

# THE VOICE

## MAGAZINE

Vol 23 Issue 42 2015-10-23

### Meeting The Minds

Dr. Jon Dron, The Future of University

### Dealing with Writer's Block

Three Steps to Avoid being This Guy

### Extracurricular

Armchair Sports

*Plus:*

*In Case of Emergency*

*Celebrating Knowledge Portals*

*and much more!*



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



**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

## These Hallowed Halls



So that was that. The election is over, the Liberals attained an unexpected majority, and life, it seems, continues without there being an election campaign running. Democracy has once again been exercised, and while nearly a third of us did not bother to participate, over two thirds did. Our system has given us another majority government with a minority vote, and has once again ignored over half the votes cast. This time, however, there is some hope in that the winning party has promised to review our electoral system, and perhaps move it to something that will waste fewer votes with each election.

However, with them having achieved a majority with the system as it is, I have to wonder how seriously that promise will be taken. Right now, however, we can do little but have faith that what was promised will be what is delivered.

Also, Halloween is coming, and, while I don't know how it's been in your area, around here, the last few years have seen fewer and fewer houses decorated, and the number of kids making the rounds decreasing along with it.

Until this year, that is. For some reason, it seems to be making a resurgence, and there are already several houses in my neighborhood that have full yard displays. At least one air-filled monstrosity can be seen on most blocks, and the number of fake spider webs hanging from trees, or along the railings, fences, and windows would give the impression that we've been attacked by some advancing army of arachnids. This is good news to me, as Halloween is a holiday that, while highly commercialized, has come so far from its origins that, these days, it seems to be about nothing more than having a little fun, and that is something we all could use, in my opinion.

In the spirit (pun intended) of that, next week I will be off once again. I'm hoping you're going to be far too busy simply enjoying Halloween to have any time for *The Voice Magazine*, and I'm going to use the time to try to catch up on everything I wasn't able to last time.

In the meantime, I'm leaving you with our feature article, where we ask Dr. Jon Dron about his vision of a future for universities. Honestly, I have to say I disagree with his vision. While I do agree that a university should teach beyond the bare facts and into a way of interacting with the universe, I disagree that we, as learners, should be the ones determining our course to get there, for the simple reason that we don't know enough yet. That's why we're students and not professors. Telling a student to chart his or her own learning goals and acting only as a repository of knowledge when students approach eliminates the essential function, to me, of teachers providing guidance as to whether what is being learned is valid. If there were no false information, no educational blind alleys to chase after, perhaps then I could see his idea of a university working. But as it stands, I wonder how many people would be disadvantaged by following multiple dead-end paths to their learning while a properly engaged professor could have directed them toward the correct paths to begin with.

Of course, that's just me, and that's just the feature. There's a lot more to discover in this issue, so, until next time, enjoy the read!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl', with a stylized, flowing script.

# MEETING THE MINDS

INTERVIEWS with AU's EDUCATORS



*Back in February, The Voice Magazine interviewed Dr. Jon Dron about his approach to teaching. Marie Well has since conducted a follow-up interview that looks more at exactly who Dr. Dron is beyond just the academic work. If you're curious about what type of person becomes a course designer and wins a National Teaching Fellowship from the UK, you may want to read the first or second parts of the interview first.*

**Marie: What do you feel is your life's purpose?**

Dr. Dron: I believe that we are ends in ourselves, not means to an end, so that's a bit of an awkward question. I guess, in broad terms, not so much as a purpose than as an attitude, what I'd like to aim for is to make a positive difference and to enjoy the experience of doing so. I'm probably not going to end war, poverty, ignorance, hatred, or cancer but hopefully I can do my bit to make the world a slightly better place than it was when I arrived, and to savour every moment of the experience, good and bad, as best I can.

**Marie: If you were granted omniscience, what book would you write?**

If I were granted omniscience I would know the answer to that already and I would almost certainly find a better way to communicate it than to write a book about it. But, if I did, and if I were limited to only words, it would have to be a book of poetry.

**Marie: If you could give your wife any gift fathomable, what would that gift be?**

Happiness. Failing that, me being a better person. Actually, I asked my wife this question and she said "an Irish wolfhound" which, as usual, is a much wiser answer than mine. It's not that she actually wants one. It would not be the Irish wolfhound that would bring her happiness so much as the fact that it would demonstrate my pure, unselfish, unquestioning love by giving her what she asks for, no matter how absurd the request, no matter how much I would hate to add a huge, high maintenance dog to our very tiny house that is already filled with one very small but very energetic Jack Russell, and no matter how much I might question whether she really wants it either.

**Marie: If you could pioneer the future of online university, say 20 years down the road, what would it look like?**

In some ways like it does today. Some things are worth keeping. Universities have very many roles, among the most valuable of which are to provide a legitimate space for independent thought, to catalyze interactions between smart people, to generate new (though not necessarily practical) knowledge, to stabilize and sustain

the culture of a society, and to offer accreditation of skills and knowledge that can be used by others in the society. But gosh I would like to make some changes!

