INKWELL

A STUDENT GUIDE TO WRITING
AT THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

INKWELL

VOLUME
10

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WRITING CENTER

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ON GENDERED LANGUAGE

Throughout the history of modern written English, the norm of using the generic masculine pronoun ("he"/"him") has been contested. Rather than set a publication-wide standard, the *Inkwell* Editorial Board has chosen to let each writer decide for ____self how to address this issue.

ON GRAMMAR

By design, *Inkwell* exists within tension: we recognize the value of both standardized language structures and writers' potential to shape those rules for their own ends. In some cases, we defer to the writer's voice over grammatical conventions. Our editing process, as well as our final product, reflects this.

INKWELL: VOLUME 10

Olympia, WA

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EDITORS' NOTE

The first *Inkwell* was conceived, written, and published in ten weeks. Now, nearly a decade later, the process is a nine-month endeavor. Within this, we have watched ideas and gut feelings become fully developed and articulated essays. There is something to be said about being with a piece of work from the very beginning, watching an idea turn into a conversation that sparks a first draft.

The writers represented in *Inkwell 10* worked closely with the *Inkwell* Editorial Board over the entire academic year. This long, collaborative process helps everyone involved learn about what it's like to write and edit for a publication. Beginning with group brainstorming sessions in the fall, writers shaped the main ideas of their articles and began drafting in winter. By spring, the pieces were ready for line editing. This is the most rewarding stage—when these confusing, shaky, beautiful drafts get refined and polished enough for the writer's voice and purpose to shine through.

Inkwell is an extension of the Writing Center, both our authors and our audience. When you make an appointment at the Writing Center, we, the tutors, want to know what you, the writer, have to say. We want to hear your voice.

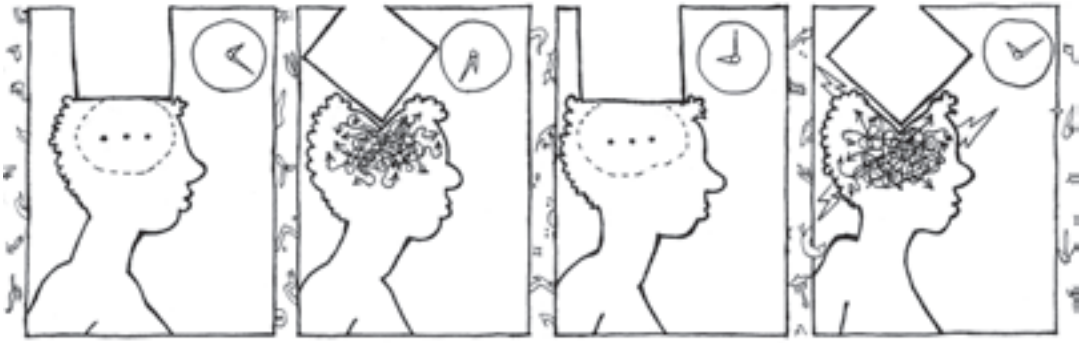
Inkwell is our voice, what we have to say. It's our chance to share with you what we know, what we feel, what we struggle with, and what we wonder about. Like you, we are writers.

THE *INKWELL* EDITORIAL BOARD

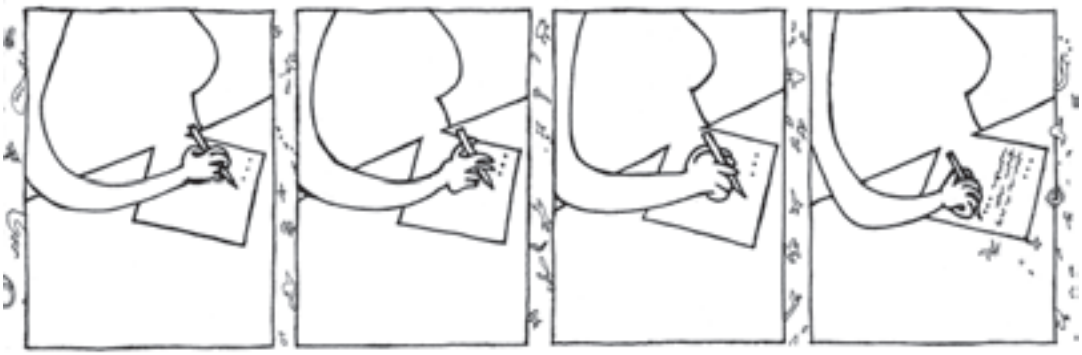
Becoming the Dishes

Steve Bakker

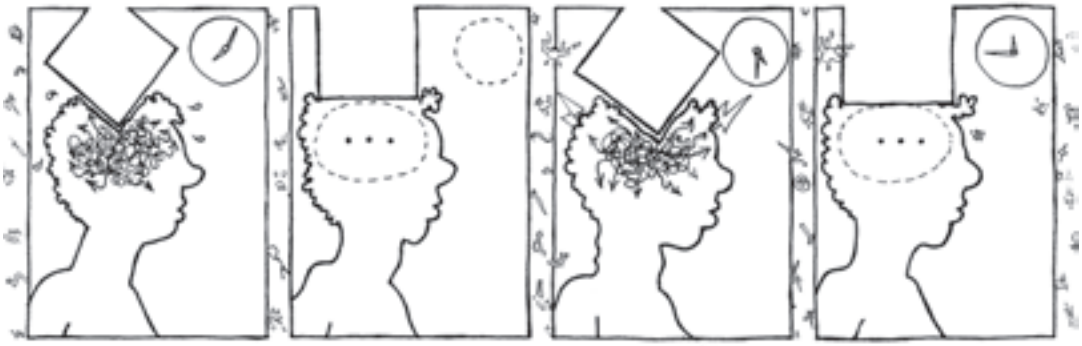
Getting caught up in agony over writing isn't anything new. I've been told I was a "good writer" for most of my life—sometimes I believe it and I'm proud of what I've written, but I get stuck and self-conscious a lot. I got put on academic probation several times and failed out of college twice due to anxiety over work and not completing it. I have often wondered if something I am supposedly "gifted" at shouldn't come easier.



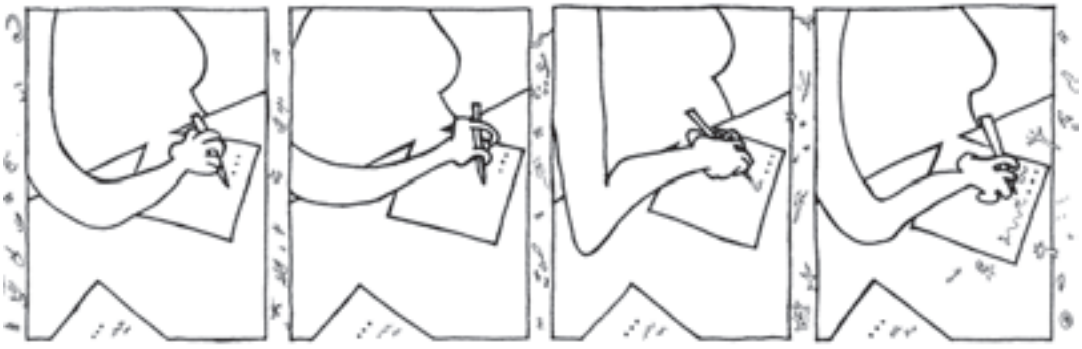
Writing is still one of the hardest things I do. What has changed, subtly and incompletely, is learning and relearning to accept the contradictions of pushing against, embracing, and accepting my anxiety in the writing process. I am less hesitant to put my arm around the shoulder of this flinching and terrified aspect of myself, coming to see it as not only a hellish companion but a worthy one. I've accumulated enough experience to recognize that accepting my agony around writing redirects its power into more constructive ends. More of my nervous energy channels into writing; less of it turns against my self.



I have incrementally internalized advice from a grumpy Evergreen psychology professor, now retired. To paraphrase him, "The really big psychological trouble people have doesn't come from their suffering; it's the suffering *about* their suffering that's the real problem." I have come to see my agony about my agony as the real killer in my writing process. The anxiety itself can be a disorienting pain in the ass just fine without my help; meanwhile, I can resume the work of writing.



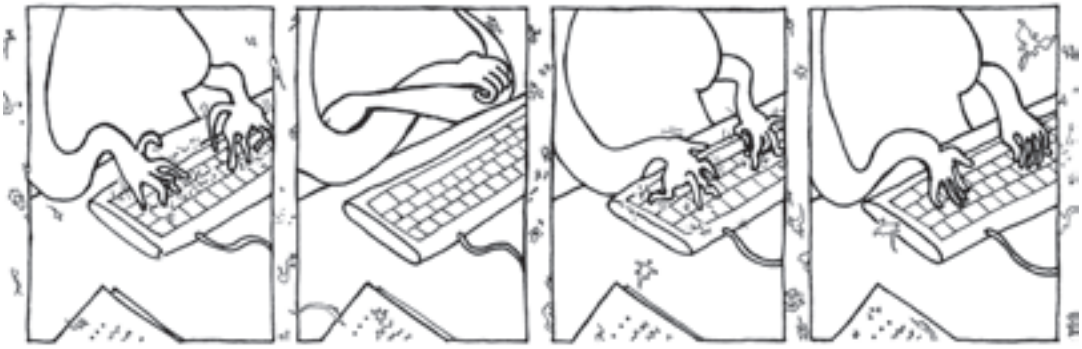
Sometimes accepting my anxiety doesn't work. I freak out and lock up. Then I either take a break or I rage against myself—sometimes I do both. When I rage against the agony-on-agony, it doesn't budge. It might even get stronger. With outside human support, I've started to more deeply explore what constructive intentions might exist behind the savaging inner voice. Something behind the voice isn't all bad. Something in it wants me to think more thoroughly and do better.



Sometimes I enjoy writing. My joy and anxiety are learning to take easier residence together. They sidle alongside each other as I write. My process starts with freewriting, lists, and crude outlines, half-procrastinating, half-processing my fragmented thoughts and frustration in filthy scribbles and filthy language. I usually feel disoriented, and what I write presents turbulent, cloudy streams of thinking. Then come the times when the writing unfurls into sharpening thoughts and scrawl. Currents of clarity run through the haze.

Sometimes the union of this joy and sorrow is an ungainly grind. Sometimes their paired electricity takes the ache of weight off my bones and it carries me away, and I *become* writing. But if I am to give due credit to joy and suffering's warming relationship—as slow, fast, and real as the melt of glaciers—I must say that the major mass of the time has been painfully unexciting and unsexy.

If I'm continuing to grow as a writer, it's definitely taking its time. Sometimes I wish writing would get easier, just like doing the dishes got easier. For me, doing the dishes automatically is a recent development: I didn't have to wash my dishes until I lived away from parents and campus cafeterias. Doing the dishes and not doing the dishes were both agonizing. I worried that I wasn't doing my dishes often enough, and when I was doing them, I worried that it was eating away too much of my time.



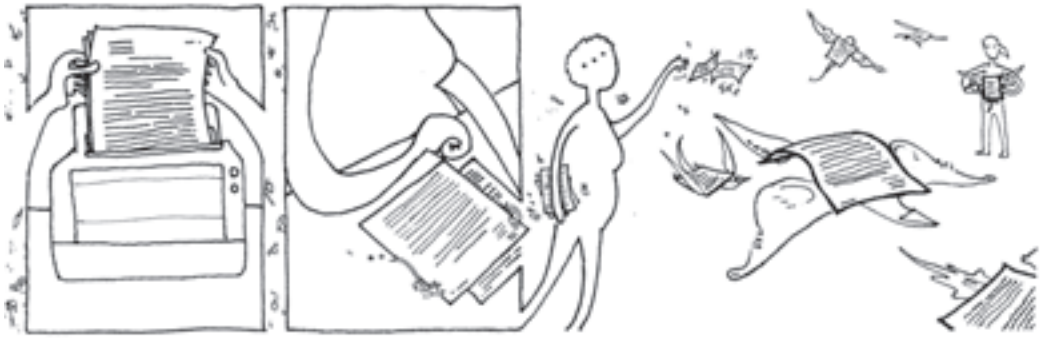
It took a decade to get into the unconscious practice of doing the dishes, and I only noticed it had become habit in hindsight. Doing the dishes is a non-issue now—*I am become doing the dishes.* I don't worry about the time it takes, like I do about so many other things. I didn't have to do the dishes twenty minutes every day at the same time to arrive as a dishwasher, as I have so often assumed I ought to do with writing. I just did the dishes pretty often. Practice can be imperfect and irregular and still add up. The growth is often invisible in the middle of the process, when it is actively lived. When did I really arrive as a dishwasher? When I first put a sponge to a plate. When did I really arrive as a writer? When my mother showed me how to scrawl an S and I followed.

