In Carl Lipson’s “Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric: It All Comes Down to Maat,” he researches the ways in which the concept of MAAT influenced the writing of the ancient Egyptians. The concept of MAAT commonly refers to “truth, justice, or order, ” but Lipson translates MAAT as “what is right” (81). Lipson bases his analysis on the understanding that MAAT refers to the “premise that humans must not disturb the balance state of creation, but instead must respect and live in accord with the cosmic harmony and natural order” (81). Lipson, thus, claims that MAAT influences the writing done in ancient Egypt, as it must always be in accordance with the key concepts of practicing MAAT. Throughout the chapter he points to examples in which the culture of Egypt influences the ways in which letters were written. He focuses on specific genres, such as hymns, love songs, texts of instruction and letters. All of these writings could not upset the natural order, MAAT, and reflect deliberate choices made by the authors to appeal to MAAT.

For example, a text of instruction will not just be a conversation between two people. It will be framed around gaining the approval of the king, and demonstrating how such a text of instruction will benefit the king and his kingdom. In letters Lipson points to specific instances where MAAT not only influences the content, but also the way in which the text is arranged. The patterns reinforce the “strong hierarchal basis of the society,” which place an emphasis on the roles of its members. The arrangement, and the entire MAAT system does not only reflect the concepts and values of MAAT, but of their culture. The group collectively worked to please their leader. As a result, their writings, because they would be read in public, would reflect what MAAT means, and emphasize its importance. The letters appeal to the MAAT system as a means of communicating and identifying with one another.

Personally I find the concept of MAAT particularly interesting because of the strong connection between the cultural practices and writing practices. The writing reinforces cultural understanding of MAAT and its use as a system and/or concept.

1. Is there a guiding system, or concept similar to MAAT that we can identify, or that is used, in the writing of our society/culture?
2. How far away have we moved from reinforcing hierarchy in our writing? Have we?

I suppose what I’m really wanting to know is have we completely moved away from this sort of model for our writing, or are our cultural practices still very much tied to our writing practices? I think there is a lot to discuss here in regards to cultural rhetoric, and I’m curious what you all think.