

Summary writing (argumentative writing)

"Did you hear what happened to Adam last Friday?" Lindsey whispers to Tori. With her eyes shining, Tori brags, "You bet I did, Sean told me two days ago." Who are Lindsey and Tori talking about? It just happened to be yours truly. I can tell you that what they are saying is (a) not nice and (b) not even true. Still, Lindsey and Tori aren't very different from most students here at Linton High School, including me. Many of our conversations are gossip.

An important negative effect of gossip is that it can hurt the person being talked about. Usually, gossip spreads information about a topic—breakups, trouble at home, even dropping out—that a person would rather keep secret. The more embarrassing or shameful the secret is, the juicier the gossip it makes. Probably the worst type of gossip is the absolute lie. People often think of gossipers as harmless, but cruel lies can cause pain.

If we know that gossip can be harmful, then why do so many of us do it? The answer lies in another effect of gossip: the satisfaction it gives us. Sharing the latest rumor can make a person feel important because he or she knows something that others don't. Similarly, hearing the latest rumor can make a person feel like part of the "in group." In other words, gossip is satisfying because it gives people a sense of belonging or even superiority.

Gossip also can have a third effect: it strengthens unwritten, unspoken rules about how people should act. Professor David Wilson explains that gossip is important in policing behaviors in a group. Translated into high school terms, this means that if everybody you hang around with is laughing at what John wore or what Jane said, then you can bet that wearing or saying something similar will get you the same kind of negative attention. The do's and don'ts conveyed through gossip will never show up in any student handbook.

The effects of gossip vary depending on the situation. Next time you feel the urge to spread the latest news, think about why you want to gossip and what effects your "juicy story" might have.

Our forums are full of conversations. There are three major effects.

We are likely to spread negative information about a person as well as unwritten rules, or unspoken rules, of our group. But we prefer to give negative feedback. However, gossip can hurt or even strengthen a sense of belonging. We give negative feedback to avoid it. Gossip can also enhance an invisible code of conduct.

Think twice

Q Gossip will also enhance an invisible code.