First of all, all universities would be free. Universities are a social good. Quite apart from their direct contributions to knowledge and the economy, they produce educated people, and educated people improve life for everyone, not just for themselves. However you choose to measure it, the value of universities far exceeds what has ever been spent on them. Expecting students to pay for universities is at least as ridiculous as requiring children to pay for schools. There is little I hate more than the awful narrative around the economic value of a university degree and the consequent appalling lie that students are customers. Our customer is our society, not our students. Students are a crucial and non-negotiable *part* of universities, and are arguably among their more important outputs, but they should not be its paying clients. And of course, like Athabasca, such a university would be open to anyone and everyone. The notion of universities as filters that discriminate the worthy from the unworthy is ugly.

There would be no fixed-length courses. Courses (if we still needed to give them a label) could be any length from five minutes to five years and would be entirely separate from the accreditation process. One 'course' might look like a page of Wikipedia, another might feel more like a club, another might be more like a gallery where you bump into interesting people while examining the exhibits, another more like a game. These course-like things would be more connected, more embedded, more flexible and more social than their ancestors, and they would often be integrated in students' daily lives, only rarely demanding that they visit a particular place at a particular time.

You would not so much *go* to a university (though some might – diversity is good) as *engage* with it as and when it made sense to do so. It would not necessarily be something to which you devoted a few years so much as a resource with which you could engage at any time throughout your entire adult life, dipping in when the need arose rather than to suit timetables of institutions. Perhaps, to keep it economically viable, everyone might have 'education credits' that they could spend on participating whenever it made sense to do so and they were ready for it.

*You would not so much  
go to a university as  
engage with it as and  
when it made sense to  
do so.*

No one would ever fail a 'course'. If the notion of passing and failing had any meaning at all – which, in most cases, it would not, thanks to the disaggregation of assessment and learning - there would just be some students that had not yet finished learning.

Students would work with faculty to design and plan their own work and identify the outcomes they wished to achieve. Faculty would support them, only guiding them when they sought guidance or needed help. Faculty would just be one of many sources of knowledge and help. Universities would not so much be the holders of knowledge as the hubs to help people and knowledge connect. The university's role in knowledge creation and preservation would not be lost, but it would be distributed across many spaces that it would help to link together.

Accreditation would authentically assess the skills needed in the way in which those skills are actually applied. You might gain many forms of credit from a single course or get credit from the aggregate of many courses, but courses would be far from the only input into accreditation. Universities would participate in a massive connected web of authority in which individuals, companies and crowds would play as much of a role as traditional institutions. Universities would accredit what learners actually know (and need to know), not what

universities choose to teach, and this would be demonstrated in ways that both support that learning and are authentic to the skill being demonstrated. You would not necessarily get a degree from a single university, unless it were simply a way of packaging up other forms of proof of learning. Instead, you would have a portfolio of evidence, including badges, direct evidence of progress, recommendations, and endorsements from many sources. Some would be highly reputable and reliable, others less so, but all could count.

Above all, universities would be seen as learning communities. I think universities are not so much about learning stuff – that's just a means to an end – as they are about learning to *be*. They should be places to discover passion, to be catalysts for both individual and social change. Freed of the need to teach to objectives and assess the outputs, they could be much more about exploring the less tangible aspects of the stuff people are learning, of making connections, of building supportive networks and communities. This role has always been vastly more important than the university's role as a source of information, specific skills, and credentials.

I would like them to retain the independence and distance from commercial and political interests that has always been one of their strengths. Universities are a place where societies can daydream about things that have no obvious practical and immediate benefit but that often turn out to be the most meaningful things of all. There are other ways to do that. Some large companies have found ways to make such spaces – famously things like HP's Skunkworks, Xerox PARC, Google's 20% time – and there are plenty of foundations and benefactors that support those like artists, inventors, philosophers, and poets. But few have such traction and few provide the rich social environment where ideas can grow and spread without constraint or separate purpose. Universities are far from perfect at that, but they are the best we've got. Rather than applying only to a small elite who have jumped through the academic hoops, I would like the option of participating in this research space to be available to anyone. If you have a dream, an idea, an invention, a passionate interest, then universities should be a place that you can join, almost like a club, and that can support you in achieving your vision, and to share it with others.

It should go without saying that I would hope to see such reforms occur in parallel with similar (though not identical) reforms in schools. In fact, it would be hard to achieve significant change without that. Schools need to work much harder on cultivating a love of learning, empowering their students, supporting them as human beings rather than outputs, if such a change in higher education is to be successful. Though there is a counter tendency in some countries (the US and UK, for instance, seem set on retrograde paths) I'm encouraged to see such changes happening in many places, from Finland to BC. There's a long way to go yet, but some regions are heading in the right direction.



*See that cool stuff there? That's a sample of what students who get interviewed for The Voice Magazine's Minds We Meet column get in the mail, just for talking with a fellow AU student for a while and letting us report the results!*

*Sound good to you? Sounds good to us too! So let us know if you'd like to be featured in The Voice Magazine by writing us at [voice@voicemgazine.org](mailto:voice@voicemgazine.org). We'll hook you up and you can help your fellow students get a feel for what amazing people are on this journey with them!*

## Extracurricular Armchair Sports

Carla Knipe



There is a sudden flurry of activity in sports just lately. Suddenly people are discovering that they really like watching baseball games, and the new hockey and football seasons are also underway. But, for people who want to participate in sports without playing, fantasy sports leagues and sports card trading might be an alternative.

