

A Shift from Rules to Tools

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From the start of anyone's journey in writing, there are always rules that are implemented as strategies to help you become better. Even as you learn to write the alphabet you are taught to write the letters a certain way. Some people are taught to only use your right hand to write because it is the correct way, and it is the only way to succeed in writing. Would these mere lessons at a young age be our first introductions to writing constructs? Do these constructs and rules benefit us in becoming great writers? What rules aid and what rules inhibit a writer's ability to grow? These constructs, as presented in *Bad Ideas About Writing*, are flawed. Writing constructs do not benefit a writer in the long run, and I have experienced it to an extent firsthand.

As I skimmed through the table of contents, I could relate to most of the ideas presented. I had been taught and introduced to almost every one of them. Yet I found that the constructs that most resonated with me were "Writer's Block Just Happens To People" and "Official American English Is The Best." Also, Irvin's "What Is "Academic" Writing?" was relatable to me as well. It has always been taught to me that if you were not writing complexly, or if you were not creating these extensive sentences, then you were not writing your age or grade level. Academic writing as defined by the *Writer's Handbook* is that "Writing can and should be taught and learned in a certain systematic

way...becoming a good writer is a matter of learning forms of academic writing.” In other words, academic writing has a strict format that is without slang, humor, or words and sentences that were spoken in real life. Academic writing as taught by my former teachers was rarely condensed and simple. It involved so many structures of writing, such as the use of formal language and strict outlines or planning methods. The implementation of these structures, at first, helped guide my classmates and me. I, too, concur that academic writing is necessary as a foundational tool and especially is a source of being able to start the journey through writing, but somewhere along the lines throughout my education, these tools became rules.

As I wrote with academic constructs in mind, I found myself losing any sort of meaning in my writing. Slowly as I churned out these sentences hatred for writing churned within me as well. After all, as young kids, we tended to write in the way we spoke... yet, for some reason, the way I wrote being Chinese-Indian came out in a broken, dialogue focused approach, and that surely reflected in my papers and was deemed as non-academic writing. My “lingo” was not “proper” and did not “belong” in writing, especially never on a graded paper that was lightyears away from an A. As Alvarez mentions, “The English-only myth assigns deficits and gaps to anyone with home languages that are not English” (94); I felt that same distress and believed that my writing was terrible, even though I had the right ideas but conveyed them unconventionally. I struggled and did leaps to perfect my English to ultimately become “Academic” English. Once middle-school started, I was adding things that were useless to my arguments only because my mind found itself forming these lengthy, extravagant sentences that did not

sound remotely like me in order to pass. I found that my classmates, too, would share that same experience of adding nonsense or useless sentences to meet the word count. The impact of this construct had students believing that using extra words would equate their writing to being more academic or intellectual. That flawed mindset stuck with me, even through high school. Writing would slowly become tedious, and soon enough writer's block became a recurring character throughout my writing process.

Writer's block as defined by Edmund Bergler in Carter's "Writer's Block Just Happens," "Writer's block is a condition in which a skilled writer with the desire to write finds herself unable to write." I perhaps "tried hard to not try at all" (Carter 99). It was the *blank page* that he had touched on that connected readers to the tribulations of overcoming writer's block. He captured and explained how writer's block is an intention derived from the writers themselves. He includes these anecdotes that not only dispel the myth against the construct but also encourage writers to use techniques that would be considered "non-academic" writing. The very lessons I'd been taught to avoid, he motivated me to embrace. Even as he mentions the *blank page*, I related to the sensation of comfort in its emptiness. Writer's block had taken over me as if I were cast under some spell that all great writers constantly undergo.

Hand in hand, the tools that are given to me to aid in the writing process throughout my education have only touched the surface of what writing intends to do. No teacher of mine saw the message I tried to convey as best I could in those concise sentences. They were so focused on the ideals set by academic writing like the word count and the number of pages, that they forgot that writing's ultimate goal. Writing

conveys a purpose to an audience and should not be dictated by word count. I found that my peers would share that same experience of adding nonsense or useless sentences in order to meet the word count. But now as I enter college, the truth, though discovered late, is revealed.

Currently, as a business major who is taking an Introduction to business course, writing for this class has been a complete 180 compared to the way I had always been exposed to. I had this notion in my head that rhetoric and analysis would hunt me down through the rest of my life, that it was the most vital part of writing that I had to cling to even if the way I wrote it or did it was deemed “unacademic.” Yet during the first week of business class, I had been asked to write in a direct, curt, and straightforward manner. I was told that the goal of Business writing was to get directly to the point. The whole lush of word vomiting or word dress-up was never going to be on my agenda for this class. I was in pure shock at how business writing consisted of frank and simple sentences. Take Adam’s “Ten Tips for Better Business Writing” as an example, he writes “Start by **writing** short, declarative sentences...” To reiterate the objective of writing in business should be “short and sweet” as they say.

The genre of business consisted of presenting concise and clear information, presentations of graphs, charts, and short reports were what was required in my field.

Finally! I’ve escaped!

But does this style of writing or this particular field allow avoidance from writer’s block? Does this allow us to stray from “academic writing”?

No. In truth, there is no escape. Academic writing and writer's block should not be seen or interpreted as constructs. They are not rules, nor guidelines that must be obeyed. Instead, they are challenges and obstacles to overcome. Through all my years of English writing education, I had never been exposed to how to hone my writing skills, or given the tools like, Rose's "Rigid Rules", Irvin's "What is Academic Writing?," and even articles from *Bad Ideas About Writing*. These texts not only help reaffirm that these constructs are myths but aid in providing readers with resources to harness your writing abilities. The only way to convey your message to your audience is by overcoming these myths. Forget about how these constructs are a part of writing, let go of that romanticized fantasy that teachers or peers say is part of the writing process. Let go of those rules and barriers. Instead, diminish those myths to truly gain access to your skills, only then will you begin to unlock an understanding towards the goals of writing, and to overall tarnish the limits that set you up for failure. Don't let those myths stop you from really becoming a great writer.

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Author Bio

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