It would be nice if writing was as consistently fun as doing the dishes. While water evaporates from drying plates, the sexiness and excitement of the daily kitchen sink endeavor never do. They endure in the tingle of waterlogged fingertips. Dish-washing steams and foams into spans of passion that follow me into the rest of my day.

Wait. Dishwashing is never that fun, and never sexy. Writing sometimes is, and the pleasure lingers. Doing the dishes is important, but now I don't care all that much about it. I don't think about doing dishes better, or doing it for an audience. I care a lot about growing as a writer, and I care enough to risk presenting my writing to an audience. Pain and anxiety accompany the extent of that care. The agony comes and goes, and I expect it won't ever disappear. Whether exciting, agonizing, or mundane, there are times I love writing and love what I write. I wouldn't say that about doing the dishes.

What I can offer from my experience is to keep at writing for agonizing and nourishing eons, even if you sputter and go dry for stretches of time and then get back to it. Share it in progress, when it's an unfinished mess, with people who are able to respond to it constructively but with substance. This may be a search with dry stretches of its own. Keep seeking and keep finding. Keep insisting.

When I finish a piece of writing, I'm never satisfied—and this is part of the process. When I revisit my pieces after a time, I am more likely to be proud of the results. Even when I'm not, I always have a sense that reaching completion and some level of coherence in a work of intensive writing is miraculous. Expect that the miracle work will often be a clunky, mechanical exercise that is neither sexy nor exciting. Desert seasons of banality oscillate with flash floods of passion. Both of these do harm; both of these bear life.



When Your Voice is Important

Imani Washington

As a black female, I was born with two strikes against me. My mother knew this and raised my siblings and me with the same basic idea: we must be above average to be considered equal. This is why I was reading long before I stepped foot in a classroom. This is why my mom corrected our speech, constantly telling us that *ain't* isn't a word.

In elementary school I was always two reading levels ahead of my class; in high school I was taking my English courses at the community college. My teachers applauded my papers, which in turn boosted my ego. In a country where people's ways of reading, writing, and speaking are perceived to be directly related to their intelligence, I reveled in my accomplishments. It took a group of juvenile offenders to make me question my reading and writing skills—and my own voice.

In the fall of 2014 I started a year-long program called *Gateways for Incarcerated Youth*. The program focused on the juvenile justice system, and we took weekly trips to a detention center to work alongside young incarcerated men in a seminar-like class. The nine men my class worked with ranged in age from eighteen to twenty, all but two of whom were something other than white. I didn't know what to anticipate during my first few classes, but my expectations weren't high when I was judging the young men solely based on how they sounded. They ended every sentence with *You feel me?* and *Know what I'm sayin'?* When they read from books in front of the class their voices were flat, they mispronounced words, and they paused often. Too quickly, I decided they needed my help, someone who would teach them the ways of the reading and writing world.

My views began to change when we started reading *True Notebooks* by Mark Salzman, a high school English teacher. The book followed Salzman over the course of two years as he worked and wrote with youth in a detention center. It's written well overall, but what made it stand out was the dialogue and actual essays from the young men. I've heard that dialogue is a hard thing to write down, that it can sound robotic or simply unrealistic. *True Notebooks* didn't do that—the guys speaking in the book sounded exactly like the guys I worked with week to week. They sounded real. As for the essays, Salzman says he didn't edit them, just typed them up. Had he made corrections, the book would've lost everything that made it unique. It wasn't dressed up as something it wasn't. As the title implies, the book was true.

Soon, we began doing writing prompts together at the beginning of class. Everyone had the chance to share what they had written, and I would often stay quiet, not wanting to take up the space meant for the young men. Week by week the guys would read, and week by week I was amazed. They read long freewrites about philosophy, they rapped poems about their childhoods and growing up. They told stories about their moms. While

they spoke, I was transfixed, listening to the words they had written come alive off their lined paper. I could've easily pointed out grammatical mistakes the way I'd been trained to do my whole life, but it wasn't important. Just like in *True Notebooks,* they wrote with the kind of passion you can't put on a grading scale. Nothing I had written seemed as heartfelt or animated. They weren't writing to prove anything, and so it was beautiful.

I was foolish to think I could be some sort of savior for them, because they don't need saving. They're smart enough to navigate their way through this world. But I know this isn't how they will be perceived. Their skin color will be seen before they are. And if people can get beyond that, the slang will be heard before what is truly being said. I know because I was guilty of this same crime.

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My mother was born and raised primarily in the South. For as long as I can remember, her voice has held no twang to prove this, but one phone call from a relative is enough for the *y'all*s and *ain't*s to slip back into her vocabulary, if only for a moment. When I was ten years old or so, my family took a trip to South Carolina to visit her side of the family. I met the most eccentric, lively, colorful, and loud people I'd ever seen in my life. Their faces alone held more expressions than I knew were possible, and when they told stories they spoke in a way that made me feel like I was there, like I too was experiencing my mother's childhood summers. I was enchanted by them. But when my cousins told me that I talked funny, I had no problem returning to the pedestal that I'd claimed at a young age. I confidently told them that *I spoke right,* as if I had the credentials to make such a statement.

During a conversation with my mom, I asked her why she was so adamant about how we talked. She explained that she knows how people with Southern accents are perceived as unintelligent. She said that the world was already going to look down on us and she wasn't going to give them another reason to. I consider my mom to be very successful. She works a job she loves as a high school English teacher. She owns the car she drives and the condo she lives in with her wife. She worked hard to get where she is. Sometimes, though, I wonder how much of her voice she gave up, both willingly and unknowingly, to get where she is.

In "'But I Write The Way I Talk': Inclusion and Exclusion in American Academic Writing," Marissa Luck writes, "A certain type of English is accepted in American academia that is culturally and socioeconomically specific. This standard of English privileges and excludes certain groups of people." Academic voice is the

standard, the way of speaking and writing that everyone is expected to know. We are told that in order to get anywhere in life you must speak properly and write correctly. You must fit into a predesigned box.

Only recently have I begun to realize that you cannot judge a person's intelligence or writing skills based solely on how they speak. The way you talk holds your memories, your home, your scars. It holds everything that brings good art to life. It represents a part of you that should show in your writing. Your work should sound like *you*, not like what the world thinks you should sound like. Whether you are writing or speaking, your voice is always important—because it is you, and you deserve to be heard.

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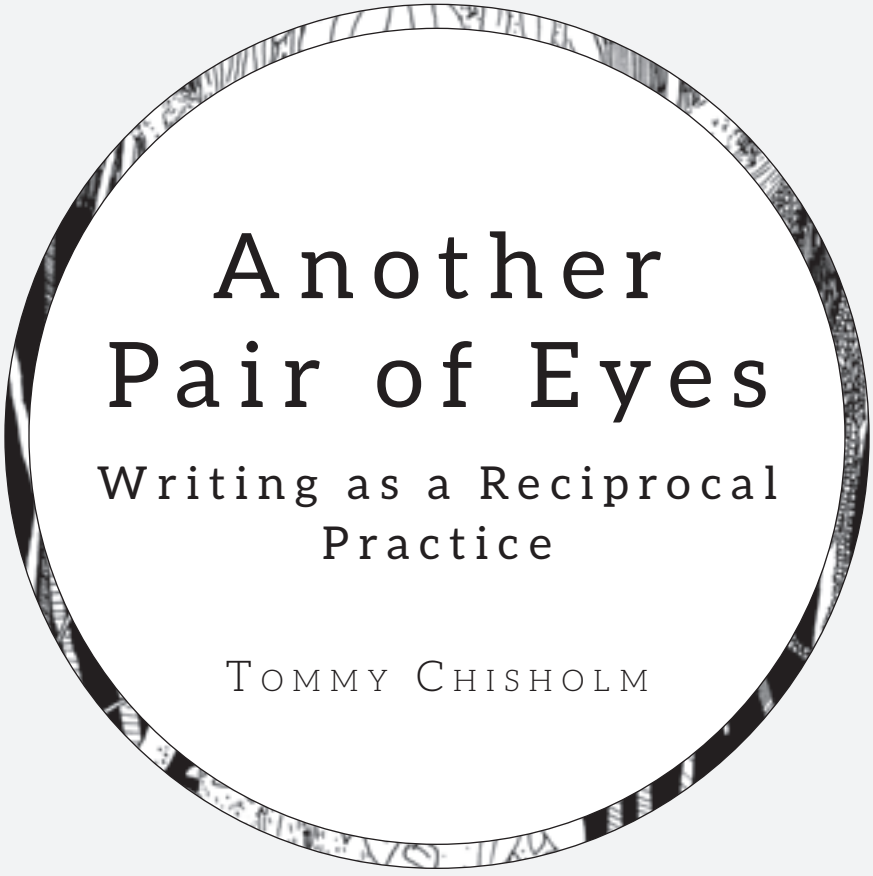

Another Pair of Eyes

Writing as a Reciprocal Practice

Tommy Chisholm

My first quarter at Evergreen began with a rude awakening: not an earth-shattering crisis, but an epiphany. My professor asked us to journal about what a writing process looks like, a simple in-class assignment I was incapable of completing. No one had ever mentioned to me that writing is—needs—a process, and that each writer's process is different. Any time I had written a paper in high school, or creatively on my own, it had been in one short, unprocessed burst. For too long I'd romanticized the idea of spontaneous writing, like Kerouac drafting *On the Road* in one night or a jazz musician improvising while performing. Something about this seemed more authentic.

What I really discovered in myself was fear: the fear of committing to a piece of writing. If I labored over a piece intently for days or weeks and it proved to be lousy, then I risked suffering the disappointment of producing a piece of bad writing. But if I busted out a rapid-fire piece of lyrical poetry or an essay for class, and it too was shoddy, there would be no emotional turmoil since I hadn't truly put much of myself into it.

I made it a goal to build a writing process. Realizing I was going to be working from the ground up, I sought out a friend, who happened to be a tutor at the Writing Center, for guidance. She explained that the Writing Center was a place where tutors could work with me to build that process. After my first few sessions at the Center, I realized that talking with other writers about my work was what my process needed most. By engaging in a dialogue with a writing tutor at each stage of the process, I was able to overcome my overwhelming doubts.

The writing process can be broken down into five stages: brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, and proofreading, all of which are opportunities to better understand your work through the give and take of conversation. By compartmentalizing the process, I could visualize what a piece of writing could look like at each stage, and recognize how I had previously been smushing all five stages together.

Brainstorming

Often when I begin brainstorming I only have a rough idea of what to write about. By sitting down with a tutor or another writer and starting a dialogue about my ideas, I'm able to suss them out and explore potential avenues worth investigating. Even if you don't have a clue what to write about, getting a conversation going is the best place to start.

At the Writing Center, a tutor can take notes while your mind gushes everything out, allowing both of you to look back and connect your ideas. Mapping these connections into an organized form like an outline is often the last bit of brainstorming for me. The outline is made up of points of interest for my piece, which I then use as a jumping off point for freewriting. This is when I let my mind wander over the page, exploring my ideas as far and wide as possible. There's a certain kind of thinking only accessible through the physical act of writing, and freewriting is a brainstorming technique that often lends most to the piece I'm working on.

Drafting

Drafting is the stage where my work tends to be its most solitary. During this stage

I use my outline from brainstorming as a blueprint for my first draft, unloading everything I can say into a word processor. Once everything I can think of at this time has been said, I'm ready to get my dialogue with another writer going again so I can better understand where my concepts are clashing, where I'm too vague, and what information is still missing. At this stage I also look for insight into how successful the structure of my piece is: if my ideas fit together, if they're in line with the outline, or if I need to create another outline for the next draft. Though it can be arduous, there is a freedom at this midpoint where I'm capable of adding and subtracting at will. I can talk with other writers throughout, getting their feedback as I make additions or cut sections.

Revision

The goal of revision is to be able to settle on all of the ideas within your draft. While revising, I seek out the help of another writer in making my concepts interact with one another fluidly. Having another pair of eyes on your work during this stage allows you to see where your ideas are opposing each other. It's easy to believe you've been clear in a piece of writing when all of the ideas are yours and already make sense to you. When I invite a tutor or another writer to give feedback on my draft, they're able to point out where I need to better articulate my ideas and what areas are unclear. By revising with another writer, you can work through these tough spots.