Fantasy sports leagues consist of players, called league owners, or commissioners, who assemble a list of pro-athletes from across the chosen league to represent their team and then compete against other fantasy teams by comparing the real-life game statistics

of their choices with those of the other players. Tallying the statistics is made easier now, thanks to computer technology, but it is not a new phenomenon, and can be done by hand. The first leagues were created in the 1940s and 50s starting with Major League Baseball as a table card game called "rotisserie," or "roto" for short. Other card games for other sports soon followed which led to development of fantasy sports leagues in their current form. They suffered a lull in popularity until the 1980s and 90s, when newspapers and magazines began offering fantasy sports leagues complete with prizes for the winners. But these paper-based leagues fell out of favour due to the rise of the Internet.

Fantasy sports leagues have taken a more sinister turn in recent years. What began as a bit of harmless fun are now often used as a method for online gambling. A billion-dollar industry, these for-profit leagues have been prohibited, or severely regulated, in many American states, and have been the subject of police investigations because they can be rigged.

But it is not difficult to start your own for-fun league among friends and co-workers. There are lots of instructions and forums on the Internet, including ways to customize your league. Or, it is easy to join an online league that others have started. Each has their own different rules and levels of commitment and some require an entry fee to join, so it is best to research to find the league that best fits your requirements and comfort level.

Another way to become involved in sports is to become a sports card collector. Many grown-up kids of a certain age remember buying hockey cards from a corner store, each complete with a sliver of pink gum that went stale in ten seconds flat. Sports cards have always had an air of nostalgia, but, in the early 1980s, the collectible sports card market exploded. Dedicated shops opened up and there were trade shows that specifically catered to the collectible market. No longer were cards dumped in a drawer or carried around in school bags and jeans pockets. They were treated with gloved fingers and placed in special acid-free albums and cases.

The peak of the sports card fad fizzled out in the 1990s but collecting and trading cards remains big business. The cost of a pack of cards is no longer a dime (and the ubiquitous gum has been mostly discontinued) but there are still lots of aficionados and serious collectors. Rare cards still go for hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars at auction. There are still card shops and trade shows, but many collectors do it more for the love of collecting, not as an investment opportunity.

If you think you'd like to get involved with sports card collecting, don't think that all the good cards have been scooped up and you don't have a chance. Many great cards turn up at yard sales and in flea markets. Ebay is also a good source for cards. You can build a collection on what interests you rather than what you think will make money. Limit yourself to a budget and don't aim to collect absolutely everything. There are lots of Internet forums and collectors guides to provide advice.

These two activities are a great bridge between simply watching sports on television and actually getting out and playing them!

#### RESOURCES

<http://www.fantasizr.com>

<http://games.espn.go.com/ffl/welcome/createleague>

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/how-to-start-a-fantasy-football-league.html>

[www.etopps.com](http://www.etopps.com)

<http://www.sportscardforum.com>

<http://www.cardboardconnection.com>

*Carla is an AU student and a caffeinated beverage definitely keeps her going through her studies. However, her pet peeve is seeing people occupy the tables at Starbucks for long periods of time when she can't find a seat.*



## Music Review

MC Shadow

Samantha Stevens



**Artist:** MC Shadow

**Singles:** "Resurrection," "Lost," and "Lullaby of Pain"

I love action movies. I love everything about that genre of film: the car chases, the grand stylized battles and fight scenes, the impossibilities, and the music that accompanies the action. Although the films may be a guilty pleasure of mine, the music in films like *The Fast and The Furious* has given Rap and Hip-Hop artists incredible inspiration and an amazing platform to present their intense music to the world.

MC Shadow is a veteran rap and hip-hop artist who began in the 80s and has now returned to the music scene after a long hiatus. Achieving some success with his band Get Loose Crew in the late 80s and early 90s, and credited with being the first white rapper in Canada, MC Shadow left the music industry after experiencing some disappointments. However, if his latest singles are any indication, he is returning to the

music world at a perfect time. He credits bands like Massive Attack, Evanescence, and Arctic Monkeys for inspiring his new music, MC Shadow's latest singles are phenomenal and a credit to the rap and hip-hop genres.

"Resurrection" begins with music that is reminiscent of a grand orchestra. The song picks up with the beginning of a steady beat and female backup vocals provided by Sarah Beatty. By the time MC Shadow's rap begins the music has already achieved an intensity that will have listeners' hearts racing in anticipation. The sounds steadily grow and crescendo, eventually reaching an epic climax.

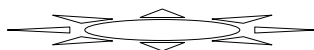
At first I didn't enjoy "Lost," the second single released, however, I absolutely loved the chorus and how the lyrics lead to it. The harmony between MC Shadow and Tekniq is amazing. The electronic effects in the song sound very metallic to me, but after listening to the lyrics a few times, I understood the reasoning behind the effects. The song is largely inspired by large cities, especially the darker side of life that reside in those cities. The brief heavier sound later in the song breaks up the music perfectly, and the hit of metal really captures the attention.

