

## ACT ONE

An office at an elite northeastern college. There's a stately, antique mahogany desk. There's a high wall of bookcases, filled with an overwhelming number of books.

There are a few framed images from revolutionary movements: a Lech Walesa / Solidarity poster; a painting of the tennis court oath; a photo of Emiliano Zapata; a photo of Nelson Mandela in a Springbok uniform; and a portrait of George Washington.

Janine, early 60s, white, is behind the desk in an ergonomic chair. Zoe, 19, black, sits in a folding chair across from her.

They are looking over a paper. Zoe sips from a venti Starbucks cup.

JANINE

You're missing a comma here.

She holds the paper out to Zoe. Zoe looks.

ZOE

Oof. Yeah. I definitely am.

JANINE

ZOE

Always proofread in hard copy.  
Proofreading on a computer *does not work*. / Excellent word choices by the way. I don't think I've ever had a student use "bedeviled" in a paper before. I love that word. All the "be" words, bemuse, beguile.

(agreeing)

Mmm.

ZOE

Bedazzle. Beseech.

JANINE

Beget.

ZOE

Classic. Betoken.

JANINE

Bemoan. Oh, I could do this all day. Focus Janine. Next comment. Ah, here, you have -

"Washington succeeded owing to his presenting himself as a leader, elite status as a plantation owner, and his ability to establish commonality."

ZOE

Yes...

JANINE

ZOE

Have you heard of the idea of parallelism? / It's - the idea that every clause in a list should have the same grammatical structure.

Oo - shoot, yeah.

No - right -

ZOE

I definitely know about it, don't worry / I just -

JANINE

ZOE

Because here you have “presenting himself as a leader” - gerund - “elite status” - noun - “his ability” - noun with possessive pronoun. Can you hear it? / Whereas if you imagine - “His ability to present himself as a leader, to project elite status, and / to establish commonality”

Yeah, yeah -

“and to establish commonality.”

JANINE

Yes - yes! There are a plethora of options, three gerunds, three nouns, but any one of them telegraphs to your reader - “you are in safe hands. This writer will not do anything truly horrible to you, like assaulting you with grammatically incompatible clauses.”

ZOE

No, totally. My English teacher had us do like 800 worksheets on it senior year I just - I wanted to get the draft in early so I could get your comments before the deadline, and to be honest I had kind of a tough weekend and I didn't get to proofread as much as I normally would.

JANINE

Oh. Well.

ZOE

Okay. So I correct all of that, and then the writing's good?

JANINE

Well... It's a bit more complicated. I've written suggestions, but - Do you have a little more time?

ZOE

Yeah, I mean, I want to make it as strong as possible. But I know office hours are almost over, if you -

JANINE

Oh, it's no problem. I just turned in a draft of my new book so there's *no* chance I'll be productive. I have absolutely nothing to do until dinner with my better half at 8:30.

ZOE

Haha, well, hopefully it won't take that long!  
Um, so what else is there to fix?

JANINE

Well... it could all use a bit more flair.

ZOE

...flair?

JANINE

When you can give your reader a detail from the past that's human, that's real, the reader can suddenly imagine how history actually worked. For instance!

(Janine gets up and goes to the  
bookcases to hunt for a book.  
Zoe checks her phone)

Have you ever been to India?

ZOE

No. Never.

JANINE

It's really - it's quite spectacular. The spirituality is - jubilant. And who knew lentils could be delicious? You really must go sometime.

ZOE

Well I do like lentils.

JANINE

You know this place has oodles of money for travel, if it's related to research. I had a student once who developed his entire senior thesis around getting funding to visit places where he wanted to bungee jump.