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Martin Luther King was a fighter for peace and brotherhood. He did all that he could to ensure equality among the races, but he approached the issue from a different perspective. Instead of heading a violence-oriented black nationalist group, King believed in nonviolent protest to forward his cause. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written during his incarceration for being an "extremist," reveals his dissatisfaction toward white moderate groups. Throughout his letter, King outlines situations that should attract the support of moderate white Americans, but is disappointed that no one has acknowledged him.

The letter is a tool, remarkably designed to evoke awareness of Negro hardship. In a period when segregation was legal and a distinct boundary existed between the black and white races, King's letter drew enough attention to make civil action possible. King's letter specifically targeted the general public--not any single race--and by doing this, all people would be able to discuss together the problems facing them in segregated society.

The introduction helps readers identify with King; it portrays him as unbiased and explains why he is there in Birmingham. When delivering an explanation, he gives less important reasons first and the most important last. This technique allows a gradual climax of logic. King may have come to Birmingham to receive an honor or to participate in a nonviolent direct-action program, but the main reason he was there was because injustice was there.

Using reason, he anticipates his opponents' comments before changing to a new subject. This is evident in his abrupt switch from first-person to second-person: "You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham"

"You may well ask, 'Why direct action?'" You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws." Each of these changes, and other main points, appear as the topic sentences of each paragraph. King's paragraph structure is orderly and arranged from least to most important detail--each paragraph presents a different point headed by a topic sentence, integrating large numbers of examples to illustrate the extent of the racial problem.

In King's letter, the examples given of racial injustice are representative of many different situations. King exemplifies the actions of lynch mobs, abusive policemen, the perplexity of having to tell one's children that colored people are inferior people, and pictures of inferiority beginning to distort children's personalities. Similar to using contrast when comparing, King centers on the plight of the Negro people while working toward racial unity.

Within those highly representative examples, a major way of catching the reader's attention is found. The word "segregation" is repeated eight times alone in the sixteenth paragraph of King's letter. This repetition places the reader's focus on segregation; the sentences surrounding each appearance of that word blends on into the next, creating a continuous, coherent list of the ruins of segregation.

Parallel structure is more effective, though equally as important as other literary techniques. This structure appears as: "when you have to concoct an answer. . . when you take a cross-country drive. . . when you are humiliated day by day. . . when your first name becomes 'nigger,' your middle name becomes 'boy' (however old you are) and your last name becomes 'John' . . ." Within each episode of parallel structure, words loaded with emotional meaning are incorporated: "curse, kick. . . kill," "humiliated," and "bitterness." Also, irony serves as a method of contrast. "The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward

gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.”

In the period of civil rights lobbying, many techniques were employed to capture and sway the audience’s attention--riots, shootings, murders. These were all violent ways of accomplishing nothing. Instead of a person arguing his point effectively, he scattered the audience by threats and intimidation. Nonviolent direct action, practicing argument from structured reason and logic, always works better than fighting. Letters and speeches, therefore, are more capable of attracting a crowd.

It is likely that if racial equality has not been brought into existence yet, there must be something blocking its progress. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, that something is the percentage of white Americans who are content with the state of Negro suffering, desiring to see no change. Therefore, the more understandable and reasonable King’s letter is, the more likely it will have influence on an otherwise deaf audience.