"Lullaby of Pain" is very different from the other singles. The tempo is slower, and the overall music is very soft. Sarah Beatty provides the female vocals in this track as well, and the difference between her sensual and alluring voice beautifully contrasts with MC Shadow's extremely masculine rap and vocals. The piano and guitar further add to the overall feelings created by the vocals, and the result is a beautiful and incredible song.

Apart from these singles being MC Shadow's extraordinary return to the music industry, he has also created a video for "Resurrection" that is closer to a movie than a simple music video. This is intended to be part of a trilogy of videos and short film that he is creating, with the music videos for "Lost" and "Lullaby of Pain" continuing and finishing the story that begins in "Resurrection." The story is centred around four friends, their execution of a bank heist, and inevitable mystery and betrayal. So, yeah, I loved the video as well, and you can check it out [here](#).

If these singles are any indication, the next year will be busy for MC Shadow, and I eagerly await a full album. "Resurrection," "Lost," and "Lullaby of Pain" can be found on iTunes.

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



## In Case of Emergency

Christina M. Frey



It's been drilled into your head since kindergarten. Recognize emergencies. Call for help. Don't interfere.

But have you ever thought—really thought—about how *you'd* respond to a medical emergency in your own home? Here's a hint: No matter how prepared you are for an emergency, you're never really prepared for an emergency. But you get an on-the-spot education when it happens.

Here's what I learned when my nine-year-old had a severe asthma attack and stopped breathing (she's fortunately fine now).

**1) Call 911.** This seems very obvious, but when you're thrown into an emergency situation it's natural to rush to try to help the person in distress, or even to wonder if you can handle it on your own. Every minute counts. Make the call—and don't dither. If there's nothing to worry about, they'll let you know.

**2) The dispatcher is on your side.** The dispatcher will ask a lot of questions, and in the shock of the moment it may seem like they're trying to prove you wrong—or to make light of your fear. Not true. They're trained to get the most accurate information possible so they can send the right crew with the right equipment. They also need you to stay calm so they can tell you what to do and what not to do while you're waiting for the EMTs or paramedics to arrive.

**3) Knowledge and training aren't enough.** Even if you're a trained EMT—like my husband is—it's a completely different experience when you're thrown into an emergency situation, and the patient is a loved one. It's hard to think straight and remember the proper steps to assess and treat when the stakes are crazy high.

And even if you do take those steps, there's a limit to how successful you can be without medical equipment and support. In my daughter's case, all we had to work with were rescue breaths. When the paramedics came, they pulled out epinephrine, a ventilator, some tubes, oxygen, and a bunch of other specialized medical equipment. Not the kind of thing you have lying around the house.

One more good reason why calling 911 is essential.

**4) Back off and let the professionals do their thing.** The paramedics told me we were surprisingly calm. I'd been a bystander in an emergency situation before and had watched relatives losing it, and their reaction hadn't helped anyone (as understandable as it might have been). That memory gave me enough presence of mind to keep from interfering in my daughter's case, even though I was desperate to help.

It's heartbreaking to see a loved one hooked up to tubes and surrounded by medical personnel. But freaking out distracts the medics from doing what they're supposed to do—save a life.

**5) Your memory will play tricks on you.** Apparently the cops showed up (I believe this is routine in our area when the emergency involves a kid). The paramedics told them that it was an asthma case, so they had it covered. I didn't see or hear this exchange at all. But what I did notice—and vividly remember—was holding myself back from putting a towel under my daughter's arm when the IV needle spilled some of her blood on the living room carpet. Your brain's a bit unreliable in a traumatic situation, which is yet another reason why you need to call in the professionals, no matter how much you think you've got this.

Before that afternoon, I knew what to do in an emergency situation, but I didn't really get it like I do now. Take some time to think through how you might emotionally respond if you needed to take action today. No one wants a medical emergency in their own family, but emergencies are inevitable—and preparedness saves lives.

*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](#).*

## In Conversation with Bad Citizen, Part II

Wanda Waterman



*Bad Citizen is an up-and-coming band from New York, known for lively classic rock and R & B. On July 15 they put out their debut EP, *Citizens Rise*. You can see the video of one of the songs, "Watch It Fall," [here](#). Recently bandmembers Matt, Frankie, Steve, and Patrick were good enough to talk to Wanda Waterman about NYC, social conscience, and the new EP. (See Part I of this interview [here](#).)*

**Do you feel that New York is a creatively stimulating city? Why or why not?**

MATT: Yes ... I do a lot of writing while I'm on the subway. I see, hear, and *smell* (hehe!) so much just sitting on the train.

You can't help but be inspired, pissed, or depressed and wanting to express what you've experienced in NYC. I was born in Brooklyn so I feel like I'll always be connected and reap inspiration from NYC.

**Why did you call this EP *Citizens Rise*?**

FRANKIE: I think the EP title is a recognition of sorts. The power of normal everyday people has declined. Our government is run by lobbyists and their corporate bosses. We need to band together to make this world a better place. The songs are essentially whatever the fuck we feel like writing about.

