THE GRE AND ME
A Creative Portfolio and Conversation

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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May 2009

May 9, 2009
Abstract

This portfolio displays a variety of responses to selected Graduate Records Examination (GRE) Issue topics through a variety of media: comic strips, poetry, collages, photographs, and creative non-fiction. These responses have been compiled in a PowerPoint to be viewed along with the binder of written responses. These works represent a culmination of my mind’s wanderings, especially due to its expansion from my acquired education at Ball State. From researching the GRE writing component’s structure and history, I have written a larger response to the issue of standardized writing in my Artist Statement. Having freed myself from the paranoia of a weighted response being only in the form of an essay, my imagination has soared—something the Honors College has always encouraged, and for which I am thankful.

Acknowledgments

- My warm thanks to Dr. Lindberg who helped clarify my ideas for this creative project, aided me in my research about the GRE, and was an amazing editor for my Artist Statement. I am very grateful for all her encouragement and support for my portfolio and presentation.

- I would also like to thank Professor Christman who helped me with my creative non-fiction writing. Her suggestions and insight helped me to create a more unified and stronger portfolio.
Artist Statement for my Honors Creative Senior Thesis Project

It was the summer of 2008. It was the summer job in a cubicle for eight hours a day having no work to do. As Susan Sontag said, “The life of the creative man [and woman] is lead, directed, and controlled by boredom. Avoiding boredom is one of our most important purposes.” I came upon the GRE Pool of Issue Topics while browsing the internet for GRE information. I was looking at GRE information because my senior year was upon me, and having been a studious student my entire academic career, I thought it would be best to look into this daunting step to grad school application.

I was responding to the prompts in a conversational way (may I stress it was a lonely office job): “GRE what are you talking about?” I also wanted to practice writing every day so I made a goal to write my way down the list (this was before I noticed there were about 250 prompts presented). And so at the end of the summer I had about forty-seven responses that were chatty and rambling and cheeky in nature.

The idea to grow these writing exercises into a cultivated Senior Honors Thesis started in the Fall semester. As an English major who has thought about getting an MFA down the road, the idea of creating a creative writing portfolio seemed well worth my time. As an English major who has also struggled with standardized writing and whose scholarly essays have often been graded short of the highest marks, I reveled in the idea of rebelling against the rules of a “proper” essay. I also wanted the chance to be funny on a “test” (which SparkNotes warns against).  

1 “The Essay section is neither the time nor the place to be sarcastic or controversial. It’s not the place to espouse random views about life or death or hot fudge sundaes. Save all that for your blog” (Goodman 302).
Discussing the project and constructing the Abstract submission, Dr. Lindberg and I modified my original response goal from all 250 to 121. When I discussed the project with my creative writing mentor, Professor Christman, we modified 121 to the "strongest" responses, which ended up being forty-seven responses in mixed media. Simply, who would want to read them all? Even the GRE research teams give students only six prompts because the issues are similar. I have thoroughly snorkeled through the pool and have carefully selected the pearls to showcase in my creative portfolio. A pearl necklace is much more impressive than a lake of oysters, and much easier to present as a unified work of art.

I decided to research the GRE and include my findings and comments in my author statement as I started to question many aspects of the GRE. I was curious about how the Issue Topics had come into existence. What were the collegiate criteria for judging of writing skills in standardized testing? And, most importantly, how could I argue that my responses possessed this "skill" that seemed to be narrowly defined? I revisited the GRE website and clicked on the research link, where I again discovered a "pool" of research articles. After I had selected, a list of potential articles' abstracts, Dr. Lindberg and I discussed which articles would be most beneficial to my project, and we astutely narrowed the list to articles which we then read and analyzed together. Her guidance and insight helped me find what my main goals for my creative thesis were, and will be explained later in this statement.

The decision to include other forms of art in my responses came because I wanted to expound my creative skills in poetry and art and distinguish my individual expression from the mass responses. So as I reread old drafts to see which ones I would submit to Professor

2 "...all study participants rated a common set of six prompts. The six prompts were selected to represent the variety of content and phrasing of prompts in the larger pool" (Powers and Fowles, 1998, 6).
Christman. I was also reading through the rest of the Issue topics and writing/drawing new responses. The non-verbal responses break up the portfolio so that one does not fall into a monotonous pattern of “telling” responses. The reader is required to look and think, and is hopefully held in a state of wonderment at what will be on the next page. The images also have as a goal simply to display humor. I say simply because I have chosen to draw stick figures along with using computer graphics. Stick figures are simple and universal, yet every detail, an eyebrow, a limb, the arrangement of the figures, requires a sophisticated decision.

To present these comics and other visual components, I created a PowerPoint show. One is supposed to view the PowerPoint with the binder, as the PowerPoint has all responses “placed” in it. When a written response comes up, it can be read in order in the binder. Not only do I save trees, but I save the quality of the photographs I have used by having the viewer see them via screen. Also, one cannot create a PowerPoint during the GRE, but the PowerPoint application from Microsoft is a tool that I have used in many classes, and effectively so.

The next formatting decision was how I was going to present the “Issue.” I decided a text box was fitting, separate and aloof. In a larger point size and Times New Roman font, the issues sit on top of the page, a billboard of superiority and scholarliness.

I also came to the judicious decision to edit my responses. This was a significant decision because the GRE allows only forty-five minutes to organize and type an essay. so how could I argue that my responses could equal the required responses if I had been “coached” to my best work? I would guess my first drafts took fifteen to twenty minutes, and I didn’t even bother with spell check (which the GRE also does not have). Professor Christman helped me see which of
my "digressions" were valid and interesting, not mere rants. By asking me what my thesis "was about," she helped me revise my own responses. She showed me how to reel in the big fish: she did not help me bait the line. In this way, my portfolio is more appetizing and based on my own recipes (though Professor Christman did help me to "clarify" the recipes so my end product of a "recipe book" could be more easily visualized).

While editing I focused on narrowing the responses, not expanding them. The CRF does not specify any length requirement, but if a student has played this game long enough, she should know a substantial argument is very likely to be expressed in five paragraphs, about two-three pages. As shown with the poetry and the comics, I am focusing on answering the "big" issue with a short depiction. I also focus these depictions on expressing my individual character, as shown through a personal reflection, a past scene depicted with dialogue, or a list of additional wanderings.

While editing my final selections I decided to use footnotes. There are several reasons for this:

1. They tidy my narrative responses.
2. They give my paper a scholarly look.
3. When typing an essay for the GRE, footnotes cannot be inserted.

As a reader, I have a certain love/hate relationship with footnotes. They break up my concentration when I am reading, as I am too curious to not glance at the bottom and see the "bonus info." As a writer, I liked making fun of the footnote phenomenon because my extra

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3 Digressions is in quotes because I am referring to Holden’s hatred for the speech teacher bullying the kid about his "digressions," from Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.*
asides are extra opinions, which (since this portfolio are my responses) are still relevant information.

When I first went through the pool, I organized all prompts into five categories or themes which I perceived them to fit. The original portfolio was going to be divided into these chapters. However, Professor Christman’s notes on the similar themes that came through my varied responses made for a stronger organization for the portfolio as a creative whole. These themes, such as the relationship with my mother, my particular status as a college student, discussing art vs. Art, and evaluating today’s ties with technology are voiced through the various prompts. These themes were more important that chapters, so I represented all the prompts in Times New Roman font.

As for explaining the research, I will use questions as headers, and explain my findings and comments relevant to each question.

*How did the GRE come to have a writing component?*


In 1996 research was conducted to discover whether the “personal statement,” which graduate programs strongly take into account for admissions, served as a valid indicator of writing skill. A personal statement would allow the writer to stress “desirable traits” such as motivation, maturity, professional aspirations, depth of knowledge, and commitment to the

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4 Personal statements were defined as having two functions, to allow elaboration and provide another indication of writing ability (Powers and Fowles, 1996, 1).
field" (Powers and Fowles, 1996, 1). A personal statement also "often contains important life history" (1). However, despite the individual depicted elements revealed in the personal statement, the aspect of "uncertain authorship" and the "training" of students were warnings presented to graduate schools about the validity of the personal statement as an example of a person's actual writing ability. And thus, facing a demand for a way of standardizing writing, the GRE added a writing component.

