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Academic Life — Lightning Talk Series



# ESSENTIALISM

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# STAYING FOCUSED IS VERY CHALLENGING THESE DAYS.

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- Too many options
  - In many directions
- Too much information
- We need to focus ...
  - ... in order to make any progress



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# THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM

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Choice: Billie Ward, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/billieward/)

**Choice:**

“I have to”  $\Rightarrow$  “I  
choose to”

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# THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM

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Sensitive Noise, Milos Milosovic, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/milosmilosovic/)

Noise:

“It all matters” →

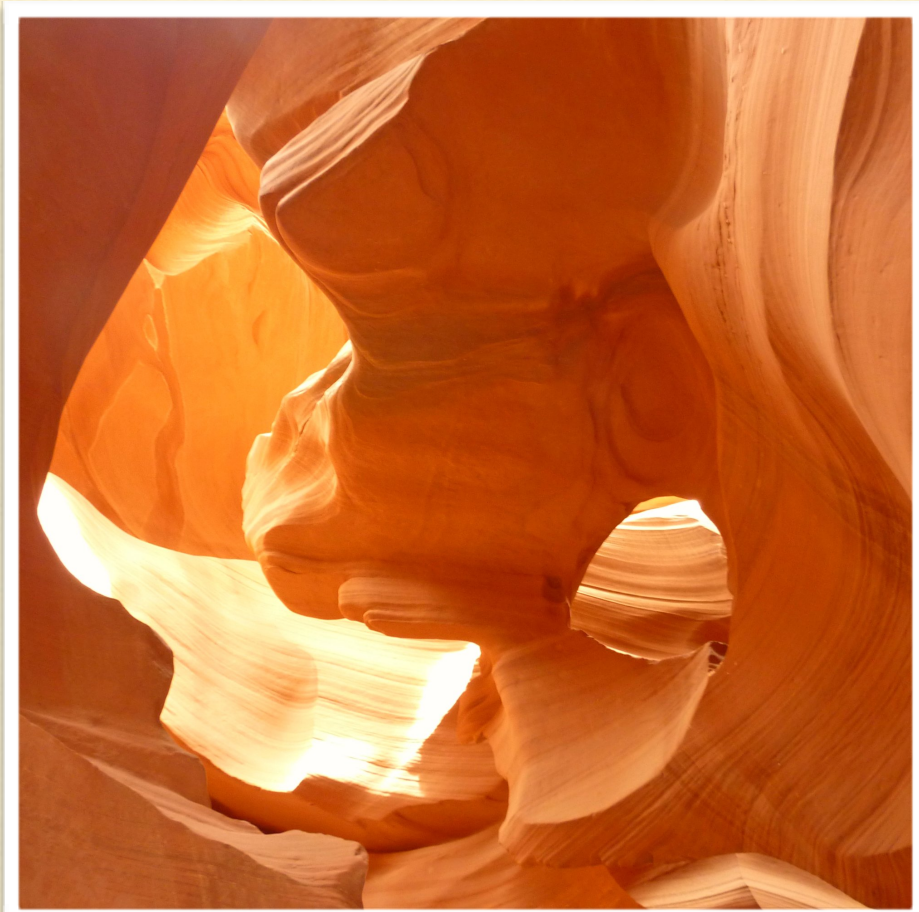
“Only a few really matter”



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# THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM

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Fantastic formations in Lower Antelope Canyon, Frank Kovalchek, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/frankkovalchek/)

**Trade-off:**

“I can do both” 

“I can do anything,  
but

not everything”

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# STEPS

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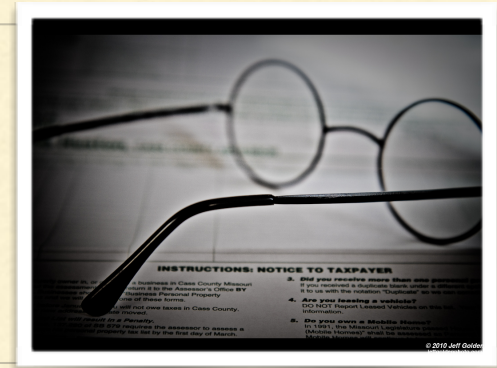
- **Cut the trivial many.**
  - Say no often.
- **Have clarity.**
  - Clarity of intent and mind to be able to say no.
- **Explore a lot.**
  - This is where clarity comes from.
  - Usually missed or ignored.



Steps, pawpaw67, flickr.com



# ESSENTIALISM IN READING RESEARCH PAPERS



- Skim many many papers.
  - 5 minutes time max.
  - Go through title, and abstract; skim the intro, section titles, and conclusion.
- Select few (5-6 for a course project) to read with more care.
  - One hour maximum.
  - Focus on big picture (ignore details); pay attention to the story, figures, and the flow.
- Select 1-2 papers and read them in depth.
  - 4-5 hours.
  - You should know how to reproduce the results (e.g. proofs).

# ESSENTIALISM IN WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS



- Exploration is the secret key here.
  - You explore by writing, and revising.
- Start with an outline (skeleton).
  - Includes your section titles, and one sentence for each paragraph.
  - Revise the outline, over and over, until you are happy.
- Finally write the whole paper.
  - And then revise some more!



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# REFERENCES

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[1] G. McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, 1st edition. Crown Business, 2014.

[2] S. Keshav, “How to read a paper,” *SIGCOMM Computer Communication Reviews*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 83–84, 2007.