Susan Swift wrote the following poem after being solicited to review the writing standards in her school district. Not surprisingly, she encountered sheet after sheet of finely detailed expectations and outcomes listed neatly across a columnar page. “The indifferent standards lay before me more like a mathematical equation rather than anything that remotely resembles what happens when flesh and blood dares to take up a pen. Such an experience for a writing project person is disillusioning, thus the poem.”

The Standards of Writing Wrong

BY SUSAN SWIFT

Beyond banal verbiage
Lie meaningful messages—
Codes strung from
Ancient tongues speaking
Deep within our modern
Weak words, wanting
Much of wisdom.

Xerox pages lie lifeless
Before me in languages
Unrecognizable,
Unteachable.
Neatly charted, lined,
Categorized, fragmentized
Fractions of sense.

Nothing falls from
Their precipitous walls
Of words. I’ll plant
Them as totems, merely,
Ugly mugs that ward
Off the evil within
The frowned faces
Themselves, warning
The weary to tread not
Here.