

**Third Place, Prose**  
**Grades 10-12**

***“On Writing,” Shira Hanovich***

They say there is nothing scarier than a blank page, but whenever I open my word processor, I find that to be far from the truth. A blank page may be intimidating, but nothing strikes true fear into me than staring down a half-finished document and having to read through my own words. Days, even hours after I have written them and declared them a masterful use of the English language, I find myself unable to even skim through my sentences without physically cringing away, slipping out of my desk chair and succumbing to some sort of pity-induced despair on my carpet.

I had to pause after that paragraph, you know. Not to reveal my sleeping habits to the entire world and then some, but I had to shut my computer and pretend to be unconscious for a moment.

And I’m forcing myself not to delete it. It’s surprisingly hard. I can’t get over the way it’s written. Those run-on sentences and pretentious synonyms for computer stick out like thorns. Even now, I’m trying to change my style. Sparse sentences, a less formal tone, hopefully a reduction in commas.

I still don’t think it’s working. I know it’s not working. I can almost make myself physically ill if I think about what I’m doing too hard. How egoistic can I make myself out to be? I’m not an essayist, far from it, and I find my own writing style to be conversational at best and awkward at worst. Even now, seconds after each word goes down on the page, I am holding my pinkie back from the delete key. No one likes to read paragraphs of self-deprecation, funny as I might think they are.

See how I’m trying to fix things? See how my writing style is hardly consistent enough to follow? Sitting down to write this, it was supposed to be a formal

essay: no first-person, no contractions, and absolutely no starting sentences with Ands and Buts, despite how much I like the sound. And also no delete key.

But no delete key means that once I've lost interest in the concept and need to fix it, I'm not allowed to.

This was supposed to be an exercise in restraint, I think. Or self-acceptance or whatever. I couldn't tell you now. Perhaps I could if I read back, but as I've already said,

I'd really rather not.

*Shira Hanovich is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Louis Park High School. She enjoys writing, reading, theater lighting, science fiction, watching video essays, and horror games.*