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① This paper will never be perfect. ①

② As much as I obsess over the mechanics, the voice, and the meaning of the words I arrange on the page, they will never achieve perfection, never be flawless. As a student, this idea has weighed on me for my entire educational career: my inability to execute a task – any one task, it seems – perfectly. Failing to do so represents a serious lack of willpower on my part: am I not dedicating enough effort, not prioritizing myself correctly to achieve what I want?

I've driven myself crazy trying to complete perfect assignments, write perfect papers, and play perfect pieces. In a way, my drive represents the standards of my parents, myself, and my society: as I approach the time when I'll need to apply to college, my GPA and test scores (perfect or imperfect) will supposedly be large factors in determining my admittance into the school of my choice. From there, it will determine my career, salary, lifestyle, and future at large.

③ From this side of things, the push for perfection seems pretty justified. ③

After three years of high school and one year that's caused me particular stress concerning grades, however, I want to look at perfection objectively: outside of a score on a rubric or a grade (arbitrarily given by a teacher who may or may not be conscious of that score's effect on my ability to go to college), is perfection even possible? ②

④ The calculated, logical music of Mozart has often been described as 'perfect', but who could argue a lack of artistry in his compositions? Who could point to flaws in *Starry Night*, an

ill-advised word choice in *Don Quixote*, or a lapse of judgement in the dynamics of one of Chopin's waltzes? The human race, in its respect for true art, shows its awareness of the fragility of creation and the inexistence of perfection. The difference between great works of art and those less so, therefore, lies in the distinction between perfection and precision.

Perfection is concrete. It is solid, immovable, and inelastic. Perfection is achieved at the end of the road, at the end of a journey, when nothing is left to change or fix. Perfection is endgame.

Perfect circles are perfect, and perfect circles are precise. Drawing a perfect circle means that each element is mathematically sound, and that any discrepancies are nonexistent. Each element is undeniably perfect. Circles are set in stone, so to speak: they are predictable and they are constant. Their angles (or lack thereof) are uniform no matter which particular circle is examined, and inscribed arcs and calculations always produce expected results. But drawing a perfect circle freehand is impossible; it requires a compass, a computer, or some kind of tool. Circles are not a part of humans' innate internal geometry. We can be as precise as possible, double-checking curves and tangents, but we cannot be perfect. In a way, humans' inability to create this measure of perfection by our own devices symbolizes our lack of biological authority: we are not capable of creating perfection simply because we are not meant to create it. We are at the mercy of our own inherent flaws as a species.

Precision can and does exist without perfection. Circles are perfect and precise, yet art is precise but imperfect. Art reaches for a goal: if it is precise in its execution, it is effective. It evokes emotion, inspires feeling, and gives us alternate perspectives on the world around us. Perfection leaves no room for interpretation, which is the breathing room that the arts crave. "Perfect" implies an end, but it's almost pessimistic to think that there could be an end to

expression. Perfection is reached when there is nothing else to do. No more corners exist to round, no splinters stick out, no wrinkles show any degree of fault. Style, however, is a quality that lives in these folds: it cultivates the virtuosity and finesse of the artist and nurtures the empathy of the audience. Style is innately human. In a way, style is a function of the spirit of the performer or creator. Writing and performing, in addition to other arts and skills, involve taking a pre-formatted structure – an essay prompt or a piece of music – and allowing the artist to shape the structure as he or she sees fit in their individual style: injecting the essence of herself into her creation. The structure can be inherently perfect or not: it's up to the artist to blend her own thoughts, interpretations, and emotions into her execution and her work.

Whether accessible or not, flawlessness wears at the edges of the minds of students, athletes and musicians alike. Each strives to be a master of their craft, practicing under the mantra “practice makes perfect” and pushing themselves each time closer towards their goals. Perfection is impossible, however, in terms of these activities because often the situations that produce results at a given time are fleeting and temporary. The fragile harmony of preparation, environment, and energy that goes into one product may not ever be available in that context again. This is why artists thrive on inspiration and athletes on their energy: they realize that the right moment for execution can arrive and depart in a split second. This plays a part in the discussion of precision, as well, in that the right moment for performance must create and maintain a balance while simultaneously incorporating style.

