

*I wrote the first version of this essay in college, when I needed both an intro to my creative nonfiction portfolio and to study for a physiology exam. It's grown and changed over the years, as I have.*

---

## Why I Write

I write because my motor cortex directs nerve impulses downward. They travel through my brainstem and cerebellum, propagating into a precisely orchestrated network of electrical signals that continue to move downward. Down through my corticospinal tract, down through my spinal cord, down the pathways in my arm, racing across synapses until they reach the somatic motor neurons that control the muscles of my hand and wrist. Some are excited, others inhibited. They flawlessly antagonize each other to provide precise control of my movements. My movements of gripping the pen in my hand, pressing it to paper, and scrawling out my messy handwriting across the page. The movements of writing.

I write because I learned to read almost before learning to walk, and which came more naturally, I really can't say. After reading then re-reading the books that lined the shelves of my childhood home, I wrapped my fingers clumsily around a pen and began to form my first shaky letters in an old, spiral-bound notebook pilfered from my older sister's backpack.

My mother taught me about the art of writing, encouraging me by saving the short stories I began mass producing around age seven. She still has them, preserved in a purple-lidded sweaterbox, safely packed away under my old bed. She is a talented writer; during my high school years we spent many late nights sitting on the faded yellow-and-green couch in our living room editing school essays, while I sipped tea and she drank Diet Coke. I write because the adventures of Greek heroes are reasonably safe conversation for a mother and teenage daughter learning to trust each other. I write because these subjects often covertly segue into deeper conversation.

I write to further understand myself and my values. To have a conversation with myself and discover where I stand and what I feel. I write because I am clumsy and shy when it comes to verbal discourse, but faced with a blank sheet of paper I am brave. Sometimes I write because I have something to say. Sometimes because I don't know what to say. Sometimes it's to pay the bills, feeling grateful to get by doing something I enjoy. But the truest writing is when I simply need to hear the soothing sound of my pen scratching into paper as thoughts erratic in my head fly out to rest more serenely on the page.

I write because I am a scientist, and I am a better scientist because I write. I write to share my research with the world, because when I find ways to clearly communicate my work I end up understanding it better myself. I write because it helps me think and understand, and I want to help others do the same. I write to further science literacy and trust, with the hope of providing a welcoming voice that connects others to the research I love.

I write because my words are unique; because even my most mundane experiences do not parallel the experiences of anyone else. I write to improve my writing, to communicate, and because it is the best way I know to show people how I perceive the world. I write because words continue to captivate me now as they did as a child. There is a narrator in my head that cannot stop, and for her I will always keep writing.