This article made me realize that my responses served more as a personal statement, for I included my life history (childhood and recent) in my answers and emphasized my "desirable traits," such as creativity, humor, and daring. It's ironic that the "training" the researchers are pointing their fingers at now exists for GRE responses. In fact, I have bought the SparkNotes in which Aristotle is quoted in the answer to the prompt, as if Aristotle is often used in everyone's "voice." The only training I have received for my prompts are my collected and varied experiences in creative writing classes and exposure to literature and criticism. I have met with Professor Christman, who has read all my prompts. I selected these prompts first according to what I deemed "most interesting." She did not tell me how to make my voice more pleasing to a certain audience, but helped me make my voice stronger, which I think is valid and helpful writing assistance. My responses are not lies about my writing ability or my personality, but a genuine reflection.

5 Referring to help students get on their papers, from composing it to editing it (Powers and Fowles, 1996, 1).
6 This "training" was from the "search of literature which uncovered a variety of advice to students on creating personal statements so as to gain favor with admission committees." The literature gave tips to help students develop their own "voice" and how to select a "suitable topic" and provided "exemplary samples to emulate" (Powers and Fowles, 1996, 2-3).
How were the writing prompts measured?

Source: Powers, Donald E. and Fowles, Mary E. "Correlates of Satisfaction with Graduate School Applicants' Performance on the GRE Writing Measures." (1997)

The GRE is a business, and, as such, it hired researchers to see if the criteria they had come up with to score prompts reflected the values held by "potential users of test scores" (Powers and Fowles, 1997, 1). The potential users were faculty and deans of colleges, 80% of whom were "very satisfied with the proposed scoring guide" (1). The scoring guide emphasized traits such as the quality of content, the development of ideas, and the extent to which essays addressed the topic as more important than such features as vocabulary size, punctuation/spelling, and sentence structure (1). The GRE then stated that their hired readers’ training would consist of “discussing the presence of each trait in benchmark essays” (5). The researchers also stated the limitation of the study, being that any essay that “tended to generate controversy among readers were not included in the sample and no consideration to the possibility of different points of view among graduate school personnel regarding the bases on which satisfaction with student writing is based” (9).

My issue with this article is that the standardizing is limiting the writer and the reader’s response. The reader is not allowed to assess outside the box of success, never encountering a controversial essay. Is there validity in weirdness? My Whittinger essay was very weird and was a factor in my being chosen as a candidate for the prestigious full ride scholarship, so my personal experience says yes. I wonder how these experts came up with these "benchmark

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3 One could assume that these essays would contain their “suggestions of evaluating success” such as ease of reading, level of maturity, ability to cite relevant literature, historical imagination, and parsimony to name a few (Powers and Fowles, 1997, 4).
essays. Did actual students write them or did the experts write them as a sample for their readers? I agree with the traits they emphasized: after all, one can always have someone edit a paper in the "real world." Also, they identify the main reason for a poor grade as displaying a "poor understanding of the task and/or the subject discussed" (4). I ask whose fault is that? And why can't one eloquently display confusion? The quality of my content is my number one concern for my responses, but it is this vague concept of "quality" that I am exploring.

How does the GRE present the Issue Topics?


There are two essays in the writing component of the GRE: the issue and the argument. Test-takers are given two issues and directed to choose one to present their perspective. They are given only one argument to analyze. All these prompts are published for test-takers to read and use as they please. The effects of examinee choice were examined closely in order to decide whether the test-takers should be allowed choice of topic to respond to. The issue of choice was exclusively researched in one article, which claimed that "Performance was sufficiently higher when a given item was chosen than when it was required" (Powers and Bennett 3). When given a choice, writers were more motivated and more likely to persevere when responding to tasks that interested them (4). Studies showed that students mainly chose on the basis of "familiarity with a topic" (8). When researchers broke choice into gender and scores, the result was that generally
women chose a prompt about diaries, men chose a prompt about fish, dummies picked a prompt about a beach, and smarties picked a prompt about painting. This led to the conclusion that students may need to be coached about how to select the best topic, and that the most difficult essays are the most challenging and interesting.

This article interested me because I am picking the prompts to put into the portfolio as well. The article also illuminates how the GRE sees "choice" in its standardized test. The GRE encourages the use of choice because present day students are now "self-regulated learners." However, there is the argument that we are self-regulating ourselves to please the evaluator, and that this "supposed freedom is in reality yet another constraint." The fact that students chose a topic based on familiarity, or how much they could perceive themselves writing about it, is directly tied into the time restraint of the GRE. Students prioritize their response in terms of quantity and are allowed no time to think new things, only enough time to regurgitate preconceived thoughts. The researchers explained the goal of the test as this:

"Assuming that outstanding people are usually outstanding on a small number of qualities (and that the purpose of the exam is to identify such people), test-takers ought to be allowed to select the tasks on which they can demonstrate their best qualities."
performances.” (7)

What am I outstanding in? What if it is poetry? What if it is portraying a point through a drawing? What if it is composing song lyrics? What if it is writing a dialogue?

The article caused me to also realize that I am not the only one with a rebellious response. Data showed that examinees responded to the GRE questions with “minimal time and effort... either submitted a single response... or entered a humorous or nonsensical responses” (13). These cases were deleted—mine survive in a portfolio because I say so.

*How did the Pool come into existence?*


Various publishers have included “retired” test questions study materials in order to allow test-takers the freedom “to focus more on the substance of a test than the mechanics of taking” (Powers 1). This reasoning seemed logical enough for the GRE to pursue, and they looked into how they could ease the anxiety of “the blank-page problem,” which is actually more like a blank computer screen (3). Their goal is to help test-takers spend less time in “formulating and organizing their ideas and more time to translating and communicating those” (2). What they found when surveying how students chose to prepare\(^{12}\) was that there was no detectable effect on test performance (14). In order to discourage extreme preparation such as memorizing essays, the decision to publish a large pool of topics was made (2).

\(^{12}\) Memorized essays, wrote outlines, brainstormed ideas, read sample essays, thought general, thought specific (Powers 11).
This article focused a lot on the writing process, in which I am interested. I agree with the statement, “Writing is a process, one that entails complementary activities of prewriting/planning, drafting, writing, and revising” (17). However, this process seems to be cut short in the GRE. Since the method test-takers use to prepare for the writing competency part of the test is not disclosed to grad schools (would they be interested?), does the GRE support the thought that the end justifies the means? The researchers did announce that the writing component might hurt “diligent” students or students with cultural differences. This makes me think about my own writing process. I like to meditate on an issue, walk down McKinley with it a few mornings in a row. Then, in the evening when everything is done. I like to sit down and binge-write. As I respond to these prompts, I am also paying careful attention to experimenting with different “translations” of my ideas.

I agreed with their first two traits to assess: the ability to discuss and critique an argument and the ability to articulate and support complex ideas. However, I question what’s so great about sustaining a focused and coherent discussion. Stream of consciousness is a style that is treasured in some texts, and might make for some fascinating and insightful responses. Here is a list of their suggestions, paraphrased, on how to handle the issues:

1. Read the question. In your own words, describe the thinking and writing you will have to do for this assignment.
2. Don’t jump to a position on the issue.
3. Decide how your own position lines up. State your position as clearly as you can.
4. Show your reader you’ve considered other positions before drawing your conclusion.
5. Consider using concrete images. (21)
I have definitely tried to use my "own words" and have liked jumping around on the issue; it was the deciding that I got tired of. I wanted to show the reader all my ideas and describe my thinking. And, as for drawing conclusions, what clearer way than drawing a picture?

**How were the Issue Topics constructed?**

Source: Powers, Donald E. and Fowles, Mary E. “Test Takers’ Judgments About GRE Writing Test Prompts” (1998)

The creators of the GRE actually put a lot of thought into constructing their prompts. In 1992 in a survey of faculty responses on the Issue topics, the researchers uncovered the statement “If we do not provide avenues for them to express these connections [what they are now learning to what they know of life] we are indeed missing an opportunity.” The GRE responded to this survey by reevaluating the prompts (Powers and Fowles, 1998, 3). Although the view that writers should be motivated enough to perform well on any topic regardless of personal appeal was stated, the GRE’s goal was to allow test-takers to draw on their interests as well as their experiences, and as their test-takers are international and diverse, assessing the accessibility of the prompts was vital (3).\(^3\)\(^{13}\) Earlier assessments of the prompts (in 1990) focused on three factors: discourse mode,\(^14\) rhetorical specification,\(^15\) and wording/structure\(^16\) (4). Eight years

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\(^{13}\) In fact, the Board wanted to infuse FAME into tests (fairness, access, multiculturalism, and equity) (Powers and Fowles, 1998, 20).