**There's a social conscience in your songs, a sense of defiance toward injustice. How did that develop—or was it already a given?**

MATT: With all of the brutalising of blacks and other minorities by crooked cops, and the gay and lesbian community fighting for rights they shouldn't even have to be fighting for, I wanted our video for "Watch It Fall" to empower people. The mission is definitely a given; I've always felt like I should stand up for the oppressed.

**Are there any books, films, or albums that have deeply influenced your development as an artist?**

PATRICK: I get influenced by everything; it all works its way into my psyche and how I approach music.

I grew up in North Carolina and there was a local band I knew called Alli With An I, who were in that early stage of the punk rock and pop punk sound. Their album, *I Learned It By Watching You*, was seminal to me—it showed me what's possible with a guitar, bass, drums, and some killer tunes, even if you're a kid from a small town in NC.

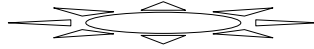
**If you had an artistic mission statement, what would it be?**

STEVE: I have piles of mission statements, but my favorite might be "Chim chim-in-ey chim chim-in-ey chim chim cheroo, I does what I likes and I likes what I do." Best when sung, naturally. From *Mary Poppins*. Piles more.

## What's next for you?

MATT: We're writing new songs that are a bit more dynamic and expansive in sound. Our sound is maturing, and not in a "suit and tie" kind of way ... more like a seasoned fighter working up to the championship fight. It's the next chapter of Bad Citizen, and it's gonna' get a lot badder!

Wanda also writes the blog *The Mindful Bard: [The Care and Feeding of the Creative Self](#)*.



## Study Tips from a Semi-Anonymous Friend

### How to Write Like a Philosopher, Part III

*There is nothing more that The Study Dude wants for you than to learn the art of stringing rhetorical questions at the beginning of your essay.*

*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.*

The book *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* by Eric Hayot explores the deep question of how to

write like a philosopher. He won't necessarily teach you how to write in a lucid manner. Instead of instructing on clear writing, he likes to visualize you floundering in an anxiety-riddled state. That anxiety strikes most philosophers as essential to good writing.

## Craft Compelling Titles and Subtitles

Titles and subtitles can make your essay or book come alive. They not only provide direction, but also spark intrigue. You have a range of creative freedom from which to draw your titles and subtitles.

Unfortunately, however, if you want your title to show up on Amazon's search engine, your freedom stops short. That creative edge goes backstage in favour of its technological rival: namely, the search engine. If you start typing in a letter of the alphabet, Amazon will show frequently searched words in the drop down box. From these frequently searched words, you can get a better sense of what words will get more traction for your title.

I'm not sure of the algorithm for library search engines, but I do know that academic titles need to use keywords common to the discipline. The disciplinary buzzwords or jargon can gain you traction in your title choice. I'm also not sure whether library search engines track most commonly searched words, but these engines do somehow keep record of disciplinary keywords.

Eric Hayot presents some other views on how to make titles and subtitles work for your piece of writing:

- some circles of academics write their intros and conclusions after writing their book chapters. The book chapters are often not written in the order the author ends up presenting them in.

- the introductions to chapters should come before writing chapter titles that are subject to change through the duration of the writing process.
- Wait until you almost or completely finish your writing before sticking a title on it. Hayot likes to start with tentative titles, ones subject to change depending on the direction his content flows.
- Craft your subtitles so that they are parallel. For instance, if one starts with a gerund (a noun ending in -ing, such as fishing), then try starting them all with a gerund.
- Titles should express a great deal about the nature of the work that follows it.
- A succinct short memorable title can make its way into the English vocabulary.
- Make your title descriptive and your subtitle surprising or vice versa.
- You can also simply omit your subtitle and keep the title (capping at seven words).
- You can start your title with "On" and finish with the topic of the essay.
- You can spice things up by assigning your paper a one-word title or by making your title long and your subtitle short.
- A surprising title would consist of two words (an adjective and a noun) or three words maximum.
- Make your title a question for a little suspense.

### **Sprinkle Figurative Language in Academic Writing**

In a book by Helen Sword that I read and loved, I discovered that figurative language could take the abstract or the conceptual and transform them into physical, tangible entities. The joy in this discovery, for me, stemmed from the pervasive view that academic writing uses too many abstractions and too few sensory objects. I like to read about real things, not just strings of nominalizations that say very little to nothing in the end. Nominalizations are stuffy nouns that stem from adjectives or verbs, such as *department* for *depart*.

Talking about nominalizations, I recently bought a beginner's relational data modelling book to read for fun. Perhaps the content was designed for beginners, but the writing overflowed with nominalization after nominalization. Just gleaming a simple concept from a paragraph felt like trying to dissect the author's ego. Two authors involved themselves on the data modelling book, and reading their inserts, I could see immediately which one offered the clear and compelling writing and which one pushed the strings of nominalizations. Given that the book sizes at almost 700 words, I started exploring alternative books.