Editing

Once I've established the content of my piece I can begin editing: the process of going through each paragraph and sentence and tuning them up. My ideas may all be there, but am I using the best possible words to convey them? At this point we can finally address issues with grammar and punctuation, because worrying about grammar earlier in the process can get in the way of forming content. I usually have each draft I've written open in separate documents, copying and pasting from each into my current document. I've also come to realize that retyping my draft word-for-word into a fresh document and editing along the way often yields the best results for me. It can be a bit of a Zen practice, in the same way that freewriting can be. I'm able to labor over each word and better articulate what I'm writing about.

Editing with another writer will build a stronger, more dynamic piece of writing. You can comb through your paragraphs together, word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence, catching what you may not be able to on your own. We often get too close to our work and lose the ability to

recognize where we're being too ambiguous or unclear. In those moments it's best to seek out the feedback of other writers.

Proofreading

At this point in the writing process you've nearly wrapped up the entire piece. This last stage, proofreading, is often the most gratifying. Once you're through, you can let the satisfaction of completing your piece of writing wash over you. Proofreading is the process of rereading your work in order to be positive it's as errorproof as humanly possible. Put your and another writer's joint knowledge to use, and read through the piece a few times just to be safe. If it's free of any errors and you're happy with the final product, you're ready to close the book on this one.

Postscript

Before coming into the Writing Center and encountering writing as a reciprocal practice, I was compressing all five stages of the process into that one short burst. I would lose my nerve along the way, getting psyched out by the great multitude of directions a piece of writing can go. I ultimately lacked confidence in my ability to follow through with a piece of writing. Working alongside other writers encourages me to continue forward, makes me aware that my writing has worth, and lifts me out of that psychic gridlock.

My dialogue with other writers has proven to be the crux of my process. What I needed was knowledge of the different stages of writing and a community to share my work with. A writing center isn't the only place cooperative writing relationships happen, though. Groups of friends, or even writers who don't know each other well, can come together to build a community.

If you want to develop a writing process, it's going to take time to figure out what works best for you—a writing process can always be in constant development. I encourage every writer to try out reciprocal writing, to always explore and experiment, to pick the brains of other writers on their processes, and to not stop searching. Since realizing that writing doesn't have to be a completely solitary experience, I've become more confident in my abilities and empowered to write more often. If you're struggling with your writing and want more out of it, working with other writers can help get you where you want to be.

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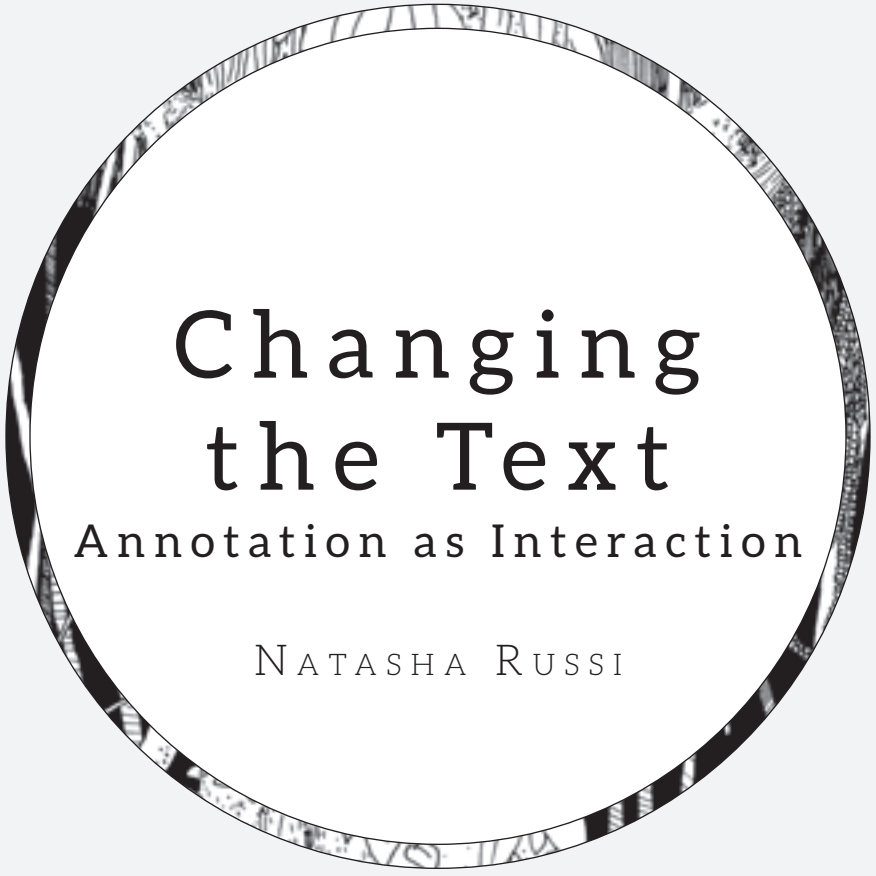

Changing the Text

Annotation as Interaction

Natasha Russi

When I write in a book, I am breaking through the walls around it. Everything tells me that I shouldn't, that I have no right to be there, that I'm destroying something. But I see writing in books as my way of sharing space with them, and this destruction as an act of participation. Books are public spaces, and by breaking in, I am refusing to be denied entry—I am claiming my right to be in conversation with ideas and to play an active role in language.

Historically, books have been the domain of the wealthy, requiring the education to make reading possible. That much is still true, and reading remains systemically inaccessible to many people. But commodification of the written word has made it so we come into contact with thousands of words on a daily basis—words on screens, signs, and pages. Mass printing, the publishing industry, and universal education have made books accessible in an unprecedented way; almost anyone can access the ideas and language previously reserved for those with wealth and status. Most books in a college setting are one of thousands of identical copies. Mass-produced books are not precious by nature of their conception, but rather acquire preciousness through our interactions with them: the epiphanies we have in seminar, the rare sunny days spent reading in the grass, the spines that break at a favorite page. And yet, many students view books—and by extension the ideas contained within them—as hallowed artifacts that are complete and unalterable. We continue to treat books like they cannot be messed with, as sacred, unique vessels of knowledge greater than ourselves.

Culturally, we place the Authors of books at the center of the reading experience. Information, knowledge, ideas, and Truth only move in one direction: from the Author, through the word, to the reader. This perpetuates a hierarchy in which the Author is right and the reader is trying to find out what being right means. Even on the level of the word "authority," we credit Authors with unquestionable ownership over ideas.

Because of this, many readers approach reading from the perspective of tracking down that Truth, a hunt where only the person who follows all the right steps will find it. If Authors owned the Truth, and it were identifiable, this approach would be completely reasonable (and the world would be a much simpler place). But there's no such thing as a single Truth that can be owned—rather, there exists a multitude of truths. When readers are looking for the Truth, they can't hear when their own voice speaks in the act of reading.

The hierarchy that places the Author at the center of reading prevents dialogue between the work and the reader. When students perceive the Author of a text as unquestionable, it prevents them from identifying flaws in the work. Countless times I've asked people what they think about a text and heard, "I don't think I have anything to add," or "I don't feel like I'm allowed to say anything about this." They don't think they have the right to speak to the material they study. Many struggle to center themselves within the

process of reading and interpretation. For most people, it means reevaluating many years of schooling that demanded right answers about the symbol of the green light in *Gatsby*. Our culture privileges certain voices over others, and many of us have internalized the message that our voices shouldn't be heard.

But if looking for Truth in a text closes it to the interactive process that is reading, annotation restores the reader their right to interact with a text, to use it and play with it. Books, sentences, and even words are spaces that we can enter by reading—both physically, as material objects and symbols on a page, and metaphorically, as gatherings of ideas and thoughts. To consider language as a space allows the possibility for it to be manipulated by the person who enters that space; words are not empty or finite, but as alive as the person who reads them. Each reader's lived experience makes them uniquely qualified to read the text in a way that no one else can—there is no Truth, because for each reader there is a different truth. The truest text, made up of more than the words on the page, is the amalgam of all these truths, the mingling of every possible truth, present at once. Every reader brings to their reading the entirety of themselves and the wealth of experience, knowledge, and understanding that makes them who they are. The words change. That is the magic of reading.

From a young age, I was taught to revere books, and this meant keeping them in "good condition." I found myself preserving my books out of fear—fear that my words didn't belong there or that what I wrote would be wrong. If I wrote in a book, anyone could pick it up and see a record of my failure. I overcame my fear of marking my books out of frustration, not epiphany. For fear of being wrong, I had developed a convoluted note-taking system that put too much distance between myself and my books, and I finally got tired of navigating it. Only in retrospect do I recognize annotation as an interaction between myself and my texts.

At first I made notes in the text just to be more efficient—but breaking the rules was electric. The more I wrote in the margins the more I wanted to write all over the pages. Now, my annotations blossom: I circle emphatically, draw arrows across the text, link concepts in boxes, trace patterns across pages, draw pictures in the margins. With each new method of annotation, I further discover that writing in books is, for me, a truer form of reading. My annotations fill the spaces left on the page, inflate the ideas with my reactions to them, record the movement of my mind through the text.

If an archeologist were to find my books, they wouldn't find just artifacts: they would find me in them.

Writing in books makes the collision between myself and language tangible and visible. In the same way that arrows, boxes, and circles fill the spaces between words, I flesh out the hidden corners of an idea. When the Reader's voice is held on the same level as that of the Author, knowledge and ideas can expand in many directions at once, rather than along one line. Every text is infinitely interpretable, and its meaning changes every time it is read.

When I read, I change the text: I bring to it all that is inimitable, unique, and particular about me, and through it I am uncovering my truth. And when I read, the text also changes me: it makes a mark in my thoughts. Reading strategies that honor the Reader's voice destabilize the hierarchy built into our conventional approach to reading and allow for individual truths to replace the ideal of Truth. Annotation breaks into a text so that we are not isolated from its ideas. It opens books up to reveal everything hidden inside them, the everything that can only emerge through us.

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Experiments in Writing the Lived Experience

Ariel Birks

You can't write down what can't be written. Grief, happiness, epiphany, love. It can feel impossible to write the world. This is because language only points at what is real. Language is like the telescope we use to see the stars, but not the stars themselves. Language is like the microscope we use to see the organism, but not what's on the slide.

Normal is hard to write. If in your immediate culture, nakedness is normal, but in your general culture, it's not, how do you write about the intersection of those cultures? Explaining your personal catalog of experiences to establish your norm is exhausting and impossible; there's too much data and you have forgotten almost all of it. There could be a tension between your normal and the culture's normal. Is that the most normal thing for you? What can you even call normal?

Simultaneity is hard to write. Simultaneity can feel ambiguous, but also fated—like the future and the past interact somehow to lend purposefulness to a present choice. If you explain the facts first and then the fatedness, it's like your mind concluded an intuition from the facts, when the actual experience felt like facts, feelings, and premonitions that happened all at the same time. Different languages have different systems for this, but in English, writing reconstructs time so that one thing happens before another. You can write about a melodic strain and shuffled stairsteps that obscured the voices of your neighbor and the landlord. You can write that, also at that moment, you realized that you had to leave immediately and without a goodbye. But how can one write to depict the simultaneity without imposing an unwanted logical structure?

Complexity is hard to write. You can write about a social movement that took place over several countries, multiple regimes, and many theological strains. You can follow all of the dialogues, organizing them according to similarities and dissimilarities. Each participant in the social movement has a context to bring to the story, and there are so many ways to sort the story out into simpler stories. But how do you preserve the nuance of the diversity of inputs?

You can write that it was a complex love affair, that you loved her for complex reasons, but when you try to find the words around it, you only say that you know you loved her and it might be that she loved you. Maybe you want nothing more than to be able to put this experience into words. Maybe that's why you doubt it's love.

How do you write about things that have little to do with language?

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Or, what one cannot speak about, one must silence.[1]

Are all knowable truths, because they are knowable, those that can be abstracted? And do we allow that there are knowable truths that have no counterpart in words?

1. *Stanford Encylopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Ludwig Wittgenstein," online edition, last modified March 3, 2014.

Are there some forms of abstraction that are better suited than others to complement the complexities of our lived experiences? And what is the value of the pursuit of the world as discoverable through the arts? Is art meant to pursue truth, or are truths made through art?

