

# THE VOICE

MAGAZINE  
Vol 23 Issue 05 2015-01-30

## Minds We Meet

Interviewing Students Like You!

## Sexist Tech

Do Male Designers Mean Male Products?

## English 353

Review with a Grain of Salt

*Plus:*

*The Travelling Student  
Maghreb Voices  
and much more!*



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***The Voice  
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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## On "A Goal Too Far"

Good Afternoon,

I just wanted to say that this was a great piece. It is something I have personally been struggling and Deanna is right on point with the importance of quality of education and not speed of completion. It was a nice reminder for me to slow down and soak in the information, a needed reminder at that.

Thanks for publishing, and Deanna, thanks for writing. :-)

Regards,

Crystal F.

*The piece of paper is proof you took the journey. What you gained from the journey is why the paper's valuable. -Karl*

**We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org), and please indicate if we may publish your letter.**

## EDITORIAL

Karl Low



## Techno-gender

Most of the time, I tend to agree with the opinions my writers have. That's generally what happens when you've got a bunch of university-educated people trying to write smart, well-researched articles. There's not often a lot that can be objected to, but this week is a bit different. If you take a look at Primal Numbers this week, S.D. Livingston takes a look at the issue of sexism in technology, and (spoiler alert) concludes that although societies may be sexist, the technologies they develop generally aren't, and are getting even less so.

I tend to disagree. Not in that our technology generally isn't sexist by nature, most of it probably isn't. But I disagree that that's the default assumption we should have. Consider the example of the smart phone, which Livingston does. While it would appear that the smart phone is not a sexist device at all, the design of the standard touch-screen can make it difficult to use in a precise fashion if you have long nails.

Also consider the size and design of such technologies as laptops and iPads. While newer models are smaller, original models, although perfectly suitable for carrying in a briefcase or backpack, were generally slightly too large to fit securely into most ladies hand-bags. Of course, this doesn't mean that these products were made sexist on purpose, but rather by the simple lack of considering the differences between genders, and the almost exclusively male designers creating these products for how they would use them.

Part of the problem with this subject is that so many assume if you're declaring something sexist, you're declaring those who created it to be purposely chauvinistic or anti-female, but I don't think there's any need to go there. Sexism doesn't have to be intentional. I'd go so far to suggest that most times, it's not, it's just people blindly not thinking beyond themselves. But the idea of sexism, unintentional or not, in technology is important, because as our society brings technology into every aspect of our lives, the unquestioned assumptions that product designers, and all people have really, that they aren't sexist could lead to the development of various technologies that unintentionally make life a lot harder than it has to be for around half our population.

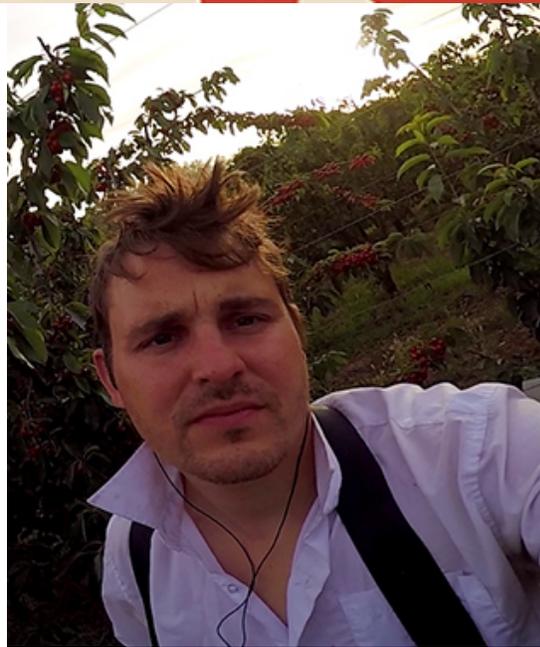
The moral of the story, to my mind, is that whenever you're making something, ask yourself, "Is this sexist, somehow?" Asking that question of yourself isn't saying that you're a sexist person, just that you're a person who has probably only experienced a single gender, so is there anything about your creation that might not work for people who aren't the same gender as you? Doing so not only keeps us aware of unintentional sexism, but might go so far as to broaden the audience of people that our creation can appeal to.

Aside from that, however, this week is a particularly good issue of *The Voice Magazine*, to my mind. Starting with an interview with our own Travelling Student, as well as his setting off on his own in his regular column, we also have a look at the new AUSU planner, a warning for those looking at student reviews of courses, a thoughtful look at how our viewpoints are created, and of course our selection of reviews, advice, and other articles to keep you thinking.

Enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl". The signature is stylized and cursive.

# MINDS WE MEET



*Philip Kirkbride is an AU student from Ontario who is balancing studies with world travel. He's enrolled in the Bachelor of Professional Communications program.*

*Philip is known to The Voice Magazine readers as "The Travelling Student." We recently caught up with Philip in Australia and interviewed him by e-mail about school, work, and, of course, travel.*

**Where are you from, and where do you currently live?**

I was born and raised in London, Ontario, though I consider Waterloo Region in Ontario to be my home. I'm currently writing this at a small cherry orchard in Young, Australia. I have a working holiday visa in Australia and am slowly travelling across the country.

**Describe the path that led you to AU. What was it that made you realize you wanted to go back to school, and what pushed you into the program**

**you've signed up for?**

My college informed everyone in my program that we were eligible to receive two years' credit in the program at AU. Once I had a steady job I started taking classes part-time. I wanted to broaden my skills and give myself the option of applying for a masters level program later on

**What do you do like to do when you're not studying?**

Of course I like travelling and writing—those two should be obvious. If I'm not reading, writing, or working, I'm probably hanging out with friends old and new. I really enjoy making people laugh, and I enjoy eating delicious food.

**What are your plans for this education once you finish? How does it fit in with where you want to go?**

I have a technology background but I hope a degree in communications will open up doors which allow me to take on more of a business role in future endeavours.

**Who in your life had the greatest influence on your desire to learn?**

Besides my parents, my grandfather, Douglas Kirkbride, was the biggest influence. No one in my family has a college or university education but my grandfather is extremely well read and travelled.

He lived in Britain as a child and saw the German warplanes flying overhead. Later he would join the British Navy, allowing him to travel across Europe. After that he immigrated to the East Coast of Canada. Having never

---

driven a car before, he and my grandmother purchased a Volkswagen Beetle and drove all the way to Sarnia, Ontario where they raised their family.

When I was younger he had a huge basement library, and if you asked him a question about another country or history you could always expect a long and detailed answer.

**Describe your experience with online learning so far. What do you like? Dislike?**

I like that I can study from anywhere in the world at my own pace. At times I've been pressed for time because of work, and AU has allowed me to extend classes. At other times I've had a ton of spare time which has allowed me to finish extra class work.

One of my biggest pet peeves is the lack of education about online education. A lot of younger people in Canada get it now as most universities are offering some of their classes online. When I'm travelling abroad though some people just seem confused with the whole concept of online education.

**When was the point where you wavered the most about whether it was worth it to continue your schooling, and what made you decide to keep going?**

There was a point when I was extremely busy with work and questioned if it was worth it to continue my studies. The flexibility of AU in allowing me an extension really helped to encourage me to keep going when things settled down again.

**What's your most memorable AU course so far, and why?**

It's actually a class I'm taking now ECOM320: *Overview of E-Commerce*. I find it really interesting mainly because I have an interest in both business and technology. I was also really impressed with how up-to-date the course is; the textbook mentions a lot of events that have happened as recently as two years ago.

