

Why I Write

One of the best pieces of advice I have ever gleaned from the internet: you should always be yourself, unless you can be Batman, in which case you should always be Batman. My writing, in a way, is like the Batman alter ego to my Bruce Wayne. Writing provides me with a mask, a sort of shield that allows me to get away feats of daring I would not even consider attempting in person; behind my notebook, or computer screen, I can muster up the nerve to dole out doses of tongue-in-cheek satire, unfiltered opinions on the state of things I have no authority on, and even a few rare moments of sheer vulnerability. Writing has shaped my world view and allowed me to transcend my own reality. Beyond all, writing has become the expository lens through which I can shine a spotlight on the people and the world around me.

My writer's origin story is slightly less climatic than training to protect Gotham City and seek revenge against the Joker, but I suppose, like Batman, it did start with me becoming the thing I was afraid of. The narrative is pretty short and sweet: I was a bumbling eleven year old girl who absolutely abhorred writing and everything it entailed. The whole process made me a bit sick and the negative reinforcement of C's and D's on my returned essays made me want nothing to do with it. My father and my English teacher convinced me to join the middle school Creative Writing Club to work on my writing. It was there that I started rhyming a few lines and a few weeks in, I was suddenly a poet. Then I started writing the eighth *Harry Potter* novel with my best friend and I was suddenly an unfinished author. I wrote for my high school paper and I was suddenly a journalist- a dozen clichéd short stories, abandoned novels, news articles, satirical essays, and an egotistical art blog later, and I think I am finally ready to don the gray tights and cape, so to speak. I think I might be a writer.

Comment [s1]: I am worried about playing it safe with this "thesis style" statement. One of the things I'm really trying to get out of this minor is the ability to add a bit of creativity to a seemingly typical essay, and I am a bit worried that I am not expanding my range enough.

Comment [s2]: I definitely tried to take the Orwell route with this anecdote about my writer's origins. I think it is almost impossible to talk about why you do something unless you explain why you started in the first place. I do not know if this quick history really captures the process I'm trying to get at though. I didn't want to dwell on origins too long because the reasons I started writing were so different than the reasons I write now. However, I think it's still important to convey that in a way, once I caught the writing bug, I could not stop.

So that is the “I Write” part of “Why I Write”; I think I can readily accept that I write and as a consequence, I am a writer, but the “why” took me a much longer time to understand. The only explanation I could give for the longest time simply became “I write because I do not really know how to stop, I do not really know what people do besides write.” That makes it all sound a bit mechanical, I suppose, like I am nothing more than a set of fingers pressing down on keys like a machine. But I am not a machine, I am Batman. And like any other superhero, I use my alter ego to achieve what I cannot as Bruce Wayne.

At its most selfish core, my writing just started as a way to just be someone else. Even through academic writing, for a few pages, I can fool a reader into thinking I am an intelligent biology student, a skilled research assistant, or literary analyst. Through fictional prose and poetry, I can be Batman, or a six foot tall, suave, brilliant character with confidence and wit. Through writing, I can build a world where my jokes always get a laugh and my heated rants about the state of humanity actually affect the world. I am not entirely inept without a pen or a keyboard, but the magic of the eraser or backspace key makes any potentially awkward moment disappear entirely. There is no social anxiety or stuttering in writing; writing is the control freak’s paradise. But with great power- wait, wrong superhero. Point is, eventually I started to realize that my penchant for writing could be used for something greater than my own escapist goals.

Part of my fascination with becoming someone entirely new stemmed from my need to unearth the stories of others. Maybe that is a bit more Clark Kent than Bruce Wayne, but I have an insatiable desire to understand the lives and intentions of others, and writing became a tool for me to do that. Through news articles, stories, and essays, I have the privilege of sharing someone else’s story. Part of my superpower is the ability to give other people a voice, and to use writing

Comment [s3]: I think this is where I really identified with Joan Didion in a way. I agreed with her points about writing being a type of virus that you cannot get rid of, but I tried to take it a step further and use that as sort of a launch pad for my real motivations.

as a way of understanding people in a different way. Listening to the stories of others gives me a fresh perspective on the world around me. It is a form of humility to see from vantage points that are not my own. Writing through the voices of others forces me to expand my perceptions and question my steadfast opinions. Through writing, I learn.

In a way, the characters I met through literature in my childhood had almost as much to do with my upbringing as my own parents did. Harry Potter remains one of my best friends. Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim helped me understand anxiety. And I do not exaggerate when I say Ned Vizzini's character, Craig Gilner helped me survive high school. These writers and the people they created with their words have had the most significant impact on my life, and I think the naïve, idealistic kid in me wanted to do that for someone else to- I want to write books and essays that might just help someone get through another day, or to create a new companion for some reader who needs to feel less alone. Writing does not simply affect the caped crusader; it has the ability to peel back the mask and improve the person behind it as well.

In a much less literary and metaphorical way, I write so that I may be able to convey new psychological research in the future. Every new medical treatment and test that has ever been done in the history of psychology has been submitted as a written proposal and presented as a paper for the entire scientific community to read and build upon. The field is still in its infancy compared to other sciences and this is the age of learning. Through writing, I will be able to add to the wealth of knowledge that is yet to be discovered and have a tangible effect on the lives of others.

I am still in the process of becoming the writer the world deserves, and I'm certainly not yet the writer it needs, but I write to save the world. Maybe it is just the world of one other person, maybe it is the world of psychology, or maybe it is just the world inside of my head.

Comment [s4]: I am not sure whether branching off into my love of reading is tangential. I have these two points that I am trying to illustrate with this paragraph. The first is that I am sort of trying to live up to my heroes, and the second is that writing has shaped the real me despite my insistence on using it to create a new persona.

Writing is a power that transcends boundaries and allows me to become a better person, and is my weapon of choice for battling the villains of this world and giving a voice to those around me.