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Machines assemble raw components, they transform media, they disassemble groupings. Machines can make complex things simpler, and make tasks requiring great strength less exhausting. Machines gain our respect the more parsimonious they are in design, the more they reform chaos into the elegance of structure and logic. Language formalizes ideas and edits experiences into shareable data. In other words, language is a machine to code the unseen as seen. When language moves us into revelation, it points us towards things we knew previously only by our own baffling knowing, things we know even though they resist explanation.

It's impossible to share worlds, but we try to do so by expressing our ideas through whatever medium will bear them. The language that we use to point to life is an effort to have a conversation. Through writing, we are trying to show each other some part of our thought processes and our subjective ideas, some evidence of the work we've done and the selves we are. We want to know who knows what and how they know it. We're curious and we're hungry for understanding that will help us survive. We want to know that we're not alone.

Original experiences, original thoughts themselves, are dead and gone before they hit the page or leave your lips. Writing just notches the groove into a record, one that plays on into new moments; it filters in through the noise of the present and becomes the tune you might remember the moment by. Words allow you to spend more time with an experience to dissect and understand the thing that died. Writing is part of a grieving process, this way. The living parts of you can't be written, but they reach out towards where your language is. That language points to life, and what's beyond your knowing, in order to stay alive. So writing is also part of a birthing process, this way.

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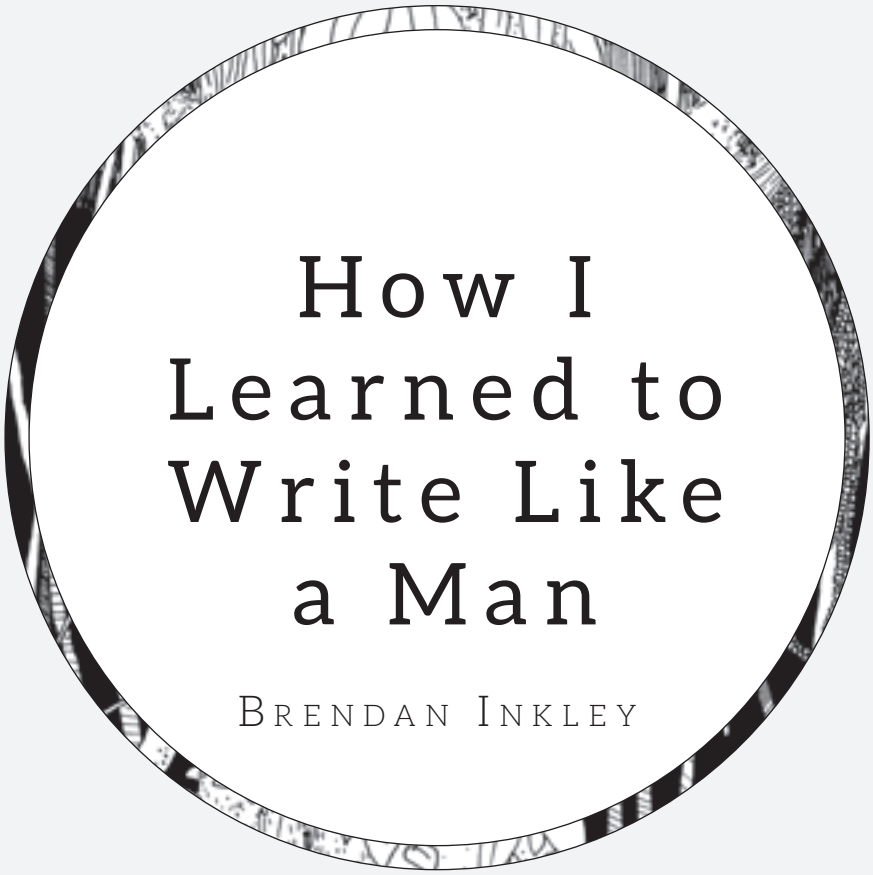

How I Learned to Write Like a Man

Brendan Inkley

Depression, anxiety, and addiction defined my adolescence, and these formative years will always be a part of who I am, both as a person and an agent of expression. This was also the time when my social education as a man was coming to a head. I was actively learning to suppress many forms of expression that would otherwise have been available to me. This meant that as I accumulated the experiences that would shape and misshape me, I was also slowly constricting my capacity to speak to and engage with them. Burying my ability to define my own identity, particularly through the self-expression of writing, was a condition for my passage into the image of manhood I was raised in.

My parents met as journalists. Our house was filled with books, and as a child I developed an intimate relationship with reading and writing. But a clear line was drawn between the edifice of writing and the act of self-expression. Sitting at the kitchen table of a family with a paternal history of depression and anxiety, men were expected to talk about these things in code, if at all. Questions about identity had neither context nor audience.

By sixteen, I had shut myself off to the possibility of who I could be, learning to perform all the tricks of maleness and having none of the confidence to pull them off. Just as I learned by observation how to sit, stand, and walk like a man, I taught myself how to talk and write like one. I became humiliated by the words I used or the way I laughed; my handwriting lost its curls and character to become demonstrably careless. The content of my writing narrowed.

Facing identity with your words requires vulnerability—this was unacceptable for a young man growing up in my familial, social, and scholastic environment. Recognizing this, I made it unacceptable to myself.

The boys who were my peers were also coming to grips with who they were and who they had to be. But I did not dare invite whatever my friends' responses would be to the fears that paralyzed me. I could not have imagined that there might be someone to read the things I would have written and say that I was not the only one who thought them. No—better to occupy my nervous hands with paint pens, Marlboros, and the corks of stolen wine bottles than to let them betray with pencil or pen some unregulated expression. When I write, always, the first audience and the first voice of criticism is the one in my head. His work is to keep me from writing at all. He is the one who taught me how to be a man, and how to write like one.

In my sophomore year of high school, I was arrested and began a program of group drug therapy. In this numb period of recovery I was isolated from my words. Each Wednesday, a dozen men circled up against introspection. Our facilitator guided us in meditation, a silent form of reflection. I was taught coping mechanisms, guided to outlets, and re-educated in the virtue of wordless persistence. I did not write about my experience, and in forgoing this, gave up the opportunity to do what I think I needed most: to touch what was raw and give witness to my own cries of pain. In the outside world, shared cigarettes and silence persisted among us as acceptable forms of communication between men.

There was harm in the lessons I relearned in therapy, but sobriety allowed me to look up from the years of my adolescence and open my eyes to my external reality. I was suddenly aware that I had only a short time left in high school, and it was hard not to notice that the future beyond it was blank. In this period of receptiveness, I was encouraged to take AP English. Here in the 11th grade, I entered my puberty as a writer.

The curriculum dealt not so much in empowerment as in the power I was already predisposed to possess. It was a blowtorch applied to a pilot light, flattering hyper-masculine assertiveness in thought and language. I learned how to make claims and drive them home, how to argue and convince. I was not graded on my ability to write in order to ask or to listen, even to myself.

My expression remained constrained. I had learned to hold in without learning to let out, because this was not taught when I was taught to write. Academic writing became a carefully closeted form of expression for me: a safety valve for the things I needed to talk about. I wrote these essays repeatedly and feverishly, happily imbibing the powerful libation of claim and contention, argument and assertion.

I had lived in a state close to destruction for long enough to forget that I was capable of simply creating something. This feeling of actually having made something with my hands was my quiet victory. But I think I was so able to engage with this energy because of the way it engaged me—through my coming-of-age potential for an uncritical relationship with my maleness. I didn't yet know how to use the blocks of language to build an identity for myself. Instead, I wore it down to facelessness with the acid idea of maleness that I couldn't quite embody but could still project with the same toxic consequences.

My senior year of high school, I participated in a youth leadership program that taught social justice concepts alongside a different kind of writing. Workshops emphasized poetry as a tool for exploration, understanding that each person is a poet in telling their own story. This was no Wednesday exercise in numbness. There was no meditation, no willed escape, only a circle of peers. It was a powerful thing to be considered a poet, trusted to create something vital, and given the task of writing not off a prompt but about what I had to say. I came gradually to engage with my identity, and learned how I could define myself through my writing. In retrospect,

it makes sense that it felt like I was meeting myself for the first time.

Without knowing it, I had been delineating the terms of my own rite of passage. I left this program feeling like a man for the first time: complete in my own body, with both its scars and its frailties; comfortable in the awareness that the masculine and feminine in me were parts of the same whole; sure of the mindful, open, and sincere way I wanted to conduct myself in the world; and trusting that in the future I would feel this way again. Through that writing I had been able to define this manhood and, in certain moments, embody it.

When I write now, I have to realize that no matter how I define and relate to my maleness, I am still a man. So when I write with the expectation of an audience, paying attention to what I say and how I say it is important. There is a difference between filling a void and taking up space, between expressiveness and the lack of a filter, between knowing when to stay quiet and simply succumbing to the hateful impulse to silence myself. It can be hard to distance mindfulness from anxiety—to identify when I own my self-examination and when it owns me.

The practice and process of writing is conducive to the deliberate and intentional expression I want to make. But when I share my writing publically, I open myself up to the regulatory scorn of other men. Every time I write, I face an internal audience whose every member is a reflection of the hardest parts of myself to acknowledge: a mental auditorium of men's men braying spitefully for my silence. Writing this, I remember that I have another, far more eloquent critic within me: one who holds me accountable to my own definition of *man*, and reminds me of the person I can explore and become with the help of the written word.

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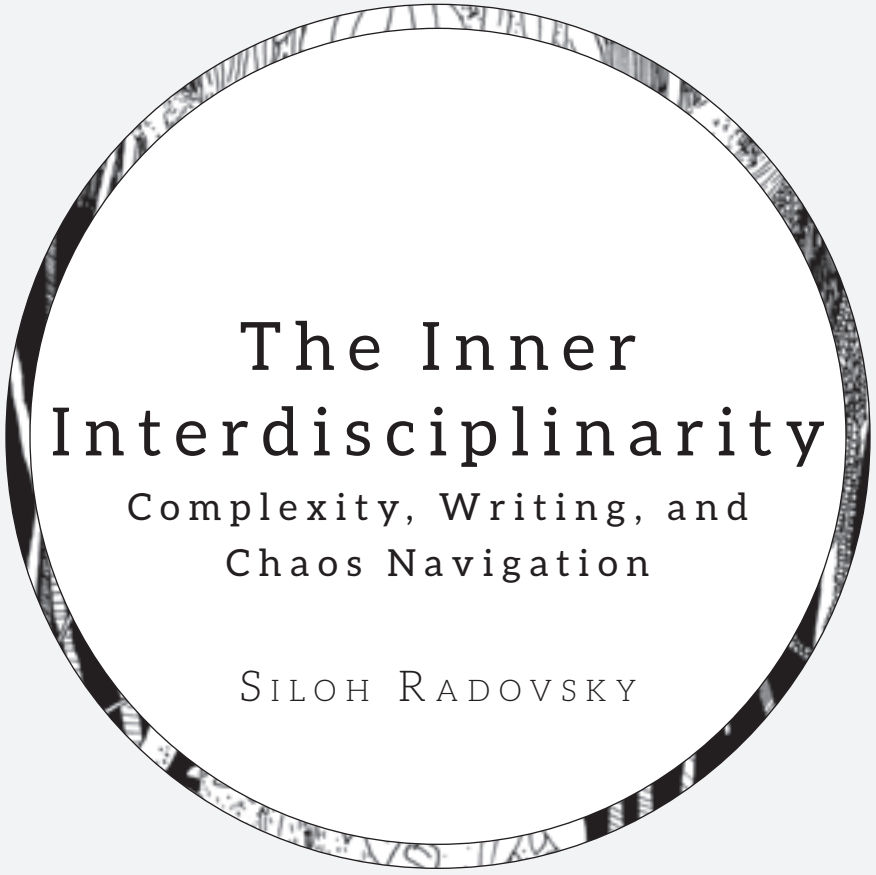

The Inner Interdisciplinarity

Complexity, Writing, and Chaos Navigation

Siloh Radovsky

Last spring, I transcribed a page of *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* by Rebecca Solnit and taped it above my typewriter. In the passage, Solnit relays a conversation she had with a friend, who told her about "a Hawaiian biologist he met who discovers new species by getting intentionally lost in the rainforest." This image of Solnit's mythic biologist presents an interesting negotiation of a purposeful task and a deliberate quest for defamiliarization: how is it that you find something when you are not sure what it is that you are looking for?