**Describe the proudest moment in your life.**

I have two moments which tie for proudest moment. The first was being flown to Amsterdam all expenses paid by BlackBerry for a technology conference at the start of 2013. The other moment was being selected to develop the BlackBerry version of a mobile app "PictureThis" which was featured in several popular news outlets including CTV.

**If you were the new president of AU, what would be your first project?**

I'd increase the number of classes which allow you to receive text-books in all-electronic format instead of just print. While I personally prefer paper based text-books, I think electronic formats can improve accessibility for students in remote countries who are looking to get a quality degree from a Canadian institution without leaving their home country.

**If you were trapped on an island, what three things would you bring?**

Sun glasses, surf board, and a lifetime supply of margaritas.

**Describe one thing that distinguishes you from most other people.**

The level of passion and effort I put into my endeavours.

**What is the most valuable lesson you have learned in life?**

This is an oldie but a goody: 80% of success is showing up.

**What do you think about e-texts or the plans to make the university follow a call-centre model?**

As I mentioned earlier I think e-texts are very important. That said I think we should still have the option to receive paper based textbooks.

As for the call-centre model I think it would be great if it's done right. If I call in about a problem I'm having on an assignment and I want to call back later, I want to have the option of speaking with the same person. This is one of the most frustrating things about getting technical support over the phone if you don't get the same person you have to explain everything over from the beginning.

**How do you find communications with your course tutors?**

I find it varies hugely between tutors. I have some tutors who have very few in-office hours and stand me up when I call them at a time they set for a phone call. Yet I have other tutors who are extremely helpful and will actually email me periodically to see how I'm doing.

**Where has life taken you so far?**

My family isn't rich and I didn't have high marks in high school. Despite that I worked hard in college and managed to get lucky with a lot of opportunities. I got a short-term job with my college in my field right after graduating, followed by another great job after that. Later on I started my own business, and I'm now studying at AU while I travel the world.

**What (non-AU) book are you reading now?**

I'm just finishing a great book called *An Economist Gets Lunch* by Tyler Cowen. I'm writing an [article](#) for *The Voice Magazine* about how some of the tips in the book have allowed me to eat well on a student budget as I've been travelling.

**What prompted you to begin writing for *The Voice Magazine*?**

I'm a web developer by training but I always had a fantasy of being a travelling writer. After seeing an ad in an AU Student Union email, I responded and pitched my idea to Karl, the Managing Editor of *The Voice Magazine*. Karl liked the idea and I've been writing for *The Voice* ever since.

## Student Sizzle AU's Hot Social Media Topics

Following what's hot around AU's social media sites.

**AUSU Student Forums**

In the [Humanities Course Discussions](#) forum, user "derdall" inquires if anyone else is taking SOCI 348, *Sociology of Environment and Health*.

**AthaU Facebook Group**

Michelle seeks help navigating funding requirements for Ontario. Shoba inquires which devices e-texts can be read on. Andrea is looking for study tips for the CMNS 421 *Being Online* exam.

Other postings include course withdrawals, multiple users trying to access DRR material, and courses ACCT 250, HUMN 201, and PSYC 375.

**Twitter**

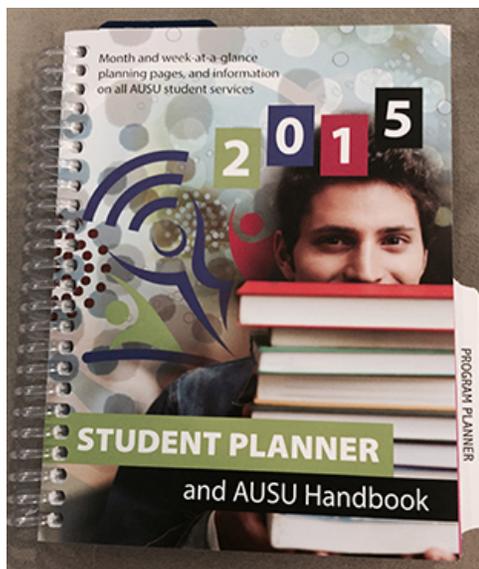
[@AU Business](#) tweets (on Jan 27): "Registrations for our [#HockeyMBA](#) opening in 5 more days! <http://bit.ly/14StyGP> "

[@AthabascaU](#) tweets their daily quote for Jan 23: "You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try" - Beverly Sills



## Get with the Plan(ner)

**Barabara Lehtiniemi**



Part of the fun of distance education is those parcels that come in the mail. Finding a box or bulky envelope in my mailbox is like receiving a present.

A special mail treat recently was the arrival of the **AUSU 2015 Student Planner**. My desk is tiny but I always have an AUSU planner nearby. Not only does the planner help me keep on track, but it's full of useful information that I don't get from any other source.

A quick look through the 2015 planner revealed a number of new features this year:

**AUSU executive bios (pages 8-9):** covers the three executive positions on council: President (Jason Nixon,) VP External & Student Affairs (Kim Newsome,) and VP Finance & Administration (Corrina Green.) It gives short self-introductions with photos. A good way to get to know the execs on AUSU council and understand what each position does.

**AUSU & council fun stats (pages 10-11):** mixes serious and fun statistics, including AUSU newsletter numbers, the varied credentials of council and staff, the number and kind of pets AUSU councillors and staff collectively have (including horses, fish, and a ferret,) and the distribution of astrological signs (no Leos, Libras, or Scorpios on council or staff.)

**Live chat info (page 13):** details another way to contact AUSU staff. Quick questions are promptly answered when AUSU staff are available.

**Service standards help (page 16):** outlines the help AUSU can provide if you're waiting too long for tutor help or marks.

**Health and dental (page 22):** summarizes the new (in 2014) AUSU health and dental plan. Includes details on plan fees and a link to further information.

**Peer support (page 25):** lists a few ways to interact with other students, including the [AUSU Forums](#) and a couple Facebook pages.

**Convocation services (page 37):** outlines what AUSU does to assist students attending convocation.

**LifeWorks.com (page 40):** highlights a service offered by AUGSA. Use the login info provided on this page to access a wealth of Employee Assistance Plan (EAP)-type information and services. Topics include health, life changes, finances, relationships, and parenting.

**AUSU member services booklet (tucked into program planner divider before page 41):** a quick pull-out reference guide on what AUSU is and does.

Worth repeating, these planner features appeared in 2014, too:

**AU departments quick reference guide (pages 15-17):** provides a quick summary plus contact info for AU's Advising Services, Counselling Services, Learning Services Tutorial, Ombuds Office, Examination Services and more.

**Great AU finds online (pages 18-19):** outlines online resources for AU students.

**lynda.com (pages 26-27):** describes how to take advantage of over a thousand video courses. AUSU members are eligible for one year's free access.

**AUSU meetings (page 36):** provides details on how to attend—by telephone—AUSU meetings.

**About this planner (page 37):** describes how to recycle every bit of last year's planner. (Tip: before you recycle, save any blank note pages for use as quick scribble notepaper.)

**2015 handbook/planner survey (page 39):** allows students to influence next year's planner. The survey is now online, leaving no excuse for not completing it. Respondents could win an AUSU prize package.

**Calendar pages (pages 44-231):** the meat of the planner. Sprinkled with weekly facts, quotes, and trivia.

**Citations and references (pages 232-241):** links to resources on various citation styles, and quick tips on MLA, APA, and Chicago styles.