\(^{14}\) The type of writing called for.

\(^{15}\) The ways in which a writing task is specified or constrained.

\(^{16}\) Phrased as questions, commands, and the degree of personal experience they called for.
later, following the responses of test-takers, the researchers proposed that effective prompts should do the summarized list:

1. Be thought provoking
2. Allow some latitude for individual expression
3. Relate to the general experience of all examinees
4. Provide no advantage to any particular subgroup17
5. Alternate interpretations of prompt may arise. (5)

As stated in the earlier research article, "Effects of Examinee Choice on a Test of Divergent Thinking," participants preferred prompts they could relate to, draw on personal experience for, etc. In this article, difficult prompts were "uninteresting, unfamiliar, ambiguous, evoking negative feelings, difficult to relate to" (10). Of course, researchers wrote that there were significant differences among individuals' taste (11). However, this did not stop them from distinguishing the responses of men from women. The following is my analysis of the research: women selected prompts that emphasized the importance of learning and possibilities,18 whereas men selected prompts that required having a strong stance19 (13). The data collected showed that test-takers' self ratings were "not predictive of writing performance" (14). Thus the researchers suggested that test-takers need advice about their choice of prompt, since GRE readers reported

17 Example: Do you think PMS has become more of a personality label than a biological term?
18 Such as the following prompts:
   "Originality does not mean thinking something that was never thought before; it means putting old ideas together in new ways."
   "Only through mistakes can there be discovery or progress."
19 Prompt examples:
   "Art upsets, science reassures."
   "Peace—whether between nations or within a community or family—must be negotiated from a position of strength."
that some of the most compelling essays were written in response to prompts that evoked strong (but well-supported) negative feelings (11).

I found the published comments of the test-takers extremely interesting as I tried to see how I related to their views. I will reprint their comments in two categories: Reasons for Weakest and Reasons for Strongest. I will not include the particular prompt because the emphasis is the individual’s feeling. I will write my viewpoint on their comments in italics, creating a dialogue with the test-takers.

Reasons for Weakest:

- "I know a little about these topics but I don’t feel I have the knowledge needed to write a good essay." (C-2) *Why limit yourself? Go for the challenge of scraping something together with the knowledge you do possess.*

- "Because I don't relate as well as I should to national issues." (C-3) *I know exactly how you feel. I don’t read the newspaper or watch the news, yet I am at college to gain a wider world view. Is there something to this common feeling? Could you write a valid response about how and why you do not relate to national issues, explaining the guilt?*

- "In my opinion, this is a rather vague premise. It bares too many options to adequately form a concrete opinion." (C-4) *Why don't you list options? Why not journal your thought process? Bet it's interesting!*

- "It would take time to just determine what the topic actually means." (C-3) *Then take this chance to tell THEM what this prompt is really about, take the meaning into your own hands.*
• "Perhaps my prejudices... would cause my writing and reasoning to go off the deep end." (C-6) Artists often go "off the deep end," so why can't the writers of scholarly essays?

• "I have a strong liberal arts background. Science bores me and I don't understand it fully. I write more passionately for subjects I enjoy and understand." (C-6) Oh God. I hope I never describe myself that way. As a student of life, I can try to respect and appreciate different subjects because who knows, they might help me better understand my passions as well.

• "Too many words—difficult to understand." (C-7) Just like some of my answers.

• "It is hard for me to define... in this day and age." (C-7) So redefine and write!

• "It is a lazy question that requires little thought and little effort, a lot of these questions tend to insult one's intelligence." (C-13) Ouch, why can't we be this brutally honest with our "real" answers?

• "I do not know which angle to attack these essay effectively." (C-15) Prompts are prey. devour!

• "It really requires a philosophical answer, I believe, and I am not the best at providing such answers." (C-17) What is so great about a philosophical answer? What other categories of answers are there? Logical answer? Earthy answer? Sarcastic answer?

• "I have no real idea what the question is about." (C-18) No "real" idea, huh? What about a fun one? A crazy one? A few fake ones?

• "Everyone can't figure out what little sayings mean. Creativity doesn't come through for everyone. So in order to write about it, it would be difficult if one were not on the right train of thought." (C-20) Damn, my creative train is late again—no use in reading poetry now.
• “There is too much logical reasoning in it.” (C-24) Can't break the logic lock with a little hairpin of imagination?

• “This topic presents an argument, but there is really not much one can say after stating the obvious.” (C-29) Except perhaps why you find the answer so obvious, and what sort of idiots would not find your answer obvious.

• “This topic is too one-sided and biased. It seems to represent the attitude of an egoist!” (C-29) You had a class with Professor Cermudgeon too?

Reasons for Strongest:

• “I selected this topic because of the truth in it.” (C-3) I felt the same way about some prompts. I wonder how similar our “Truth” lists would be?

• “I like this topic because it gives me the opportunity to talk about what I think are the problems that are affecting us as human beings. We can’t talk about this every day.” (C-5) What an opportunist! But why can't you talk about these issues every day? Isn’t that what going to class is for?

• “I think it is a very broad topic to which most of our social, economic and environmental problems (among others) can be related. It is very actual and important.” (C-9) So definitely worth the time and effort of thinking and writing on. one might just come across the solution for world peace!

• “This topic seems to be more alive and active than others. I don’t believe every word of the topic but it excites me.” (C-10) It sounds like your answer will be peppy and spunky: speppy or spunkpy.

• “I think it's time to re-evaluate what... is really about.” (C-11) No time like test time.
• "This topic is very important to me. I would enjoy expressing my beliefs and ideas on the issue." (C-12) *What a very open nature you have. I wonder if there are any issues that are important to me that I would not enjoy expressing my beliefs on?*

• "I would be able to identify myself and to state who I really am." (C-24) *Prompt, thou hast aided in defining who I AM.*

• "This question appeals to me because I can answer simply based on general life experiences." (C-27) *Why is life experience general and why is using those experiences as answers simple?*

• "I had spontaneously the most arguments go through my mind on what to write about this topic." (C-27) *This prompt was a brain grenade!*

• "It is pertinent to life in general and most student/people can identify with it." (C-27) *The slash between student and people intrigues me. Am I not existing in both states? Are students different then people?*

**Conclusion**

Seniors have a lot of decisions to make. What is our next step to be? Is it grad school? Is it starting a career, or just finding a job? Where does the Honors Thesis work into the senior’s "next step?" For me, my Honors Thesis was a place where I could meditate, using the prompts as a way to reject the anxiety about standardized testing, to explore my own string of questions and issues, to expound on my personal experiences. My responses are essentially still essays, for "essay" derives from the French "essai," which means "to try" (Lott 393). I have tried to answer the anonymous Issue speaker, and to answer in a variety of media: essays, comics, and poems. I have tried to create a dialogue with the persona of the GRE. I have tried to connect with others’
feelings about the prompts. I have tried to have fun with answering. Readers of these selected answers may not think them mature or insightful, but then to try does not always mean to succeed. To try is to learn.
Works Cited and Consulted


Jan 2009


Truly innovative ideas do not arise from groups of people, but from individuals. When groups try to be creative, the members force each other to compromise and, as a result, creative ideas tend to be weakened and made more conventional. Most original ideas arise from individuals working alone.

I dedicate this binder of innovative responses to all the people I have had the good fortune to meet and who have chosen to spend some of their valuable time with me.

To Dr. Laurie Lindberg, my honors thesis advisor. I loved our long talks that would seemingly drift away from “work,” but these conversations strengthened my purpose in this project, and the bigger, even more complicated project of my life as a graduating senior. Her experiences in all “realms of life” have been enriching to hear, and as a result, my voice is more rich through these texts.

To Professor Jill Christman, my creative writing mentor. Perhaps she made my responses “more conventional” by encouraging me to edit my responses for grammatical sloppiness and to lose the less formal language that splattered my responses. I think my responses are stronger and more clearly communicate what my original idea was, which I came up with all on my own, in a lonely cubicle.

To my family. Thank you for allowing me to ramble about my ideas and to humor my excitement of numerous creative endeavors. I am grateful for your pockets emptying on my account on numerous occasions and your hearts that have always open. You all have shaped me and will always be a part of me, especially my mom.