I do not take the persistence of this dilemma as a sign of failure, but its appearance rarely comes without a hint of anxiety. One thing I've found that gives me a vantage over all this uncertainty is writing. As a believer in the importance of letting complicated things remain complicated, I value the ways that writing allows me to navigate the discomfort of effort. It becomes a compass or key of sorts.

Studying in an interdisciplinary manner undoubtedly contributes to the frequent need to re-orient myself to what I am doing. I have spent a lot of time worrying that I was ultimately going to have to pick one field of study over the others, because that's what it meant to grow up. The further I got along in school, the more the tensions within myself increased. The thoughts and feelings I had about my place within the world were beginning to blur my academic plan, and my next step felt illegible.

I signed up for a full-time creative writing program so I could bring everything that I was working with to the table, and have the space to consider why my future seemed like a series of infinite contradictions. It was a total divergence from the reasons I had heretofore articulated to myself about why I was in school; it felt luxurious, selfish, and terrifying.

It turned out that this wasn't any more or less "practical" than the other options, and it did not limit me from other pursuits. But it did ask me to relate to myself and my aspirations in a different way than any of the other academic programs I had taken thus far. I knew I would be asked to draw something from within myself—to compose something new out of the vastness that alternated between feeling like too much to deal with and an empty void. Only through the practice of writing, which I both feared and craved, was I able to unearth the narratives I was silently feeding myself. I was invited to open up desires that I had foreclosed without articulation.

In the middle of the quarter, my teacher introduced us to metacognitive writing: writing that explores one's own learning or thinking processes. We answered questions about what we were struggling with, what skills we wanted to develop further, and how our writing had changed. I had never been asked why I was doing what I was doing and where I hoped to go with it.

The potential obscurity of the word *metacognitive* doesn't adequately reflect its simplicity. We might see metacognitive writing as an extension of the brainstorming or the drafting stage, though it can be utilized at any point of a writing process. I set a timer for ten or twenty

minutes to carve out space for these kinds of questions: What am I trying to do? What am I having trouble with? What would help me? In what ways am I doing well? What are the doubts that are holding me back?

While clarifying my ideas, metacognitive writing also makes space to listen to, and draw upon, my own inner resources that might be otherwise inaudible. It never clutters, and it never fails to identify steps that I can take. Shifting into the state of mind where I can begin to examine my thoughts and feelings about a project tends to reveal that which is hidden in plain sight. The spontaneous composition of these questions often begins to unwind the overwhelm before I even begin to answer them.

The questions I pose to myself change, but the process of stepping outside what I am immediately grappling with gives me the distance to look out at the terrain I am uniquely crossing. It helps me guide myself through my own process, and helps me to learn from myself. This kind of orientation makes me comfortable with, and enthusiastic about, willing myself to get lost over and over.

Knowing that I can always pick up the tool of metacognitive writing helps me to trust that in such moments I will have other options besides either giving up or falling back upon a predetermined trajectory. The practice allows me to keep moving, so that the challenges and contradictions can be a site of emergence rather than an endpoint. It does not numb the confusion with false answers, but lets the questions come to light. In other words, it recognizes the importance of process, not just outcome.

Metacognitive writing is applicable not only to the realm of writing, but to other fields of inquiry. I believe it to be particularly relevant to my peers who feel similarly pulled between different spheres of study and conflicting identities, regardless of what form their work will ultimately take. Different fields of study have unique vantage points which assume their own forms of validity. Inside of myself, all of these different ways of knowing need not compete: I straddle the worlds and bring each of their forms of knowledge to bear upon each other. But my inner experience is always capable of holding complexity that my surroundings might not be structured for.

That creative practices are treated as luxuries, or only something to be developed seriously by those who pursue them professionally, can be seen in the budgets of learning institutions. Perhaps this accounts for my previous sense that writing is auxiliary to "real" work, rather than an indispensable tool for navigating

the complexity of the present. Is writing a discipline, or is it a way of proceeding? When so much of the communication we do is with ourselves, deciphering the stories we tell ourselves shouldn't be seen as secondary to academic writing, as they often show up implicitly in what we do and how we do it.

I often feel most inspired when I am trying to hold together unbearable tensions, when I am at the edge of piecing together elements that might not initially appear to be related. I have always been pulled in many directions and felt this to be a handicap, yet armed with the tool of writing for myself, I see the potential for clarity amidst so much contradiction. To limit ourselves to the task at hand is not necessarily to be more disciplined and attentive, but to accept an already limited scope of engagement—limited by our preconceptions and a fixed notion of our intentions. For me, fear and uncertainty influenced the academic choices I made, but not in a way that was satisfying or even more "productive" than what I chose for myself once I was able to identify what my fears even were.

Developing the tool of writing has changed the way I relate to complexity—the impossible interdisciplinarity that I contain. This is not because writing provides ready answers, or because the fabricated identity of "writer" resolves the fractured world I inhabit. Rather, it lets that chaos be legible, and sometimes even delightful; I become aware of the nuances of pressure as well as unanticipated spaces of lightness. Writing is something tangible I can do to begin stretching seemingly disparate pieces of myself into an acknowledgement of cohesion. It gives me a form through which to discover resonance in the external world that I might never have found otherwise.

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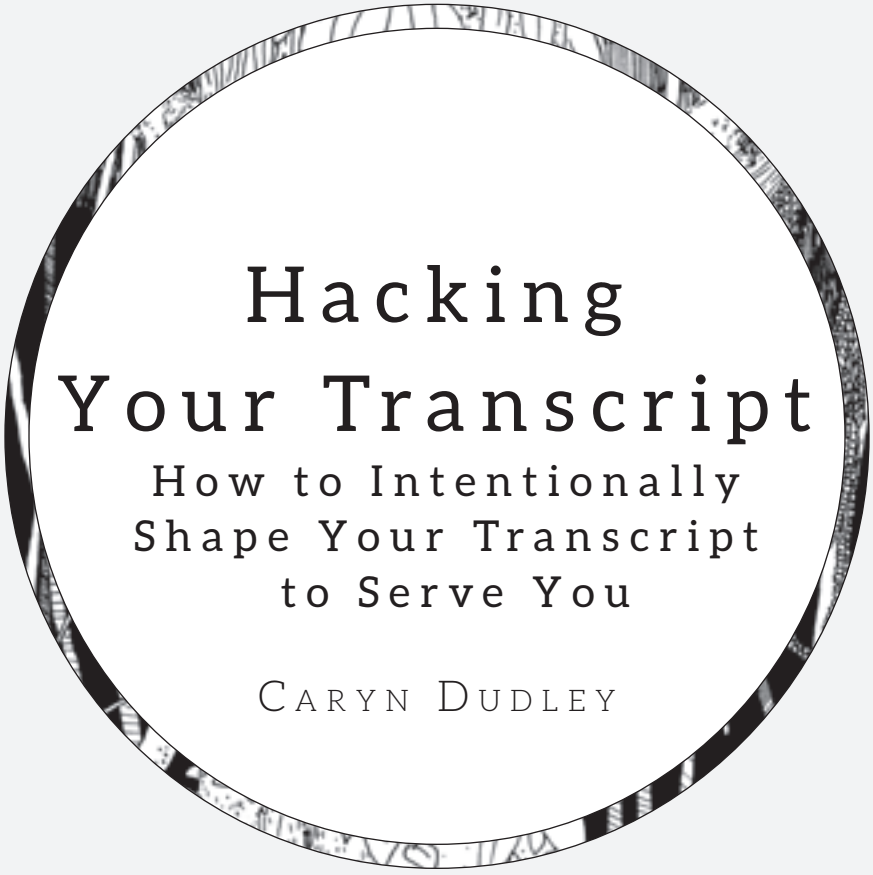

Hacking Your Transcript

How to Intentionally Shape Your Transcript to Serve You

Caryn Dudley

Every student who attends The Evergreen State College will leave with a narrative-based transcript unlike that of nearly any other school. No matter what you learn, create, or achieve here, your transcript is a fixed and semi-public record of your undergraduate education. The unique nature of an Evergreen transcript gives you an incredible amount of influence over its content, which can let you shape it to effectively serve you after graduation. Much is left to your control, and it is yours to harness if you choose.

See Your Transcript as Your Audience Will See It

You most often see your transcript in pieces at each evaluation conference, but a future reader of your transcript will see it as a complete collection of documents. Getting perspective on your transcript as a whole and imagining its journey out into the world beyond Evergreen can help you think about how to shape it effectively.

Every Evergreen transcript is composed of the following documents:

1. A one-page letter from the College that explains Evergreen as an institution. This gives outside readers context as to why they are holding something more complex than a list of course titles and grades.

2. Your Record of Academic Achievement, which most resembles a traditional transcript. It lists the program and course titles you've taken in chronological order, followed by their course equivalencies and the amount of credit you've earned. If you have any transfer credits, the name and credit amount of each institution will be listed at the top.

3. Your Academic Statement, which acts like a cover letter to your transcript and introduces readers to your education at Evergreen as a whole.

Then, paired by program in reverse chronological order:

1. Faculty Evaluations, which form the bulk of your transcript in the absence of self-evaluations and give your faculty's perspective on your performance in each program and course.

2. Self-Evaluations, which are optional but can add important perspective and detail not captured in your Academic Statement or faculty evaluations.

In a sense, your Record of Academic Achievement unpacks the integrated programs that you've taken so they make sense to the outside world, while your Academic Statement and evaluations fill in the details that course listings and credit equivalencies cannot convey. All of these documents work together to communicate to your reader what you've gotten out of your education at Evergreen.

To get a sense of your transcript as a whole, consider either collecting the pieces of your transcript and putting them together, or requesting your unofficial transcript from Registration and Records.

Anticipating your audience's experience will be much easier when you hold your transcript in your hands and get the chance to read it yourself.

Consider having someone outside the Evergreen community look through your transcript. Ask if they find anything confusing and what understanding they come away with about you and your education. It's easy to forget what doesn't make sense to someone outside of Evergreen after you've been here a while.

Think about how someone in your intended field will read your transcript. What may be considered too personal or too dispassionate will vary; commenting on your growth by admitting your struggles will be received differently in different disciplines. You may want to talk to a faculty member in your field of choice about this.

Identify the Purpose of Your Transcript

Whether you know your immediate after-college plans or not, you might have plans one day that will benefit from a well-crafted transcript. You want your transcript to stand this test of time. Looking back at your transcript and wishing you'd made other choices with it could be painful—and worse, impact your ability to pursue your new goals. Don't pretend to commit to something you aren't sure about. Everything that you study will inform, in some way, everything that you do in the future.

When surveyed, Evergreen alumni have commented that they have used their transcripts to apply for graduate school, professional and fellowship programs, scholarships, financial aid, employment, and internships, and to get promotions and pay raises. Many alumni also expressed that their transcripts were valuable for personal reflection and preparation for interviews, as a reference tool for writing cover letters and application essays, and as a model for writing performance reviews and recommendations for others.[1]

The purpose of your transcript goes hand-in-hand with whomever you anticipate will read it: admissions boards, employers, yourself. It tells readers what you've learned and done—and therefore what you can do. Your transcript is how you can justify that you have an equivalent of the major asked for by a graduate program or job posting; it's where you can refer employers to demonstrate that you have a skill set that bumps you into

1. The Evergreen State College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, *The Evergreen State College Five/Ten/Fifteen Year Alumni Survey: Administered to the Undergraduate Classes of 2007, 2002, and 1997 in 2012.*

The Evergreen State College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, *Evergreen One-Year Alumni Survey 2012: A Survey of the Undergraduate Class of 2011.*

a higher level of qualification; it's how you convince an organization that their internship will add to the experience you've been building in their field.

Your tone, or the attitude conveyed by your writing, is important for appealing to your audience. Your transcript is not a place to rant, make excuses, or be dramatic. The tone should be a balance of professional and personable, similar to a cover letter.

When thinking about purpose, audience, scope, and tone, you also want to think about how these manifest in each part of your transcript and how they relate to one another. Each document plays a nuanced role that supports the overall intent of the transcript.

Record of Academic Achievement

Your Record of Academic Achievement is the document that most resembles a traditional transcript, giving credit counts and course equivalencies in terms more familiar to your reader. Besides your Academic Statement, your Record of Academic Achievement will likely receive the most attention from your reader.