If you haven't ordered your 2015 AUSU Student Planner yet, it's not too late. Just log into your AUSU account at [ausu.org](http://ausu.org) and follow the ordering instructions. Contact AUSU staff if you need help; you can find contact info on the website.

*Barbara Lehtiniemi is a writer, photographer, and AU student. She lives on a windswept rural road in Eastern Ontario*



## Lichen on Logs

**Jason Sullivan**



This weekend I was taking some pictures of lichen on logs protruding through the snow around my frozen local reservoir. My photo session was interrupted when I encountered a friendly couple who were taking videos of their family dog doing tricks. Seeing me, the dog stopped in its tracks and bolted in my direction, barking furiously. I'd owned a part-Rottweiler like this dog before and didn't panic or take excessive precautions. It occurred to me, though, to consider what the viewers of the video the couple were making would see? They'd turned off the camera to chase down their pooch, who'd not responded to their calls that it return to them at once. As such, the 'scene' was cut. Our respective videos and photos both halted; the perspectives we were conveying were held in suspension. I thought of how much goes into the production of any viewpoint.

Later that day I was thinking about the Stanley Kubrick film *The Shining*. Probably most folks recall the horrifying moment where Jack Nicholson, playing Jack Torrance, busts through the door with his axe and exclaims "Here's

Johnny!" Yet we must also remember the opening scene, where the family drives out to the lodge where Torrance is to be caretaker over the winter while he writes the novel of his dreams. The view from above the family's red Volkswagen Beetle provides the audience with an eerie and voyeuristic feel. We are looking down and into a family's life, much as the world around us at times looks into our own. Directors know how to create a desired feeling with camera angles and cinematography. Right from the beginning, *The Shining* provides the audience with a crucial sense of distance from the main characters; it is like the family is from a different place or time.

Movies produce a perspective of the director's choice in the same way as our school essays allow us to convey our own window onto the world. A recent documentary about *The Shining* called *Room 237* delves into this and reminds us that visuals are subjective rather than objective (Room 237, 2013). Never does a person reach a viewpoint, be it of a gorgeous mountain range or the truth in one's heart, without some sort of productive effort. Like the vanishing point in a painting, where parallel lines meet on the horizon, the eye and mind are drawn to certain truths as a result of careful effort. To sound objective, essayists are implored to avoid using 'I' and to appear impartial even while making their point.

The production of perspective is crucial. In the case of essay-writing, the reader is expected to believe that the thesis statement is objective even though its creation occurs from the hand of a subjective human being. The ghost of the Bible's first Commandment is invoked, that 'thou must have no Gods before me' (ie before the truth being conveyed) even though the precise visage of the 'god' (ie the author) remains unknown. Of vital significance is the fact that Moses, who was the bearer of the commandments to the people of Israel, was allowed to see God's face. As students in an academic context, we are asked to convince the reader that what we are saying is objectively valid, even while we claim that we are not the creators of the viewpoint we project as true.

Jacques Lacan once wrote that animals do not cover up their tracks the way humans like the boy (Danny Torrance, played by Danny Lloyd) does at the end of the *Shining* (Kubrick, 1980). To be truly aware of the subjective nature of the seemingly objective Truth that we convey is to be aware of the ability to elide our own role in the transformation of our opinions into certainties. This may have significance in terms of the beloved Christian poem 'Footprints', for instance. The beautiful poem concludes with the statement that at some moments there appears on the beach only a single trail of footprints, and that "it was then that I carried you" (Stevenson, 1939). Yet, in nature, when two tracks become one it is usually because a predator has captured its prey. Perhaps faith (and here I'm talking about faith in the possibility of a truly objective point of view) is about allowing oneself to be carried away by one's own certainty in the beliefs one holds. In regards to the natural sciences, the term 'scientism' refers to an unwavering certainty that the empirical results of the scientific method are the best way to arrive at Truth. We're taught as students to present our perspectives as fact, even if at times our feet must leave the ground of reality.

A point of view, therefore, is a carefully constructed process. It has a methodology. We directly ask our professor to believe in what we are saying even while we claim that any reasonable person would agree (or at least accept the validity) of the truth of our claims.

The man and wife making home videos of their dog were illustrating their life. I felt awed and fascinated that when I arrived on the scene (on set, so to speak) I, in a way, encountered what happens when the production phase is paused. While putting the camera down the man yelled for his wife to please run and grab the dog. We distance education students know how much work goes into essay-writing in terms of presenting a perspective within the backstage realities of the rest of our working and family lives. Sometimes we just have

to stop and call off the dogs (as it were) or watch some mindless television. A good assignment feels both personally resonant and academically sound yet, almost invariably, the mundane-yet-invaluable world of pets, kids, and dishes remains external to the final product. Could it be otherwise; could an essay represent every facet of a topic, including the behind-the-scenes realities of its production?

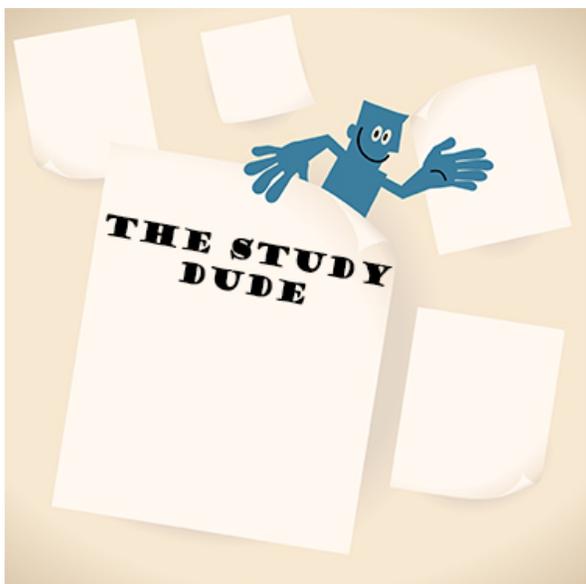
Jorges Luis Borges quoted a 1658 mythic narrative by the Spanish writer Suarez Miranda who described a map of the world that was so explicitly precise, so objective, that it literally replaced that which it claimed to represent (Borges, 1658). Imagine if Google Earth was updated to the nanosecond and every act and movement of every living and dead thing on the planet were visible at the exact moment they shifted. The representation would literally become that which appears and, in a sense, the world would cease to exist. Objectivity, then, is as impossible as a map that truly shows every detail of reality. Yet, for the purposes of parsimony (not to mention to tell the story we want to, whether of peaceful lichen or blissful marital relations) we invariably edit and arrange the selves and stories we represent. As much fun as it is to imagine total honesty and clarity, would we really like what we saw?

For the purposes of making our points clear in an academic setting, we students would probably be pretty disenchanted with the whole project of our education if we did not learn to somehow distill down our myriad influences and thoughts, desires, and ideas into a more palatable, not to mention readable, form. We can tweet every detail of our life and, if we choose, report on every microcosmic aspect of our existence, yet the act of portrayal allows us to paint a picture that conveys what matters most to us, and what seems most true in the context of the topic at hand. Objectivity invariably rests upon a sifting process, a special skill that we hope to attain through our education.