Style is the essence of individualism: where creativity and openness are concerned, each person interprets and produces material in a unique way. Musical performance, in particular, relies on nuance brought by the individual to bring the piece to new light. A sonata played perfectly by a world-renowned virtuoso may have less ‘heart’ than the same piece played by a

high school student simply because of the level of emotion given by the performer. While there is certainly something to be said about skill level in considering this scenario, musical performance is about interpretation. The notes on the page are already there; it's the musician's job to interpret them and tell the story. Style as it applies to music is obvious: the available choices in dynamics, articulation, and even rhythmic accuracy provide a literally infinite number of possibilities to the performer. As it applies to writing, however, style is an integral part. Writing can't exist without style: there is style in the arrangement of sentences and paragraphs, in the way words are strung together, and in the very words that are chosen. A simple, expository sentence displays as much stylistic choice as one that drips with eloquence and loftiness. Writing inevitably involves subjectivity: even with the outward absence of voice, writing still breathes with the rhythm of its author. Instructional prose, even, has a palpable feeling and direction. All writing has emotion, and all emotion is visible to the reader. Because writing is styled according to its intended audience, it also relies on a balance: the chemistry between the author and the reader. This balance can be shifted and toyed with as the author sees fit, in that the reader can be a close friend, a confidante, or a stiffly regarded outsider.

2 But it is not just art and performance that can showcase a stylistic identity. Handwriting, for example, can be argued to be an extension of a person's personality. It's a learned skill, one that is taught in primary school and evolves over a lifetime. Penmanship is unique in that it is a necessary skill: not everyone is a writer, but everyone writes something. Handwriting is unique then, as a mandatory skill, in that it doesn't have to be perfect. While not outwardly revered as an art, handwriting is respected as being uniquely individual. Handwriting is "allowed" to be singular and different, and handwriting does not necessarily dictate the value of the person who creates it. Similarly, while people can be pushed by parents or society to be polite, tough, or non

confrontational, there is no one perfect personality. The fact that society allows there to be no one ideal manifestation of a person (or no correct style of handwriting) almost serves as society's own concession that we are flawed. In terms of handwriting and personality, individuality isn't equated with imperfection. This is not an attack on perfection, and perfection is not an attack on individuality. The two are mutually exclusive, in that neither can exist without the other.

While perfection may be devoid of individuality, it is anything but empty and emotionless. Although science and math are viewed as cold, hard subjects, they also involve subjectivity. There's an element of artistry not in their implementation, but their existence. There's a kind of quiet romanticism in the way the natural world fits together, or at least the way we've interpreted it mathematically: the careful puzzle of trigonometry and calculus, the complex biological processes that allow life to exist, and the field of molecular geometry that seems to grow as the subatomic particles we discover continue to shrink. These are only pieces, however, in the greater design of the world in which we live. Maybe that's why humans aren't capable of achieving perfection: the perfect natural world around us is a blank canvas for us to color as we like.

If we look at it this way, living life as a human is in itself an art form. The human life isn't meant to be lived perfectly: there's no perfect formula, no way to secure a life without regrets or pain. This simple fact is comforting, at least to me, in that life is truly our own creation and stems from our individual choices. We are creatures of free will: there are no standards we are held to aside from the ones we set for ourselves.

Maybe, since we can't achieve it, we should stop chasing perfection. Maybe the perfect medicine for a world striving for perfection is the realization that it is impossible. The solution to

our predicament as a perfectionist race is to recognize our flaws and learn to live with them; imperfection within art, and within life, creates beauty, expression, and style.

⑦ And that sounds perfect to me. ⑦

"Identify 5-10 choices you made in writing that you believe increased the effectiveness of the paper as filtered through the DAMAGES + rubric... elaborate each choice, specifying the authorial intentions and cognitive process behind it."

1. Approach - first sentence

This is possibly my favorite first sentence I've ever written for a paper. In one slightly bold line, I tried to do several things. I wanted to set the tone for the rest of the paper, as an introduction should. By addressing the topic of the essay head-on and challenging an accepted belief (by implying that perfection in writing does not exist), I believe this sentence captures the self-awareness I wanted to incorporate throughout the piece. I don't think this is exactly a meta-paper, but establishing my thoughts and positions on perfection (especially in my own work) this early on in the paper shows that I believe in my convictions and am not above them: my creation (the paper) can't be perfect, according to my theory, so I admit that it can't.

