career plans. The 18-year-old may have a Visa card, cell phone, MySpace page, part-time job, PlayStation 2, and an admissions letter from State U., but ask this wired and on-the-go high school senior a few intellectual questions and the façade of in-the-know-ness crumbles.

2. *The Dumbest Generation? Don't Be Dumb*

SHARON BEGLEY

The following is excerpted from an article by science columnist Sharon Begley that appeared in *Newsweek* in May 2010.

A more fundamental problem is what Bauerlein has in mind by "dumbest." If it means "holding the least knowledge," then he has a case. Gen Y cares less about knowing information than knowing where to find information. . . . And it is a travesty that employers are spending \$1.3 billion a year to teach basic writing skills, as a 2003 survey of managers found. But if dumb means lacking such fundamental cognitive capacities as the ability to think critically and logically, to analyze an argument, to learn and remember, to see analogies, to distinguish fact from opinion . . . well, here Bauerlein is on shakier ground.

First, IQ scores in every country that measures them, including the United States, have been rising since the 1930s. Since the tests measure not knowledge but pure thinking capacity—what cognitive scientists call fluid intelligence, in that it can be applied to problems in any domain—then Gen Y's ignorance of facts (or of facts that older people think are important) reflects not dumbness but choice. And who's to say they are dumb because fewer of them than of their grandparents' generation care who wrote the oratorio "Messiah" (which 35 percent of college seniors knew in 2002, compared with 56 percent in 1955)? Similarly, we suspect that the decline in the percentage of college freshmen who say it's important to keep up with political affairs, from 60 percent in 1966 to 36 percent in 2005, reflects at least in part the fact that in 1966 politics determined whether you

were going to get drafted and shipped to Vietnam. The apathy of 2005 is more a reflection of the world outside Gen-Yers' heads than inside, and one that we bet has changed tack with the historic candidacy of Barack Obama. Alienation is not dumbness.

Bauerlein is not the first scholar to pin the blame for a younger generation's intellectual shortcomings on new technology (television, anyone?), in this case indicting "the digital age." But there is no empirical evidence that being immersed in instant messaging, texting, iPods, videogames and all things online impairs thinking ability. "The jury is still out on whether these technologies are positive or negative" for cognition, says Ken Kosik of the University of California, Santa Barbara, codirector of the Neuroscience Research Institute there. "But they're definitely changing how people's brains process information." In fact, basic principles of neuroscience offer reasons to be optimistic. "We are gradually changing from a nation of callused hands to a nation of agile brains," says cognitive scientist Marcel Just of Carnegie Mellon University. "Insofar as new information technology exercises our minds and provides more information, it has to be improving thinking ability."

3. *Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project*

MIZUKO ITO ET AL.

The following is excerpted from a 2008 study of the effects of digital media on young people.

In both friendship-driven and interest-driven online activity, youth create and navigate new forms of expression and rules for social behavior. In the process, young people acquire various forms of technical and media literacy by exploring new interests, tinkering, and "messing around" with new forms of media. They may start with a Google search or "lurk" in chat rooms to learn more about their burgeoning interest. Through trial and error, youth add new media skills to their repertoire, such as how to create a video or customize games or their MySpace page. Teens then share their creations and receive feedback from others online. By its immediacy and breadth of information, the digital world lowers barriers to self-directed learning.

Others "geek out" and dive into a topic or talent. Contrary to popular images, geeking out is highly social and engaged, although usually not driven primarily by local friendships. Youth turn instead to specialized knowledge groups of both teens and adults from around the country or world, with the goal of improving their craft and gaining reputation among expert peers. What makes these groups unique is that while adults participate, they are not automatically the resident experts

by virtue of their age. Geeking out in many respects erases the traditional markers of status and authority.

New media allow for a degree of freedom and autonomy for youth that is less apparent in a classroom setting. Youth respect one another's authority online, and they are often more motivated to learn from peers than from adults. Their efforts are also largely self-directed, and the outcome emerges through exploration, in contrast to classroom learning that is oriented toward set, predefined goals.

4. *Is Google Making Us Stupid?*

NICHOLAS CARR

The following is from an article in the summer 2008 issue of the *Atlantic*, a national magazine.

Over the past few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory. My mind isn't going—so far as I can tell—but it's changing. I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I'm reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I'm always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle.

I think I know what's going on. For more than a decade now, I've been spending a lot of time online, searching and surfing and sometimes adding to the great databases of the Internet. The Web has been a godsend to me as a writer. Research that once required days in the stacks or periodical rooms of libraries can now be done in minutes. A few Google searches, some quick clicks on hyperlinks, and I've got the telltale fact or pithy quote I was after. Even when I'm not working, I'm as likely as not to be foraging in the Web's info-thickets reading and writing e-mails, scanning headlines and blog posts, watching videos and listening to podcasts, or just tripping from link to link to link. (Unlike footnotes, to which they're sometimes likened, hyperlinks don't merely point to related works; they propel you toward them.)