As post-secondary students we are in an enviable position. Unlike workers who have limited or non-existent freedom of speech in their workplaces, not to mention limited opportunities for creativity outside of 'problem solving' according to the exigencies of the job site, we get to research, investigate, and challenge the course material and ourselves. When we choose to unwind from work we have the option of doing our coursework, such that we instigate ourselves to think critically about our surroundings and to produce a viewpoint that creates our own omniscient (ie. God-like) perspective upon the world. After all, to shine light on something is not only to reveal facets of its character but also, as Derrida aptly put it, to recognize "the brilliance of the beam...the ubiquitous dispersion which...disperses the better to invade everything!" (p. 293). By research and study, we come to an understanding of the world which matches our own image of it. In a sense, creativity and interpretation are about remaking an object in our own image. Just as Jack Nicholson's character is reminded that "you've always been the caretaker", (Kubrick) we Athabasca students are the caretakers of our own education and the meaning that it provides to us and those around us.

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### Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

*There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to write acclaimed essays that garner millions, make speeches that go down into the annal of history, and make that winning PowerPoint that takes your future company public.*

*Well, in these articles, as The Study Dude, I'll try to give you the study tips you need to help make your learning easier. I'll also give you straight and honest opinions and personal anecdotes—even the embarrassing ones that you wouldn't ever dare read about from any other study tip guru.*

What better way for the Study Dude to enlighten a book weary readership on how to write essays than to reference the *Writing*

*Essays for Dummies* guide by Mary Page and Dr. Carrie Winstanley. This is one dummies guide I would highly recommend (and I've otherwise come to deplore dummy guides).

### The Stages from Planning to Drafting Your Essay

There was one system I read about for writing essays that hit the nail on the head for me. When I was an undergraduate, I would narrow my topic, do ample research, and take quotes and place them either on cue cards or in an outline in Word. From there, I would group the cue cards and outlined quotes together under logical headings and would often string the quotes together with introductory phrases or sentences.

However, I've since come to learn that paraphrasing is the ultimate way to go, and you should try limiting your direct quotes to only a small portion of your page.

Yet, Page and Winstanley (2009) introduce guidelines for writing your essay:

- Assess the nature of the assignment. Examine both the keywords and the action words (the verbs) that are part of the parcel of the assigned topic.
- Update your calendar. Mark in everything related to your due dates plus your leisure activities in a calendar. Make sure that you spend roughly 80% of your time reading and researching your essay and the remaining 20% writing and editing.
- Do the research. Highlight every little relevant tidbit in articles, books, or other media that you find. Note which parts are most relevant and which are least relevant. Keep a bibliography of all the articles you read, ideally on cue cards or on your computer system.
- Map out your essay. Use index cards, coloured highlighters, mind maps, or a PC outline program (such as the one you can find in Word) to get your notes together.
- Write. If you happen to be so lucky to have an intelligent friend who is not versed on your subject, pretend you are writing for him or her as your audience.
- Write more. Use headings and subheadings to structure your paper that you later delete.
- Edit. Use a printed version of your essay for making edits. Make edits and return to your computer to insert them in their appropriate places.
- Polish. Make sure that your paper is free of spelling, grammatical, and structural errors. Polish that puppy.

### **Write at Every Opportunity**

When I left graduate studies, I stopped writing altogether. However, I later became smitten with the idea of writing book reviews on Amazon, often writing a one- to two-page write-up based on extensive notes I would take from each book. That experience became a causal factor in my ending up writing for The Voice Magazine, writing an e-book for eventual publication on Amazon, and possibly making a podcast. It's not only a reality that the more you write, the better writer you will become; it's also a reality that the more you write, the more opportunities will arise.

Page and Winstanley (2009) have some positive encouragement to get you honing the writing craft today:

- Write at any and every opportunity you have available. Always make time for writing projects.
- Wherever you go, cart with you a pen and notepad for jotting down ideas, poems, or anything in the written word format that inspires you.
- Journal daily. Write about your day, your goals, your dreams, or your day's successes. Write in a journal every day, twice a day if possible.
- "Whatever you do, tell yourself 'I'm a writer'" (p. 25).

### **Study Environments**

Whenever I came across an essay that had a set structural requirement, I got excited. Thinking that my great performance in math classes made me a more logical thinker, structure seemed second nature. But the reality is, you don't need to be a logical, linear thinker to structure effectively. You can be a creative thinker or an outside-the-box thinker (who tend to gravitate toward mind maps for implementing structure). Yet, here are some guidelines for structured essay that may help you up your grade in your next assignment:

I've encountered a lot of conflicting views on what constitutes as an effective study environment. Some people say to have non-distracting barren walls. Other say a Feng Shui environment will make you more apt to want to study.

I do know that people who are taking graphic design courses should stay clear from a lot of colourful images, as the colours on the walls can drastically alter onscreen color perception.

Perhaps if you are studying to become an accountant, you may opt for barren walls and organizers to boot, but if you are like Mary Page and Dr. Carrie Winstanley (2009), you will want a place to study that makes you calm and happy:

- If you have writer's block, go to an enjoyable place to mix things up, such as a park or a coffee shop. Even your bed or kitchen are places you should consider working in.
- Keep a clean, tidy desk, unless you get energized by a mass of papers and objects surrounding you.
- Do things to relax you, such as burn aromatherapy, ensure adequate sleep, listen to enjoyable music, and post relaxing and beautiful photos or images around your working space. If you would love to study on the beach, replicate that environment in your study area by posting pictures of Hawaii and other tropical places around your room. If your thing is snowboarding, post images of snowboarders sailing off of the snow-capped Himalayas. Don't make it dull. Make your study space your escape.
- Turn off cell phone.

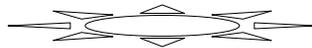
- Have all of your necessary items within arm's length.
- Guzzle back the water, only drinking tea and coffee in moderation (if at all).
- Eat lots of healthy snacks, such as berries and nuts. (Don't forget to chow down on spinach at every opportunity.)

At an aromatherapy shop called Saje, you can find many study friendly formulas. I really enjoy the Ylang Ylang sedative for calming nervousness and impatience. Whatever scent you decide to buy, make sure it is one you love to smell, as that is an indicator that your body is deficient of whatever the scent provides.

So, there's nothing to fear. The Study Dude is determined to make right for you all the wrongs I made in grad school—one A+ at a time.

#### References

Page, Mary, & Winstanley, Carrie. (2009). *Writing Essays for Dummies*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons.



#### The Smiling Ghosts of Mides, Part III

"The desert could not be claimed or owned—it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names . . . Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures, left nothing behind, not an ember. All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape."

- Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

(Read [Part I](#) and [Part II](#) of this article.)

Discovering that scenes from *The English Patient* were filmed here in the Mides Gorge (depicted as the Libyan Sahara in the film) takes me back to meeting Michael Ondaatje at a poetry reading in Halifax, long before he'd written the novel on which the movie was based. After having delivered a precious parcel of poems, Michael humbly joined members of the audience at a small reception. Naturally, everyone fawned on him; even then he was considered a major Canadian poet, and the poetry reading had been pretty darn wonderful in spite of the suffocating highbrow nature of such events. But he appeared to be stoned, his answers brief and vague, as he struggled to answer my simpleminded questions. Perhaps he was always like that, or perhaps he was just mentally wiped out after having delivered his deepest convictions in his best words, as my father used to be after preaching a heartfelt sermon. I'd like to think it's one of these two, because I can't imagine a stoner putting together as complex a story as *The English Patient*, or, for that matter, of giving such poignant voice to even a small piece of the great mystery of the Sahara.



*The desert gourd.*

Driving away from Mides, we see pockets of date palms and bull rushes waving slowly *en masse* in the breeze, like grand dames at a ball. Such motion seems all the more beautiful within a setting of broad vistas of motionless rock and sand.