To James. Thank you for supporting my fledgling of an idea and telling me that yes, my prompts were innovative and oh, so often, telling me over the phone (as long distances require), that you were proud of my work and talent on this project. With your encouragement and love I was never working alone this year.

To my friends, those at Ball State and other wheres. Talking with you all and listening to your thoughts throughout our shared “student life” has been more memorative than any one class. Thank you for helping me to compromise my naive original thoughts (and sometimes stubborn). All your voices have increased the humor and music of the thoughts in my head.

Thank you all with helping me find a way to be creative and to not compromise my individuality to the most conventional system: standardized testing, the GRE.
We learn through direct experience; to accept a theory without experiencing it is to learn nothing at all.

I have a theory
That there is a lot more pain
To walk through

Scratches of unsaid snideness
Mooching brambles that will not let go
Of my muddy shoe laces
Corruptive gum smearing and sticking to my left sole
As my right toe stumbles on an unseen crack
My ankles may turn
My shins may scrape
My thin shirt of identity may tear
And the night might press me
To confess I am nothing
And sleep with it.
And as night covers me
Will I experience stars
Or are they just a bright theory?
It is possible to pass laws that control or place limits on people's behavior, but legislation cannot reform human nature. Laws cannot change what is in people's hearts and minds.

Intriguing...does this state that people are inherently born as good or bad people? It sort of reminds me of the vague sense I got from the demon child movies—good parents just get stuck with anti-Christ, bad luck. Mr. and Mrs. Cleaver.

This also reminds me of the book: *Lord of the Flies*, because that was when, in seventh grade, I was taught about the Id, Ego, and Super-Ego. Now we all have Ids, which as Freud puts, is full of purvy, incarnate desires like hooking up with your one parent, which is repressed by society's behavioral laws. Then there's the Ego, which makes me think of "teenyboppers," who are almost acceptable in public, but then do loud annoying things in large mob-like clumps of idiocy. The last is the Super-Ego, refined and hoity by society's laws—accepted by the masses, able to function in society, thinks everything is dirty, because they are repressing their dirty thoughts and projecting them onto everything so we end up being paranoid about censorship and political correctness, because the Super-Ego is a repressed Victorianesque persona.

So rules are made to be broken; systems are made to have loop holes; pandas are made to become extinct; and laws don't fix the real problems of society. If laws cannot change the Ids, which are the fun thoughts we whisper to ourselves at night, what can? (Nooo, not putting all the snarky people in a tank of sharks with annoying strobe lights attached to their heads). It's listening to your Id, and figuring out how to soothe it AND be amongst society, because society is full of crazies that will rub you the wrong way, and you can't physically slap them, because that's painful and wrong. So verbally? Perhaps, only sometimes, but that can get you fired. So mentally and then writing about it? Well if you get rich from it, who cares? Unless your Ids are in crappy song lyrics, then I care... and you better beware... because I'm working on this invention with panda bears... and bamboo strait jackets.

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1 And also scientific recommendation that your offspring would be, well off.

2 "If that Ryan kid says one more snarky comment in class I'll shoot him with a snot laser and call him a booger brain."

3 The people's heads, not the fish's.
The way students and scholars interpret the materials they work within their academic fields is more a matter of personality than of training. Different interpretations come about when people with different personalities look at exactly the same objects, facts, data, or events and see different things.

They used “different” three times. Can’t they use different wording for the term different? So interpretation is linked to personality. I agree, so should we take personality tests instead of training sessions? I’d much rather read about what my astronomical sign means in the work place than be trained how to type efficiently.

Let me tell you what my personality is, and how it affects my training. I don’t remember the four letters but what I do remember, is that I’m an “inspirer.” Basically I get excited about different ideas and want to share them and offer aid to others about their dreams. So I love discussions. Thinking about the “what ifs” is more fulfilling than doing the dirty work to get there. Dirty work = paying attention to minor details... or any details that don’t let my imagination flit about like those happy-go-nowhere-in-particular yellow butterflies in spring.

And with all this, what did my aptitude career test tell me I’d be good at? A farmer! Now even I know that, though it is good hearty work partnering with wonderful Mother Nature, it’s dirty hard work from the crack of dawn... and as a dreamer, I need my sleep.

I think different interpretations are sooooo cool (thus English major and film minor, and history minor...), but what to do with them? And how do you handle different interpretations amongst family and friends?

Let me tell you what my mother’s personality is: a scientist, pretty much the exact opposite of mine. She is logical, notices the details, and comes up with a plan, which, by God, she will repeat over and over for your own good.

So while I like to simply lament, she busily implements.

“Whhhhy don’t I have a boyfriend?”

“Because you don’t make eye contact in the hallways and make small talk and since you are pretty they think you are stuck up. And you don’t go to after school sports. Go to tonight’s football game and walk around! Give guys compliments, they need them too you know. Boys aren’t always competition for goodness sake! And ask one of them out; don’t just wait around. Don’t give me that mortified look, it won’t kill you!

1 Yes I do, ENFP, but how much does that help with the prompt?
2 You should go to grad school so you can be on our insurance still while the economy is bad!
I see the possibilities in everything; she sees the realistic ending in everything.

“Oh my gosh, James is so great! He takes time to talk to me on the phone every day⁵, and he writes the funniest texts! And did you see this letter he wrote to me? I mean he put stickers on it! And his mix CDs are so fun, wanna listen to one in the car? You like Cat Stevens right?⁴ And he has a beard, gosh I like facial hair.”

“Don’t have sex yet until you’re on the pill.”

Our interactions are quite volatile at times, yet we need them. We push each other to the brinks of frustration, and let me tell you, that’s quite a catharsis, and when we’re done butting heads, we head to the kitchen and share cake or cheetos, something we both will always agree on. . . that and when it comes down to it, we’re both pretty smart cookies, no matter how different we look at things.

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⁵ And he hates the phone.
⁴ She does.
Most people choose a career on the basis of such pragmatic considerations as the needs of the economy, the relative ease of finding a job, and the salary they can expect to make. Hardly anyone is free to choose a career based on his or her natural talents or interest in a particular kind of work.

As a freshman in college I was thinking of picking up an art minor along with my slew of studies because I enjoy art. I did not factor in the studio time for the class, and with having to read a novel a week for my Humanities, I couldn't keep it around. I finally orphaned the minor from my DAPR family. My mother helped me cope with the feelings of guilt by reminding me I could always take community art classes later, so I can focus on my major and "career possibilities" and then sufficiently "functioning" on my own.

How far can talent take you? Perhaps my Romantic ideals are dimming, but almighty talent won't carry you to Mt. Olympus on winged sandals. I don't know how much "talent" I have for writing. Writing is hard for me, some forms harder than others, but something draws me to it. Not necessarily every day. And so, I have been shy of self-proclaiming that "I am writer!"

I knew I wanted to be an English major when, from my introduction to creative writing course, an author visited and spoke to our class. She talked about how she worked at writing, but that it wasn't easy for her. She said being a writer is more than the ease of which you can put pen to paper, you have to wonder. You have to observe. She said how she just didn't get things, and they would turn and turn in her head, and she would work on forming those thoughts through writing. Her example of an open mind was saying that, if you could be curious as to why the people performed the actions of 9/11 (not applaud or romanticize, but just try and see any understanding), you could be a writer.

This spoke straight into my soul. I've never innately understood the world... or the people in it, but I am so very curious about some things (some things more than others granted). I felt...
that writing helped me sort out my confusions, to understand my dawning revelations, especially about how I think and feel. The way I asked “why” was to make up possible scenarios/stories that would go on and on—and be so far from logic, but be housed in this other realm in a fanciful mansion or a bare frame. And though I have not always been humble with my writings, I am now getting better acquainted with my faults, and thus the improvement and steps to take to make my writing stronger.

And although I may complain about the “system” my writing has to go through and I have to be taught, my writing has had its moments to flourish and open doors of opportunity to me, so there is no call for me to estrange myself entirely from my quirkiness.

listening to birds, train whistles, Jane Austen, losing weight, laughing, Disney, learning new things, relearning old things, collecting creativity, growing wisdom, kindness, lifting responsibility, leaving self-doubt.

I should specify writings as my first drafts, which I assure this is not.

Working on an essay early and giving friends candy to proof read it, not going to my mother the first thing for I will be sensitive and indignant to her criticisms instead of calmly considering, and re-reading and not being afraid of the delete button.

