

What would I say?

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It's not very often that I read the morning's news and think there's not a lot I want to say. This morning happens to be one such occasion. That may, of course, be because I need to go on holiday (coming, soon). And it may be that the world is already heading that way. What it did remind me of is a conversation I had recently.

The conversation was in a cafe, with a waiter. I was away (which is not uncommon) and the cafe proved to be a good spot to write for a while so I visited a couple of times, using my coffee as table rent. The waiter noted that I was always 'tapping away', as she put it, and asked what I was writing about. We got into conversation. During this she admitted she could not recall writing anything since she'd left school. My guess is she was in her mid thirties. She joked that she had English GCSE, and she admired her children's work, but if she wrote a shopping list it was amazing.

I asked her why if she could clearly write at one time she did not do so now. "What would I say?" was her response. It took very little time to discover there were issues, including both her own access to continuing education and the education of her children, that she was worried about. So I suggested she had got something to write about, after all, and a local paper, at least, to write to.

I had a variation on this conversation yesterday with Graham Hambly of PQ magazine, who also became an [honorary fellow of the AIA yesterday](#). The discussion was on the difficulty of getting people with expertise and opinions to write them down. It seems that as soon as most people see a pen (remember them?) or keyboard they freeze.

Why is this? What is the paranoia about writing about? We insist that every child in this country learn English and insist that creative writing is a passport to success and yet a tiny proportion of the country feel the need to partake in the process. And the waiter in that cafe shocked me into realising that fact again, and made me realise that for many this is because they don't feel empowered to say anything and it is not that they have nothing to say. That, of course, is wrong. The whole process of writing, from a diary onwards, is about empowerment. I wish more would realise that and take the opportunity. The world would be a better place if they did.