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Essay writing: a joy for some, a dreadful undertaking for others. During my years in school, I have seen countless students shaking the heads at the idea of polishing their writing skills: “But why?”

Let’s get the obvious answer out of the way first: good essay writing is beneficial for one’s academic records. The majority of courses require some form of written reports, especially in social sciences and literature. Here, students’ composition skills directly affect their grades. But working on essays can improve one’s class performance in indirect ways. By doing research, thinking through arguments and applying logics, students can gain deeper understanding on various topics, which will be useful for their coursework. Report from the College Board shows that among the individual sections of the SAT, writing score has the strongest correlation to first year GPA. So, the first and simplest reason for improving essay writing is: it’s good for one’s grades.

The most overarching and thus most important reason is that essay writing is a superb way to improve one’s communication skills. The goals of an essay are to convey, convince and inspire, arguably in that order; and those are exactly the things people want to achieve when they communicate with others. And what can one do in life without proper communication? Be it school, work or personal life, people want to effectively get their ideas across, persuade their audience and even prompt them to act in certain ways. And even though communication consists not only of written forms, the same skills used in essay writing are essential: picking facts and ideas, forming arguments, choosing the right words, and using the appropriate tones and lengths for different audience/occasions. However, these benefits are not obvious, and thus many students are not aware of them.

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Finally, writing is a cognitive challenge invoking memory, language and thinking ability. Therefore, improving one's essay writing skills can stimulate all these different areas of the brain, or, making one smarter in a way. And the best thing is that it is also a suitable form for training: students can take their time, and if they make mistakes these will be clearly recorded as ink on paper (or words on screens for the tech savvy students) right in front of them and they can easily fix and redo their writing, as opposed to speaking where people don't always have records of what they say, and once a word escapes their mouths, it's hard to take back. In addition, in the process of honing their writing, students will get to know many new things, be it facts or feelings, and also learn to be patient and consistent with their reasoning and approach, which are essential skills in life.

So what do all these mean? They mean that it is important for students to improve their essay writing skills. But as with many other things in life, just telling them "it's good for you" doesn't necessarily mean they will do it. Schools could use a combination of incentives, from increasing the weight of writing assignments in courses, to organizing essay competitions (the monetary prize needs not be big, but the winners should get a lot of publicity; students love it) and creating a school/department blog where students can submit their essays for review and publication. In short, it's better for students to be aware of the benefits of writing and be motivated to work on it, rather than them thinking "Here comes another dreadful piece of coursework".

## References

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