
Academic Life — Lightning Talk Series



ESSENTIALISM

Yashar Ganjali, University of Toronto

STAYING FOCUSED IS VERY CHALLENGING THESE DAYS.



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

THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM



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

We have **choice**:

“I have to” ➡

“I choose to”

THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM



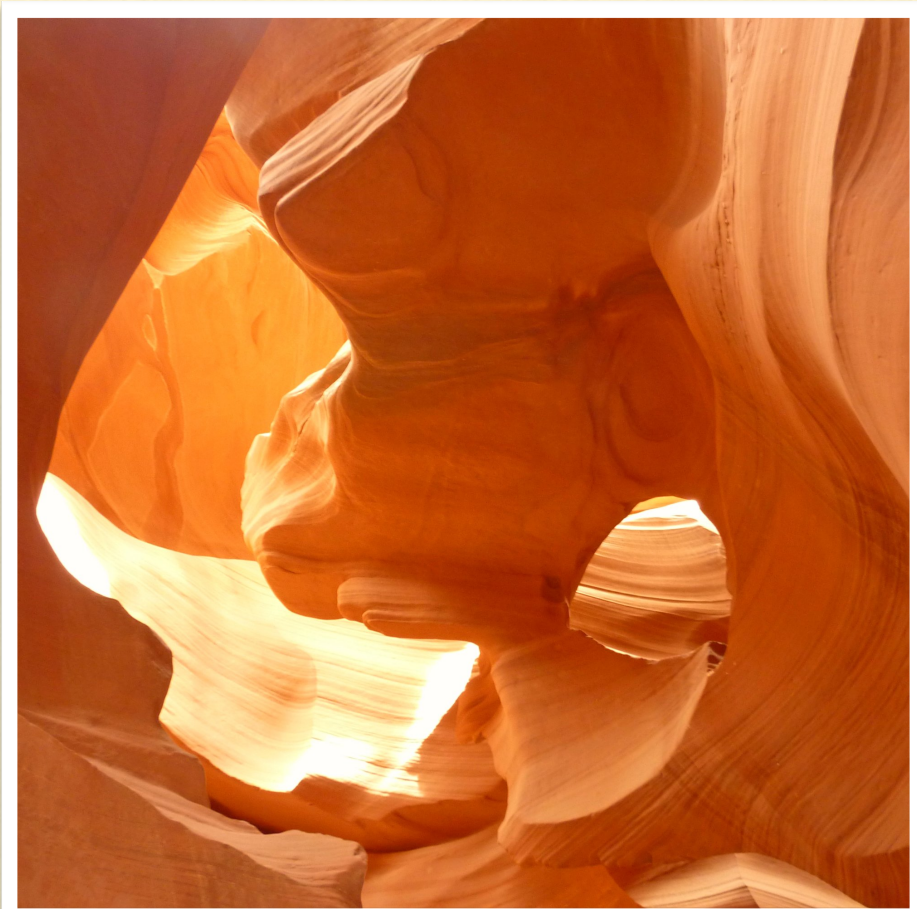
Sensitive Noise, Milos Milosovic, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/milosmilosovic/)

There is a lot of
Noise:

“It all matters” ➡

“Only a few really
matter”

THE ESSENCE OF ESSENTIALISM



Fantastic formations in Lower Antelope Canyon, Frank Kovalchek, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/frankk/10000000000/)

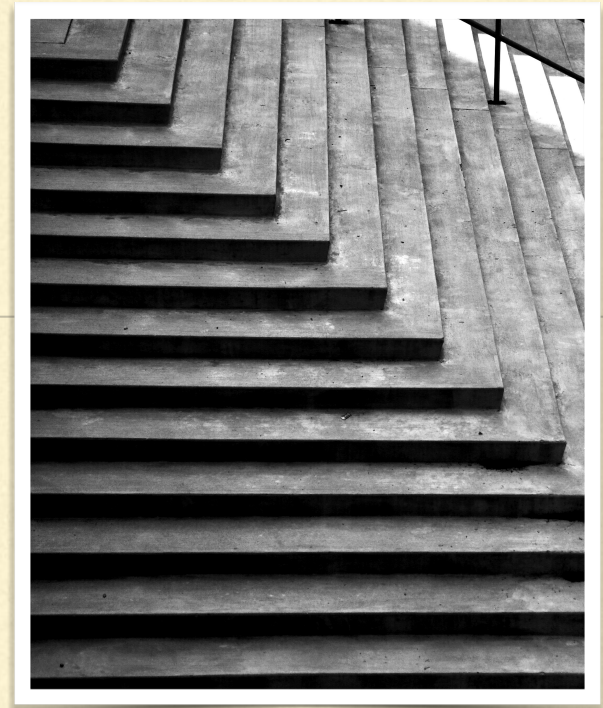
See the **trade-off**:

“I can do both” ➡

“I can do
anything, but
not everything”

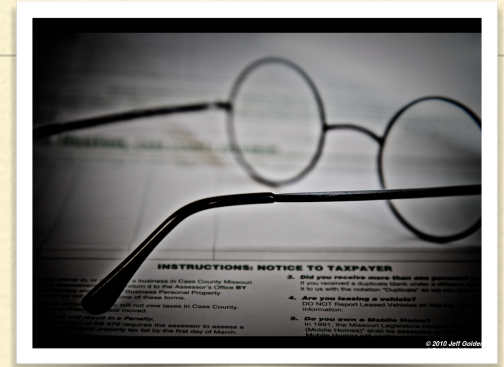
STEPS

- **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

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).

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!

YOUR FUTURE CAREER

- First: explore, explore, explore
 - Take different courses, do internships, attend events...
- Find your passion through exploring
 - It's usually not a love at first sight. :)
- Then, focus and narrow down
 - And get deeper into that area

REFERENCES

[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.