While most of the influence you have over this document is in which programs or courses you choose to take, you can also negotiate with your faculty what credit equivalencies you'll be awarded. If you know a graduate program or career path will favor certain credit, you can talk to your faculty about how to earn it.

You can also negotiate having your credit labeled as Intermediate or Advanced. Although upper-division credit is only officially awarded in mathematics and science programs, upper-division work is done across the curriculum—having your credit called Intermediate or Advanced is the best way to reflect this. This may involve altering the coursework, since not all students come into a program with the same background on the program's subjects. It is also possible that your faculty will ask you what credit you want, so be prepared to supply an answer. The earlier you can negotiate your credit, the more successful you'll likely be.

Academic Statement

Your Academic Statement is your readers' first—and possibly only—encounter with your voice in your transcript. In a way, your Academic Statement can attempt to answer the "So what?" of your education. It can highlight the big points in your education in order to synthesize and draw connections between all the coursework you've taken. It can tell your reader why you took the programs and courses you did at a college with no course requirements; how your choices helped you accomplish your goals at a college with no majors; and how all together your

decisions have brought you to graduation and prepared you for your next steps after college.

In your Academic Statement, you may want to focus on what you've done and what you can do as a result, rather than focusing on what you think and feel. It may be tempting in narrative writing about ourselves to delve into these deep places, but consider whether that's appropriate for a semi-public audience. Also, use caution in what kind of personal information you include. It is advisable to *not* include anything that cannot be legally asked in an interview—marital status, religious practices, disability status, etc. While these things may feel critical to your story, they can be compromising to include.

You will want to sharpen your focus as you near graduation. Start early and take advantage of the support the College offers, including workshops during Orientation Week, in-program support from faculty in Fall Quarter, Mentoring Days in Winter and Spring Quarters, and the services offered by the Writing Center and Academic Advising.

Faculty Evaluations

Evaluations from faculty form the bulk of your transcript, especially if you choose not to include many self-evaluations. Though you can't dictate their content, there are ways you can influence it. Before enrolling in a program, ask the faculty how they approach writing student evaluations and what they typically include. Faculty have a range of styles, so don't assume what theirs is like. From their answers, consider if theirs is a voice you would value in your transcript.

Typically, faculty have their evaluations of students ready for the evaluation conference. Go into this meeting having considered what you think you will see and what you would like to see. Take this opportunity to read through the evaluation carefully and really think about what it conveys to your intended future audience. If there is anything you would want revised, faculty are usually open to this input.

Self-Evaluations

Whereas your Academic Statement looks at your Evergreen education overall, self-evaluations focus on the work you did in a particular program or course. Self-evaluations are optional in your transcript, and there are several things to think about when considering whether to incorporate them.

First, you can pick which self-evaluations to include. Having one does not mean you must put them all in. Second, you can be choosey about what content a given self-evaluation contains. A self-

evaluation doesn't need to touch on everything you did in a program; you can write one just to detail a particular project. Third, you do not need to submit them to Registration and Records at the end of the quarter; you can wait and revise them all together as you near graduation.

Self-evaluations do add bulk to a transcript, and it can take time to make them transcript-worthy. So in what situations might you make room for one or more?

- If you do not have space in your Academic Statement to speak to something important that you want in your transcript.
- If your faculty evaluation did not include something you want your readers to know, especially if you did an internship or independent learning contract (ILC) where your faculty saw less of your learning process and experience.
- As a defense against a negative evaluation from your faculty, or to explain extenuating circumstances that your faculty cannot disclose.

If included, a self-evaluation should add something valuable to your transcript that would not otherwise be there. Do not add a self-evaluation just to have it; the extra length will not be worth it to your reader or to you. Self-evaluations should not describe the program, since faculty evaluations already include course descriptions. They need to go beyond, telling your reader what you did, what you learned, and why it matters.

Your self-evaluations are also a place to use coded language: certain words that indicate to readers the level of rigor of your coursework. Words like "exceeded" and "beyond expectations," both in your faculty and self-evaluations, will be read as if they were As. Words like "met expectations" are read as Bs. Use this kind of language to convey to readers the strength of your academic performance.

The Power of Your Voice

By requiring you to generate some of the content of your transcript, Evergreen asks you to be a primary source on your education. The difference between reading "Cumulative GPA: 3.5" and "The meaning of my education is…" can be tremendous. This is the most essential strength an Evergreen transcript offers you as a student. Having your voice in your transcript is about saying what you want to say and owning the relationship it creates with your reader. Your voice marks you as an individual, allowing you to stand out as a real person among a sea of grade point averages.

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To the Writer

Cai Logan

Have you ever received a writing assignment only to feel that special kind of whatthefuckness—a niggling at the pit of your stomach that metastasizes into all-out panic? So you take the assignment home but treat it as if it's got the plague, stuffing it into the dark recess of some drawer for later. Then you decide to write the thing, but first you gotta take a shower and watch some embarrassingly bad reality TV show and then go outside and gaze into your backyard thinking it would be hilarious if the Messiah fell out of that tree over there, and

then, *finally then*, you drag yourself back inside, lift the assignment out as if it were a dirty rag, sit down, and stare at it—not reading—just staring for some unidentifiable length of time because you're now descending into a swirling abyss of terror where time collapses into itself. I know you feel me.

The whole scenario is funny, sure, but the reason this type of fear exists is not nearly as comical. What I mean to say is that we've been processed. The Standardized American Experience does writers a disservice. It squeezes people between the narrow lines of pass and fail. Starting at the tender and imaginative age of four, standardized education discourages us from exploring our own ideas, and instead asks us to exchange our creative intuition—vibrant hodgepodges of our collective and individual experiences—for something in a can.

Think about your high school experience, the five-paragraph essay, the red pen, every bright idea you've had that didn't meet parameters. Think about the very word *assignment,* memories of unhelpful feedback, and feelings of defeat and discouragement. That deep echo of dread that some of us feel when we hear the word essay is not natural apprehension. Educational and social conditioning alienate us from our ideas while cultivating fear around making the grade.

In the first grade, I had an imagination that defied lines. I would color outside of them and doodle along margins, sometimes even writing straight off the page onto some forbidden beyond like the desk, the kitchen floor, or the wall. Paper couldn't hold me. My teacher would assign an essay on cats and mine would be written upside down. The cats would have horns; they could talk, even fly.

My disregard for the rules drove the teacher mad. I nearly failed the first grade. I was identified as a problem child, yet there had been no real offense. My first-grade teacher openly chastised me, often. She told me I would be held back if I didn't "get with the program." By the end of that year, I didn't think I was very smart. I began to feel ashamed of myself.

Eventually, I began to write in those lines, use topic sentences, obey word counts, stick ruthlessly to the assigned theme. By the time I graduated high school, all semblance of voice had been wrested from me. The task of writing began to make me panic. I avoided writing, and even felt lousy about writing that received good marks. Every time I wrote, it was as if I were being squeezed through a vice.

I once visited a friend's private high school in an affluent neighborhood. The contrast was shocking. Where I came from, the posters on the walls delivered

directives: "Follow rules," "Listen," "Be on time." At my friend's school, the posters said things like, "Lead" and the ever-surprising "Question authority." My friend told me about classes where students were encouraged to take risks, invest in their own thoughts, be creative, and reflect on their experiences. Here was a place where education didn't amount to the reproduction of arbitrary standards of "good," "right," and "passing."

If you had an experience closer to that of my friend's, consider yourself lucky. Maybe your parents had enough money to assure that you received an education that encouraged agency. You hit a lottery of sorts, that's for sure.

Yes, people deemed lower class are often discouraged from unique and personal thought and action and, instead, expected to learn to follow rules—yet that's only one strand of a very tangled web. Many people on the margins will have their own variations of this story. Some were told that their cultural dialect wasn't the correct way to write. Some were taught that their voice, because it wasn't a man's, was not valid. These are just a few realities; there are more. The details and the damage vary, yet, for many of us, the fact remains the same: we are the heirs to a legacy of trauma surrounding our writing and expression.

Writing is a form of thinking, and when your thinking is tethered, so is your writing. And it's not just the rules, grammatical or otherwise, that bind us. It's the culture of fear and punishment that holds these structures up. Explicitly and implicitly, we learn that there are real consequences, real stakes, for writing beyond the lines. By the time many of us reach college, we've internalized this without even realizing what happened to us. Thought and expression become a special privilege, reserved for the few that social hierarchy designates as smart and having something real and valuable to say.

When we become aware of the actual situations within which we live, we begin to operate with concepts and language that allow us to take possession of our selves. Then, we can reach out to others who struggle to recover their voices. Personal liberation feeds collective liberation.

So what does it look like? How do we begin to claim agency over our voices?

Know your worth. Your writing and thinking are valuable and you deserve to be heard. Your writing does not fall into the binary of good and bad. You are moving along at your pace of refinement and skill. Give yourself a chance to be human in your process. You will improve, be challenged, and at times be impressed.

Branding yourself the worst writer ever or claiming you're so good that you don't need feedback isn't helpful, nor is it honest. Maybe say to yourself, "I'm learning, and that's okay."

Imagine a linear writing process as a set of stairs. It moves you up in increments. Could you imagine trying to jump the distance between the first and second floors of a building? Use the stairs. F. Scott Fitzgerald drafted *The Great Gatsby* over one hundred times. Polished writing rarely happens in one sitting—most often writing must be crafted, massaged, shaped. A linear process will take you through the stages of refinement: brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, and proofreading.[1]

Writing doesn't have to happen in isolation, even though American individualism would have us believe that writing and thinking are solitary endeavors. I once had an instructor tell me that "writing is a social act." Writing communities exist to support you in your work. If you're an Evergreen student, the Writing Center is a great starting point. If not, find a person or group whose approach to writing resonates with you. Find the people who will listen to your

1. For more information about the writing process, see Tommy Chisholm's article in this issue, or check out *Inkwell* 2 for an in-depth discussion of each stage of the process.

ideas and value your writing. Find the people who will help you realize your vision.

Read the writing you love and imitate it. There are many ways to do this. You could try analyzing how an author organizes information in a particularly powerful essay, and then use the same information organization in your own writing. Or you might try isolating beautiful sentences from your favorite book and then inserting your own nouns, verbs, and adjectives into the sentence structure. This is reading as a writer. Imitating the writing you love allows you to figure how that writing works.

Begin a writing practice. This means sitting down at a specific time, every day. It doesn't matter what you write. You could write the F-word a hundred times for all I care, so long as you're writing. It gets you into the habit and lets that fearful part of you know that the act of writing isn't going to kill you.

Take a stand. Let's say you submit an essay and the instructor's feedback tells you to cut a certain paragraph. But you love that paragraph. It's your favorite. It's essential to your whole point, dammit! To cut the paragraph would be akin to severing your own arm. Then do not cut it. Who cares if you look back in two years and think to yourself, "Oh, that paragraph doesn't belong there after all." I understand that successful writing is successful communication, but this is about your authority as a writer, about cultivating confidence in your intuition. Accepting feedback is an art, yes, but trusting yourself is one too.

I've watched many of my student colleagues sink in their chairs at the sight of writing assignments. Many of us are processed through a wounding educational experience and told that we aren't smart enough when we can't meet arbitrary standards. It doesn't have to be this way, though. We can recover from the effects of these standards while learning new ways to act in concert with our ideas, our writing, and ourselves.

