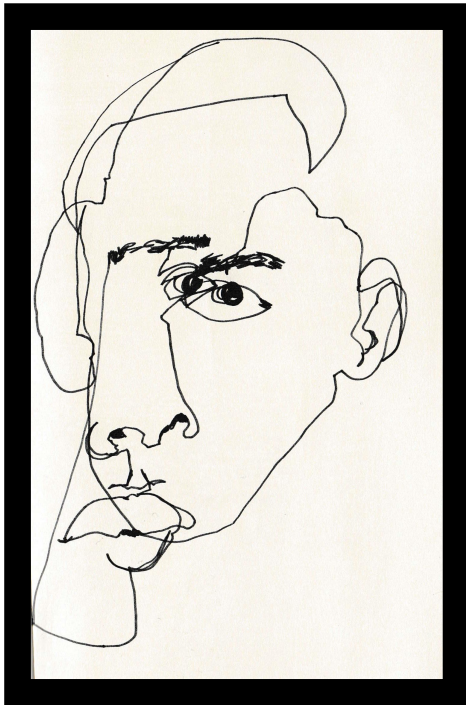


THE RELUCTANT WRITER



SUMMER PROJECT: BLIND CONTOUR DRAWING

“Blind contour drawing” is an artistic exercise where you try to sketch an object without looking at your paper. There are several reasons for doing this...none of which is to produce a good drawing! First, it forces you to really observe your subject, without relying on your preconceptions of what something is *supposed* to look like. Second, it prevents you from overthinking or polishing your work while you’re in this observational phase. Finally, it helps you to capture the essence of a figure, because you have to use your instincts to identify the most important shapes in the overall image.

You can probably see how each of these skills applies to writing. If you jump too quickly to your concerns about how a finished product is supposed to look, you can lose sight of your subject and your goals. The drawing exercise breaks that pattern by forcing you to observe your material and to make decisions—even unconsciously—about its key, defining qualities.

Why not start the summer by buying yourself a sketchbook? Try setting aside a time once a day, or once a week, to do a quick drawing. Your subjects can be people, scenery, or natural or manmade objects. While you sketch, try not to lift the tip of your pen or pencil from the paper. Think about the main shapes and features that identify your subject. If you like, make a few notes on the page about what you observed. With practice, your brain should develop new habits of observation and comprehension. Blind contour drawing can also be an extremely amusing family activity!

CONSULTING

Summer is a great time to learn new writing skills and plan for the Fall.

KIDS:

New group class: “The Museum of Ideas” is a week-long, half-day class for kids aged 10-16. Learn how to brainstorm, organize and present your ideas by building a miniature museum display! A flyer with more information is available on my website.

I’m also offering individual **book publishing projects and assessments**, for ages 8-18.

ADULTS:

Individual consultation can help you to get unstuck on your dissertation or book project, focus your website or report content, or learn to integrate and present complex information more clearly.

*Sessions take place at my Temescal office:
510 49th St. (@Telegraph), #209
Oakland, CA 94609*



NEW RELEASE: THE WILLOW TREE TRILOGY

Barnacle Books is proud to announce the publication of *The Willow Tree Trilogy* by Livia, Beatriz & Caterina Reis! This unique project was a collaboration by a set of triplets, each one writing a different portion of the same story. Part fairy tale, part horror story, and part friendship-drama, the trilogy follows a group of children who fight to save a magical kingdom from evil forces. To see a preview or order a copy online, visit erikaclowes.com/barnacle-books.

SCAFFOLDING

We usually think of writing as a solitary activity. But many aspects of writing are inherently social or interactive. For example, most writers hash out their ideas with friends; all published writing is reviewed by an editor; and in the end, all writing is an act of communication with others. When writers are learning new skills or are struggling with the process, there's also a real need for external scaffolding from other people. Components of writing like comprehension, time management, synthesis, and organization won't come about just by trying harder or for a longer amount of time. There are some things that a writer can't do, unless she has an explicit plan and concrete reinforcements for that plan. For that, she may need someone else to set up a framework for her.

Many parents resist scaffolding their kids' writing, though, for several reasons. First of all, they're bone-tired! Second, they may believe that it's their kid's responsibility to get homework done without being hovered over. And finally, they may not know *how* to help, or they feel discouraged after previous attempts to help have failed. The thing to remember is that if your child is struggling with homework—avoiding it, crying over it, taking forever to do it—then most likely s/he is literally not able to do it without more scaffolding help from you.

So, what is scaffolding, and how do we do it, in a reasonable way, at home?

- 1. Help with time management.** Use a calendar to specify a time to do the task, and a timer to delimit short, 15-min work sessions. Don't expect your child to be able to do this independently without reinforcement!
- 2. Reduce the number of tasks.** If your child is struggling to come up with ideas, for example, don't expect them to hand-write notes, organize, and edit too! Set aside 15 minutes just to list what they remember from the text, and circle the one they find most interesting. Letting them dictate their ideas or talk them out with you can often be a bridge to the next stage of work.
- 3. Make the instructions more concrete.** Essay prompts are usually full of implicit expectations and vague terms that can cause students to freeze up. Try re-phrasing them in a way that is more literal. For example, instead of "Talk about a person who inspired you," you might say, "List 3 things you've learned from Uncle Joe, and write 3 sentences for each one." This advice extends beyond prompts as well: break the assignment process down into incremental steps.
- 4. Listen to and reflect your child's emotions.** Students can feel intense frustration, self-doubt, and confusion when they're facing a writing challenge. Don't underestimate the importance of scaffolding their emotional regulation. Acknowledge (with as much specificity as you can) that the question is confusing, that it makes sense for them to be stuck, or that the project is making them feel angry or incapable.

There's no magic way to prevent all homework frustration, but scaffolding in one or more of these four areas is often the key. Also, note that none of these supports involves "doing the work" for your child. It's true, you may be carrying some of the work *load*...but this makes sense if the full load is simply beyond the child's capacity. Once s/he has rehearsed a specific skill successfully several times, s/he'll be able to do it more independently.