Writing prompts that have played an important role in my academic career are posted in the Appendix.
The video camera provides such an accurate and convincing record of contemporary life that it has become a more important form of documentation than written records.

What to believe more?
The newspaper
or the news channel?
Which will give me a clearer picture of Truth?
Camera be my guiding light
recording contemporary life.
Page of print illuminate my mind
wording present situations.
Camera be my eyes.
Paper be my thoughts.
And together I will have
a voice.
The camera person
And the columnist
I will swallow.
I will eat the editors reading and watching.
I will crunch the anchor team.
The press will go down my gullet.
The photographers will be snapped by my florescent teeth.
And I will be bloated by their opinions.
And I will be too full to think.
Any decision—whether made by government, by a corporation, or by an individual person—must take into account future conditions more than present conditions.

Thinking of the future is a skill that one has to learn. Immaturity is thinking only of the present situation: I want to be gratified NOW (government: want more resources—WAR, corporation: want to cut costs—FIRE, individual: want to feel good—DRINK). These decisions can obviously have strong repercussions (LOSS of resources (land, lives, depletion of materials) LOSS of quality of product (and consumers), LOSS of consciousness (and productivity for tomorrow, and if overly done, liver).

As a college student, I know preparing for the future is very important, in fact, this is what you believe college is all about. Is there ever a time in your life where there is no future to plan for? When you are old and you have your will and cemetery plans—what then? You shouldn’t just sit and think of the future if you aren’t dead yet.

My best memories of college are born from some poor decisions. These memories are a collection of knickknacks thrown in a drawer near my bed. My big decisions to make are placed on a huge book case, polished, reflecting the best opportunities available for my future (so no illegal activities, either expressed by the law or my parents or my own goody-new-shoes conscience).

In my drawer I have movie stubs and crumpled restaurant receipts. On my facebook wall I have had invitations to stress eat bacon with friends at midnight breakfast during finals week and photos of me playing Guitar Hero in sweat pants on the floor. On my phone I have texts to go on a walk after class or do a dance video when I get home. When I close my eyes it is spring and I leave work early or arrive late because I was walking with you and we lost track of time or didn’t care to keep it and when I open my eyes I remember a brimming joy in the lightness of your smile and laugh, and a heavy pounding in my chest, and our eyes simultaneously drinking in and pouring out such an essence of wonder and amazement and thankfulness, thinking that maybe, oh certainly, this is it!

Paying attention to present conditions may lead to an even better future condition: of love and sharing and an interesting bed-side drawer.

1 They is referring to the omnipotent collection of the intelligent constructionists of the GRE which collaborate closely with the scholarly constructed institutions.
2 Feel happy! Go for a walk! (advice from Monty Python’s Holy Grail)
3 Poor in that I spent money harhar.
4 Faking to be an expert.
If people disregard the great works of the past, it is because these works no longer answer the needs of the present.

Take that statue of Buddha out.
We need a computer terminal there for visitor feedback.

And we need a bench to fight off fatigue so move that podium—the one with the silver table setting—to the basement.

Oh and a donation box.
Let’s see.
Those Sioux moccasins are getting ratty.
Box them up.

We need a rack with fliers with press releases with pamphlets and packets and programs.
Take down that painting I mean Jesus is in four paintings already!

Oh? Well darn, Fifth Third has bought the building?
Any extension to pack the Art up?
No?
Well take some photos and maybe Ebay will answer the past.
Originality does not mean thinking something that was never thought before; it means putting old ideas together in new ways.

Originality's definition in that wording is synonymous to the saying "Variety is the spice of life."

Old idea: peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
Slightly original idea: peanut butter and jelly bagel.
Original idea: peanut butter and jelly raisins and granola sandwich.
Very Original and Slightly Disgusting idea: peanut butter and jelly sandwich in blender (with bananas!).

Thank you originality for making the poor college student’s affordable grocieries innovative!
Scandals—whether in politics, academia, or other areas—can be useful. They focus our attention on problems in ways that no speaker or reformer ever could.

How many times have you flipped through the news stations to see the same celebrity scandal repeated in shocking concerned tones over and over... day after day... until there’s a tornado storm warning... and then it’s right back to how spoiled celebrity makes stupid decision, conveniently in front of eight camera crews, or how candidate so and so has a past of prejudice where there is a written document with the word “ho” on it.¹

Everyone wants my attention. Hell, I want your attention!

Attention = power. If you are sulking over an ex-whatever, you are letting them have power over your thoughts, your mood, your life. A dictator enforces you to pay attention to them: look at my posters; listen to my speeches; don’t listen to anyone else or you disappear and your body is displayed in a museum for science to make me look good!

Why do so many people want to be on TV? If someone takes the time to watch and hear you—you have power. If you give scandals attention, than they have more power (scandals or the people in them, or the people commenting on them). It is not often that people will want to stray from the juicy gossip of the scandal to focus on the problem and reformation. If we didn’t have scandals, we wouldn’t have tabloids, and if we didn’t have tabloids, we wouldn’t have a difference between “hard-hitting” news and fluff catering towards the vulgarity and common crassness of human nature.

But when the both come together it is such a thing of beauty. Ah, my college newspaper, giving me a front page of the kinky bondage club or the bell tower covered with a condom! This is what college news is about! Scandalous wit! Bravo!

¹ Say supposed note is from junior high years of supposed candidate.
Society should identify those children who have special talents and abilities and begin training them at an early age so that they can eventually excel in their areas of ability. Otherwise, these talents are likely to remain undeveloped.

Why does society get to do everything? And is society only adults, because children are separated? Children change, and though their talents might not, their interests could very well abandon former aspirations. Children should not be pigeonholed into "an area to excel" at.

And why can't children be in charge of their own development? Censoring can be so frustrating, because you might be mature enough to "handle" the content appropriately. I censor my own entertainment now—a movie could very well be PG-13, but if it's scary/bloody, no thank you. Or if it's chalk full of vulgarity, I'll pass and save my money. I suppose my censoring is more of boycotting, I don't want to support products I find are vapid and incorrect.

And what if someone wants to learn something they have no talent in? Is that so bad? What if Hitler got to go to art school, even if he sucked? I mean there is some art made by "talented" people that I find, crappy, (sorry for the non-docent vocabulary).

So what's the harm in letting more crap be made? How would anyone like being forced into areas they test successful in? And the arts are subjective for the most part, what if society quelched individuality and experimental art so everything was "good" and thus the same? And how long would this "development" take? Some artists become artists later in life, like in their retirement! Old dogs might be able to learn new tricks... if they wanted to get up and humor people, and old people certainly can contribute to all-powerful society with new talents (or newly discovered talents). I want to be able to discover new things about me all my life, cause I have to stick with me, like it or not, and I want to be interesting to myself.

And if you die, I don't think God will come up and say "Hey, I gave you a lot of talent in _______, how come you never used it? That really pisses me off, go and try again!" And if He did give you a hard time, well I'd have to explain it to Him like I did with my Mom when I wanted to quit piano lessons, (which I didn't have talent for, but I'm sure God would know talent if He saw it).

"Thanks God for the gift, but no thanks, free will right? It got boring for some reason, I did some other cool things though..." And then He might scratch something (beard, head, bug bite—cause He made them, why not?) and say "Well, you weren't successful at any of it, but if

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1 Saving $9.00 per ticket and thinking of Saw and American Pie in particular.
2 Certain music and paraphernalia fit this genre: Superman that Hoe, Twilight shirts, Confederate flag
3 Quelched: verb, meaning to quench and squelch.
4 Referring to the whole scope: music, directors, painters, writers, on and on
5 I hated practicing scales and playing the keys softly, pish.
you were happy with your life and still did good in the world, that’s all a God could ask for!
And we’d hug and eat ice cream.  

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6. Cookie dough ice cream with caramel sauce.
Technology creates more problems than it solves, and may threaten or damage the quality of life.

Anyone could argue about some kind of technology as improving the quality of life. But then, we have people living way longer and so many babies. . . it's really threatening my quality of life. . . babies crying on airplanes, old people driving too slow. . . yeaahh, technology is a bully for sure.

What I do suggest is that we try to control technology for our quality of life. Like for a certain time of day, we have a technology siesta. We all are Amish for two hours! Well, okay, baby steps. No cell phones, no Internet, no cars. Machines can be turned off. People can walk and enjoy quiet and solitude. No televisions so people can read books or enjoy live music (no IPODS). This would make my life better. It's tiring to be plugged into the world-wide-web anytime, or have people call or text anytime—or at least twelve hours straight.

