My Sense of Style

In the beginning of Chapter Two, Steven Pinker talks about our instinctive tendency to talk but not to write. I found this interesting because I have never thought about that before. When we are babies, we start to copy the people around us and make noises with our mouth, then we make sounds that sound like words, then we start copying every word that we hear. Now imagine if a toddler saw you writing on something and they just picked up a pen or pencil and started writing the same thing you were writing. Children don't pick up on writing the same way they pick up on talking because it is not instinctive. When we start teaching kindergarteners and first graders, we won't have to teach them how to speak but we will have to teach them how to write everything they are saying. I thought this was a very interesting concept because it makes me feel better about not completely knowing how to write well. It is a taught skill, not an instinctive behavior.

Another part of Chapter Two that caught my attention was how Pinker used different styles depending on what he was writing. One style that I particularly liked was the practical style. This is where the reader and writer would be established right off the bat and they would be positioned into their respective roles the entire time. There is no question about who the writer is talking to, which makes it easier to read the work, since you already know who the audience portrays. In this case the writer has a specific goal, and that is to satisfy the reader's needs. This style is also usually fairly brief because the reader needs the information in a timely manner. Pinker makes it clear that this style is usually for relationships like a student and teacher, supervisor and employee, and contractor and customer. I think this would be one of the easiest styles to write with.

On the other hand, Pinker explains how he thinks that knowing the hallmarks of classical writing style will make anyone a better writer. He goes on to explain how classical writing takes whatever form and whatever length the writer needs to present an interesting truth. He quotes, "the classic writers brevity comes from the elegance of his mind, never from the pressures of time or employment." This is a great quote to help the reader understand that classical writing isn't hard or pressured, it is simply giving something a meaning and truth and explaining it passionately and to the best of the writer's ability.