

EDITORS' NOTE

In Chun Hui Pek's writer's history essay, he discusses letting go of the five-paragraph-essay method he learned in high school. Pek states, "For every high school student, writing with this formula is a must." What rules of writing did you learn in high school, and which of them do you still use? Did you ever break the rules? Do you want to? Furthermore, music is one motivation for Pek when he revises his essay. What inspires you to write or to revise? Pek's new essay structure does not follow a formulaic convention; rather, the content drives the structure. How does his essay's structure mirror his new writing process? Have you ever been encouraged to change your writing style?

WRITER'S NOTE

"Fish Bone" was my first essay that broke the high school's "Five Paragraph" rule, also known as the "Fish Bone." I remember my first draft didn't go well, but after long training in English 102, I have learned a lot of techniques about writing. So after the second final revision, my essay got a lot better. Now when I compare my second final draft to the previous draft, I can see how much I improved in my writing.

Nothing Like a Fish Bone

Chun Hui Pek

Are there any rules of writing?

For a high school student, the answer is yes. Back when I was a sophomore, I was told by our teachers that we should follow certain so-called "style-rules of writing": we were prohibited to use "I," "me," or other first-person narrative, we were not allowed to put our own thoughts in our essays, and everything we put on our papers had to be based on the reading. Those were the absolute laws of the essay, which we believed and never dared to break, or we would not be able to receive good results from our paper. One of the instructions they taught us is the "Fish Bone Formula." "If you use this formula, you will succeed in every single writing class," they told us.

"Fish Bone," also known as the "five paragraphs essay," is a theory that all high school teachers teach their students about writing. The whole formula, if you draw it on a paper, looks like a fish bone: a upside-down triangle head, which represents the introduction starts from general to specific, 3 rectangle bones, which represents the 3 body paragraphs, and a right-side-up triangle tail, which represents the conclusion starts from specific to general; this is why we refer it as "Fish Bone Formula." For every high school student, writing with this formula is a must. But once a student reaches to a higher education, those rules and formulas seem unnecessary.

Now I am in college. I was required to write an essay in my English 102 class. First, I thought it was easy; there was no difference compared to what I have written before. I sat down in front of the computer, started to brainstorm as I did millions times before when I was in high school. I planned out the thesis, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Then, I plugged in the "meat" to my "fish bone" without a second hesitation. The whole process took me no more than 1 hour to finish this essay.

Like before, I never regretted what I had written. So I moved on to the next “assignment.” I read an article in a book called *Beyond Words*. Then suddenly, I felt that something was not right. I looked back at my essay. *That’s it!* For the first time, I felt unsatisfied with what I had just written. *I can do better than this boring, no-life essay*, I told myself. Suddenly, I recalled an important point about writing in my college English class.

In English 102, Professor Helmbrecht wanted us to read an article from *Fresh Voices* and “Confessions of a Former Sailor.” Those articles blew my mind: they do not follow the laws of essay, not even the “fish bone formula,” they are subjective—the authors put their own voices and ideas in their essays, and most surprisingly, the authors even use “I” in their essay, which is a taboo in our high school writing class. Professor Helmbrecht told us that she doesn’t want us to be restricted by the rules of essay; instead, she wants us to be free to express ourselves. Just like the line in “Confessions of a Former Sailor”: “Correctness, conformity to rules is a simple matter; communicating effectively to another human being is not.” Correct grammar, sentence structure, and certain rules are important, but effective communication is more important.

So I asked myself again. *Are there any rules of writing?* This time, the answer is no!

I closed my door, turned on the music, and blasted it. I listened to “21 Guns” by Green Day, “New Divided” by Linkin Park, “Love Drunk” by Boy like Girl, and a couple of other songs. Then, I erased the whole essay, and started over again.

This time, I had decided not to follow the so-called “rules of the essay”: I broke the “fish bone” rule, I used “I,” and my writing was subjective—I talked about MYSELF. *Yes, this is what I want!* I had no restriction on expressing my own feelings. I felt like I was flying. At that time, I was free . . .

This essay assignment has taken me to another stage of writing; it has totally changed my writing style. Now instead of focusing on the structure and the rules, I focus on the main point I want to deliver to the reader. In the end of the essay, I gave it a title: Nothing like a Fish Bone.

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