When people want an immediate reply, they are not going to be receiving my best reply. I am a slow e-mailer. I have to sit and think how to craft my greeting. I must think, "who is my audience? What is this e-mail really about?" Yes, spell check on my e-mail is a time saver, but it also makes me lazy on the content proofing. I figure as long as I get the big mistakes taken care of, why sweat over comma placements? Technology is damaging the quality of my communication. Words just spill out on the cell phone, no concern of rhetoric on the family plan. Yet, technology is also improving my communication. I try to text fast and witty replies. Ah, the challenge of texting tone. What is important to convey in a tiny screen that must be sent in 5 minutes?

Technology is not the only thing to threaten the quality of life either. Attitude overrides the tool. I could be grouching over my keyboard, or be whistling while typing. Often I stare comatose at the screen, not sure what project to begin, like answering life's questions.

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1 Like the technology to make Penicillin.
Many problems of modern society cannot be solved by laws and the legal system because moral behavior cannot be legislated.

If cheating wasn’t a word, I might do it—only if it was easier (sometimes just following the rules is easier and less of a hassle than finding ways to sneakily break them). If cheating wasn’t a concept, I might ask a friend to help me on my take home test. Teachers are always saying how group projects are good for you, teamwork is beneficial to your future career, but failing is an individual process, so have fun with this solitary hell of paperwork. But, I would follow up morally—I’d say thank you to my friend, maybe buy them a coffee, and return the favor if I could.

If stealing never existed because taxes were never invented, I might do it. I’m not sure what, maybe only things I’d need, like food, but I like sharing more than stealing anyways, so I guess I’d beg to share stuff before taking things from someone, in the hope we would have a genuine exchange and they would return the act of sharing.

I also have this strong disdain for people when they bluntly ask me for something, like when I might be commenting on whether I really like this nail polish or not, and why do we even bother with nail polish, and... "Can I have it?" ¹ Perhaps my disdain is jealousy because I have had numerous unspoken and thus unrequited desires, and am amazed and horrified that someone would just ask. Could satisfaction be so simple?

If trespassing didn’t cause people to shoot at me, I’d do it. To be able to walk into a beautiful house and observe someone’s life and wonder what it’d be like to be them, to walk into a field, to go follow a creek along countless backyards, to pet animals not contained by fences—and run from them.

I guess I’d still follow the one moral rule if no other rules existed: Treat others how you’d want to be treated. This is basically respect, and attention—lots of it, like listening to me—oh, and compliments—like what you’re reading—tell me it’s good and don’t just pick that up! Ask me for goodness sake, but don’t ask me all the time cause then I can’t surprise you—and don’t straight up and ask me! Weave your request in eloquence and rhetoric. And don’t take me for granite² or granted, and don’t boss me around telling me what I can or can’t do! I’m 21 for goodness sake Mom!

¹ My sister.
² Granite, like I should be some mature statue of a young lady and not crumble.
It is dangerous to trust only intelligence.

I trusted you.
You with your cold stare
Blank and glare.
I tried to reach out
Your connections I checked
But sparked my doubts.
Your batteries were charged.
Your memory had space
yet you deleted my paper
with no trace
of remorse.
Such an intelligent source
You are not much comfort
late at night
when my tears slide
and I ask why?
There is only me.
And your blue screen.
In the age of television, reading books is not as important as it once was. People can learn as much by watching television as they can by reading books.

I don't know how to answer this prompt. Was there a show I missed?
The study of an academic discipline alters the way we perceive the world. After studying the discipline, we see the same world as before, but with different eyes.

Wow, will my eyes really change? Does everyone get a pair of colored contacts when they graduate? Tinted sunglasses color-coded by major?

If anything has happened, my eyes have been OPENED. I SEE new things that I’ve passed every day.¹ I see old things differently but NOT with different eyes.²

Having studied has provided me a light for my eyes, not new eyeballs. More lamps have been hooked up in my brain’s circuitry. I now have been taught how to use tools, like putting batteries in a flashlight to see things better—and blind possible rapists.

I know some people who are about to graduate who are, really, quite the same. If college is about seeing the world differently, maybe there’s a way they can get their thousands back. Instead of allowing their eyes to open and see new points of view, they squeeze everything to their previously conformed reality, shrinking big worldly ideas into their water-stained, near-sighted lenses.

And people who haven’t studied an “academic discipline” can equally have their world altered. I know it may be cheesy referencing this, but I remember reading this Campbell Soup soul book, where there are inspirational stories, and one went through how a simple smile to a stranger had this chain of good effects, and well, the opposite is possible too. Someone gives you crap at work, you take your frustrations out on your spouse, who then snaps at the children, who then become bullies, which causes other kids to be sad at recess and become writers... Perhaps this is not a permanent change to our perceiving, but is anything permanent? Might I become disillusioned and depressed after I enter the stark world outside my studies?

If college succeeds in its mission, then we leave with a slew of different colored sun glasses.

¹ "Huh, that’s a real tree in the Atrium."
² "The carriage at the park in Salinger’s The Laughing Man, represents an unwanted pregnancy?"
In order for any work of art—whether film, literature, sculpture, or a song—to have merit, it must be understandable to most people.

Let’s break Merit down shall we? Merit. Value, worth, respect. How does art attain this? And is it “Art” with a capital A?¹

Does understandable mean we can connect with it intuitively?² Or does it mean we understand the message of the art/artist?³ Or does it mean we can see the reason why the art is good.⁴

And who are “most people?” People who go to museums? People who possess senses (not even all necessarily)? People who can reach a high level of understanding on most subjects?

This is an issue museums struggle with, especially art museums. You have some who want to stay prestigious, catering to a collection and audience of the past with dignity and scholarliness. There are other art museums who try to spice up their exhibit with labels and activities for kids. Which is better?

I like both. I feel like I have been given a pass to try and understand the erudite exhibits, thanks to my education and my parents exposing me to museums all my life. However, it is interesting to see new innovative techniques that museum’s employ to try and have the collection connect to the audience, to grab their interests. A museum, a public institution, should try to make their collection understandable and welcoming. An art gallery can be as cautious and rigid and opaque as it would like. This may be a bit different for other venues. A public concert hall should have diversity; a public library should have different sections. A movie theatre should play different genres.

As a writer, I know a few things about being the “artist,” and wanting to produce art that can “reach an audience,” though I’m not sure who my audience is or if I will ever be blessed with one.

My fourth grade teacher said she could see me being a children’s author and I was so upset by that premonition of my writing’s future, stomping off the bus and fuming to my mother. While my mother said it was a compliment to my writing, to me she was saying my writing was only

¹ There is no discernable difference between art and Art, except for people who deal with Art can feel snooty about it and generate more “cultural capital.”
² “I don’t get it, but I like it.”
³ “Oh, I see, the colors are balanced and yet opposites of each other, creating friction and energy, yet working as a whole, which is quite like life which has individual complicated components, yet they work together to create a whole experience.”
⁴ “Huh, well I don’t get it, but I know the artist was making a new frontier in the art world, so that’s why we have it in the museum.”
good for little kids with snotty noses and scratchy scalps who liked repetitive books like the *Baby Sitter's Club*. Children's books aren't bad, in fact, I tried to write one for a contest and was graciously unaccepted. Perhaps it was not deemed understandable to most people,⁴ but I suspect other qualities were more strongly lacking.

⁴ It did have a talking cardinal, statues, and squirrel communication embedded in the plot.
Success in any realm of life comes more often from taking chances or risks than from careful and cautious planning.

Excuse me, GRE? I do not understand what “any realm of life” means. You have one life, besides the case of reincarnation—you currently are one person with one life at one time. Work realm, play realm, love realm... there really is no set boundaries in your life. One success is bound to affect the other areas of focus, so in conclusion that was stupid phrasing.

On the whole, I have to agree. Most of my personal success is luck, which was needed because I was taking a risk. Applying for a scholarship to a college I didn’t know anything about (some TV host guy came from there...) was taking a chance on gas money and a Saturday which paid out. Now, to meet the requirements, that required careful planning. From elementary school I started honing my skills as a good student—excellent attendance, exceptional effort on homework, studying for tests at home (oh the hatred I had for math flashcards!). My parents also planned on putting me in the path of well roundedness. I was encouraged and driven to dance class, tennis lessons, art classes, libraries, museums, (even a basketball camp of utter humiliation where I was forced to wear this band of dorkiness that attached to my glasses and hung around my neck. Yes, I was the one who got the most improved, because I was the suckiest—which made me reconsider that perhaps everyone else was really good, and not a beginner like me—yeeeaaah).