For me, as for others, the Net is becoming a universal medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears and into my mind. The advantages of having immediate access to such an incredibly rich store of information are many, and they've been widely described and duly applauded. "The perfect recall of silicon memory," *Wired*'s Clive Thompson has written, "can be an enormous boon to thinking." But that boon comes at a price. As the media

theorist Marshall McLuhan pointed out in the 1960s, media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.

5. *Are We Getting Our Share of the Best?*

R. SMITH SIMPSON

The following is excerpted from a 1962 article in the U.S. government's *Foreign Service Journal*.

My initial surprise was to find among the candidates an abysmal ignorance of so elementary a subject as the geography of the United States. Few could even place accurately the principal rivers: one with so descriptive a name as the Ohio was not infrequently identified as being "somewhere west of the Mississippi." Few could name the principal seaports, and, of course, any requirement demanding such detailed familiarity with this country as identifying the states comprising the "wheat belt" or the "corn belt" was completely beyond the average candidate's depth.

As to elementary economics and social data, most could only guess at the population, labor force, and gross national product of their country. Many did not know what constituted "gross national product." They had no clear idea as to the principal products of their country, nor as to its exports and imports. They could name a few of each, but had no notion of their relative importance and had given no thought to the role of imports in the American economy.

As with elementary geographic and economic aspects of the United States, so with historical, sociological, and cultural. Americans abroad are asked a great many questions about their country. How did the United States acquire the Panama Canal? What is its status now? Who started our war with Spain (or Mexico) and what came out of it? When did our labor movement start and where does it stand now? How does a Jimmy Hoffa get control of a powerful union? What were some of the reform movements in American history? What became of them?

A good half of our candidates could answer such questions with only the thinnest recital of facts; many could not discuss them at all. Some could not recall ever having heard of the Populist movement; few knew its connection with Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom." Asked if he knew anything about the Progressive movement, one candidate replied, "Oh, yes, that was LaFollette's movement." To the question, "Where did LaFollette come from?" he could only reply vaguely, "Somewhere out West."

6. *Your Brain on Video Games*

STEVEN JOHNSON

The following is excerpted from an article in the July 2005 issue of *Discover*, a popular science magazine.

To understand why games might be good for the mind, begin by shedding the cliché that they are about improving hand-eye coordination and firing virtual weapons. The majority of video games on the best-seller list contain no more bloodshed than a game of Risk. The most popular games are not simply difficult in the sense of challenging manual dexterity; they challenge *mental* dexterity as well. The best-selling game of all time, *The Sims*, involves almost no hand-eye coordination or quick reflexes. One manages a household of characters, each endowed with distinct drives and personality traits, each cycling through an endless series of short-term needs (companionship, say, or food), each enmeshed in a network of relationships with other characters. Playing the game is a nonstop balancing act: sending one character off to work, cleaning the kitchen with another, searching through the classifieds for work with another. Even a violent game like *Grand Theft Auto* involves networks of characters that the player must navigate and master, picking up clues and detecting patterns. The text walk-through for *Grand Theft Auto III*—a document that describes all the variables involved in playing the game through to the finish—is 53,000 words long, the length of a short novel. But despite the complexity of these environments, most gamers eschew reading manuals or walk-throughs altogether, preferring to feel their way through the game space. . . .

Among all popular media today, video games are unique in their reliance on the regime of competence principle. Movies or television shows don't start out with simple dialogue or narrative structures and steadily build in complexity depending on the aptitude of individual viewers. Books don't pause midchapter to confirm that their readers' vocabularies have progressed enough to move on to more complicated words. By contrast, the training structure of video games dates back to the very origins of the medium; even Pong got more challenging as a player's skills improved. Moreover, only a fraction of today's games involve explicit violence, and sexual content is a rarity. But the regime of competence is everywhere.

7. *The New Literacy*

CLIVE THOMPSON

The following is excerpted from the August 2009 issue of *Wired*, a popular technology magazine.

As the school year begins, be ready to hear pundits fretting once again about how kids today can't write — and technology is to blame. Facebook encourages narcissistic blabbering, video and PowerPoint have replaced carefully crafted essays, and texting has dehydrated language into “bleak, bald, sad shorthand” (as University College of London English professor John Sutherland has moaned). An age of illiteracy is at hand, right?

Andrea Lunsford isn't so sure. Lunsford is a professor of writing and rhetoric at Stanford University, where she has organized a mammoth project called the Stanford Study of Writing to scrutinize college students' prose. From 2001 to 2006, she collected 14,672 student writing samples — everything from in-class assignments, formal essays, and journal entries to emails, blog posts, and chat sessions. Her conclusions are stirring.

“I think we're in the midst of a literacy revolution the likes of which we haven't seen since Greek civilization,” she says. For Lunsford, technology isn't killing our ability to write. It's reviving it — and pushing our literacy in bold new directions.

