

Question: One thing that I keep thinking about is the genre and the register of academic writing versus the type of writing that you do. Academic writers can hold things very close to the vest, right? And unwilling to let them go until they are absolutely perfect. But when you have a demand of fast turnover of deliverables, do you have any tips how to sort of find your voice and get comfortable in that sense?

Answer: One of my tips is, so we all have access to multiple registers. The academic register is not the only register we have, even if it is the one that we've developed the most practice in because you are in grad school and then you have all your friends that are grad students. You have other registers. You have your like 'talking to children' register, or you are 'talking to your dog' register, or your you know like 'I am just so tired and I can't even handle this anymore', or you are like you know. So think about – so one of the things that I do when I am writing an article I'm like 'man! This is getting pretentious. I don't even know what I am saying anymore' like, what- what's going on here is I try to really consciously switch registers into register that's like way too informal. So I switched to like internet slang, like I am not going to capitalize or punctuate anymore. I'm just gonna like take it way too far in the other direction because it's easier to kind of tidy up and formalize a little bit, a really casual register sometimes than it is to de-pretentious a too formal register. There's a verb for you, de-pretentious. [Laughter]

So particularly if you've gotten stuck on this track of like 'oh my god, this sentence now has three semicolons in it' like 'what am I even doing here'. [Laughter] You can think 'okay, what if I put this into internet slang, what if I put this into like text speak, what if I put this into like you know, just like really simple terms, what if I – you can run through like – Randall Munroe has written this book called 'Thing Explainer' which explains complicated concepts using only the thousand most common words in English and so it has a website for you. You can go and put your writing in and it will highlight any word that you use that is not in those thousand most common words. So you can use that as an exercise for like how complicated is the vocabulary that you use here, like can I get it down into the Thing Explainer or the Up Goer Five type of vocabulary, so there is a couple of different tricks. Or you can like put it down, try to explain it to yourself verbally. Say to yourself why you are so annoyed with what you are writing first. [Laughter] Let that develop into 'oh, maybe this is actually what I want to say'. Sometimes I also use the like transcription features, the audio transcription features, where you can just talk at your computer. That kind of put you in a more informal register, or what if I were going to have to tweet about this. There is a variety of tricks to get your brain into like 'oh ya, I do have access to these other registers. I don't have to write everything in words of like six syllables or more. You know, how can I get access to it again, even when I am actually trying to explain these concepts that I am used to encountering in the context of academic jargons