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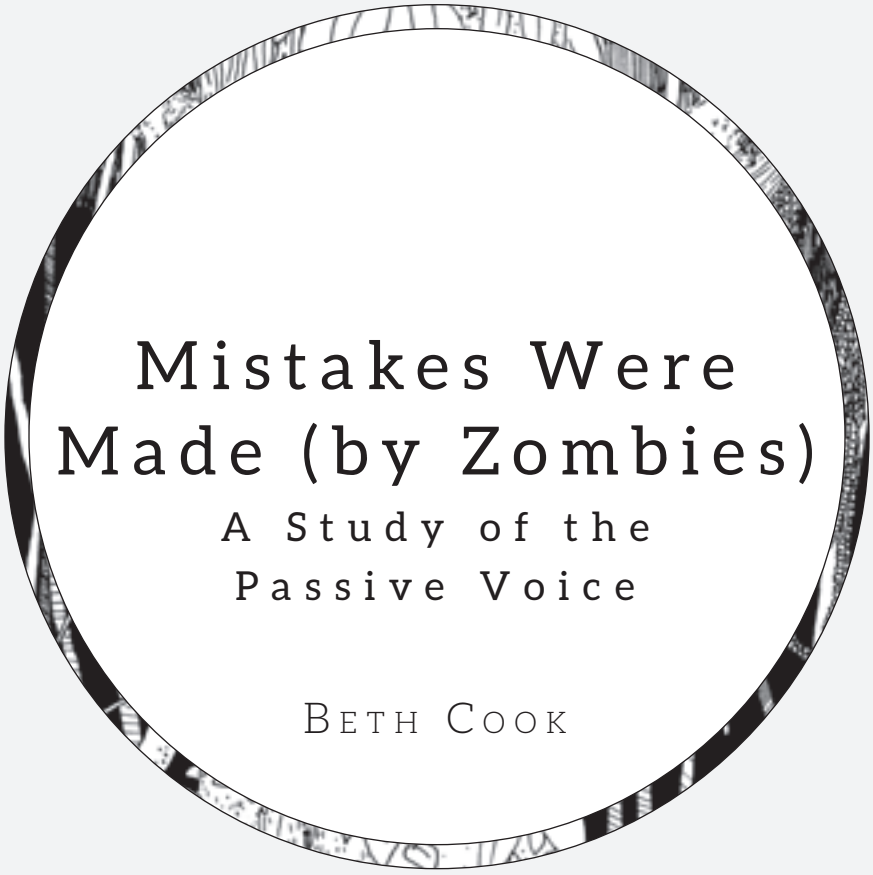

Mistakes Were Made (by Zombies)

A Study of the Passive Voice

Beth Cook

The saying goes that you have to know the rules before you can break them. Many skilled writers sometimes make the decision to break certain grammar rules, and the effect can be a beautifully constructed sentence. This is usually harmless, but the Always-Use-the-Active-Voice rule is the only grammar rule I know of that, when broken, has greater ramifications beyond how the audience perceives the writer. Besides the fact that many see the passive voice as "lazy" or "awkward," its effects can leap off the supposedly objective page and influence the way we think.

Like most things in life, the use of the passive voice is all about intentionality. Our choices have the greatest positive impact when we are knowledgeable and purposeful about them. No writer's work exists in a vacuum—consciously or subconsciously, everything that shapes who we are also shapes how we write. Our words eventually will become part of the greater cultural narrative of how we tell our history, whose stories we choose to emphasize and how. All those little decisions add up to something big.

"What the heck *is* the passive voice, anyway," you may ask, "and why does everyone keep telling me not to use it?" Stick with me here, but I need to give you a quick grammar lesson before we continue, just so we're all on the same page.

In grammar lingo, the subject is the person or thing performing the action, and the object is the person or thing being acted upon. This is in the active voice:

The puppy [subject] chased [verb] the ball [object].

If we change the sentence to the passive voice, the subject and the object switch places:

The ball [subject] was [verb] chased by the puppy [object].

Sounds weird, right? That's because we've taken the focus off the adorable puppy and shifted it to the ball. Why do we care about the ball? Go back to the puppy!

A trendy tip for identifying the passive voice is if you can add or substitute the phrase *by zombies*:

The ball was chased (by zombies).

The proposal was unanimously approved (by zombies).

Each participant in the trial was shown (by zombies) a series of pleasant images before being punched in the face (by zombies).

This helps me remember the difference, because zombies are the most passive of all horror-movie antagonists.

In the case of the puppy and the ball, the verb changed from the active *chased* to the passive *was chased by* or, at its core, *was*. In most instances of the passive voice, the verb is some variant of *to be*: *is/are/was/were*. This is why you'll often hear people describe the passive voice as "lazy" writing. But, of course, it's more complicated than that.

If you don't know how to look for the passive voice, it's easy to miss. If you don't know why it can be problematic, it's easy not to care. In his TED Talk, filmmaker and author Jackson Katz gives a great example of how this can be dangerous:

> This comes from the work of the feminist linguist Julia Penelope. It starts with a very basic English sentence:
>
> John [subject] beat [verb] Mary [object].
>
> Now we're going to move to the second sentence, which says the same thing in the passive voice:
>
> Mary [subject] was [verb] beaten by John [object].
>
> . . . We shifted our focus in one sentence from John to Mary, and you can see John is very close to the end of the sentence, close to dropping off the map of our psychic plane. The third sentence, "John" is dropped, and we have:
>
> Mary [subject] was [verb] beaten.[1]

This shifts all too easily to "Mary is a battered woman," or "Mary is a victim," and now John's crime has become Mary's identity.

If this sort of rhetoric were the exception and not the rule, it might not be such a problem. Unfortunately, the passive voice is used this way so often that our eyes brush right over it without seeing how no one is being held accountable. Think about how many times you've heard a politician, CEO, or other powerful figure say something like, "Mistakes were made." Oh, really? Those mistakes just made themselves, did they?

For these reasons, we can and should learn how to identify the passive voice and whether it's doing any damage. In *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues,* Julia Penelope says, "The rhetorical reasons for the popularity of the passive are obvious: remove the agent, shift the hearer/reader's focus to the victim. . . . In order to defeat these deceptions, we have to learn to ask 'by whom?' when we hear an agentless passive. All it takes is a little practice."[2] We can learn to identify the passive voice not just in the writing and speech of others, but in our own.

In the wave of public response to the murder of Mike Brown, damali ayo stated:

> I heard students at one of my recent visits to a college talk about how "I am in danger because of the color of my skin." This is not true, you are in danger because of the mindset of the culture and mentality and actions of other people. The burden is not on you. It is on them. You are not being killed (passive tense), people are killing you (active tense). You can't stop the passive tense, you can only stop the active tense. Stop the killing—then people will stop being killed.[3]

You don't walk out into the world and just happen to get killed like you just happen to get a cold. Viruses are blameless;

1. Jackson Katz, "Violence Against Women—It's a Men's Issue." TED Conferences, LLC, May 2013.

2. Julia Penelope, *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues* (New York: Pergamon, 1990).

3. damali ayo, "Quick Race Bites," damaliayotalks.tumblr.com, November 1, 2014.

murderers are not. Darren Wilson himself said about Mike Brown's parents, "I'm sorry that their son lost his life," not, "I'm sorry I killed their son."[4] For those paying really close attention, his comment is technically in the active voice, but it's still conveying a sense of passivity. Wilson has taken himself as the agent out of the sentence and made Brown the one responsible.

But what happens when a person is not the intended focus of a sentence? I had heard that using the passive voice was encouraged in scientific writing, and not having done any myself, I wondered why that was. I asked around, and an acquaintance explained how scientific writing comes from a completely different tradition than journalistic or creative writing and therefore has its own particular set of standards.

> [Passive voice] takes the focus *off* the people doing a thing, and puts it on the thing itself—which is the science, and which is what people reading scientific writing want to know. We probably don't care that Heather micropipetted 50 mL of whatever onto agar gel, but we probably do care that 50 mL of whatever got onto agar gel by means of a micropipette (and Heather signed off to say she'd done it).
>
> . . . It expresses the priorities of its community: science is done *by* people, but it is not *about* people. It's supposed to be bigger than anyone (and everyone) involved; facts are supposed to be facts no matter who collected the data, or who is reporting it. One could argue about the extent to which this is actually the case, but it is so universally believed that a lot of people forget the sheer number of people involved in doing science. It's not impersonal because it's inhuman—it's actively *depersonalized* and that is because that depersonalization makes it easier to do well.[5]

This is a great example of when you can use the passive voice effectively. It puts the focus where it needs to be: on the science, not the scientist.

In creative writing, however, the passive voice is usually discouraged, since active voice feels more dynamic and propels the reader forward. But using the active voice just because it "sounds better" isn't enough. Novelist Dorothy Allison objected to how often she encountered the passive voice when reading sex scenes, especially in ways that made the woman seem passive or victimized. So when she wrote her own books, she deliberately used the active voice in sex scenes to give her heroines their rightful focus and power.

4. "Ferguson officer Darren Wilson has 'clear conscience' over Michael Brown shooting," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2014.

5. Mace Spiegel, online message exchange, October 24, 2014.

On the other hand, plenty of well-respected authors have chosen to use the passive voice in beautiful ways. Let's unpack two of my favorites.

> "The story so far: In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move." – Douglas Adams

Adams does not specify who or what created the Universe. As much as we might want to hold someone accountable for this bad move, we can't. Likewise, we do not know who or what is judging this as a bad move. In a classic example of Adams' genius, the chaotic, infuriating anonymity swirling around in the quote is reflective of the Universe itself.

> "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." – G.K. Chesterton

Which leaves us to wonder: dragons can be beaten *by whom*? The implication is, by each of us. It is a deliciously subtle empowerment. Go, Reader. Fight and beat your dragons.

Academic writing is a tricksy, slippery creature that contains some aspects of all three of these traditions—journalistic writing, science writing, and creative writing—plus its own set of standards. We must constantly walk the line between objective and subjective, adjusting our tone to fit the particular assignment. If you're taking a science class, your faculty may encourage you to use the passive voice. Or you may get teachers who hate it and never want to see it in your writing. If you're working on an assignment and don't know whether to use the passive voice in a particular sentence, ask yourself who or what in the sentence has the power and what that conveys to the reader.

A great time to practice weeding out the passive voice in your writing is in your self-evaluations and Academic Statement. You want to make yourself look good, so using active language like *I learned. . . I created. . . I facilitated. . .* can help assure your readers that you are the one in charge of your education. But even here, you can use the passive voice deliberately with good results. In a recent self-evaluation, I read through my first draft, looking for instances of the passive voice I could reword. I found one that said, "I was fascinated by the lectures." It had crept in accidentally, but the decision to keep it was intentional. This wording put the focus on me and my learning; if I had said, "The lectures were fascinating," the focus would have been on the program itself.

Your education does not end with graduation from Evergreen, and you will continue to write and speak sentences for the rest of your life. If you know the semantic tools available to you, you can make better choices about how to use them. Whether you use the active or passive voice, great, but make it an intentional choice.

What we read shapes how we think, and how we think shapes how we write. If we can interrupt this cycle and make different decisions about how we write, this can change the landscape of what people read and, in turn, change the way they think. As a writer, you have the ability to shift the power dynamics of a sentence. The passive voice is like any tool—designed (by zombies) to help us, but in the wrong hands can become a weapon. So what do you want your writing to do: build or destroy?

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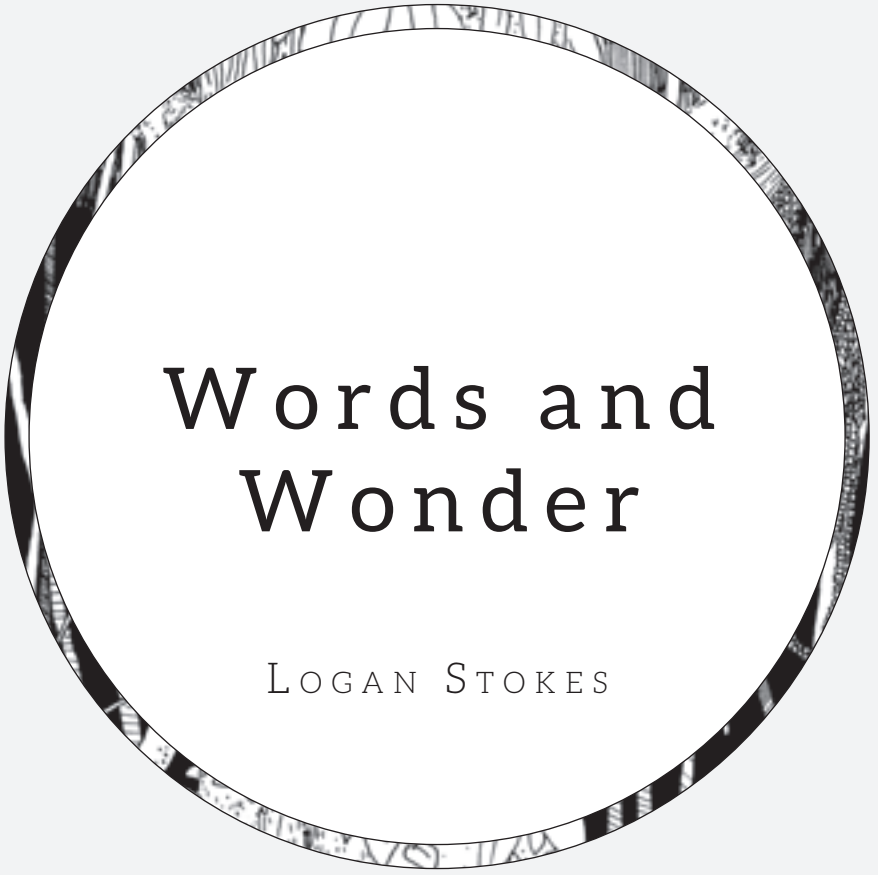

Words and Wonder

Logan Stokes

Language is a powerful toy.

