

Science Writing & Argumentation

Every year some of the best articles on scientific topics are anthologized in a collection aptly titled *Best American Science and Nature Writing*. These articles come from well-respected periodicals, such as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Wired*, *Popular Science*, *Discover*, etc. Here are nine that I thought were well written *and* entertaining.

You must write on Isaac Newton's letter and then choose five articles from the other nine supplied. For each create a 2-part summary (i.e., at least two paragraphs) that answers all of considerations below. (40 pts ea., 240 total).

REQUIRED: "A letter from Mr. Isaac Newton, Professor of the Mathematics in the University of Cambridge, Containing His New Theory about Light and Colors," Sir Isaac Newton

from the *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2003*. Richard Dawkins, ed. Houghton Mifflin, NY (2003).

1. "A Skeptical Look at September 11th: How we can defeat terrorism by reacting to it more rationally." Clark R. Chapman and Alan W. Harris. (15-24)
2. "DNA as Destiny." David Ewing Duncan (25-35)
3. "Memory Faults and Fixes." Elizabeth Loftus (125-144)
4. "The Blank Slate." Steven Pinker (188-199)

from the *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2005*. Jonathan Weiner, ed. Houghton Mifflin, NY (2005).

1. "Twilight at Easter." Jared Diamond (41-52)
2. "Personality Plus." Malcolm Gladwell (87-99)
3. "In the River of Consciousness." Oliver Sacks (216-227)
4. "The Curious History of the First Pocket Calculator." Cliff Stoll (250-260)
5. "Dining with Robots." Ellen Ullman (261-270)

Consider:

Article Title

Author

Concept:

- a) What is the main thesis?
- b) What is the supporting evidence? What forms does it take?
- c) What is the counter-argument? How does the writer address the counter argument?

Style:

- a) How does the author ingratiate him/herself with the audience?
- b) How does the author construct an ethos? (in science, writers are concerned first with credibility, then with likeability.)
- c) Briefly discuss the other two modes of persuasion (pathos, logos). If the argument is unsavory or counter-intuitive, how does s/he ask us to put aside our prejudices?