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Self Reflection Essay

I don't always have my priorities straight when it comes to writing. At first glance, it might seem like I know what I'm doing because my sentences tend to be grammatically correct and I've managed to incorporate a good amount of big words into my vocabulary. (Note: this is me from the future; yes, this certainly sounds pretentious as fuck, but keep reading it gets better). In my opinion, though, that says very little about my writing ability. Every second I spend making sure what I'm saying *sounds* good is a second taken away from making sure the message I'm trying to express is clear, or from assessing whether it is the right message to be focusing on in the first place. Writing serves primarily as a method of preserving ideas, but this purpose isn't immediately clear nor a priority to many who write for assignments (including myself). Not only is a great amount of whitespace used to fulfill boilerplate requirements that say nothing about the topic at hand, but many words and phrases themselves don't add anything to the meaning of what has been said. Thus, I've found myself reading multiple pages worth of words which only contain a paragraph worth of content in them on multiple occasions. While peer reviewing another student's paper, I found myself telling them that the impact of their argument was blunted by formalities. Like, it was clear that if they had been *speaking* to me about their topic instead that their points would be strong and coherent. Instead, I was stuck reading 'according to', 'they said', 'they also said that', 'the author', and my favorite, many ambiguous usages of 'they'.

It took me a long time to come to such a realization. Often, you don't realize that you've just learned to do the wrong thing until it's already too late. Honestly though, I think a necessary step in learning how to write well and express your ideas clearly is to go through a phase where you just stuff your writing with as many big words as possible and think that the fancier you're

being, the better. To me, this equates to a quote from Pablo Picasso: "'Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." There's an art to minimalism-- the same skillfulness needed to paint a nearly blank canvas so that it is considered to be masterful is used by the graphic designers that spent countless hours learning the ins and outs of their craft just so they could design the seemingly simple interface of an iPhone. Writers do not escape this cruel fate.
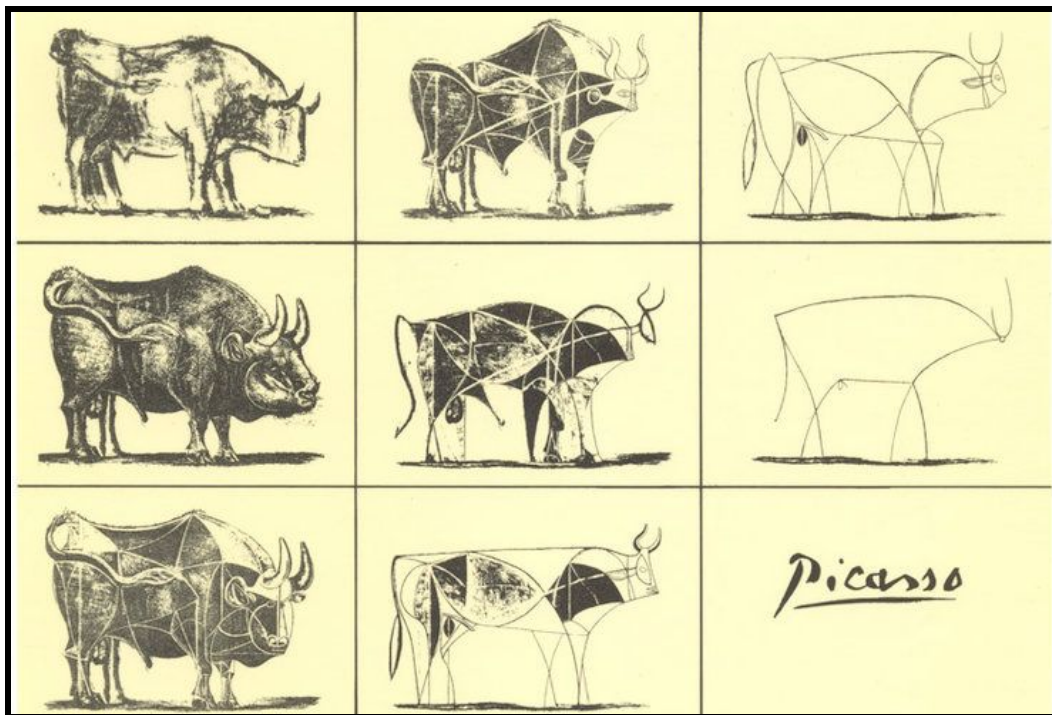
Picasso's bulls, which have been a topic of discussion in my Expository Writing class, perfectly exemplify the concept I'm describing. The bulls begin relatively minimal in features, but go on to increase in complexity and detail until not much more is possible. Then, Picasso strips detail after detail away from the bull until only its general shape is left. It seems that I'm onto something here, as searching up Picasso's bulls led me to find an article from Business Insider titled "Why Apple employees learn design from Pablo Picasso" where the author describes these bulls as "the Apple way". Masterful simplicity is key.

As you can probably tell, I'm not very good at being concise. Everything I've said thus far can likely be summed up to be no longer than a few sentences. My rant itself exemplifies everything that it is complaining about. On the bright side, you can see that I'm being critical of this practice, and that's a huge step. I've only come to spot this terrible habit towards the end of my first semester in college, after taking classes such as Expository Writing and First Year Seminar. All of the peer review sessions and assigned readings have helped with this. I've literally gotten feedback from my peers on some of my writing like, "I don't know what you're talking about here". That should never come out of somebody's mouth after reading something-- all I'm doing is stringing together tiny vessels of ideas in an attempt to paint a bigger picture, where could I have went wrong? Assigned readings have been a big help since they provide examples of what good writing should look like, but even more importantly they often give explicit advice on how to learn and improve. For whatever reason, this section from the book *Letters to a Young Writer* by Colum McCann (which was assigned as a reading in First Year Seminar) has stuck with me:

> There are no rules. Or if there are any rules, they are only there to be broken. Embrace these contradictions. You must be prepared to hold two or more opposing ideas in the palms of your hands at the exact same time.
>
> To hell with grammar, but only if you know the grammar first. To hell with formality, but only if you have learned what it means to be formal. To hell with plot, but you better at some stage make something happen. To hell with structure, but only if you have thought it through so thoroughly that you can safely walk through your work with your eyes closed.
>
> The great ones break the rules on purpose. They do it in order to remake the language. They say it like nobody has ever said it before. And then they unsay it, and they keep unsaying it, breaking their own rules over and over again.
>
> So be adventurous in breaking—or maybe even making—the rules.

I haven't fully actualized my findings in my writing yet-- but I'm going to. I've already changed the way in which I write my emails in an attempt to make information as simple to read and understand as possible. If you read my ten page research paper for my Expository Writing class, the latter half will, for the most part, be more straightforward than the first, as the writing process spanned for more than a month and I was coming to some realizations throughout. Put simply, it's a work in progress. Continuing my education in computer science, I'm positive that I will learn to better organize my thoughts due to the fundamental logical principles encompassed by the field. That, in turn, will make its way into my writing, and my aspirations will be met.

I love flowery conclusions, but unfortunately I'm out of ideas for this one.