At nearby Tamerza we descend into a beautiful green space fed by springs and waterfalls. A row of elegant palm frond huts begins at the top of the cliff and winds prettily to the bottom of the gorge. In the huts are friendly vendors selling high quality local handcrafts. Two musicians play *zokra* and *dharbouka*. We join European tourists in gazing at the magical waterfalls in the golden desert light that lovingly illuminates everything it touches.

We find a desert gourd (*citrullus colocynthis*), a small melon-like fruit that's edible, medicinal, and has a history of being highly suspect by desert peoples. Despite the latest research, my Arab friends insist that it's slightly poisonous. Aptly, one of its names is "Vine of Sodom," invoking the ancient city that was so wicked that God destroyed it.

The Old Testament bears witness to the antipathy Semitic peoples bear toward the desert gourd:

"And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof."

~II Kings 4:39-40, KJV

I secretly stuff the gourd into my backpack and bring it home. Later I'm scolded for bringing such a thing into the house; apparently it's something untouchable, even a bringer of bad luck. In cases like this where the science contradicts folk tradition, I'm tempted to trust folk traditions, which are so often confirmed by science in the end. I take a photo and then throw the gourd out.

At our hosts' home I'm delighted to find a massive growth of rosemary. I once managed the very difficult task of germinating rosemary seeds in Canada by planting the seeds around the edge of a metal can that I moved around so that it could catch the hottest rays during the hottest days of the summer. The result was one small shrub that lived inside the house for



*A rosemary garden*

a year before it shrivelled away, pining for the blistering heat of its desert origins. But here the rosemary practically leaps from the ground, basking in sunlight that is often too strong for man or beast.

*(to be concluded next week)*

*Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.*



## The Travelling Student Liberated

**Philip Kirkbride**



*My name is Philip Kirkbride. I'm a college graduate from Ontario studying at AU. I've always wanted to do an exchange program or study abroad but never found the right time to do so. This is part fourteen in the story of how Athabasca University has allowed me to create my own study abroad program. In part thirteen I woke up completely drained from my excursion as a brush cutter. After realizing the job would make studying for my Athabasca classes extremely difficult I decided to call it quits. I bought myself a ticket to Quebec City.*

As I stood outside, waiting for my bus from Longue-Rive, I felt like a bit of a strange sight. People could tell I wasn't from the Cote Du Nord area, and they could probably tell I was an 'anglo' (if you're an English speaker in Quebec you'll hear that

term a lot). A woman walked past me and I greeted her with "Bonjour," still staring straight ahead she increased her pace. "Ouch," I thought to myself.

A few minutes later the young man who'd been called to sell me my ticket because he knew English came outside, seemingly for the sole purpose of speaking with me. Longue-Rive essentially gets no tourists and an anglo being there must have intrigued him. His English wasn't great but we exchanged stories and found a common interest in nineties grunge rock and video games. After a few minutes my bus arrived and I said "Au revoir."

It was an uneventful ride but the scenery was great. Especially the bits where we drove along the Saint Lawrence River. To this day I regret not stopping in Tadoussac for a whale-watching cruise, the Saint Lawrence is home to thirteen species of whales including belugas and blue whales. Of course lugging around a large blue tot and my backpack wasn't exactly appealing.

After about six hours of driving and break stops we were approaching Quebec City. I thought about the embarrassment I would face going back to my hometown so soon, the dullness of said town, and the feeling of complete lack of opportunity. As I pondered what I would do next I looked out the window to see a large sign which read "Bienvenue Quebec la capitale nationale".

I stepped off the bus in my steel toe boots, my bomber jacket, my backpack strapped over my shoulders, and holding a large plastic storage container. I got some weird looks from the people with convenient travel bags with wheels, something that I wished I had instead of having to carry this tote into the bus station.

At the ticket counter I asked for the pricing on a ticket back to London. After a few minutes on the computer the attendant informed me that their company only operated in Quebec, I'd have to transfer to Greyhound in Montreal but she could sell me a ticket. After she called Greyhound on the phone and spent a few more minutes on the phone I was informed that the trip would be just over \$300 after taxes.

That was more than I expected, so I headed to subway to think about what I'd do next. I didn't have much waiting for me in London, so paying over \$300 to get there seemed like a steep price. I figured I'd stay in Quebec for the night and think about it. I used Google Maps and found a nearby hostel. What would normally be a ten-minute walk was a very painful 20-minute walk thanks to my large blue storage container. Every few blocks I had to stop when I felt like my arms were about to fall off. It probably didn't help that I was still sore from lugging the brush cutter through the bush yesterday.

I finally arrived at a hostel, *La belle Planet Backpackers*. The first floor was a café with a 'chilled out' atmosphere playing a mixture of indie rock and underground hip-hop. I walked over to the counter where a heavy-set man with a small dog sat. I informed him that I had made an online reservation. In a condescending French accent he told me that check in was not for another hour and I'd have to wait.

Not discouraged, I sat down in a comfortable chair. I figured I could take advantage of the next hour by enjoying the atmosphere and getting a head start on an Athabasca course that I'd start in the coming week. The class was an overview of Electronic Commerce (ECOM320), and I was excited to learn about the field I'd worked in but from a Managerial perspective. As I read my textbook the hour flew by.

I approached the counter again and asked if I could be checked in. The large man with the dog said it was a busy time for them and because of that they only had 1 very small room, for a price of \$40, minimum stay two nights. I was surprised because I had a confirmed booking for \$30 for a single night. After arguing my point to no avail I gave in as it was still a lot cheaper than any hotel, and all the other hostels had been booked up.

A girl in her mind-twenties showed me to my room. It was a horribly cramped room with a single bunk-bed and enough room for two people to stand up straight. The bedding felt like the kind of plastic sheets which I thought were only made for children who frequently wet the bed. While I wasn't happy with the room, or the price, I figured, "Oh well, at least I can have a hot shower."

After my shower I went downstairs to ask about what I should see in the city. The owner rudely mentioned that I should probably pay first. I handed him my credit card and said "I figured you already had my card on file from the online booking I made."

"We only take cash," he said in his most condescending voice.

That was it. I'd have enough. I tossed the key over the table at him, "You keep it," I said, "Saving a few bucks isn't worth being treated like dirt."

I walked back up to my room and proceeded to empty my blue storage container. I had a few extra bags I was able to cram most of my stuff into. A few things including the storage container and some extra clothing were abandoned in the room.

I walked out of the hostel feeling liberated. I had been treated like crap and I spoke up, letting the owner know I wouldn't have it. What was even more freeing was not having to carry around the storage container I'd left behind. With that, I found a bench where I'd fire up my phone in an attempt to find somewhere, preferably cheap, to sleep that night.



## Writer's Toolbox In Brief, Part III

Christina M. Frey



We've spent the first few weeks of the new year sweating the small stuff—abbreviations, initialisms, and other short forms. We've looked at Canadian usage and examined when to use capital letters and periods. This week we'll wrap up our quick survey on short forms and sort out some more basics: plurals, possessives, and more.

### Double Trouble

Most of the time—when you have an abbreviation in all caps with no periods in between—**form the plural by adding an s**. That's right, no apostrophe.

*Example A: We've spoken to three MPs about the issue.*

*Example B: I counted four CEOs in the room.*

The general rule also applies when you have an abbreviation that's become almost unrecognizable as anything other than an ordinary

word (caps or not):

*Example C: The machine's lasers cut the steel.*

Not surprisingly, there are a few exceptions to the rule. First, for abbreviations that use multiple periods, form the plural with apostrophe + s; this avoids any ambiguity over the purpose of the s.