So then, my GPA and ACT were in order for the scholarship, but what about the letter of recommendation? Well, that would fall into the risk “realm” (a dangerous, yet exciting place with breathtaking rides and strange fashions and innovative, but perhaps deadly, invented gadgets, and weird food combinations). Since I took the chance of being a ham in Latin class, singing my projects, participating with the utmost creativity, and the odd raising the hand to answer even if you might sound stupid, or worse, like a know-it-all in front of your classmates. Getting to know the teacher was never a plan, but it fostered out of mutual respect and appreciation and similar sense of humor.

So I DON’T agree! Ha HA! Success is the movie The Odd Couple, with both of them hilariously playing off the other, Walter Matthau being sloppy chance taker, Jack Lemon being meticulous worrywart.

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1 Yes, we often had desserts, but that’s not what I meant.
2 Miss Elifrits was indeed such a fun lady, hosting Latin club, attending conventions, and organizing a trip to Rome.
Anyone can make things bigger and more complex. What requires real effort and courage is to move in the opposite direction—in other words, to make things as simple as possible.

I agree.
As societies all over the world have more and more access to new information, the effects on life-long learning can only be positive.

People in history have been able to do life-long learning; it’s called reading books. And positive? How could it not be unless you learned something that greatly affected your life and values, perhaps making you lose your faith in a loved one, your religion, your country, in essence, humanity. But then, to “lose” seems to possess the sentiment that you have stopped learning, in an essence given-up the pursuit of more information to settle on your jaded attitude, which doesn’t pertain to this scenario.

And GRE? I’m sick of the vague phrases. Is society different than the human race? Society is a term that is referring to a certain class of people: polished in some way, usually educated, and having connections, either famous or of a large community.

I really hope I don’t get this question when (if) I take the GRE. I’d just give-up trying to impress them and ramble about my daydreams of my future learning opportunities as an eighty year old—What? You want to hear it? Well, if you insist...

Though my feet hurt sometimes, and driving around is even more of a headache, I put my book down (a classic novel I hadn’t gotten the chance to read in school), to prepare for my art class. I put on the rather boring outfit of stretchy loose clothes and take my huge flashy rings off, for today we are working on the potter’s wheel.

I return from my class, excited of the conquest I had managed (though I sacrificed the cleanliness of my nails and face), and sit down to my computer and respond to the comments on my website (or blog). I chuckle at some, ponder others, and mutter some derogatory comments at a few and go to make a cup of tea (yeah, I’m going to be an English-like old lady!).

Then I work on my writings. Today I feel a poem. I’ve been reflecting on a certain memory from the past, seeing it in a new light, and wanting to catch the shadows that have been cast on my mind. I put on the brain typing helmet and think the words and then edit them on the large touch screen that is my computer monitor.

After a first draft, I go to my home theatre. I scrutinize a few channels, snort in disbelief at the utter crap that’s still playing, and order a new foreign film to watch. I feel young again as the heroine struggles in her adolescent search to find herself in her current environment of confusion. I cry; I laugh; I feel renewed in my joys of being part of humanity. I’ve just got to share this movie with someone!

I go to my telephone and call a friend from college (not too hard to keep in touch, though she lives in Florida, the part that is underwater). I recommend the movie to her, she tells me of a
new research she's read about. I invite her for dinner next time she comes up for air and heads my way.

I get ready for bed feeling satisfied with my seven degrees, thirty-six awards from scholarship success, twenty renown publishings, and countless smart and fun acquaintances from conferences. I still have trouble sleeping, for I always wonder—what would have happened if I had abandoned my life-long learning in institutions, to follow life-long learning with him?
The most elusive knowledge is self-knowledge, and it is usually acquired through solitude, rather than through interaction with others.

Oooh, I do like the phrase “elusive knowledge is self-knowledge.” So poetic sounding.¹

I’m not claiming that I have figured myself out, but I have made a lot of progress since entering the grand doors of college.² Though I think most of my epiphanies come from times of solitude³, I do need interaction with others to help me come to realizations of my ticks.⁴

For example, wondering why I, who, not to brag, am pretty friendly,⁵ do not like this “friend” (meaning friend included in group of friends). I know she annoys me, but not so much others—oh the elusiveness of how she has gotten, nay, itched and teased, on my nerves—her mannerisms and comments mocking my patience with humanity. Her loud piggish guffaw. The way she would hit my arm, hard, after I said something slightly sarcastic. Various comments that could not be qualified as snide because she said “Just Kidding!” so loudly after it.

What we deride in others is usually what we secretly fear resides within ourselves. She was bossy, and confidently so. She was snobbily stubborn. She thought she was so superior—with her individual tastes, her intelligence, her worldliness, her dietary self-control. Was I jealous of her confidence? Of her lunch that was foreign and exotic and mainly vegetables and supposedly less calories than my Cheetoes bag?

Were her victories of over-achieving too close a mark to my territory, a territory that I had secretly kept manicured, ready for the time to open the doors and brag of their splendors, though keeping it covered due to fear of jealousies and apathy? Like when she showed everyone her still life of her cool Van sneaker and thought she was so unique.

Was I angry at how she was stubborn, and how that usually ended with her having her way, where as my stubbornness was usually kept in the pen⁶ having to sulkily eye his borders—and when he did come to the fence—ready to rear his head and win the fight—he was told he needed to quiet down and not be so selfish, and for his own good, not to stomp around, and wipe that look off your face!

¹ Meaning it can be considered as containing an element of deepness—meaning it can be reflected and bemused upon—meaning it’s possible futures are being in a pondering quote book, a white wash board in an office cubicle, a poster in a classroom.
² The process entailed entering a dorm complex—by using my student ID—in which said complex contained a snazzy computer lab, but no air conditioning in the rooms.
³ By solitude I do not mean for you to picture me meditating with candle...warmers...listening to moody music and reflecting on my inner aura of mysterious workings.
⁴ Ticks as in machine-like gears that keep me going and how I was worked up to be on the path of Kimness... not my friends shouting “OMG! You have a blood sucking insect plunging its diseases into your body!”
⁵ Smiles and waves good-bye to co-worker saying “Have a nice day.”
⁶ I am a Taurus.
Oh, and do you know where I got that reflective wise comment? From someone else! So my elusive self-knowledge is actually, not so solitary. AND my self-knowledge of my "Kimness" isn't so elusive after all—at least from what my family and friends tell me. “Oh, Kim, you’re just cranky from being hungry, go eat something.” “Now, don’t be so over-dramatic Kim, just because you aren’t getting your way.” “Kim, you should really go to bed; you don’t think clearly without sleep, remember that time you thought you wrote this great story... and it was just confusing?” “Kim, you can wriggle yourself out of anything.” “Kim, you’re not a bad driver, you’re just bad with directions...” “Kim your face does not hide anything—are you confused?” “I know your upset, your sensitivity does not let you take criticism well.”

As you change, so should your knowledge of yourself, from being composed of other’s observations, your previous hypothesis (what you’d like to be true of yourself, but might just not be so), and your own reflections.

7 Hopeless more like it.
8 Well actually I was just dazing off and thinking about what I want to eat for lunch... but I can’t let her know that.
9 Sensitivity or ego?
Creating an appealing image has become more important in contemporary society than is the reality or truth behind that image.

I have peeled countless layers
And the truth is
The truth is really
Really the truth under
Underneath
my image
That you are peering at
Leering at
My behind
I am hiding what is important.

What is important you cannot
Possibly image
Imagine
I look like a girl
No a woman
By clothes?
Yes, my size is
Over ten
years
My uterus lining has been sloughing off
But only recently have I been sleuthing
For
The yin to my
Yang off my mask

That is a woman?
No

A girl?
No a person.
A perdaughter.
A human.
A huwoman.
My name is
What I'm called is

What do you see
Of me?
No close your eyes
Shut
Up
And listen to my
Voice?

High and polite
Low and sultry
Sulking lips
My words
kiss
red lip
stick
up for me
and my
Image
It's yours too.

especially scorn and indignation and hurt.
It is easy to welcome innovation and accept new ideas. What most people find difficult, however, is accepting the way these new ideas are put into practice.

