



“How writing makes life better”

For me, writing is not simply the physical transferring of ink onto paper; it is an organic process, a living and breathing method of recording information as well as fantasy, a way of providing the wider community with a pocket-sized window into another world. Good writing should make the beholder laugh, empathise, cry, feel vulnerable, and reflect on their views of the world. As E.L. Doctorow put it, “Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader – not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon”¹. The depth of emotion that writing can convey to the beholder is unique, and truly, truly special.

Writing is quite literally the cornerstone of our modern civilisation, the most potently influential means of communication between centuries of human existence gone by, and indeed amongst humans today, and quite possibly one of the defining factors in the continuing success of our human race. It is an vessel for the recording of raw and emotional human expression throughout time, an opportunity to participate in the clarification of complex thought, and a beautifully varied means by which to escape the woes of material life, to increase one’s happiness, and to make, defend or criticise age-old arguments. After all, there is a reason that John Milton wrote “hee who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe”².

Firstly, writing is “the fuel that drives communication, and communication serves as a framework for society”³ – it serves as the very foundation for our civilisation today, by providing the most basic of means by which humans can collaborate with one another. Collaboration has been, and continues to be, one of the most important facets of human social interaction, and this centres on the importance of recognising and contemplating different viewpoints and perspectives, in order to reach an optimal conclusion. Writing quite literally encapsulates a miscellany of different opinions, thoughts and attitudes, each of which provides a unique and novel approach to the discussion at hand, and each of which are as valuable as the others. This sharing of ideas, especially in inter-generational dialogue, is essential to understanding the past, and how we ought to shape our society as a result of our previous learnings. As Voltaire put it, writing is “the painting of the voice”⁴, and these “paintings” have been passed down through the generations of human existence, providing us with a vast base of knowledge, and a wealth of different experiences, all written for us to discover. Thus, writing is exceptionally important, as it gives us, the modern generation, an incredible amount of knowledge, accessible at the turn of a page. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, proclaimed that “knowledge is

¹ Doctorow, E.L. (?). E.L. Doctorow Quotes. [Online]. Goodreads. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/30209-good-writing-is-supposed-to-evoke-sensation-in-the-reader-not> [Accessed 23/09/2023].

² Milton, J. (23 November 1644). Areopagitica. [Online]. The John Milton Reading Room. Available at: https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu/reading_room/areopagitica/text.html [Accessed 23/09/2023].

³ Grand Canyon University. (25 March 2022). Why is Writing Important?. [Online]. Grand Canyon University. Available at: <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/gcu-experience/why-writing-important> [Accessed 23/09/2023].

⁴ Webber, B. (19 July 2023). “Writing is the Painting of the Voice.”- Voltaire. [Online]. Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/illumination-curated/writing-is-the-painting-of-the-voice-voltaire-326e77bbdd7a#>: [Accessed 23/09/2023].



power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress”⁵. Writing grants us an incredible opportunity to learn from our mistakes in the past, and create the fairest, most advantageous society that history has seen thus far. As well as this, we can see in today’s world that writing in the news, whether that be in print or on the screens of smartphones, is widely received by the masses, and serves as an important way for people to become informed about the world around them. It allows us to empathise with the different experiences of people from all over the globe, and creates international connections between those who were previously strangers, all from a few, informative words written on a page. This can only serve to strengthen our society even further still.

Another widely-received benefit of writing is that it can greatly improve your memory, and allow you the opportunity to reflect on your thoughts more comprehensively. According to M. Donald’s study, “Writing enables the external storage of information that can be represented symbolically, and which can then be analysed, critiqued, reproduced, and transformed, among other potential actions”⁶. This is a process that simply cannot happen to the extent in the mind than it can when information is written down. The opportunity to actually see your thoughts laid out in front of you in ink on a page is unique to writing, and it enables the human to achieve clarity of thought, to consider how best to make decisions, and to undergo a simplified yet no less valuable process of self-reflection. Indeed, Gregory Ciotti states that “writing has been shown to help people communicate highly complex ideas more effectively”, and that it “helps eliminate ‘it sounded good in my head’ by forcing your hand; brains forgive fuzzy abstractions, prose does not”⁷. Writing our thoughts down to process them before sharing can certainly help keep us out of some uncomfortable situations! Writing is also known to help with the process of encoding, which is essentially a biological process in which decisions are made about what gets saved in our long-term memories, and also about what is not remembered. “Writing improves that encoding process. In other words, when you write it down it has a much greater chance of being remembered”⁸. Thus, writing is instrumental in the actual biology of remembering, as well as enabling us to meditate on our thoughts in a more effective manner.