*Example D: I was so jet lagged that I had trouble sorting out my a.m.'s and p.m.'s.*

Second, use apostrophe + s when you have single-capital abbreviations:

*Example E: The professor's Q&A session was mostly Q's and offered very little in the way of A's.*

### Getting Possessive

The rule for possessives is simpler than you might expect: form possessives of abbreviations just like you would possessives of other nouns. For abbreviations not ending in s, add apostrophe + s:

*Example F: The BMW's fender was damaged in the collision.*

*Example G: The OED's latest edition lists a variant spelling.*

For abbreviations ending in *s*, follow the rule dictated by whatever style guide you're using.

### Speak Out

To determine which indefinite article (*a* or *an*) to use with an abbreviation, use the read-aloud test: if the first sound reads like a vowel sound, use *an* just like you would for a word starting with a vowel. Otherwise, use *a*.

*Example F: Sarah briefly dated an NFL player.*

*Example G: Sarah dumped the NFL player and started going out with a NASA scientist.*

A caution: some abbreviations are read aloud as the full noun they're abbreviating—like "MS" for "manuscript." In that case, use the indefinite article that goes with the noun:

*Example H: I received a MS from an Australian writer the other day.*

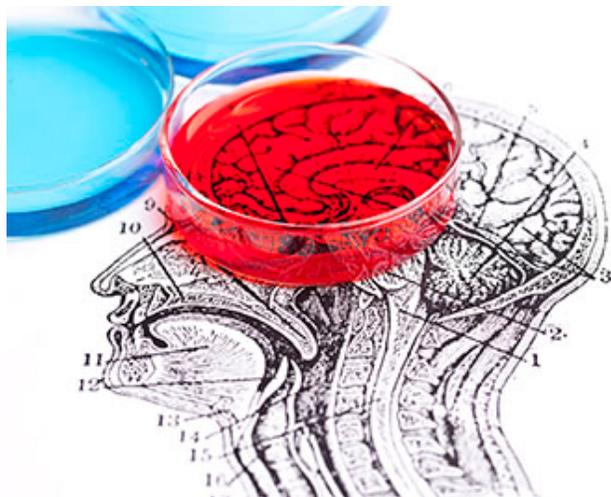
Abbreviation punctuation and usage spans dozens of categories and special rules—but a knowledge of the basics will get you started and provide you with a springboard to use should you need to explore further. Memorize the general rules and the most common exceptions, and you'll find you can navigate the world of acronyms and initialisms with ease.

*Christina M. Frey is a book editor, literary coach, and lover of great writing. For more tips and techniques for your toolbox, follow her on Twitter (@turntopage2) or visit her [blog](#).*



## Primal Numbers Sexist Tech

**S.D. Livingston**



It's no secret that the tech sector has a deep-rooted culture of sexism. This dark side of tech has been hitting the headlines lately, with stories that range from #GamerGate to Microsoft's CEO saying women should have "faith" that they'll get a raise. Which raises an interesting question: does technology (inadvertently or not) reflect the beliefs of its creators? From steam engines to smartphones, is technology sexist?

Specifically, that's the question posed about virtual-reality environments like Oculus Rift, in a recent [Quartz article](#). As the author explains, she and her female peers had problems with nausea and motion sickness when using 3D immersive technology—a

problem that their male peers generally didn't have.

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That led to some interesting discoveries while she researched the issue. One involved motion simulators in the military, where researchers found that "women seemed to get sick at higher rates in simulators than men." The second was that motion and depth perception are linked to hormones. In fact, "there are more sex hormones on the retina than in anywhere else in the body except for the gonads."

As it turned out, the answer to virtual-reality motion sickness lay in the ways that male and female brains prioritize methods of gauging motion and depth—and the fact that immersive technology relies on the method the male brain favours.

The choice wasn't a deliberate move on the part of programmers. The technology was simply easier to create.

But the underlying question remains. Do other forms of technology carry inherent biases that put women at a disadvantage, perhaps in the same way that motion simulators might affect a female's chance of being a fighter pilot?

The easy answer would be to say yes. After all, with men historically in charge of everything (it's been a nanosecond on the human timeline that women have had rights like not being the "property" of husbands or fathers) it's only natural that male-built technology inherits an unavoidable bias against women. Right? Not really.

True, men have chiefly been the ones in the science lab or at the drawing board, tinkering away inventing submarines and sewing machines. Even when women were allowed to contribute ideas and research they often didn't get any credit (check out this *National Geographic* [list](#) for a few of the heaviest hitters).

But in spite of the cultural backdrop of sexism, even during eras like the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the technical and scientific inventions themselves didn't inherently favour men.

Take inventions like the telegraph and telephone, for example. There's nothing about the objects or the way we use them that gives one sex an advantage over the other. The same goes for steam engines, light bulbs, and revolvers, along with gyroscopes, dynamite, and gliders. Society might have been sexist, but its technological advances weren't.

Fast forward to today and the same holds true for science and tech. Smartphones, computers, and electron microscopes don't have limitations based on sex. Anyone with the interest and aptitude can figure out how to use them.

Which is not to say that attitudes and opportunities don't have to catch up. Not when merely questioning the sexism in video games results in death threats and a torrent of online abuse, like the kind that *Business Insider* details in this [article](#) on Anita Sarkeesian.

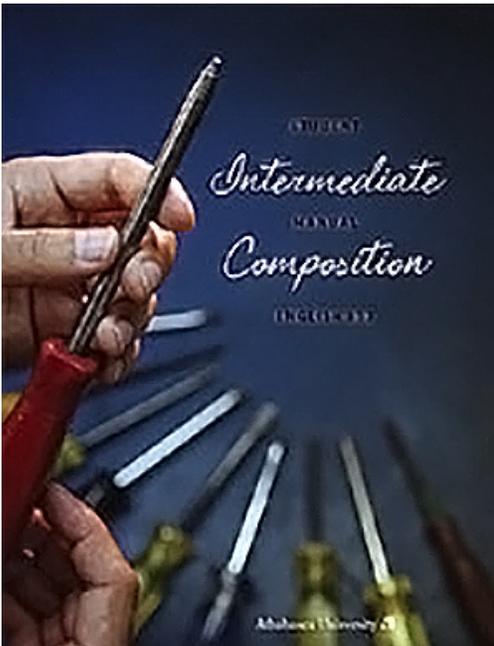
So no, technology isn't inherently sexist. Even when the minds behind it are, whether they're from the 17th century or the 21st.

In fact, maybe we've been looking at the age-old issue of sexism the wrong way. Maybe technology is really the answer rather than part of the problem. All we need are some sensors, a laser, and a bit more time in the lab.

*S.D. Livingston is the author and creator of the Madeline M. Mystery Series for kids, as well as several books for older readers. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing.*

## English 353 and A Grain of Salt

Deanna Roney



There are many wonderful advantages to being able to look back at old discussions on the AUSU forum boards: questions regarding assignments can be answered and you can find a sense of comradery. There are a few things that you should keep in mind while reading some of these posts. First, just because that was one person's experience does not mean it will be yours, and second, check the date.

Checking the date on the post is important because courses change and evolve over the years. A course thread posted in 2001 likely does not hold a lot of weight in 2015; it is great to have access to these old threads, especially for English courses, mostly because without them when I search for a course I would come up empty handed.

