Guest Column/Eric Berman

Test not sufficient to evaluate writing

Two weeks ago I was asked to sit in on MIT's Writing Center with about 800 other freshmen for the purpose of testing our writing skills. This test of expository writing was a good method of diagnosing some potential writing problems and picking out proficient writers. Although those who received a passing grade on their essays passed Phase One of the Writing Requirement, a short test is not an effective way of addressing the goals of the Committee on the Writing Requirement.

The most brilliant ideas can wither and die if not communicated properly. It is especially essential that the writing skills of all student be continuously refined, tested, and improved. Some people find it much easier to write stories than essays; they can write well. People who have one of those great days on the day the writing test might have passed Phase One; they have a few severe writing problems untested.

Some people are very practiced in expository writing but are depositors in teacher's arms, for example. They may be able to explain a specific procedure, but are unable to argue a point convincingly. These students could have passed the exam with fitting colors but would have missed a chance to recognize their weaknesses.

Some cannot work constructively from an outline or a group of notes but must have a rough drilling of some sort to work with and improve. These people (like myself) can write satisfactorily if they are given enough time, but need improvements in their improvisational writing skills.

I feel that I am lucky, because I did pass the test. Although I knew from you experiences that I can write well, I have more than my share of bad days when I cannot

negate my thinking. This test proved me from becoming too complacent about my writing and gave me incentive to refine my skills.

I feel that it would be in the best interests of the Committee on the Writing Requirement to expand the requirement to examine regular compositions only in this way can we be sure that the writing health of MIT is up to par. People complain about Johnny's illiteracy quite a bit, and it is imperative that MIT produce students immune to such criticism.

The tech couple caught my attention as I sat in bed. "You're in a funk, one," said my roommate. He didn't form, mentioning something about a long-distance call from his girlfriend.

"Look at that," I said again, a little louder. "That's the biggest one we've seen yet." "Huh?" I caught his attention.

"Whadaya say?" "Well, don't tell anyone, but there's a monstrous roach crawling up the wall behind your bookshelf. Don't worry, I'll take care of it." He groaned and continued talking to his money; I tidied of the bed and surveyed the situation.

"A chase is out of the question; the damn things just can't find it, especially with gravity on it's side. I think a spray can is the only way." I turned, waiting for approval.


My roommate I don't want to incriminate him by using his name and I moved into East Campus a couple weeks ago; we've since given up the roach hunt. After two sprays of Raid and a thorough spreading of boric acid around all the cracks and bookshelves, they still survive. The Institute makes Rock Matsers -- unless cardboard boxes with fancy labels -- at the house desks. Enough said.

Let's be fair, though. East Campus isn't the only dorm with this problem. During my temporary stay at New House over Fall '85, little C.R. I shared a bathroom. And the stories that come out of those...

I suppose it's a universal problem, especially to large dorms like this, but knowing the fact that your neighbor has roaches doesn't make it any easier to cope with your own. The things wouldn't bother me at all if they stayed in the walls and ran outside. It's when they bathe in the sink and tag-dance across my pillow that I get irritated.

Some people have suggested looking at things from the roach's point of view: that of a little animal, harmless and without any redeeming qualities, constantly hunted down by vicious humans with calculus books on their shoulders and peppers in their hands. "How,' they ask, "would you feel?"

I wouldn't take up residence in someone else's house without titles and I certainly don't. "But you'd be taking up such a miniscule amount of room," they protest.

I don't mean it. I just can't stand the sort of roach. Besides, why would I want to crawl around in your things, scaring them before I move on?

A short silence. "Okay, you're in the right. I'll make you a small compensation for the little things; they can't hurt you.

I noticed it out of the corner of my eye and strained hardly to hold back a smile. "That's a sorry face," demands my adversary. "Oh nothing. At all, except for the roach crawling up your shoe.

"What? Where? Get it off me, Get it off!"

I turned the hitter because of the conversation and killed the roach. So much for compensation.

We of Senior House value our tradition of diversity, individuality and freedom to the utmost degree. We do not want a great deal of responsibility or leadership, but we take our responsibility to think about potential consequences before taking an action as well as to welcome the responsibility that goes with them. These efforts we hope to maintain a positive and rewarding environment in which to live and study.