

Writing 151B: Editing Exercise #1

Please edit the following piece, adapted from a New York Times best-selling book. Edit for Punctuation, Grammar, Clichés, Numbers, as well as stylistic errors. Include a short “Notes to the Author” page if you do not have enough space to write the notes in the margins.

In the mid-1990s, the city of Baltimore was attacked by an epidemic of syphilis. In the space of a year, from 1995 to 1996, the number of children born[?] with the disease increased by 500%^{percent}, a number^{#1} big in size. If you look at Baltimore’s syphilis rates on a graph³, the line runs straight for years and then, when it hits 1995^{it}, rises almost at a right angle.

What caused Baltimore’s syphilis problem to tip[?]? According to the^{#2} Centers For Disease Control^{#3}, the problem was crack cocaine. It goes without saying that crack is known to cause a dramatic^{increase} rise¹ in the kind of risky sexual behavior that leads to the spread of^{#4} things like HIV and syphilis. It^{#5} brings far more people into poor areas to buy drugs, which then increases the likelihood that they will take an infection home with them to their own neighborhood. It^{#5} changes the patterns of social connections between neighborhoods. Crack, the CDC said, was the little push that the syphilis problem needed^{#6} to turn into a grand slam homerun of an epidemic.

^{#7} John Zenilman of John Hopkins University in Baltimore, an expert on sexually transmitted diseases, has another explanation: the breakdown of medical services in the city’s poorest neighborhoods. “In 1990-1991, we had thirty-six thousand patient visits at the city’s sexually transmitted disease clinics,” Zenilman says. “Then[;] the city decided to gradually cut back because of budgetary problems. The number of clinicians [medical personal] went from seventeen to ten. The number of physicians went from three to

typed out here,
but written in
numerical
figures later.

essentially nobody. Patient visits dropped to twenty-one thousand. There also was a similar drop in the amount of field outreach staff. There was a lot of politics—things that used to happen. It was a worst-case scenario of city bureaucracy not functioning. They would run out of drugs.” #8

When there were 36,000 patient visits a year in the STD clinics of Baltimore’s inner city, ~~in other words~~, that was sufficient enough to keep the disease from spreading like a bad rash. At some point between 36,000 and 21,000 patient visits a year, according to Zenilman, the disease shot out of control. It began spilling out of the inner city, up the streets and highways that connect those neighborhoods to the rest of the city. ~~All of a sudden~~ people, who might have been infectious for a week before getting treated, were now ~~going around~~ infecting others for ~~2- or 3- or 4-~~ weeks before they ~~got~~ cured. Irregardless, the breakdown in treatment made syphilis a much bigger issue than it had been before. #9

There is a third theory ~~which~~ belongs to John Potterat, one of the country’s leading epidemiologists. He ~~is of the opinion~~ that the physical changes affecting East and West Baltimore in those ~~very same~~ years are to blame, the heavily depressed neighborhoods on either side of Baltimore’s downtown, where the syphilis problem was centered. In the mid-1990s, he points out, the city of Baltimore embarked on a highly publicized policy of dynamiting the old 1960s-style public housing high-rises in East and West Baltimore. Two of the most publicized demolitions—Lexington Terrace in West Baltimore and Lafayette Courts in East Baltimore—were huge projects, housing hundreds of families, ~~that~~ served as centers for crime and infectious disease. At the same #10

time, people began to move out of the old row houses in East and West Baltimore, as those began to deteriorate as well.

#15 What is interesting about these three explanations is that none of them is at all dramatic. The CDC ^{believed} ~~was of the belief~~ that crack was the problem. But it wasn't ^{as though} ~~like~~ crack came to Baltimore for the first time in 1995. It had been there for years. What they were saying is that there was a subtle growth in the severity of the crack problem in the mid-1990s, and that change was enough to set off the syphilis epidemic. Zenilman, likewise, wasn't saying that the STD clinics in Baltimore were ^{#16} buried six feet under. They were simply scaled back ^{of} ~~the~~ the number of clinicians cut from seventeen to ten. Nor was Potterat saying that all Baltimore was ^{#17} hollowed out. All it took, he said, was the demolition of a handful of housing projects and the abandonment of homes in key downtown ^{#18} neighborhoods to send syphilis over the top. It takes only the smallest of changes to shatter an epidemic's equilibrium.

The second ^{quite} ~~and~~ perhaps more interesting ^{#19} fact about these explanations is that all of them are describing a ^{very} ~~very~~ different way of tipping an epidemic. The CDC is talking about the overall context for the disease—how the introduction and growth of an addictive drug can ~~so~~ change the environment of a city ^{#19} that it can cause a disease to tip. ^{however} Zenilman is talking about the disease itself. When the clinics were cut back, syphilis was given a second life. What was once an acute infection at this ^{point in} ~~pointing~~ time ^{turned into} ~~comprised~~ a chronic infection. It ^{became} ~~had become~~ a lingering problem that stayed around for weeks.

#20 Potterat was disinterested in those not suffering from syphilis. Potterat, for his part, was focused on the people who were carrying syphilis. Syphilis, he was saying, was a disease ^{most likely} ~~probably~~ carried by a certain kind of person in Baltimore—a very poor, ^{probably} ~~probably~~ drug-using ^{#18} ~~refer to on quotations~~

sexually active individual. If that kind of person was suddenly transported from ^{their} ~~her~~ old neighborhood to a new one—to a new part of town ^y ~~/~~ where syphilis had never been a problem before—the disease would have an opportunity to tip.