The final, and perhaps one of the most thought-provoking points that I would like to make, is that writing really can make the individual feel better. Better not just in the sense of a short-term ‘kick’ or temporary feeling of lightness, but as in the sustained and long-term increase of emotional well-being in someone’s life. According to scientific research, “simply writing for the sake of opening up your thoughts and jotting them down on a page has huge therapeutic benefits

⁵ Annan, K. (23 June 1997). ‘IF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ARE CENTRAL TO DEMOCRACY, THEY ARE CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT’, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL. [Online]. United Nations. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/1997/19970623.sgsm6268.html> [Accessed 23/09/2023].

⁶ Donald, M. (1991). *Origins of the modern mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Ciotti, G. (6 March 2023). *The Psychological Benefits of Writing*. [Online]. Help Scout. Available at: <https://www.helpscout.com/blog/benefits-of-writing/> [Accessed 23/09/2023].

⁸ Murphy, M. (15 April 2018). *Neuroscience Explains Why You Need To Write Down Your Goals If You Actually Want To Achieve Them*. [Online]. Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markmurphy/2018/04/15/neuroscience-explains-why-you-need-to-write-down-> [Accessed 23/09/2023].



that include increased feeling of happiness and reduced stress”⁹. Writing can facilitate the blossoming of happiness in people’s lives, and can be especially beneficial for those who are struggling with their mental health and well-being. Since social psychologist James Pennebaker studied the impact of writing on mental health for the first time in 1986, there have been more than 200 research studies on the subject, all concluding that emotional health can be improved by certain forms of writing, especially expressive writing. This type of writing is often used in therapy, with the aim of helping the patient to reflect on and process a negative event that they have experienced in their past. Participants in a research programme conducted in an academic outpatient integrative clinic in America were found to have “significantly improved their resilience, depression symptoms, and perceived stress and rumination”¹⁰, by undertaking a 6-week expressive writing course, involving writing for a short amount of time each day to reflect on and rationalise their thoughts. The power and benefits of writing are laid bare in this research, showing that the recording of thought on paper can have such an incredibly deep and fundamental effect on someone’s mental well-being, that they are able to carry on with their lives as happier, healthier and better-healed human beings.

In conclusion, it is absolutely and unequivocally indisputable that writing makes life better. Whether this is on a global scale, such as with the advancement of society as a result of learning from past mistakes, on a personal level, such as with the positive increases in mental health and well-being that it can evoke, or even on a cellular level, increasing your capacity for remembering useful information, writing is infinitely valuable, and an organic form of self-reflection and discovery that must be protected and nurtured until the end of time.

Word Count: 1446

⁹ British Council. (?). Boost your Happiness with Creative Writing. [Online]. British Council. Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.in/library/discover/boost-your-happiness-creative-writing#:~:text=Writing> [Accessed 23/09/2023].

¹⁰ Duke Integrative Medicine Department. (13 December 2018). Expressive writing to improve resilience to trauma: A clinical feasibility trial. [Online]. ScienceDirect. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1744388118306157> [Accessed 23/09/2023].



References

1. Doctorow, E.L. (?). E.L Doctorow Quotes. [Online]. Goodreads. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/30209-good-writing-is-supposed-to-evoked-sensation-in-the-reader-not> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
2. Milton, J. (23 November 1644). Areopagitica. [Online]. The John Milton Reading Room. Available at: https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu/reading_room/areopagitica/text.html [Accessed 23/09/2023].
3. Grand Canyon University. (25 March 2022). Why is Writing Important?. [Online]. Grand Canyon University. Available at: <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/gcu-experience/why-writing-important> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
4. Webber, B. (19 July 2023). "Writing is the Painting of the Voice."- Voltaire. [Online]. Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/illumination-curated/writing-is-the-painting-of-the-voice-voltaire-326e77bbdd7a#:> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
5. Annan, K. (23 June 1997). 'IF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE ARE CENTRAL TO DEMOCRACY, THEY ARE CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT', SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL. [Online]. United Nations. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/1997/19970623.sgsm6268.html> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
6. Donald, M. (1991). Origins of the modern mind. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
7. Ciotti, G. (6 March 2023). The Psychological Benefits of Writing. [Online]. Help Scout. Available at: <https://www.helpscout.com/blog/benefits-of-writing/> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
8. Murphy, M. (15 April 2018). Neuroscience Explains Why You Need To Write Down Your Goals If You Actually Want To Achieve Them. [Online]. Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markmurphy/2018/04/15/neuroscience-explains-why-you-need-to-write-down-> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
9. British Council. (?). Boost your Happiness with Creative Writing. [Online]. British Council. Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.in/library/discover/boost-your-happiness-creative-writing#:~:text=Writing> [Accessed 23/09/2023].
10. Duke Integrative Medicine Department. (13 December 2018). Expressive writing to improve resilience to trauma: A clinical feasibility trial. [Online]. ScienceDirect. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1744388118306157> [Accessed 23/09/2023].