2. Approach/Detail - paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5

The remainder of the first section of the paper creates a sense of narrative direction. I share my experience with perfectionist standards as a student and identify my reason for being concerned with the existence of perfection in the first place. Paragraph 5 especially connects my scholastic experience with my greater essential question, which allows me to move away from the narrative standpoint. Opening this way almost 'qualifies' me to talk about my thoughts on perfection since it introduces the line I have to the topic (as a student).

3. Style - paragraph 4

This paragraph, in a single sentence, represents a stylistic choice. I wanted to concisely explain, from my point of view, why society is so obsessed with perfection. I use this sentence to serve as the original argument that I will deconstruct throughout the remainder of the paper as I explain why perfection can't come from human hands.

4. Detail - paragraph 6

This paragraph introduces Mozart, Chopin, Don Quixote, and Stany Night. These examples all serve as representatives for great works of art that the audience should be familiar with, even if he or she is not familiar with all of them. These are works of art that are regarded as the "greats" of their time - no one would think to question their artistic perfection. This paragraph asks them to be considered in terms of technical perfection, though. This comparison that may be considered unusual shows the reader that not everything 'great' must be 'perfect', a recurring theme in the piece.

5. Detail/Meaning - paragraph 7

This paragraph should serve as a working definition of perfection - providing clarifying detail to my argument. I didn't want to cite a dictionary definition here solely because I wanted to create a 'feeling' of what perfection is - one that depends on the individual - rather than an immovable definition that would be hard to work with. I begin and end this paragraph with short telegraphic sentences -

In a way, these abrupt statements create a feeling of a solid definition, even though it will ideally be easy to work with and work around throughout the paper, as I rely a lot on the ~~own~~ experiences of my audience in society.

6. Detail/Meaning/Style: Mid-paragraph 9

In defining "style", I add another level of specificity to the piece. This definition describes style as not just something a person "has", but something that is a part of them. This paragraph is meant to redefine the way the audience looks at style in ~~the~~ reference to the rest of the paper.

7. Ending/Style: paragraph 16

I actually wrote the conclusion to this piece long before the developmental piece of the argument was ready. Although it sounds (and probably is) horribly cliché, the last sentence parallels the first in length, paragraphing, and the use of the word "perfect". Although the word has been the central focus of the entire paper, it is utilized much differently in the first and last lines. I could argue that I wanted the last line to sound nonchalant - the word is used with less reverence and fear than the first time. This, I think, reflects the point of my paper. By eliminating the huge amount of significance we give perfection in our everyday lives, we take away its power. Since the ~~paper~~ paper revolves around the idea that we should accept perfection as a human impossibility, I think it was important to use it in this cliché way in order to further dismantle its hold on society (ignore the gross exaggeration in that

phrase). In addition, the inclusion of the pronoun "me" brings the paper full-cycle, back to its narrative roots: the problem is again personal.

Essential Question: To what extent can perfection exist or be created by humans?

Thesis: Humans can't create perfection because individuals inevitably incorporate subjectivity and style into their work.

One question to be answered in feedback:

Are the breaks effective or even necessary in separating the introduction, development and conclusion?

My writing throughout this process:

After coming back from China, I had a few ideas as to what to write about. When these clearly wouldn't spawn a meaningful and powerful essay, conferencing helped me arrive at the topic of perfection. With a little work required to tease out my thoughts, I was off and running. Using Google Docs, I added to my document whenever possible: at home, on my laptop, from my iPad, and even in Java class. I wrote the intro without a problem - the narrative came easily to me - and it has remained virtually untouched save for grammatical and syntactical changes. The rest of the paper was written in chunks - I would type 1, 2, 3, or 4 sentences at a time about a thought relating to the paper. These were expanded, rearranged, and combined to create the essay that exists today. Although it was frustrating to write this way sometimes, I think it helped me for a number of reasons. It helped me write fully-formulated thoughts that existed independently from the others: this helped me avoid writing in circles. In addition, putting the essay together required a fresh set of eyes each time, since I wasn't working from a specific direction. This let me revise the paper several times over before it was even complete (something I maybe should not have done, as now I feel like I may have over-edited).