Although Eric Hayot criticizes people who criticize academic work, he does agree that figurative language can augment writing nicely:

- incorporate similes in your writing (commonly with the word "like").
- Figurative language takes concrete and abstract language and makes it tangible and or physical.
- Figurative language allows you to put in pauses, or humour and surprise. into your work. Start a new paragraph or section with figurative language and then get more concrete language to expand on it.

### **Start Your Writing with Rhetorical Questions**

Rhetorical questions add flavour to any piece of writing if done well. If done poorly, rhetorical questions can take away from the vigour of a piece. Take, for instance, a piece of writing I had done recently. The article resonated for me at the time of writing, but as soon as I reread it, I felt disdain over a string of rhetorical questions placed at the beginning. The rhetorical questions, too numerous to count, stifled the continuity of the piece. Shuddering, I thought to myself, I need to use less rhetorical questions at the start of a paragraph or an essay. I decided to reduce the questions down to three maximum.

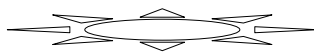
Little did I know it at the time, but I was on to something. You see, within the next week, I would read in Eric Hayot's book even more strategies for using rhetorical questions, which I will now share with you:

- Rhetorical questions should only start an intro paragraph, section, or essay.
- You can even use multiple rhetorical questions in a row. If you use multiple rhetorical questions, make sure they take up the whole paragraph.
- Use three, up to a maximum of five, rhetorical questions in the series.
- If you use multiple rhetorical questions, start with your shorter questions and work down to your longer ones. Otherwise, you can go from a narrow question to a much broader one.
- You can use an if/then style of rhetorical device, where the "if" part and the "then" part aren't logically connected, but, instead, are in opposition to one another. An example would be "If the camera proves to Janie that she is black, the community attempts to prove to her that she is white" (Burrows as cited in Hayot, 2014).

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

Hayot, Eric. 2014. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. NY, New York: Columbia University Press



## Three Steps to Dealing With Writer's Block

**Deanna Roney**



Writer's block can be a frustrating and intimidating experience. Staring at a blank computer screen, with the cursor blinking defiantly back at you. With each flicker of the cursor the brick wall between the mind and the fingers gets built higher and higher, until it seems there is no way to ever climb over it; with each flicker the wall grows thicker, making it impossible to break through. Writer's block tends to occur at the most inconvenient time: when you are running out of time. It happens when you have what feels like a mountain of things to accomplish.

What are the best ways to overcome writer's block? What will work best varies for every person. However, continuing to stare at the blank computer screen with your hands poised over the keyboard is (in my experience) not going to work. Stare at the blank page and the flashing cursor only adds layer after layer of brick to the wall. If you can step away and take your mind off your pressing paper, this could be the best thing. However, sometimes it is not always possible. Sometimes the deadline is looming and the work just needs to get done.

**Step one:** remove distractions. It can be easy to be distracted when you are fighting with writer's block. The internet is only a click away, or there may be other people milling about. I put on some low-key music and noise cancelling headphones and get lost in my own world. Which, granted, still is graced with a large, thick, brick wall blocking my writing. I close internet explorer and put my phone in another room, it is too easy to pick it up and get distracted.

**Step two:** it is time to face that taunting cursor. Write freely. Write about whatever comes to mind, preferably it has something to do with the topic at hand, but, even if it does not, just write. Choose a funky new font and go crazy. It might be written in black and white but it is not permanent. I have found some of my best thesis statements by doing a free-write (along with some sentences which made me question my sanity). I am unconcerned with sentence structure or if what I am writing makes any sense, or if it sounds intelligent, I just write idea after idea. And, somewhere in the mix, I will usually find my voice.

**Step three:** regroup. If step two leaves you with no results it at least has you typing and tackling that intimidating blank screen. The cursor is no longer adding bricks to the wall, and with each mark made on the screen bricks are slowly being removed. If your ideas were not substantial enough in step two to move onto the paper then perhaps, in there, you have asked an important question, or partially formed an idea that will help to direct some research on the topic, going in a direction that you had not previously considered.

The most important part of dealing with writers block, at least for me, is summed up in these three simple steps. Walking away for small break can help, but this is not always an option. So sometimes we just have to dive in headfirst and leave our inhibitions behind. As evidence that this method works, I present to you this article. Waiting for inspiration—staring at my blank page with the cursor taunting me—was not working. I could feel my mind being closed off and the air between my fingers and the keyboard growing dense. I did not have the option to walk away, I needed to work, and it needed to be now. So I started free writing, with headphones, and my phone abandoned in the next room.

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

## Student Sizzle

## AU's Hot Social Media Topics

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

#### AthaU Facebook Group

The Facebook group seems a little slower this week, probably because of exams for people who started courses right after school let out in June.

But Cass wants to know if MLA format requires a title page. Casey wonders what effect changing programs mid-semester will have. Kaitland seeks study tips for the LGST 377 final exam.

Other posts include service standards and the federal election.

#### Twitter

@lonipierce tweets: "Just got my latest @AthabascaU package in the mail and it included the V for Vendetta graphic novel. Awesome!!! #textbookstokeep."