The first thing she found is that young people today write far more than any generation before them. That's because so much socializing takes place online, and it almost always involves text. Of all the writing that the Stanford students did, a stunning 38 percent of it took place out of the classroom — life writing, as Lunsford calls it. Those Twitter updates and lists of 25 things about yourself add up.

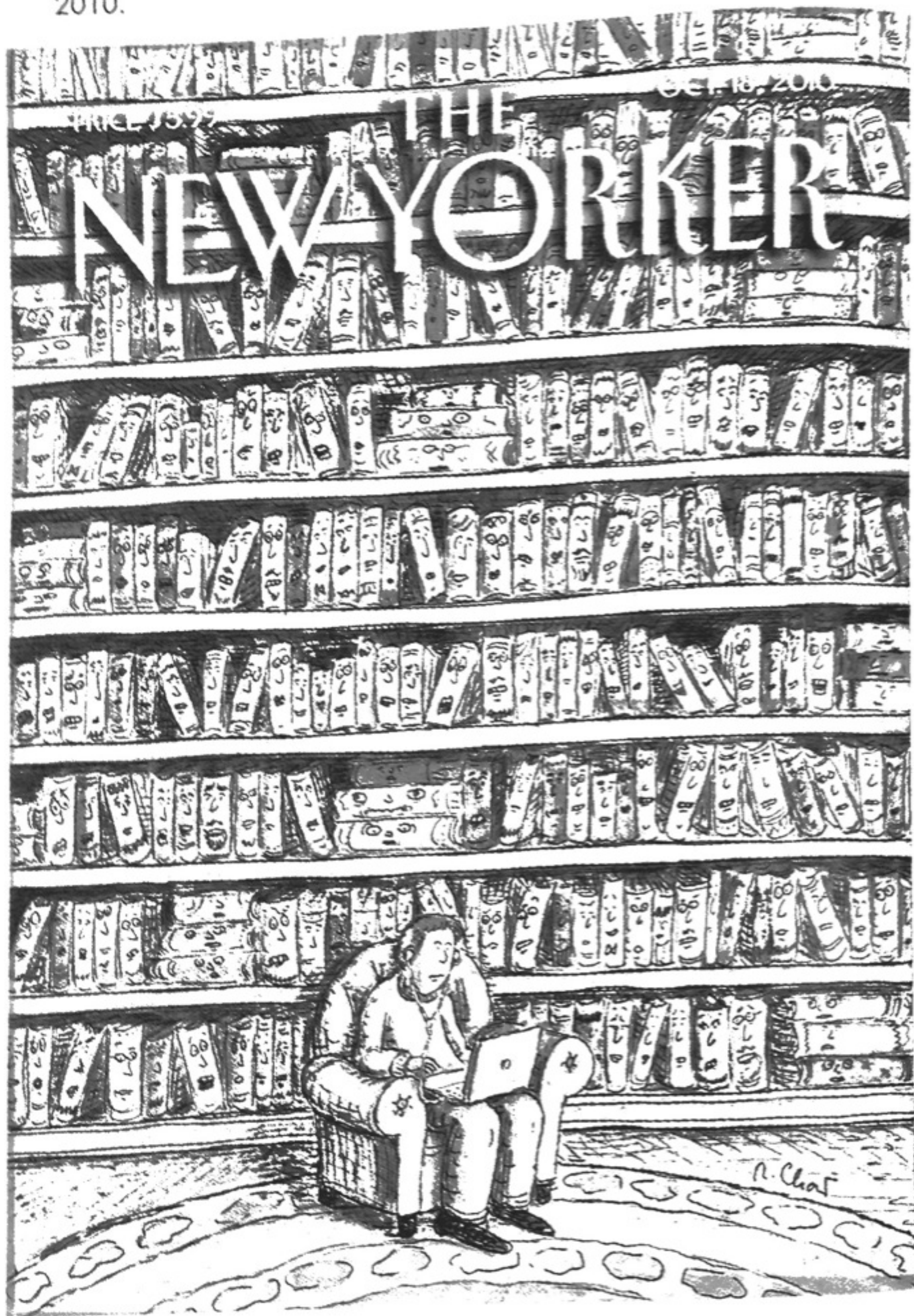
It's almost hard to remember how big a paradigm shift this is. Before the Internet came along, most Americans never wrote anything, ever, that wasn't a school assignment. Unless they got a job that required producing text (like in law, advertising, or media), they'd leave school and virtually never construct a paragraph again.

But is this explosion of prose good, on a technical level? Yes. Lunsford's team found that the students were remarkably adept at what rhetoricians call *kairos* — assessing their audience and adapting their tone and technique to best get their point across. The modern world of online writing, particularly in chat and on discussion threads, is conversational and public, which makes it closer to the Greek tradition of argument than the asynchronous letter and essay writing of 50 years ago.

8. Shelved

ROZ CHAST

The following cartoon appeared on the cover of the *New Yorker* in October 2010.



(See insert for color version.)