

College Essay

Both Art & Science: Give it Structure. Make it Sing!

Introduction

Writing is both art and science. In most forms of communication it is the science that serves the art. The “Grammar Grind” we’ve experienced together has been science, and such structure and form matter, of course. But most people respond best to art & beauty. In the end, you want your writing to sing and to move people. So, start with art...



Start with Art

Brainstorm! Throw ideas on a page like Jackson Pollack threw paint. Don’t worry about what it looks like (or sounds like) at the outset. It’s like “brain barf.” If it comes in your head, throw it on the page, knowing you’ll circle back later and figure it all out.

Shift to Science

After brain barfing, get it organized with a quick outline. This can be detailed if you wish, but it can also be a general organization plan for what you hope to say and in what order you hope to say it. Either way, you need a plan, a direction.

Back to Art

Let your language loose in your rough draft. Follow your plan, but let the ideas lead your writing wherever it goes. Don’t worry at all about how it sounds at this stage. Let it loose!

Shift Back to Science Again

Now it’s time to dissect what you’ve written. Are your mechanics good? Have you structured your sentences to take your reader on a ride? Does their structure serve your tone, your ideas, your lasting impression? Does it make sense? Does it say what you want it to say? Have you revealed YOU?

Find Friends

At this point, you've seen enough of your stinkin' paper, and you're probably a bit tired of it. Good. Walk away. Give the paper to a friend or family member to look at it with fresh eyes, to ask questions, and to offer input.

After some time away, come back and look at it with your own fresh eyes. You'll be amazed at your new perspective, and you may even become your own best new friend when it comes to critiquing your work. Don't be afraid to listen to others, and don't be afraid to trust your own new perspective.

OR.... After all that, consider ripping it up (after saving it digitally, of course) and starting with a whole new prompt, a whole new piece. Don't get so attached to your first attempt that you fail to give something new and better a chance. (Wow! Did he just say rip it up?!)

End with Art

Once you've organized and structured and critiqued and edited, now it's time to make it sing! Have you chosen the "right" words, as Twain suggested? Are they vivid? Do you show rather than tell? Does your language inspire and provoke with pace and flow? Are you taking your readers on a joyous and profound journey that will move them and leave them forever changed?

Are you in there? Do we now know you? Is it authentic and real? Did you bring us closer to truth and beauty somehow?

In the end, this is you on the page. You must own it.

Be true.

Be beautiful.

Be you.

Enjoy the journey.