@AthabascaU tweets: "Warm welcome to AU's new #WriterInResidence Esi Edugyan! #ScotiabankGillerPrize novelist <http://bit.ly/1W2wadB>."

@AthabascaUSU (AUSU) tweets: "Have you been to The Landing lately, #AthaU's social networking site? <https://landing.athabascau.ca>."



## Celebrating Portals to Knowledge

Barbara Lehtiniemi



I have a strange relationship with books. Don't get me wrong: I love books. I may even love them too much. I read books constantly. I often have a dozen books—not counting textbooks—on the go simultaneously.

However, if I buy a book, I'm likely condemning it to a dusty death. It's not because I don't want to read it. It's just that, once the book is in my possession, it gets demoted from "must read" to "must read—eventually." Knowing that I can read a purchased book anytime means there is no rush.

A library book, on the other hand, suffers no such fate. When I borrow a book from the library, it gets promoted to the top of the reading pile. Deadlines motivate me and, because I've got to return a library book in three weeks, I have to start reading it right away. I borrow a dozen library books each month, which means the purchased books continue to pile up—unread.

October is Canadian Library Month, and the week of October 18 to 24 is Public Library Week in Ontario, where I live. The library, to me, is much more than a big box of free books: it's an intoxicating portal to a vast world of knowledge. That's definitely worth celebrating. Here are three things I love about libraries:

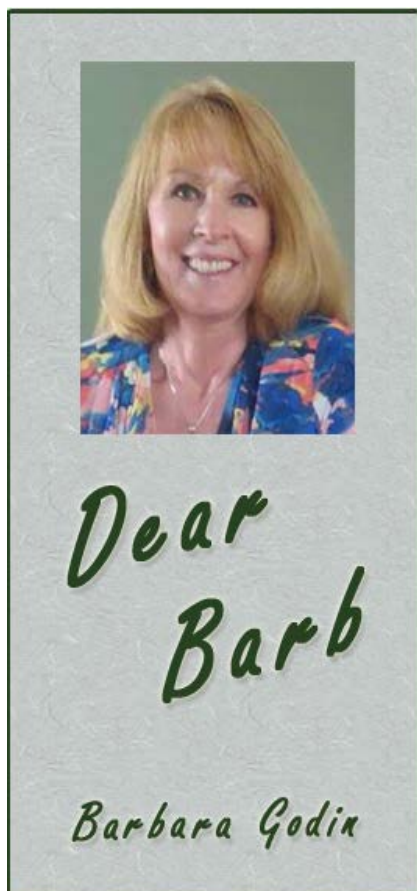
**Free books.** If we had to buy every book we read, we would be poor and the trees would all disappear. I read between 100 and 150 books each year, and I borrow more than two-thirds of them from the library (the remainder I receive as gifts, borrow from friends, or buy.) When I want to read a book, I first check if I can get it from the library. With inter-library loan, I can access books from any Ontario public library through my local branch. Libraries these days offer much more than books, but books are still my main reason for going there.

**There is more in the box besides books.** Public libraries have evolved into community hubs. Although books, thankfully, are still a big part of libraries, services expand year after year. I still get most of the DVDs I watch from the library, as well as many of the magazines I read. I go to art shows, lectures, and author signings at the library. I even occasionally used the wifi, photocopier, or fax machine. Most of these services and events are free. The only library fee I pay—excluding overdue fines—is the proctor service for my AU exams.

**Peace and quiet.** For many years, I passed by a branch of the public library on my way home from work. I would often stop in to enjoy a transitional oasis—a break between the duties of employment and the duties of home. In the quiet of the library, I de-stressed and recharged while leisurely browsing the rows and rows of books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs. It's like shopping therapy except there's no credit card bill.

Although I don't pass by the library daily any more, I still manage to visit the local branch at least once a week. The library allows me to indulge my passion for books without breaking the bank—or killing trees. The library, to me, is like a big box full of books (and magazines and music and movies) that I don't have to pay for. More importantly, it's a portal to knowledge that makes life-long learning possible. Happy Library Month, Canada!

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



## Critical Questions

**Dear Barb:**

*I have a problem with my sister, who is one year older than me. She has a lot of problems, both physical and mental. I try to be there for her, but I just don't know how much I am supposed to take. She's verbally abusive and then says she doesn't remember doing it, or it's not her fault and that she had a seizure. I know she has seizures, but I think she uses this as an excuse to treat us badly. I have tried to listen to her problems, but it's so hard as she complains about everything. It takes me days to get into the frame of mind to be able to visit or talk to her on the phone. And then I can't wait to leave. What's worse, she usually ignores me when I'm there anyway. I am torn between my obligation to my sister and maintaining my sanity! Help, Anna.*

Hey Anna:

Undoubtedly it is difficult to deal with people who have mental health issues. It's obvious you are trying your best, but there is only so much you can do. You must take care of yourself before you can help anyone else. Perhaps some distance from your sister will give you time to regain your composure and be able to deal more effectively with her. Often people want to help individuals with mental health issues by deciding what is best for them; however these individuals may have a different perspective on what they want for their lives. Ultimately as individuals we really have no choice but to accept others as they are and allow them to live their lives as they choose. So I would suggest you back off and wait for your sister to approach you and ask for what she needs. She may be more receptive to help if she is the one asking for it, rather than someone else

suggesting it. Hope this helps, Anna.

