



MUSIC, WRITING, AND THE ACADEMIC STATEMENT: A WRITTEN REVERIE

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Seven-hundred and fifty words has never felt like such a colossal undertaking. As my tenure at Evergreen comes to an end, and I approach the Academic Statement, I am overwhelmed. I stare at an unwieldy document, my mind clouded by the influence this piece could have on my future.

I think of the graduate school boards, the managers, and the scholarship committees who might weigh these words. I think about the raw materials I have to draw from—the self-evaluations, seminar papers, and textbooks; the lectures, late night recording sessions, and group collaborations. I consider the person I was when I stepped onto Red Square for the first time. I think about who I am now and wonder, “Who is this piece really for?”

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Music is for me. It is everywhere, and I love it. I even love it on television when it is used to try to sell me something. I love it for all sorts of reasons, but mainly because I define what it means to me. All the more, when I write a melody or a rhythm, I embrace the freedom to go anywhere and intend anything. Even setting out for a piece to mean nothing is an intention: it lives and breathes.

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I dream of a day when I sit down to work on academic writing and see before me the potential of a solitary treble clef, not the cage of a blinking cursor.

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How do we get people to hear what we're saying? It's one thing to write a song with an intention to be appealing, and it's an entirely different thing for a song to actually appeal.

Sometimes when I sit down to write, I feel constrained by solitude as I struggle to find my way through the prompt, searching for the piece that my professor wants from me. But am I truly alone? Are there not people singing in my ear across space and time, their voices echoing through ink and paper? When I sit down in a quiet corner of the library to write, are not Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Homer sitting across from me? Are we not collaborating, my ideas rich in their reverberations?

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Musical exploration doesn't blossom in isolation. When I sit down with my guitar, my voice, and some microphones, when I set out to wander, I am not alone; there are hundreds of artists singing in my ear as my mind meanders around to find that chord progression, that lyric, that missing piece of me. Together we can explore compassion, anger, life and death. Anything.

Inspirations sing out across space and time, and I sing back, "Here's my song, here's my voice, here's me."

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I suppose we first have to know for ourselves what we are saying. How could I expect an audience to understand me if I'm not even sure what I want to say? Do I want to inform? Do I want to persuade? Do I want to learn something about myself?

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The constraints that professors have imposed on my work have often frustrated and irritated me. But the more I struggle against constraints, the more I see that accepting such challenges liberates my creative potential.

As a producer of music, I work towards a deadline with the space and equipment I have access to, and the artist's composition to guide me. These, in themselves, constrain the process, but are integral to shaping the identity and soul of the project.

If I wish to be freed from my frustration with academic writing, I should accept academic constraints the same way that I embrace that a guitar line recorded in my living room can enhance the product, even though it won't have the same quality of sound as a guitar line recorded in a recital hall.

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Academic writing is a form of creative expression, not a category separate from it. Thinkers who have crystallized their ideas in time inspire me to challenge and broaden my awareness. And just as musical pieces are an opportunity to explore my nature and environment, and

musicians across time support me in my endeavor to express myself, academic writing is an opportunity to question, to contribute, and to evoke wonder.

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Maybe we don't have to know what we want to say. Do I mean to intend anything in particular? Maybe I don't really want to be saying one thing. Maybe I want to prod at many things without highlighting one. And then the readers can decide what I'm saying for themselves.

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When I become complacent in my process, I become complacent in my thinking, and my final product suffers. In order to grow, I must push myself to explore ideas creatively. As a writer and artist, I can't let fear and hesitation keep me from making art, even if it might seem meaningless or unoriginal—the simple conception of ideas is an achievement with inherent significance.

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If we care about what we're writing and we write it the way we want to, does it matter if people aren't sure what we mean to say, as long as we know why we're saying it?

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It is odd to be required something from a school that makes a name for itself by lacking traditional requirements. But the Academic Statement is not only a requirement, it is also an opportunity.

Even if I dislike the idea of two pages summing up my collegiate journey, I like it a whole lot more than a grade point average attempting to represent what I am. When I sit down to write my Academic Statement, my tuition payments and my efforts beg to be satisfied. My education demands to be both critically engaged with and defended.

Sure, I want those graduate schools, managers, and scholarship committees to look at my work and see someone they can believe in, but the best way to achieve that is not by setting out to satisfy them. The ideal approach to my Academic Statement, or any academic writing, is in the same way that I approach my guitar and microphones—I must attempt to satisfy myself. The act of writing, of creation, garners a freedom to wander through an ever-questioning expression of self, and allows me to constructively assess who I am. When I turn in those 750 words at the end of my final term, it is I who should be able to read them and believe in myself. ◇