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(U) The SIGINT Philosopher: When Brevity Is Just the Soul of "Huh?"

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(U) We've all written academic papers at some point, where your style is dictated by a need to sound smart. And many of us went through a needed -- albeit painful -- reprogramming when we came here to what, for lack of a better term, we'll call the "real world." We had to learn to take out our parenthetical thoughts, our rhetorically brilliant dependent clauses, our florid and flashy flourishes. People are busy, we were told. Just state the BLUF.*

(U) Eventually, I was able to adapt to the new Spartan paradigm of writing. I remembered Norman Maclean's memoir "A River Runs Through It" where he described his father teaching him to get to the point in writing. Maclean would be assigned an essay, which he would take to his father. His father would then tell him to make it half as long. Maclean would shorten it, show it to his father again, then be told once more to make it half as long. Once he achieved an essay that was now one-fourth its original length, his father would tell him to throw it in the trash, and Maclean would

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would tell him to throw it in the trash, and Maclean was at last let loose to go fishing.

(U) However, I have noted that at times *some carry this verbal frugality too far*. One supervisor I had -- one who chided me often for being too verbose when I wrote e-mails -- used to write e-mails to our team that always ended with us looking puzzled at one another. It wasn't that he *couldn't* make sense. It was that he *left too much information out*. Inevitably, one of us would have to send back a response asking for clarification. The response to that request would then typically lead to more questions. Eventually, this supervisor would give up, come speak to the team personally, and then we would work through everything. By then, the whole cycle had taken much longer than one slightly more complete e-mail would have taken to begin with.

(U) I am perhaps treading into waters ruled by Zelda or Grammar Geek, but as our writing impacts our ability to understand our discourse with one another, I'll claim just a small piece of this zone as the realm of philosophy. And I entreat you all, as sub-warden of this zone: ***Be brief, but also be complete***. People are too busy NOT to give them all the information they need to understand what you are saying the FIRST time you send it.

(U) And now, I will conclude with a paragraph that my editor will no doubt delete. It is a self-indulgent digression, replete with Baroque sentence constructions. Part of it has to do with King Sejong's creation of the Korean alphabet, and there is a breathtaking description of Henri Saint Cyr's 1952 equestrian gold medal performance. It's a pity you're too busy to read it, really.

[paragraph deleted]

* (U) BLUF does not mean, as I thought, to pretend you know something, which is too bad, because I'm really good at that. It's one of those annoying acronyms that pop up. It means "bottom line up front."

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