

The failures of formal writing narrative essay

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This paragraph is the introduction because this is a formal piece of writing, and in formal pieces of writing, the first paragraph is always the introduction. Standard protocol calls for a hard-hitting question, or bold statement, or existential quote, to begin such paragraphs to smother the reader's attention in a net of intellectual stimulation. The absence of such a device in this particular piece, however, serves a rhetorical purpose. Too often in schools, students are provided with a formulaic outline for how to structure an essay, told that there is one way to write and argue and express.

The emergence of a student's individuality through a school composition has become increasingly difficult as educators focus on teaching how to write - within proscribed boundaries - for the purpose of standardized tests and other ubiquitous assessments, thereby denying the student the intellectual benefits creative writing offers. Creative writing is more intellectually valuable than formal writing because it prevents communicatory conformity, emphasizes the thinking process and can lead to self-discovery not possible with structured composition. Creative writing cannot be thrown together by following a recipe, like instant macaroni and cheese; rather, each composition possesses its own flavor and characteristics, distinctive in the same way that a grandmother's homemade Applepie can be recognized by her fawning grandchild. Yet, as standardized tests dominate the educational docket, the process of creating prose has begun to parallel that of cooking the microwaveable dinner. Add a shocking statistic, a thesis statement mentioning the main ideas, mix in three body sections as a binding agent, top it off with a sappy call to action as a synthetic sweetener, and voila - a perfect score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test has just been achieved.

Yet the development of this ideal form of written expression has major drawbacks. As Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman wrote in *Newsweek* just last year, “ Overwhelmed by curriculum standards, American teachers warn there’s no room in the day for a creativity class,” a fact which seems to indicate the danger of an approaching conformity in the writing and thinking capacity of the next American generation. Some argue that educators lack adequate instructional time to nurture divergent thinking abilities, because “ kids already have too much to learn” in order to meet established standards. However, the “ trends of...focus on standardized curriculum, rote memorization, and nationalized testing” – which Indiana University’s Jonathan Plucker argues characterize the American educational system – come at the expense of the development of each student’s own voice and creativity (Bronson and Merryman 44). When forced to follow steps all the time, the artsy neurons of the human brain take longer and longer furloughs between synaptic connections, eventually leaving a brain with dulled creative capacity. Creative writing helps to revive the intellectual elasticity numbed by forced formulaic prose, and prevents a sizzling plate of expressive scrambled eggs from being supplanted by the banality of scripted instant oatmeal.

More so than formal writing, creative composition emphasizes the organic thinking process. Considering an issue always in fact-based and dry terms does little to extend our intellectual elasticity, but rather compacts our minds with almost too narrow a focus. The value of creative writing, as told by Pulitzer Prize winner John Updike, is in its capacity to draw the author “ closer to the actual texture and intricacy of experience”; formal writing

allows for only general, detached investment. With the focus in schools increasingly on such bland and formulaic composition, it follows logically that students' ability to thoughtfully consider a topic merely within the natural vacuum of their own thoughts and individual existence would suffer.

Conventional composition creates a culture in which concrete reasoning replaces abstract, critical thought; indeed, in the current age of computer science and technology, the language of reason manifests itself in numbers and binary code, as opposed to more fluid and universal theories and truisms. The intellectual advantage of creative writing is in its encouragement of consideration and pure thought, and the creation of a product not based on the findings of statisticians, but the personal connections and ideas that originate organically from within the author himself.

Furthermore, the agenda of creative writing is not to impress a test grader or gain entrance to an institution, but rather to graft together various dormant ideas and inspirations, otherwise reduced to a hapless, soupy conglomerate of neglected neuronal potential. In creative pieces, the reason for composition is not to reach the end; the reason for composition is to compose. Too concerned with end results to focus on the journey, educational curricula neglect to emphasize the importance of the thinking process. Yet, allowing youth to indulge in their imagination and letting them take their minds for an explorative spin has been shown to possess great benefits for development in later life. One Michigan State University study showed that many past Macarthur "genius award" recipients were the type of kids who sometimes played in their own worlds and realities (Bronson and

Merryman 45). Creative writing caters to a more important part of intellectual development than using ideas already documented; it pushes a student's intellect to contrive new ideas of their own.

The most impactful characteristic unique to creative composition, however, is its capacity in leading the author toward learning more about him or herself. Updike characterizes creative writing as a form of “truth-telling” and “self-expression”; a research paper, for example, in its straightforwardness, yields a truth arrived at through looking at others, and not through examining oneself. When a writer is challenged to innovate, he or she delves deep into the mind, unearthing the ideas only his or her own which have been awaiting the opportunity to fill up a blank page. This probing of the neglected mental recesses necessary in compositional invention is the most important creative activity in which a person can engage, for through such excavation, a person can come across the essential components of their character. The writing of David Foster Wallace, the late giant of esoteric postmodernism, seems at first glance to reflect merely his random thoughts and whimsical musings.

Yet, as Wallace's longtime literary agent Bonnie Nadell pointed out in *Newsweek* last year, “anyone looking through his drafts and even his books will see the levels of thinking that went into every sentence and every page.” Writing unimpeded by the expectations of topic sentences and conventional transitions transforms the author from a blind follower of cartography to an intrepid, literary Lewis and Clark. Personal expression and creative writing grants the opportunity to learn about oneself through the internal search it requires, leading to the “truth” about which Updike speaks so lovingly.

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Some might argue that without formal writing – a medium accessible to all – discourse in the public sphere would not be possible; without a unified way to share information, collaboration and discussion would quickly go the way of the Tower of Babel. Indeed, perhaps a standardized form of communication does serve a valuable purpose, but what if – rather than all learning the same language – everyone learned to speak each other's language? If the human race could learn to comprehend information not just in one context, but within the context of another individual, the definition of developed intellect would extend beyond proficiency in one method of expression, to increased fluency in the comprehension of the human psyche altogether. Creative writing feeds the mind's craving to think about ideas never previously considered, and discover that which otherwise would have remained buried under the introductory clauses, numbered body paragraphs, and varied sentence structure of formal prose.

Writing without an outline – that is, writing to write – provides a medium for growth lacked by the drudgery of the forced assembly of a standardized essay. Conventions dictate that in the next couple of sentences, the essay should conclude, finish the discussion of the subject at hand, and implore the reader to go out and actively make a difference of some sort, even if I am not yet ready finish thinking about the issue. In structured writing, which is based on fact, the end is truly the conclusion. Yet the process of creative writing, which stems from individual thought, is only terminated when the mind ceases to think for itself. ?