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Rhetorical Analysis #4: Sorin Oak

Once a semester, St. Edward's University puts out a creative and literary journal called *Sorin Oak Review*. To submit any kind of work to this journal, one must be a student, faculty or staff member at St. Edward's. All sorts of work is submitted and published, from photographs to short works of fiction and everything in between. It allows members of the St. Edward's community to share whatever it is that they love with everyone else and have a hard copy in print at the end of it. Because of this, it is vastly important that any kind of rejection letter, for anyone who didn't make the cut, lets the contributor know that their work is still good while informing them that they didn't make it this time. It is also important that the "Submit" page on the *Sorin Oak* website makes sense and has easy to follow instructions for those interested in submitting any kind of creative work.

Rhetorical Context

The audience for both rejection letter and the website "Submit" page are similar but still different. Not all who submit will be rejected and also not all who look at the "Submit" page will even submit any work, so the audience does vary. For the "Submit" page, the audience is a lot broader and covers all students, faculty, and staff at St. Edward's University interested in possibly submitting work to the *Sorin Oak*. However, because not all people who look at the "Submit" page will actually submit any work, the audience for the rejection letter is a lot narrower. The rejection letter will be sent out to the smaller group of people who actually took the plunge and submitted knowing how hard it is to let their work rest in the hands of possible strangers for review and knowing full well that they might not be accepted. The staff who run the *Review* need to be aware that a lot of possible contributors are students submitting to something for the first time and are already probably nervous about the idea, all the more reason to give a gentle, but truthful rejection email. Also, because the rejection email is a mass email which the staff have no time to customize, its content will need to be genuine while still telling the hard truth.

Anyone who already wants to submit to *Sorin Oak*, or even people who have hardly heard of it before, should know and understand what all goes into creating the publication and should realize from the start that it is not as easy as one might think. There are dozens of submissions but there is only a limited amount of space for each type of work. One wouldn't want to create a publication that is all poetry and ignore all the visual or fiction works which were submitted; it wouldn't be fair or right to the other people and it wouldn't be as interesting for readers, either. Most of the contributors are students who have most likely had no experience with publications like the *Sorin Oak* and are nervous but excited about the possibility of being published alongside their peers. Faculty and staff, I believe, are less likely to submit due to the fact that either they are already published and don't want to take away from the students or they don't have the time to write something to publish with their busy schedules. Bearing in mind that the majority of submitters are students, any kind of rejection letter sent out needs to be encouraging as well as truthful. One needs

to understand that there is limited space and there is often not enough room for everything that is submitted. It is hard to deal with a situation where someone else's work is accepted while yours is not, and a rejection letter should explain that perhaps the rejected work wasn't exactly what the *Sorin Oak* was looking for for this edition. But it is always important to inform the rejected that their work was not bad, just not what was needed this time. As a student writer myself, I know that these possible contributors are people who pour their hearts and souls into these works and they need to be let down gently, cushioned on all sides by encouragement and love. There are two reasons for responding in this way: the *Sorin Oak* staff want returning contributors, why send a letter which could horribly hurt someone's feelings and make them never want to submit again? Also, since the staff are students themselves, they understand how hard it is to submit one's own work for people to read and possibly publish, it can be a nerve-racking and emotional process, thus, the reason for encouragement. No one wants their hopes as a published author/photographer, etc. dashed during the already stressful years of college, better to let them down easy and encourage them to continue to make the effort and contribute next time. The rejected party should be encouraged and told to continue with whatever creative aspect they work with, that there is a chance they could be published next time. Never should it be said that the work was not good enough or that the student, faculty or staff member had no talent, or anything along those lines.

Additionally, the "Submit" page on the *Sorin Oak* website should be welcoming and easy to understand. There should be no confusion as to how to submit, when the deadline is, and how many of each type of work (fiction, poetry, visual, etc.) can be submitted per person. There should also be no confusion as to who is judging the work and when or how one might be notified of acceptance or rejection – judging is done anonymously and all accepted or rejected people are notified by email only. People in the St. Edward's community who have an interest in submitting to the *Sorin Oak* come from all walks of life, vary widely in age and mentality, and often submit vastly different types of work. To encourage more people to submit work, it is important that the *Sorin Oak* website has easy to follow directions for submission and that it feels welcoming to the entire St. Edward's community and not only the students. It is also important that the website does not focus solely on one or two types of work, but shows that all types are welcome and looked at equally, again to help get more people interested. The website links should be easy to follow and the website itself should be easy to find, especially for any newcomers who have never used the site before and are already possibly nervous about submitting work in general. Anyone who has an interest in contributing to the *Review* will not look at the site just once, but will continuously check back several times to make sure that they know what they are supposed to do in order to submit, if their piece fits the guidelines, what the deadline is, etc. Because possible contributors will look at this webpage often, it is vitally important to ensure that all site visitors are not overwhelmed but instead feel welcome and accepted into the *Sorin Oak* community as a contributor, even if they end up not making the cut for that particular edition.

Conclusion

The staff who run *Sorin Oak* need to be fully aware that all entries come from students, faculty, or staff who have worked long and hard over their entries. Thus, it is extremely important that any kind of rejection letter is sympathetic and encouraging while still informing someone that

they didn't make the cut. Likewise, the "Submit" page on the *Sorin Oak* website should feel welcoming to all entries, whether student or faculty, young or old, and whether a person has been writing for a decade or if they just started. In order for one to want to submit a work to the *Sorin Oak*, the instructions on the "Submit" page must not be confusing. Additionally, due to the two month wait to hear back from the *Review*, and the nervousness and possibly sleepless nights in between, it is important that students and faculty do not feel completely crushed when their work has been turned down. Therefore, any kind of rejection letter should be encouraging even as it gives them the hard truth.