

### Editor's Note

Sara Adams' "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," explores the process of finding her own "voice." Can you recall any writing assignments in which you were asked to do the same? What is a writer's "voice"? Do they have more than one? Adams' introduction might be labeled as experimental by most readers because of its style. What might have you expected in an introduction? Adams does not organize her essay in a chronological order. Is this strategy effective? How does the integration of concrete details from her past—such as exact places, names, and dates—strengthen her approach? How does the block quotation of her speech work in this essay? Why would an author introduce evidence in this manner?

## Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

Sara Adams

**The place:** Leland High School, room H-2.

**The time:** freshman year, fall semester, third period.

**The offender:** Ms. Victoria Kim.

**The offense:** "I want you to find your voice in this essay."

**H**a! Find my voice? Gag me. What the hell does that mean? I mean correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure people find their voices shortly after they are born. It is not exactly rocket science figuring out that the voice box and the vocal cord work together in such a fashion that this noise we call words comes out. Okay, maybe I'm being a little bit cynical, but I've never really been one to jump for joy at writing assignments—especially ones requiring me to 'find my voice.'

Needless to say, I didn't 'find my voice' in freshman English class. I didn't have the epiphany my sophomore, junior, or senior year either. I do not think the realization happens at a specific moment but rather, is composed of a series of corroborating experiences that each unveils little pieces of a person. After trying out and being selected to speak at graduation, I took on the task of writing my graduation speech, which was one such experience that allowed me to grow drastically as a writer and a person.

All through middle school and high school, I was taught how to produce boring cookie-cutter essays: intro with a "hook" and thesis, three body paragraphs, and a

repetitive conclusion. Being an analytical thinker, this was fine by me; I had a formula, and I could apply it to any topic. This monotonous form of writing, however, would not permit me to create a speech good enough to present at graduation. I had to write something to win over the teachers and school officials at graduation, then the families, and finally my fellow classmates. So, the challenge began.

I am very independent, dare I say stubborn, when it comes to figuring things out—I like to do it on my own time and terms and have a difficult time asking for help. However, sitting on the floor in my room, staring at a blank piece of paper, I was stumped. The audience for my speech would encompass a wide variety of people, and I needed different perspectives on how to appeal to everyone. This forced me to utilize all my resources including my friends, family, teachers, and my own knowledge to brainstorm effectively.

Once the topic of “007” versus ’07 seniors was chosen, the operation of actually writing the speech began. It took about two days, six crumpled up pieces of paper, countless scratch-outs, and too much pacing until I finally completed my rough draft. From there, revision after revision after revision occurred. First to my dad, then Ms. Maclise, then Mrs. Aguilera, then Mrs. Brasher, then Mr. Yllana, then my best friend, Melanie, then back to me. After each review there was the good news, but then came the condemnation. . . . Okay, condemnation goes a little too far but it was a tad bit difficult to watch people tear a piece of work apart and re-create it, over and over again. Overwhelmed by the numerous alterations being made to my paper by other people, I realized precisely what it was—my paper. If I made *every* adjustment that others were telling me to, the voice I thought I didn’t have would be lost. Witnessing others inject their voice into my speech helped me develop a sense of who I am as a writer. This insight taught me to truly listen to the advice given by others, logically evaluate their suggestions, and then decide whether or not to use them. The meticulous revising process also demonstrated the magnitude of editing and proved to be the only way to fulfill the expectations I impose on myself.

June 14, 2007 finally arrived. At first, nervous of what everyone would think of my speech, I started to doubt every word that was written on the note cards in my sweaty hands. Once the march to “Pomp and Circumstance” began though, I realized how hard I worked on my speech. I realized if I was the only person satisfied with my speech that was okay. And in those realizations I found confidence that must have shown through because people in the audience had laughed, cried, smiled and cheered by the end of my conclusion:

Yes, Mr. James Bond, Agent 007 is entertaining, handsome, suave, and dangerously dreamy, but he is not real. ’07s, us, these 426 individuals you see here today are real.

Very real. We have the emotions, camaraderie, and authenticity that cannot be found in a fictional movie or television show. We hold the power and capabilities to confront the challenges that lie ahead. Four years of our own exhilarating adventures as Leland Chargers have left us with memories, friends, experiences, and knowledge that will carry us into the world. These past four years have prepared us to face what may come with strength and passion, and they have created a 'bond' between us—ladies and gentlemen, the graduating class of 2007!

I can see now that the journey of writing my speech was just as important as the destination. I managed to captivate a diverse audience and win not only their approval, but self-fulfillment as well. It forced me to step out of the box, make use of the resources around me, and enabled me to balance implementing others' ideas with my own work. Doubts I once held about my abilities were shattered by discovering confidence in me and having faith in the power of my words. Most importantly though, I know the accomplishment of this endeavor is another solid stepping-stone in the bigger journey of truly finding my own voice.

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