**Dear Barb:**

*I don't usually write into columns like this, but I would like your advice. I am in my late twenties and have lived away from home for quite a few years. I live out of town so don't see my parents that often, but when I return home I stay with them for the weekend. Usually after the first day I can't wait to go home. My dad is so critical of me. It seems everything I do is not good enough. I feel so inadequate around him. I have tried to talk to him about how I feel, but I usually don't get too far before I can sense he is becoming agitated with me, so I just let it go. I love my dad and wish we didn't have this dissension in our relationship. Any suggestions? Thanks, Marcus.*

Hi Marcus:

I hear your frustration! It's difficult to stop being a parent to your children and I believe your dad is just doing what he thinks a father does. It's up to you to explain to him that you are an adult and are choosing to live your life your way, not his way. I know you love your father and do not want to cause problems between him and you, but if you want him to stop telling you how to live your life, you must tell him how you feel, but in a respectful way. For example when he tells you how you should be doing something, tell him that you appreciate him sharing that information with you, but you have chosen to do it this way. He may be a little surprised at first, but if you continue to do this, he will get the point and accept the fact that you are an adult and in charge of your own life. Thanks for your great question Marcus.

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.

# Lonesome Doc Doggerel in "Poetry Oughta Be Dumb"

Let us stroll Laredo streets,  
We two, we hirsute cowpoke chums,  
Let's pause beneath the golden bough,  
And break a branch to scratch our bums.  
Let's talk of anything but Greece  
Or Sartre or decadence or sums.  
Let's speak in nursery-simple rhymes—  
'Cause poetry oughta be DUMB.

Polyglots and classicists in search of  
affirmations,  
With sidelong glances over tea, assessing  
admiration,  
And penning lines that manifest  
The ghost of Thomas Stearns:

"poetry should be difficult," he said—  
A hard remark—the poets fear it.  
But most the poetry written since then—  
Well, nobody wants to hear it.

Poems are there to stir the blood,  
And not for dry pedantic wars.  
Drive it from the masses, and  
It'll burst from the mouths of hip-hop stars.

Keep it alive, my stalwart buds,  
And rhyme it for the folks in the bars.

*(Lonesome Doc  
Doggerel is a  
founding member  
of the Dry Corn  
Husk Poets.)*

*Written by Wanda Waterman*



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## IMPORTANT DATES

- **Oct 31:** November course extension deadline
- **Nov 1:** AUSU Awards application deadline
- **Nov 10:** Deadline to register for courses starting December 1
- **Nov 11:** Remembrance Day – AU Closed
- **Nov 12:** AUSU Council Meeting
- **Nov 13:** December degree requirement deadline
- **Nov 30:** December course extension deadline

## Featured AUSU Member Service: Awards

AUSU offers a variety of scholarships, awards, and bursaries for members. Here are some with a pending application deadline of **November 1**:

**Academic Achievement Scholarships** reward scholastic excellence. The applicants with the highest GPA over the last thirty credits will receive the award.

**AUSU Bursaries** help students in financial need. Special consideration is given to those who have other challenges such as disabilities, single parenting, and extraordinary financial concerns.

**Returning Student Awards** recognize the commitment of students who return to university after a long break.

**Balanced Student Awards** reward students who balance multiple life commitments with university study.

**Student Service Awards** recognize those who provide outstanding support to students in their community.

For more information on these and other awards (such as the AUSU Emergency, Computer, and Travel Bursaries), visit the [AUSU Scholarships, Awards & Bursaries page](#).

## AUSU Featured Groups & Clubs

**Group Name:** Athabasca University Library

**Where:** Facebook

**Members:** 224

**About:** AU Library is dedicated to maintaining excellent service in supporting the information needs of AU Library users.

**Activity:** On average weekly postings.

**News:** A revamped and revised look and feel, AU's Library offers easier to find resources and offers tutorials on numerous topics.



Like us! Keep checking our Facebook page for updates, news you can use, and more! Find us at "[Athabasca University Students' Union \(AUSU\)](#)".

## 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:*

### Explore the Foundations of Photography

Go beyond the basics and master the foundations of photography: exposure and composition concepts, lenses, macro shooting, black and white, and more.

**Courses:** 8, including:

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| • Exposure        | • Night and Low Light |
| • Lenses          | • Macro and Close-up  |
| • Composition     | • Specialty Lenses    |
| • Black and White | • Flash               |

**Duration:** 29h 45m

**Skill Level:** Beginner – Intermediate

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

## THANK YOU for making AUSU's Get Out the Vote campaign a huge success!

With the 2015 federal election campaign now over, AUSU would like to thank ALL of our members who pledged to vote during our GOTV campaign. It was a resounding success with over 800 members pledging to vote. It was a testament to the drive of not only our members but of all Canadians in having their voices heard.

Read the article by the AU Newsroom:

[AU Students Vote: pledge your patriotism in the days leading to Canada's federal election](#)

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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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