

Freewriting Exercises

The point of freewriting is not to generate something worth handing in – it is simply to generate *something*, from general ideas to specific points you want to work with. You take the time to work through all the ideas floating in your head and write them down on paper (or type them on the computer). Your first freewriting experiences may generate very little that you can put into a paper, but you’ve begun writing and that it is the first essential step.

Uses of Freewriting

- Generates ideas
- Moves you past “writer’s block”
- Works through ideas you aren’t sure about yet
- Allows you to write without worrying about “right,” “wrong,” “pass,” or “fail”
- Helps you to generate more words more freely

“It’s an unnecessary burden to try to think of words and also worry at the same time whether they’re the right words.”

-Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*

Guidelines for Freewriting

- Set a time limit. At first, this might only be five or ten minutes. Later it may last longer.
- Never stop writing. Don’t worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If you can’t think of what to say, write “I don’t know what to say.” Write down whatever is in your head on the page.
- Don’t rush, but don’t go too slowly either. Write the words as they come to you *without editing*.
- Again (because this is important) don’t think about editing, or correctness. Don’t even think about what the next word on the page should be – just write what comes to mind, even if it doesn’t relate immediately to what you were saying before.

Peter Elbow suggests freewriting at least three times a week, but even just once a week can be helpful. Freewriting is writing that is free – free from the burden of evaluation, correctness, and judgment. No one will look at it if you don’t want them to. You can write three pages (or more) of messy points and garbled sentences. But in those three pages, you have likely found an idea, or a phrase, or worked your way towards something worth putting in a paper that will be graded, evaluated, or judged.

“The consequence [of writing] is that you must *start by writing the wrong meanings in the wrong words*; but keep writing until you get to the right meanings in the right words. Only in the end will you know what you are saying.”

-Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*

The Freewriting Exercise, quotations, and suggestions are all taken from the following:

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Print.

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