

Reader Reaction: Chad does a Reader Reaction on his own client advice letter

Chad: [video: caricature of Chad as himself, a lawyer] The fastest way I know to test out whether my work gives the reader what they need to know is to pretend to be the reader. I put myself into character.

[video: caricature of Chad as a 60-year old man] I've been a 60-year-old widower with a property line problem, [video: caricature of Chad as a dejected 30-year-old guy] a 30-year-old who just lost his dream job, [video: caricature of Chad as a slightly older senior lawyer dressed in a business suit standing with briefcase in hand] a senior lawyer whose client must decide if it is worthwhile to sue his business partner for an accounting of profits, [video: caricature of Chad slightly older as a judge] and a judge who had five other motions to deal with on his first morning docket.

[video: caricature of Chad as himself, with one hand on his hip] The first time I tried this was with a letter I wrote to a 30-year-old garage mechanic, [video: image of a man running appears, followed by small dog and cyclist; the dog is shown running after a cyclist in an off-leash dog park] whose small dog ran after a cyclist who was riding through an off-leash dog park. [video: a drawing of the cyclist falling] The cyclist claimed the dog caused him to fall and then bit his calf. [video: caricature of Chad as the garage mechanic with a letter in one hand and the other hand holding the phone to his ear] Reading the first two paragraphs as the client, I wanted to phone up the lawyer (that was me) and say: "Hey! That's not what happened." [video: image of the cyclist going really fast through the park with lots of dogs and little kids in the background] "You forgot about the fact that the bike rider was going way too fast in a park with dogs and little kids."

[video: caricature of Chad as the garage mechanic reading the letter] It wasn't until the third paragraph that I sort of started to understand the letter's main point [video: image of the cyclist appears] that maybe the bike rider had to take some responsibility too. [video: caricature of Chad as the garage mechanic looking perplexed as he reads the letter. The sentence he is reading appears on screen: The Dog Owner's Liability Act reduced damages in proportion to the degree of the plaintiff's fault or negligence.] The paragraph said something about how the Dog Owner's Liability Act reduced damages in proportion to the degree of the plaintiff's fault or negligence. But I had no idea what this meant in practical terms. And I didn't know what to do next. Does this mean I should pay the guy? Do I apologize? Do I do nothing? [video: image of Chad's small dog appears below sentence on screen] And what about my dog – will someone want to have him destroyed?

[video: caricature of Chad as himself holding the letter] The letter was actually easy to fix – all the elements were either somewhere in the letter (but maybe a bit encrusted with jargon) or in my research notes [video: caricature of Chad as himself holding his research notes]. I just needed to explain, simplify, and make my advice clear [video: caricature of Chad as himself holding his laptop with the letter on screen].