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ENG 2140-02 Research & Argument

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**Summary**

In the article “Is Writing an Essential Skill for Engineers?” the author James R. Koelsch stresses the importance of writing skills for today’s engineer. Through the use of multiple bits of anecdotal evidence Koelsch argues that the possession of strong writing skills is not just necessary for most daily routines, but also a key to the advancement of an engineer’s career. In addition to his use of anecdotes, Koelsch also uses several other techniques to deliver his message. However, lacking from his article are any useful facts or statistics.

**Analysis**

The different techniques the writer used in forming his argument were the following: anecdotes, examples, and facts. His use of the first two techniques really helped drive the article, but the lack of quality facts may have weakened his argument.

Koelsch’s article was littered with anecdotes to support his thesis. This was clearly his most trusted technique to drive the narrative as he used it several times throughout the article. While it could be argued that he used too much of this technique in his writing, its overall effect on the paper was positive. Most instances clearly re-enforced the idea that writing skills were important to engineers. For example, the author’s first story discusses a young engineering student’s disdain for learning writing skills and how he feels it is a waste of time to learn something he will never use in the field. This particular story then goes on to explain how a Ph.D. chemical engineer who is also the president of his own consulting firm agrees with the student, as long as all the student ever wants to do is calculations. He then explains that making the decision to not learn proper writing skills could be very limiting to your chances to advance beyond just number crunching. The author also goes on to use more anecdotal evidence by quoting other engineering and human resources professionals that indicate communication skills are important not only to advancement in your career, but to just getting hired in the first place. These are very effective examples of how to use anecdotes and really drive the entire article.

The next technique the author used was examples. Throughout the text he listed several examples where strong writing skills had enabled professionals to advance their careers or opened new opportunities for them that would not have been available otherwise. One such example was when Koelsch referenced a chemical engineer who had been assigned the task of leading a global team project. This engineer stated how important it was to be able to communicate via the written word since face to face communications were not possible. She believed she would not have been chosen to lead the project if she had not possessed strong communication skills. Koelsch missed the opportunity in showing examples where the lack of writing skills hindered an engineer from an accomplishment. One example of a scenario like that could have had a profound effect on his article. Overall, his use of examples was effective in delivering his message.

The least called upon technique Koelsch used was that of facts. There were very little instances of him relaying hard factual evidence that supported his thesis. Even when he did offer facts for the reader to take in, they were hardly point-driving statements that left a mark on the reader. One such fact in the article was the statement that Cleveland State replaced an English 2 course with one in technical writing that all students are required to take. This statement would lead one to believe that Cleveland State believes technical writing is important for all students, not just engineers. This missed the point of his article. Koelsch’s use of facts was not an effective technique for this article.

Koelsch also missed on tailoring his article to his target audience. An article written on the importance of writing skills to engineers should be tailored to engineers. Engineers often utilize mathematical evidence such as statistics to make a determination on an issue. This article offered no statistical evidence. Engineers would also respond well to scientific analogies relating this issue to something they are already familiar with. While there was a nice comparison equating learning to write effectively to learning how to ice skate, Koelsch could have done more to reach his audience. Some of the article did not seem to flow well with the overall theme either. For example he leads the article with saying soft skills are needed to be effective in today’s multidisciplinary teams, however many of his examples refer to individuals writing for magazines or books. It is not understood in the field of engineering that getting published is the standard for being considered effective. The lack of a conclusion in the article, along with the seemingly random book plug in the middle, really detracted from the overall effectiveness of the article.

**Conclusion**

The argument presented by Koelsch in this article is one that could be debated with supporting facts on both sides. He did not use the types of evidence that would normally be utilized to convince an engineer and therefore might not have reached as much of his target audience as he could have. He did however present enough anecdotal evidence to support his thesis and convince his readers that writing skills are important for engineers to be successful.