

The Fox, the Rose, and the Five-Paragraph Essay

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I remember the first time I learned the “right” way to write an essay. On the blackboard, my teacher drew a big rectangle and divided it into five sections—introduction, three body paragraphs, and conclusion. “This” she said, “is the structure to a good essay.” At the time it felt like a map, now, it feels like a cage. For a while, writing an academic essay felt dull and repetitive. Staring at my blank screen, I could imagine what my essay would look like—the structure, format, the life draining language—felt like I am rewriting every essay I have ever written.

It wasn't until I read the book, *The Little Prince*, I realized that my writing does not have to feel like a formula. At first, I thought the book had nothing to do with writing; it was just a book of wonder and awe. However, its quiet lessons about imagination and seeing differently changed my view of essay writing. In the beginning of the book, the narrator shows his drawing of a boa constrictor that swallowed an elephant to a couple of adults. “That is a hat,” said the adult. From this statement, I realized, I have been thinking like the adults in the book. They've forgotten how to imagine what is underneath. I have been writing from the perspective of the adults—focused primarily on structure that I couldn't see the ideas inside. I began to rethink what academic writing could be. Like *The Little Prince*, it could be simple and profound—a place where clarity and creativity can work together, not cancel each other out. If a story for children

can hold profound truth, can academic writing also be creative without losing its seriousness?

With the 5-paragraph essay, I was able to arrange my thoughts in a clear and organized structure. I admit, writing in this way felt like I was given instructions and all I had to do was just to follow it. Even on a blank page, words were able to form in my brain and flow onto my page without breaking a moment of focus. Like *The Little Prince*, it teaches the readers big ideas through simple language. Its language is clear enough for children to understand, but its ideas could fill a philosophy course. Saint-Exupéry never hides behind complicated words—instead, he lets small images, like a rose or a fox, carry big truths. It made me wonder if academic writing could do the same: express complex ideas in ways that are honest, human and imaginative.

Writing in a format though, has done its fair share of dulling my imagination when it comes to writing creatively. I always felt that my thoughts had to shrink to fit into the format. In high school, I mainly wrote research papers which focused primarily on finding the facts, stating statistics, and citing many research papers that were done on the same topic. On and on, the repetition of formulaic structure and language had me lost in the sauce. I remember one night, I sat on my bed, laptop screen beaming its bright light at my face, constantly reminding me to keep writing. After writing tons of research papers, I felt the exhaustion of writing yet another. This kind of feeling felt like I was only forcing myself to write the essay with completion as my only goal. I often compared myself at the time to the Lamplighter, a character in *The Little Prince*. A man on a tiny planet who tirelessly lights and extinguishes the streetlight with no time to rest. The story suggests his work, though useful, is futile because he has no time for rest or

living. That's exactly what the five-paragraph essay can become: a well-meaning formula that once had a purpose, but has become mechanical when followed too strictly.

I did not expect a children's book to change the way I thought about writing. But *The Little Prince* did. The words, yet simplistic, carried so much meaning. Written in the way it is, not only are children able to understand, but adults as well. I aspire for my writing to leave readers with the same impact. Chapter after chapter, I felt an urge to keep reading. Saint Exupéry had the readers hooked on the book, whether old or young, the language and understanding of the audience caused me to yearn for this kind of feeling in my writing.

It was during my first year in college when I was assigned to write a personal narrative about myself. With the sense of wanting my essay to tug on the heartstrings of its readers, I wrote my essay whole heartedly without worrying about the grammar. Page after page, ideas came in like a flood. Writing no longer felt restrictive, but rather exciting. Coming up with what should come next and how it should be written made it enjoyable and maintained a sense of interest within me. What the narrator learns from the Little Prince is that clarity and imagination are not opposites—they're twins. To see clearly, he must first learn to imagine again. The same is true for writing. A good essay does not just organize ideas; it shows the connections between them, the way the Little Prince sees meaning in stars and roses. Only when we write with that kind of openness can our words become more than structure—they can become discovery.

Another moment that shaped my view of writing was when I wrote a story about my high school senior retreat. The prompt asked me to describe what that moment "felt

like.” There weren’t any strict rules—just reflection. I found myself writing about certain feelings, the colors I saw, and how every moment had a lasting impact on me. For the first time, I wasn’t writing to meet expectations but to explore connections. My favorite lines I wrote in the story was “that next morning, the sky was adorned with colors painted from the hand of an artist.” Writing it resonated with me, and it brought me great happiness.

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye,” the fox said as the Little Prince prepared to leave. The narrator and I had learned this lesson from *The Little Prince*, who reminds us that the most important things are often invisible. I came to the realization that writing works in the same way. Great ideas do not come from strict structure or outlines, but from quiet curiosity beneath them. When I allowed myself to write with more openness, the same way the Little Prince sees the world, I started to see meaning in places I overlooked. Sentences can carry emotion and arguments can hold wonder. Writing became more about connection rather than perfection.

Now, I can see writing in a different light. It does not have to be overly formal or restricted to the five-paragraph format to be thoughtful. Good writing can be simple while still having a lasting impression. Structure, of course, still comes into play, but should not stand in the way of imaginative writing. Writing with curiosity and openness can help lead to understanding, not just explain.

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Abstract: This essay examines how the little prince influenced my understanding of academic writing and creativity. Through personal reflection and literary analysis, the essay critiques the restrictive nature of the five paragraph essay while recognizing its organizational value. By drawing connections between the novel, themes and my own personal experiences, this essay argues that academic writing can maintain clarity and structure while also encouraging imagination, personal expression, and emotional depth.

Bio: My name is Rois Ise, and I am from the Republic of Palau. I am currently a junior at Western Oregon University, majoring in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on pursuing a career in nursing. Outside of academics, I enjoy traveling wherever I have the opportunity and experiencing new places. Being far from home while balancing school and my goals has been challenging, but it also taught me how to manage my time effectively and stay grounded in the support I received from my family and community back home.