It is also important to remember that just because this was their experience does not mean it will be yours, even if it is a current thread. As I learned in a hotel tourism crash-course, most people who are going to leave reviews have had a bad experience. People who have enjoyed their stay generally will not take the time to write it down. However, if in a hotel someone finds a nest of bugs or a substantial amount of hair in the bathroom, and as a topper they have poor service when they report the issue, they will likely take to the internet to voice their concerns and vent. The same occurs with various other industries, and education is no exception. The thread you are looking at could be a small blemish on the course or a misunderstanding that may not accurately reflect the course or the tutor. Just as the hotel-reviewer may be exaggerating the number of bugs or the poor service, you never know if the guest may have been irate about something else entirely and took it out on the customer service representative. The same can happen on a course, the student and tutor may be having off days and clash where otherwise they normally would not have. I know I am guilty of flying to the forums when I have a frustrating experience. As students we understand what we are going through in a way that those around us do not.

Typically, I would not think too long on the effects these threads may have on the students who read them. Or what they are doing to myself when I read other's threads. I simply enjoy reading other peoples' experiences, learn what I can, and go back to work. That is until I came to my last English course, English 353 *Intermediate Composition*. This course has one bad reputation on the message boards. The tutor that I had also had an overall bad reputation. Many of the students suggested that they were being graded well below what they should be, and that the tutor seemed to *want* students to fail. It seemed impossible to get a decent grade; these students mentioned that they were receiving marks nowhere near their usual "A." These comments, to say the least, sent me into panic mode. I did not just want this course, or need credit for this course, I needed a final grade of a "B" as a prerequisite for several other English courses on my must take list. This was a make it or break it course for me. The reputation of this course weighed heavy on my mind—I was preparing myself for a couple months from hell. Not only was this course, supposedly, impossible to get a decent mark in, but my tutor would not help me, and seemed not to care about the students.

But I needed this course, so despite my angst, I ordered it and prepared myself mentally for the struggle that would ensue. As I made my way through the course I found myself thoroughly enjoying the content. My previous essays had repetitive errors that I had not yet been able to rectify; this course was answering my questions and making sense of some of my errors. Still it weighed on my mind that a good grade in this course

would be hard to achieve, so my first two assignments went off to the *Write Site* before submission to the tutor. I achieved some of my best grades yet in this course, and my overall grade is the best I have yet received, and I have completed over half of my four-year program. This is when I began to reflect back on all those threads I had read. If I had not needed this course, those threads would have scared me off. I would not have enrolled in it. This course, ultimately, was one of the best courses I have taken, and I highly recommend it for anyone, whether you write a lot of papers, or not. My tutor was also amazing, discussing ideas with me and raising concerns about topics I had chosen to write about. My experience in this course prompted me to break the cycle of venting-threads and post a positive review for the course and my tutor. I would have regretted not taking that course and I wanted to share my experience with other students, so maybe a student who is looking for information on courses will find it, and it will cast some positivity on the overwhelming sea of negativity.

Negativity does have its place, everyone needs to vent. It is a healthy release of emotion, and finding comradery in your frustration can be a wonderful and healing experience. I would persuade students to make the effort to post about positive experiences with the same passion. I also emphasize for students to read these threads, positive and negative, but do not make a decision based on them. Even a course that has received nothing but praise may be a course you struggle with. Course selection and experience is very personal. Read the threads to prepare yourself for what might be coming, but every student is different. So keep in mind when you read any thread to take them with a grain of salt and check the date. Who knows, maybe without the initial scare I would not have gotten the marks that I did in that course.

*Deanna Roney is an AU student who loves adventure in life and literature.*

## Click of the Wrist

## Black History Month

**The purpose of heritage months is to encourage Canadians to explore and embrace all aspects of Canadian culture, but too often we pass up this opportunity to truly appreciate our multicultural heritage. Don't let February go by without recognizing Black History Month and the unique role Black Canadians continue to play. This week's links will give you a starting point:**

### The Basics

If you're unsure where to begin exploring Black history, Historica Canada's Black History Portal is an award-winning site with multimedia resources on important people and key events in the history of the Black community in Canada. For youth, there's also an Education Guide (downloadable in PDF format).

### The Legacy

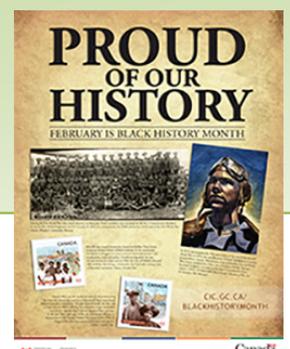
Curious about how Black Canadians have influenced Canadian history and culture? This interactive guide profiles 23 Canadians who have made their mark.

### The Films

If you want to explore Black heritage through film, the National Film Board offers recommendations for viewing. From documentaries to animated short films, these selections "only scratch the surface of ... a rich and multi-layered culture."

### The Stories

What is the modern Black experience? How do people experience racism today? An interesting and moving collection of personal stories, presented by the Ontario Black History Society.





## Say Yes

Most people will get through their entire lives without ever having delivered a eulogy. And they will be grateful for having dodged the bullet. Most people dread both public speaking and emotionally charged situations like funerals so this combination is especially tough. Most people doubt their ability to hold it all together. They wish to avoid embarrassing themselves.

Even with the Internet most people don't have access to the words, the quotations that will elevate the adequate to the memorable. Because memorable is what both the survivors and the deceased person deserve.

Recently, my mom asked me to write and deliver the eulogy for her second husband and my stepfather, George. Luckily by that time I had already created the spray of flowers for the casket and was able to do it. Not that I would ever refuse such a request; because as difficult as it is, it's also an honour and a privilege.

My process is quite simple; not easy, but simple. The work usually begins with a prayer. I pace through the house. Fragments of sentences begin forming in my head. I try to establish a theme or a connecting thread. I may reread previous eulogies I've written. I gather my books of quotations and flip to the pages marked with flags. I scroll through documents in my computer.

Finally it's time to begin. Writer's block is a luxury that no eulogist can afford. The challenge of capturing the essence of a life and doing it justice in five minutes of text is huge.

I've heard some terrible eulogies and have strong opinions of what doesn't belong. There is no need to retell, year by year, everything that happened in the life of an octogenarian. Or talk about the price of gasoline or bread when he was young. Or list every volunteer job she did in countless organizations. Or have two or three or more grandkids at the mic taking turns reading a paragraph each. Or telling a funny story that isn't. Or witnessing the miracle of death that turns a scoundrel into a saint. This is not the time for hypocrisy or hyperbole. A well-written, well-delivered eulogy captivates and informs and is over too soon. Those that aren't seem interminable and are difficult to sit through.

The document will remain open on my computer for days, because inevitably I'll be back tinkering with it. When I think it may be done I begin reading it aloud, over and over again. There is no better way to detect awkward phrasing or sections that could trip me up in the delivery. Each rehearsal makes it more likely that I will deliver it strongly and without breaking down. I time myself. The goal is being able to deliver a smooth and meaningful glimpse into the life of the deceased and bring comfort to those left behind.

As hard as all this is, it's also very rewarding when the loved ones and others thank you for a job well done. That alone is reason enough to say yes when asked, from where I sit.

*Hazel Anaka's first novel is Lucky Dog. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.*

## Music Review

### Singles by Porter Robinson

Samantha Stevens



**Artist:** Porter Robinson

**Singles:** "Lionhearted" the original, the remixes, and the edits

It is always wonderful to see a young musician recognized for their obvious talents and gain popularity and success after working hard to achieve their dreams. Porter Robinson is one lucky young man. Now 22, Porter began producing electronic and dance music at the tender age of 12. By the age of 18 he had already achieved international recognition for his music, and his song "Language" rose to be number three in the UK dance charts in 2012. Since then he has worked with other well-known electronic musicians like Zedd, with whom he co-wrote the US Top 10 hit "Clarity", and was commissioned by Avicii for an official remix of his song "Seek Bromance".

From Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Porter Robinson has been compared to electronic artists like Zedd and Tiesto. Like many electronic musicians, Porter's music ranges from primarily vocal songs to electronic-heavy dance music. I typically am not fond of electronic dance music as I find that it tends to drone on and on, but I guess that may be the point.

However, I did like Porter's song "Lionhearted", which blends the electronic beats and mixes with fantastic lyrics and futuristic singing. I mention the lyrics because, as the title of the song suggests, the overall theme of the song is one of bravery and belief in oneself. The lyrics are combined with the music in a way that doesn't mask the singing at all. Instead, important parts of the lyrics are framed with the music before and after, with the music abruptly growing softer as the singing is lightly injected.

As well, Porter allowed a variety of remixes of the song which can be a good or bad thing, but, in this case, the remixes continually add dimensions to this wonderful song. The original of the song was included on Porter's debut album *Worlds*, which features Urban Cone, and has since been remixed and edited eight times. The remixes include an Arty remix, The Alexanders remix, and Giraffage remix, and the edits are variations of the remixes, usually with the creation of radio edits.

Depending on what you are looking for in an electronic song, the various remixes and edits are great if you want to dance, workout, or relax and listen to the inspirational lyrics. The Alexanders remix has a great steady rhythm for running and dancing to, and the Giraffage remix pairs the original with a slower beat and nature sounds for a much different song. My favourite of these is the Arty remix, because the original song is still prominent and the beat is great for either running and cycling to, or listening to while working. As well, given that the song is speaking of courage and perseverance I couldn't imagine a better song for running to.

The original and all of the remixes and edits are available on iTunes.

*Samantha Stevens is an aspiring writer who loves combining her love for literature with photography, painting, music, and all creative pursuits.*



Dear  
Barb

Barbara Godin

## Getting Uninvolved

**Dear Barb:**

*I worked in an office with three other girls for the last five years. Recently I was offered a new position and moved on. I have kept in touch with two of my previous coworkers, but not the third. She has always been a drama queen and dumps all her problems on everyone else. While I worked there, I accommodated her behaviour, but now I really don't want to continue a relationship with her. She has been emailing and texting me and at first I would respond, but I don't anymore. I feel kind of bad about ignoring her, but I just don't want to hear the drama, it just drags me down. Am I a bad person for not wanting to be involved with her anymore? Thanks Katherine.*

Hi Katherine:

No, you are not a bad person for not wanting to be involved in the drama. It is your choice who you want to spend time with. Toxic people are exhausting and they do drag us into their drama. If you do not respond to her emails I am sure she eventually gets the hint and stop contacting you. Or you could have a discussion with her, explaining that you are sorry that she has to go through all these stressful issues, but that you want to keep your life on a more upbeat note. Also you could tell her, that you are willing to get together, as long as she doesn't focus on the negative events. Good luck Katherine.

**Dear Barb:**

*My parents are going through a divorce after 46 years of marriage. I am an only child so they are both dumping on me and wanting me to agree with them. I feel so torn, I really don't want to hear the details or take sides. I love both my parents and just want to share in their lives. How can I get them to stop putting me in the middle? Help John*

Hey Josh:

Sorry about what you are going through. You are going to have to be very firm with your parents. Tell them you do not want to hear what happened in the marriage, that is between them. Explain that you are interested in sharing in their lives and want them both to share in your life, but that you don't want to rehash what went wrong in the marriage and who was to blame. When they digress and begin the mudslinging, bring the conversation back to the present day. If they continue to bring up the past and bad mouth the other parent you can choose to end the conversation and tell them you will call them or visit at a more opportune time. If you continue to do this I would hope they will come to the realization that if they want to see you they will have to give up the blaming and spitefulness. Thanks for writing John.

Email your questions to [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org). Some submissions may be edited for length or to protect confidentiality; your real name and location will never be printed. This column is for entertainment only. The author is not a professional counsellor and this column is not intended to take the place of professional advice.

Comic

Wanda Waterman

# COMMANDANTE FARTETADO IN: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Of course I will do interview with you. But you must print all I say and change nussink! And you must tell Hilary Clinton that Commandante Fartetado is totally dedicated to freedom of speech. And if you refuse . . .



Meanwhile, somewhere nearby . . .

Who is this guy?

Some journalist.



Why are we executing him?

He published an article saying that the Commandante's farts didn't quite smell like roses.

WRITTEN BY WANDA WATERMAN



**AUSU**  
ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS' UNION

This space is provided free to AUSU: The Voice does not create this content. Contact [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org) with questions or comments about this page.

### Featured AUSU Member Service: Advocacy

A key role of AUSU is advocacy, both at the individual and institutional level.

Strength is in numbers, and the goal of any students' union is to provide a unified voice for the student community to accomplish things we could not do alone. All AU undergraduates pay SU fees, so AUSU represents all undergrads.

If you require advocacy or mediation on any issue, or even some support and information, you should not hesitate to contact AUSU. We provide advocacy for both individuals and for the membership as a whole.

For more information on how AUSU can help you, please visit AUSU's website at:

<http://www.ausu.org/services/advocacy.php>

### Great AU Finds Online

**The Write Site** – A fantastic resource for students who need help writing academic papers. It includes drills and exercises, writing assessment tools, links to writing resources, and samples of various types of papers.

If you need more help, a writing coach can provide one-on-one support. The site received many requests, so check back every hour or so if the queue is full.

Visit the site to find out more about how the Write Site can help you to improve your academic writing:

<http://write-site.athabascau.ca/>

### AUSU Featured Groups & Clubs

Group Name: **AU – Faculty of Business**

Where: **Facebook**

Members: 1134

About: Members are all types of students, staff, and alumni with AU. The members of the group seem to

## IMPORTANT DATES

- Jan 30: Last business day to extend courses ending February 28
- February 10: Last day to register for courses starting March 1
- February 11: AUSU Council Meeting
- February 16: Family Day – AU & AUSU closed
- February 27: Last business day to extend courses ending March 31

support, encourage and give advice to each other on AU Faculty of Business topics.

Activity: Posts several times per week that are mostly news and information on the AU Faculty of Business.



### This Week at lynda.com

*lynda.com experts have curated playlists to get you started. With hundreds of lists on a variety of subjects, there is something for everyone. Visit the playlist center for*

*more information and enter the playlist title. This week's featured list:*

### Build Leadership Skills

Being a student at AU creates some difficulties in being able to hone leadership skills, yet every employer values them. Fortunately, [lynda.com](http://lynda.com) has training on a wide range of career and business skills. The Build Leadership Skills is ideal for new grads, or anyone seeking employment while they study. This stream of courses will teach you:

- How to be a leader people love to follow.
- How to uncover your hidden strengths and talents.
- How to inspire your team.

Have a look at this playlist and start using the skills in your everyday interactions outside of school!

Courses: 7

Duration: 8h 52m

Skill Level: Appropriate for all

***Have you signed up for lynda? It's free for AUSU members. To learn more, check out [ausu.org/services/lynda.php](http://ausu.org/services/lynda.php)***

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# CLASSIFIEDS

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Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact [voice@voicemagazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemagazine.org) for more information.

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## THE VOICE

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[www.voicemagazine.org](http://www.voicemagazine.org)

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