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In his article “Is Writing an Essential Skill for Engineers?” James Koelsch argues that strong writing skills are necessary for engineers, contrary to what many young engineers believe about the obsolescence of these skills. Koelsch does this primarily by using anecdotal evidence of various engineers and how their experience with writing skills allowed them to succeed in their careers. Additionally, he employs examples related to the use of writing in engineering to further support his argument and make the counterpoint that learning how to write improves an engineer’s general communication skills. However, while his argument is well organized, it would benefit from a greater use of statistical data or case studies to allow for more broad support to his thesis.

Throughout his article, Koelsch primarily uses anecdotes to support his main argument, with some examples throughout to help supplement his thesis. Both argument techniques greatly assist in communicating his main points. These points focus on how writing skills are both the key to career success and necessary for proper leadership skills.

Firstly, Koelsch references various individual stories about successful engineers and how their writing skills allowed them to succeed and improve their leadership skills. One story that he references is that of Alan Rossiter, the president of Rossiter and Associates. Koelsch writes about how Rossiter opened a consulting firm where he frequently needed to use his writing skills to communicate between the various workers on his projects and contributed various books and articles to the engineering world. Koelsch even quotes Rossiter saying that “If you can’t communicate with the people that you’re trying to direct or lead, then they won’t know what to do.” He also references Michelle Bryner, a chemical engineer at W. L. Gore and Associates Inc. Koelsch talks about how Bryner required writing skills to be a good leader. Bryner needed to know how to communicate with her colleagues via email for the sake of “describing experiments, disseminating results, and justifying continued funding of her team’s project to management.”

In addition to his use of anecdotes, Koelsch employs examples in his article, though rather sparingly. He does this by referring to Rockwell Automation. Rockwell Automation takes great care in verifying that their potential employees are not only technically competent, but verbally and textually competent as well. They believe that it is essential for engineers to be able to discuss their ideas effectively with others both inside and outside of the company, especially when writing “proposals, contracts, manuals, and business writings.” The reason Koelsch uses Rockwell Automation as an example is to show that writing skills are not just useful in rare individual cases but are deemed essential by entire businesses or companies that employ engineers regularly.

However, two techniques that are starkly lacking in Koelsch’s article are statistics and case studies. Koelsch’s article is completely devoid of any use of these two techniques. This is a significant issue for his argument because, without hard evidence or statistical data to support his argument, he seems to be putting forth his ideas solely on the grounds of academic hearsay. This is made even worse by the fact that this article’s target audience is intended to be engineers, specifically engineers who do not see the value in proper writing skills. Engineers are known for being very logical and mathematical in their approach to the world around them. Koelsch even acknowledges this in his introduction where he mentions how engineers are “about data and delivering results.” An engineer who cares about data and statistical realities will not be easily persuaded by a paper that lacks any kind of scientific or mathematical backing and instead relies solely on select anecdotes and examples from individuals and companies.

In closing, in the article “Is Writing an Essential Skill for Engineers?” Koelsch argues being able to write effectively is critical for engineers to both succeed in their careers and be effective leaders. He attempts to accomplish this through the use of anecdotes of individual successful engineers and examples of entire companies who require writing skills for their employees. While these techniques help to communicate Koelsch’s argument and make it persuasive to a certain degree, his thesis is ultimately held back by its lack of statistical data and case studies, which would have given significantly more weight to his argument and allowed him to persuade more people of its merits.