#22 [There is more than one way to tip an epidemic ^y ~~/~~ ~~in other words~~. Epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself, and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating. And ^y ~~/~~ when an epidemic tips, when it is jolted out of equilibrium, it tips ^y ~~/~~ because something has ^{occurred} ~~happened~~, some change has happened in one (or two or three) of those areas. These three agents of change ^{#21} ~~I call~~ the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context.

Writ 151B Editing Exercise #1 Author's Notes

Author's Note #1: "Big in size" is a redundancy. I recommend saying "a large number" instead if you want to emphasize the size of the percentage.

Author's Note #2: The full name of the organization is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, so I recommend including the whole title.

Author's Note #3: I recommend removing the phrase "It goes without saying that" because it implies that the reader should already have knowledge on the subject, and it sounds too casual for the tone and purpose of the rest of your article.

Author's Note #4: I recommend replacing the word "things" with something more specific, such as "diseases" in order to sound more professional.

Author's Note #5: You begin several sentences with the word "it," which may be confusing to readers who do not know the subject of the sentence. I recommend saying what the "it" is, in this case "crack."

Author's Note #6: I was unable to find this exact quote from the CDC, so I recommend double checking your source to make sure that it is accurate. If the quote is accurate, you also need to put it in quotation marks and include the appropriate commas. "Crack," the CDC said, "was the little push that the syphilis problem needed to turn into a grand slam home run of an epidemic." OR If the quote is a summation, I recommend you do not use the term "grand slam homerun" as it sounds too informal and instead say something like "intense epidemic."

Author's Note #7: John Zenilman is a doctor and his full name is Jonathan, so I recommend referring to him as "Dr. John Zenilman."

Author's Note #8: I recommend double checking your source for the quotation because I think a phrase may be missing from this quotation. I would also consider possibly shortening this quotation to the most useful pieces of information because it is quite long. I recommend removing the sentence "There was a lot of politics—things that used to happen."

Author's Note #9: The phrase "that was sufficient enough to keep the disease from spreading like a bad rash" seems too informal for the overall tone of the article. I recommend not calling the disease "a bad rash" and using a phrase that is more appropriate scientifically or deleting the phrase.

Author's Note #10: I recommend organizing the numbers in this phrase numerically, so saying "21,000-36,000" instead of "36,000 and 21,000."

Author's Note #11: I recommend saying something like “became out of control” instead of “shot out of control” in order to maintain a professional tone.

Author's Note #12: “Irregardless” is a non-standard word that may be confusing to readers. I recommend using “regardless” instead to improve clarity for the reader, or leaving the word out entirely.

Author's Note #13: Saying “those very same years” is a bit of a redundant phrase. I recommend removing the phrase “very same” and only saying “those years” instead.

Author's Note #14: The sentence that includes the phrase “the heavily depressed neighborhoods on either side of Baltimore’s downtown, where the syphilis problem was centered” is slightly ambiguous. If you are saying that the heavily depressed neighborhoods are the physical changes affecting East and West Baltimore then I recommend phrasing the sentence something like “He is of the opinion that the physical changes affecting East and West Baltimore—the heavily depressed neighborhoods on either side of Baltimore’s downtown where the syphilis problem was centered—in those years are to blame.”

Author's Note #15: The sentence “What is interesting about these three explanations is that none of them is at all dramatic” sounds slightly too informal for the intended purpose of your article. I recommend rephrasing the sentence to something like, “These three explanations are all within a reasonable scope.”

Author's Note #16: The phrase “buried six feet under,” is slightly too informal. I recommend saying something like “closed” or “shut down.”

Author's Note #17: The phrase “hollowed out” is a bit ambiguous here. If you mean that Baltimore had less resources or people, I recommend saying something like “Nor was Potterat saying that all of Baltimore was void of resources” or “Nor was Potterat saying that all of Baltimore was void of people.”

Author's Note #18: If this is a direct quote from Potterat, then you need to include the correct citations. Ex. “All it took,” he said, “was the demolition of a handful of housing projects and the abandonment of homes in key downtown neighborhoods to send syphilis over the top.”
OR If this is a summation of his ideas, then I recommend changing the phrase “over the top” to something more formal like “to further the syphilis crisis” instead of “to send syphilis over the top.”

Author's Note #19: You begin using the phrase “tipping” and “to tip” when referring to the epidemic, but you do not explain exactly what this phrase means. I think it would be helpful to readers who are unfamiliar with the topic of epidemics to explain what “tipping” means before you go in depth with using the term.

Author's Note #20: The sentence “Potterat was disinterested in those not suffering from syphilis” does not seem necessary in the context of your paragraph, since the very next sentence clarifies what Potterat was interested in. I recommend that it be removed to help with the clarity and conciseness of the paragraph.

Author's Note #21: This is the first time you refer to yourself as “I,” which does not coincide with the format of this academic article. I would recommend saying, “These three agents of change are called the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context.”

Author's Note #22: This paragraph on tipping does not necessarily seem like it fits within the structure/organization of the article itself. Your focus has been on the syphilis crisis in Baltimore in the 1990s, but this ending seems to focus only on the topic of epidemics themselves. You also introduce a completely new idea with the final sentence on the three agents of change, which do not get explained.