"The way these new ideas are put into practice," so change is all fine and dandy, but don't ask me to do anything differently. What a shame about the environment huh? Wish there was something I could do... what? Take the bus? But, but I have too many things to carry—and I still have to drive to the bus station and the seats are so tiny, and the bus has a funny smell. What? Pack my lunch in a reusable container and wash it? But that means I have to carry stuff back to my house, no, no, that wouldn't do, and besides, I eat out a lot anyways, good for the economy you know.

Oh God, I'm fat. Yeah, you wanna go on a diet too? Let's do it! So... no soda? But I need my caffeine—and that diet stuff is going to kill you with chemicals anyway. We'll say no to junk food! Uhm, does dark chocolate count as junk food though? It has antioxidants—and it makes me feel better when I'm PMSing. Cut down on bread? But sandwiches are so affordable! How about the exercise thing, let's do that! What? An HOUR? How many days? FIVE TO SIX? Holy Treadmills Batman! I'm having a hard time getting a reasonable amount of sleep at night! How am I going to fit in packing gym clothes, driving to the gym, sweating for an hour, driving back home, showering, and GASP, I'll have more laundry to do!! What do you mean I can do it if I cut out TV and browsing the Internet? TV is my mental break thank you very much, and I have to check my e-mail and facebook account ten times a day to be kept in the swing of things and keep my numerous correspondences up to date!

Changing one's self is a nice dream. But it takes a lot of work. I remember from my gym class (whoops I mean "Physical Education" college course) that the first step of making a new habit in your life...is just thinking about it! Implementing change is a long process, unless it is forced overnight, and that's called A) paradigm shift B) revolution C) strong will power D) my mom watching Oprah:

"Hi Oprah, I'm a fat kid, and my life is sad."

My mom has tears welling up in her eyes as the camera follows fat kid in hallway of school and sitting alone on a swing too small for his enormous butt.

I come in from elementary school. "Hi Mom. I'm hungry, what can I have for a snack?"

Her head swivels around, her eyes scrutinize me...with concern; she looks back at the television. "You don't need to eat before supper. Go outside and play."

"What? But I just came from school... and I don't want to go outside. I'm tired!"
She takes a deep breath. This is for my own good so I won’t be a sad, fat loser (cause I already get ostracized for being the teacher’s pet, and having the joy of developing early, the baby fat has just repositioned itself for the long haul for the productive populating time).

“Go outside. It’s good for you!”

“But what will I do? Are you sure I can’t have a snack?”

“GO OUTSIDE!”

I sulkily go outside and catch a glimpse of Oprah on the screen. I have never doubted that woman’s power to rule the world since.
As we acquire more knowledge, things do not become more comprehensible, but more complex and more mysterious.

Sigh, here we go again: we’re never done learning.

But does life reach a point where it stops being complex and mysterious? Getting old is going to be very hard, my already slow metabolism will be as fast as a glacier going uphill. I’m already always cold. I already ask people to repeat what they say. I already forget where I’m going and squint frantically for street signs when driving.

Living is also going to be easier when I’m older, because people will let me tell the same story over and over, and let me ask obvious questions in the middle of movies, and give me a lot of space on the road.

Not to brag about being a wise one of the world at twenty-one, but I already see a lot of the simplicity in life that I had once thought so complex. People really aren’t that different from each other. In fact, I don’t feel there is one person I have met that is totally unsimilar in any way shape or form with another person in my acquaintance.

Life also has a way of keeping its motion. The motion of life isn’t a linear march of centipede feet, numerous and scuttling in a straight line. It is more the napkin being blown in the wind. Half-hazard, it rests in the middle of the road, sometimes getting run over by a Hummer, yet it still can, and does, get picked up by a breeze and is free and high above the traffic, fluttering its happy white rectangle body, doing a loop-de-loop before it goes too low and scrapes among the concrete. But then it is picked up again and is carried a distance to rest in grass. It’s alone for now, but remembers the sweet time it started this journey. Crammed in a dark plastic container, other napkins pressing up against it, and then there was a pinch—oh and the softness of those lips—the red of the ketchup that it will carry forever to remember her, whose attention singled out the napkin and gave it a purpose, a use. There is a drop, and then another. Soon the napkin is drenched—it wasn’t made to hold this much liquid! Its thin multiple layers are one soggy lump, the blades of grass can’t hold it up, and the napkin is pressed down into the mud. Down and down as the water rises, flowing. The napkin looses part of itself, a corner here, a soggy rip there. It’s afraid what will happen when it is no longer a napkin. What will it be? Soggy bits of paper residue. How disgusting, how despairing, what an end! But then... is it? Will the napkin flutter as a hundred flowers, mixed in the soil and absorbed into the petals that face the sun and bend in breezes?

Whoa, lost myself again, almost escaped the confinements of my office chair with that written ramble. Perhaps that is what older people do, sit in their achy bodies and let their thoughts be like dropped napkins in the streets.
The function of science is to reassure; the purpose of art is to upset.
Therein lies the value of each.

I think these two are twins that have been switched at birth. In my Astronomy class, my professor would adamantly stress in his slow speaking way that "Science is not truth." Not that the truth is always reassuring (my parents are people too with issues they struggle with and I will most likely have similar issues to deal with as I grow older? AHHHH!). They are assuming people like to know where they stand—science explains to people: we stand on the earth; its revolving makes gravity and gravity keeps us stuck on it.

Science can be disconcerting though. Space is big. I am not. An atom isn’t either, but scientists can do stuff to its minute parts to try and stimulate a black hole in Japan, which would hardly exist for any time, but I heard there was the slight possibility of the world being destroyed. Yeah, that’s a great function of science, creating new possibilities for world destruction.

Science also gives a light-hearted reassurance in the form of an over-dramatic television channel with aliens and space travel that my Dad is sentenced to watching in the basement, taking solace in his addiction in science’s poorly constructed1 “other dimension.” I do not blame his need for watching futuristic adventures. There is not much room for him to explore possibilities in a house full of women with their own constant alien dialogue and customs to which he merely sits through.

Art is not upsetting. Think of an art museum. Some would think peaceful, others boring. I work there, and though there is new art being made all the time and our collection is updated and switched, the art museum has very conservative, eternal rules: do not touch and be respectful (like the way you would behave to an elderly stranger: you wouldn’t run around and make loud noise, you’d nod your head, give them your time, and maybe ask a few questions). A painting isn’t going to possibly explode in a glass flask or eat away at my skin, and though I have seen some disturbing images, they weren’t burn into my retinas like staring at the sun might do.

To explain why I called them twins. Both are upsetting to peoples. Both can be reassuring to peoples. Both are inspiring and interesting to me. The value does not lie in the “purpose” or “function,” but the personal value they create in a, well, person. Artists use science as inspiration. Science is a type of art asking crafting observations and asking questions about the space near and very far around us. They are twins because one wasn’t born before the other. Cavemen and/or cavewomen, or even cavechildren, made art on their dwellings. They probably made experiments in the same day of what was good to eat and what was bad. Mammoth leg good. Mammoth droppings bad.

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1 Poorly constructed referring to the average show’s low television quality of special effects and small time spent on script writing. Shakaar.
Many people believe that a few individuals or small groups (family, friends, teachers, celebrities, for example) have caused them to think and behave in the way they do. Yet it is always society as a whole that defines us and our attitudes, not a few individuals.

My hair is long for mother
She wants me to brush it
More than once a day
And for goodness sake
To pull down my shirt when
I stand
Straight for mother
Like my hair
I am her child.

I read to talk
With Kathleen who is a bubbling
creek that is a brilliant blue
which books float swiftly
down stream and her mind
turns down the bend where I
cannot follow
for I am a very small fish
I am her public school friend.

I have my father's appetite.
For a slow pace
Sitting in front of the screen
For a full plate
Setting in the kitchen
And a smug vision
With a wolfish green
Stigmatism
I am his daughter.

I listen because my teachers tell me to
I write what my teachers tell me to
I go where my teachers tell me to
I answer what my teachers ask me.
I think what my teachers tell me.
I am their student.

I exercise to keep up
With Victoria who is a loud
Crane with long legs
And says if I listen
to the songs I can run
Despite my rooted tree trunks
And chesty fruits
I am her best buddy.

I don't watch TV.
I do not see her beautifully crafted face.
Her perfectly sculpted body.
I do not listen to her fashion sense.
I am not her cracked mirror.