By the time I could walk, I understood speech and tone and that they had significance—that there was a meaning to the jumble of sounds coming out of people's mouths. I wasn't about to observe this tool and be like, "Nahhh, I'll pass," so I mimicked the noises and started transcribing a dictionary in my head to keep up with all the words around me. And it paid off. After a while, I could ask for things I wanted, I could tell people how I felt, I could make my friends laugh. With those words and sentences in tow, when I picked up a stick in the yard, I could make it so much more. Through my narration, that stick could become a key to an invisible door that led to anywhere I wanted to go.

But just like how the shine of having a driver's license wears off after a couple years, by the time I was old enough to get a failing grade in Handwriting, the potential of language began to lose its sparkle.

It starts with being put on the spot. Some authority says to me, "Write," and there I sit in a rectangular room, looking at a rectangular book and a rectangular piece of paper, with a point tally commanding me to fill it up or face the consequences. Somewhere along the way, something important is lost. I'm so worried about the number of words I need to write or the number of quotes I need to include that I forget about the wonder I used to feel at a chance to say anything at all.

Sometimes though, I can close my eyes and pick up that stick again. I remember the hundreds of days I spent wandering through the landscape of my mind until my mother would make me come inside from the darkness. No one told that kid to imagine, but he would have whether he was asked to or not. More than anything, I would like to grasp that limitless potential again, but a part of me recognizes that I never actually let it go. In my backyard, the key to that invisible door was language itself.

Maybe one day after enough reminders that words are life's ultimate playthings, some authority will tell me to write, and instead of dread or annoyance, I will feel emboldened to comply. This time, I'll know that I—not my professor, not that point tally—hold the key. This time, when I type out each letter, I won't feel anxiety or boredom or longing for a stroll in the sunshine. I'll feel alive. Every sentence will be magic—each one an opportunity to challenge myself, to learn, to explore.

Or maybe not. It seems there will always be times when I stare at my computer screen, bitter about the wording of a prompt or the fact that I'm not having a beer with friends. But that childlike wonder at the feet of language is mine to embrace always. The kid I used to be will always be there to guide my fingers on the keyboard and remind me of my potential if I let him. Whether I choose to remember it or not, when I picked up that stick, I never put it down.

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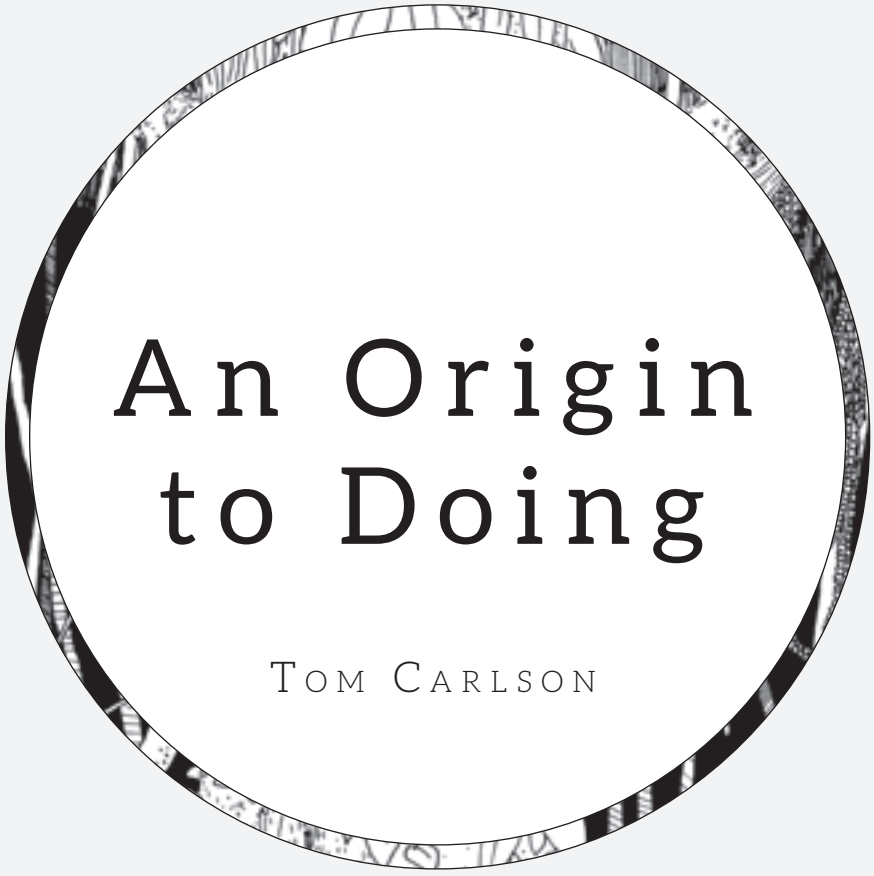

An Origin to Doing

Tom Carlson

What are the restrictions that steer, limit, and justify the labor of the imagination? Do we receive the songs of our world with the most topical stratum of our being? Out of some lack of trust, have we made ourselves irrelevant to the world, satellite of the wind, ground, and sky? How many wild convictions, ghosts, songs, and regrets were sent to an asylum because some rancid standard or covetous piece of etiquette felt their windy dictatorship wobble arbitrarily?

What if when we create, out of some chain of allegiance to our origins, the ghosts visit and the expulsion from wind, ground, and sky goes revoked? I think that this is the case, and I'm sure I feel the breath of a phantom on the back of my neck when I need to write. I feel a tug on my chest and a bird flies up to the window. My task is to open the window; it's up to me to look outside and notice, to abandon the coddle of cynicism I've honed the posture for, to forget my face at home so that I can admit my participation in the chorus of the world.

In writing, the stoke that orders my feet to step and my eyes to dilate is acknowledged and, with the crude material of language, gets dressed and described. If my feet and eyes allude to the birds outside the window, it's because I hear them, because I am writing to walk and scribbling to the key of their song.

I want to sharpen my sensitivity. I ask myself: what hibernations and autumnal descents have I neglected to lie down with? How many breezes carrying some scent made for my sinuses and blood have I scoffed away? The rain smells and sounds like a symphony, but I can't pick out a single instrument. Mountains tell the weather what to do, tectonics tell the mountains to stand up, and somewhere at the origin of it all, things that are titanic, violent, and ecstatic are driving the universe. What pulse does the bird grasp that I cannot—or else have lost—because "the bird does not distinguish between her heart and the world's"?[1]

If I want the page to reflect the commands of my heart and the sky, I have to relinquish my me, my planner, my role, and my small accomplishments and failures. My own worth must be set in the context of the world; my priorities are considered from the perspective of the moon, and the murmurs of trees and grass approach me without residue. The iron truths that galvanize my body and call me to action glow red. The arbiter of life and death pays attention.

> And do you know, do you know that mankind can live without the Englishman, it can live without Germany, it can live only too well without the Russian man, it can live without science, without bread, and it only cannot live without beauty, for then there would be nothing at all to do in the world! The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here! Science itself would not stand for a minute without beauty—are you aware of that, you who are laughing?—it would turn into boorishness, you couldn't invent the nail![2]

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1982), 235.
2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1995), 486.

I am interested in what provoked the efforts of people to begin, what keeps us from buckling under the stone logic of helplessness. I am interested in the pistons of imagination. Behind the nail is the force of the origins, the ventricle of gravity and time, and our bond to the earth. I would like to order away whatever umbrella has covered up the sky, repulsed the dirge of stars, and flattened the choir of birds. I would like to abandon the movement toward boorishness, if that is what we are moving toward. I think some people, out of a terrible forgetfulness, walk around and pray, "Then there would be nothing at all to do in the world!" I write to reckon with the umbrella over the sky and resuscitate the provocation of the nail. Writing begins in communion with beauty, with a firm grip on the chord that stretches from our sternum, up to the star that stuck around even after we shoved an umbrella in its face.

There is nothing necessarily beautiful about flower petals, what may end up on a postcard, or what some barefoot bohemian is blathering about. The last star reveres the vitality of mayhem, and even after, when hyenas cackle at the mess. Beauty: I am talking about the bond that secures us to Earth. All sides of it. After the last "why?"—why you do anything, why you care at all—the only answer defies interrogation. The only answer is because life and the loyalty of death approach, because for some reason, or no reason, our absurd life is beautiful. Why is it beautiful? The umbrella can cite surface characteristics, but these have nothing to do with the vengeance of dreams, or the first deep breath of morning. The umbrella doesn't know why the nail got invented—only how. Writing can open the window so that sidereal reminders come flying into my room. If nothing would "stand for a minute without beauty," can we also say that everything walks clumsily when it refuses to acknowledge what enables it to stand in the first place?

Writing is a chance for this acknowledgement, to make our steps harmonize with the songs of birds. So, a writing practice that is in cooperation with the instructions of my heart, with beauty, is a reconciliation of trust in the world; what gets written is language's most valiant attempt to bear testimony to the flame of my being.

Beauty is the star outside the umbrella that will never abandon the ground or our feet. It saves you and your parents and the creek of your childhood from becoming graph coordinates or schematics. It doesn't exclude tragedy or the solemnity of a fracture from its majesty. It unfetters the wings in your chest abruptly—a column of birds and wind

forthright and swiftly to the lungs from a cloud. Our mouths fumble and name the song inspiration. We nod and agree that this can be its name. Inspiration is the chord that breaches the umbrella and responds to the original and last star. Everything that we do requires that we be inspired to do so first—everything that ever gets done has its vitals in the beautiful.

Writing is a chance to endure the vibrations of this chord. This is what makes writing so ironic: it uses the media of the umbrella, the flesh of language, the infrastructure that set us peripheral to the earth, and attempts to give it an imprint of inspiration, to step to the commands of a primary star. Writing uses the umbrella to indicate outside of it.

When I write, I call upon that star—conscious of it or not. I ask it how to assemble the garbles and tongue smacks of our language into a testimonial to my core. If this goes gracefully enough, I might decide to deem it the product of inspiration. But the potency of our inspiration, of what is written, depends on how clumsily or gracefully we relate to our chord, the sky, and the beautiful.

If I ask my writing to comment on the river, I may appreciate and cite the information the umbrella provides: something about the cultural significance of rivers,

the problems and advantages of dams, or how rivers appease an argument about biodiversity. But without beauty, I would never have heard the roar of the river. I couldn't see the shimmer of rocks in its bed. I couldn't care about rivers; I'd lose the inciter for every comment on rivers ever made. I'd forget that rivers couldn't care less about cultural significance, dams, or biodiversity—that's all umbrella drivel, and the river rolls on without blinking. Nothing can be said about rivers prior to their beauty. I'm pretty sure the umbrella thinks it's primary and that it piles a bunch of chores onto rivers. Soon, if it can, it will throw a leash on my moods and the horizon, soon the trees will follow the schedule the umbrella assigns them.

Writing requires that we journey before our first words. It calls on the star and listens for the bird, and then tries to fit these murmurs into the plots of language. In order to symbolically represent what is necessarily prior to any symbol, we find ourselves flirting with the boundaries of culture, knocking up against the ceiling of the umbrella, in a space where the authority of birdsong deposes facts and rules yield to the heart. Out here, songs overflow with meanings that are capable of stretching the limits, abusing language so that it may come close to doing what we want, so that it can allude more honestly to the bedrock of our heart, to an energy prior to any umbrella.

Beauty is the only motivation for the nail and everything that ever got done. It can link what we write to the pulse of our star and our sky. Writing, as the transcription of birds and the vibration of our chord, takes on our fingerprints and is obedient only to our blood. It becomes impervious to the patents of the umbrella because it adheres honestly to the raw media that engage us with the world. Emotions take on a new accuracy, and the material of the constructed world submits to its creator.

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INKWELL WOULD LIKE TO THANK

Capitol City Press, Sandra Yannone, Taylor Dow, the staff at The Evergreen State College Writing Center, all interns who worked on a piece during *Cultivating Voice II*, and everyone else who has supported us during the creation of this labor of love.