

Free to Write

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Needed: Timer, Pen or Pencil, Paper. You may use a computer, but at least some of the time it will be helpful to you to use pen and paper—it's a different physical sensation. If English is a second language, use either or both languages. You may even mix languages if you wish.

Basic Instructions

1. Set a short time limit (anywhere from 3-20 minutes). Start short and build up.
2. Begin with the suggested phrase, topic, or question and follow wherever that leads you.
3. Write for the entire time you've set. Do not stop to think or ponder, just write. Don't even lift your pen from the paper, just keep writing.
4. If you can't think of anything to write, just write that you can't think of anything to say! Or, write "blah, blah, blah." Return to the suggested phrase and write some more. It's okay if it feels like nonsense to you.
5. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or logic. Just follow your mind wherever it goes. Let your whole body "think" and write out of that.

REMEMBER: The only way you can get this "wrong" is not to do it!

Don't cheat yourself. Write away, as if your life depended on it. You don't need to hurry, just keep pen to paper and keep on writing. If what you write feels disconnected or "stupid" just keep on writing. Don't stop to evaluate. Don't try to be smart or astute. Just keep on writing.

If, for any reason, something that you write startles or frightens you, just lay down your pen for a moment, take a breath, then pick up the pen and start writing again. The act of laying the pen down usually interrupts any frightful moment.

Freewrites are meant to be private. You will never be asked to share or turn in a freewrite unless you are told so before you start writing. Nothing you write in a freewrite will ever need to be read by anyone but you. Freewrites are private!

Drilling Down (Looped Freewriting)

1. Complete a basic “Free to Write.” Or, complete a four-level “Making Lists.”
2. Read through what you wrote. Underline or Circle any word or phrase that particularly catches your attention—because it surprised you, because it feels like it has energy, or because you like it.
3. Select one of the items you circled or underlined in step 2. Now do a basic “Free to Write” on that phrase or word.
4. Read through what you wrote. Again, underline or circle any word or phrase that particularly catches your attention.
5. Select one of the items you circled or underlined in step 4. Do another basic “Free to Write” on that phrase or word.
6. Repeat steps 4-5 as many times as you wish.

Focus Yourself

1. Follow the instructions for a basic “Free to Write”—but keep yourself focused on the original topic. If you stray, bring yourself back to the original topic, as many times as necessary.
2. Read through your focused writing. Make a list of words, phrases, or sub-topics in the writing that seem important for some reason. Do a focused writing on each of those topics.

Making Lists

Cascading Lists:

1. Make a list of things connected to a common topic. This can be a random listing. It does not need to be organized in any particular way. (=List 1)
2. Select an item from the above list and make a list of things connected to this item. (=List 2)
3. Select an item from the list in Step 2. Make a list of things connected to this item. (=List 3)
4. Repeat Step 3, using another item from the list in Step 2. (=List 4)

Do a basic “Free to Write” on any item from List 3 or List 4.

Do a basic “Free to Write” that combines an item from both List 3 and List 4.

Some General Prompts for “Free to Write” exercises

- a. Right now I am thinking about . . .
- b. I remember when . . .
- c. Yesterday . . .
- d. I hope that . . .
- e. I’m really sorry . . .
- f. Right now in my life I need . . .
- g. My best friend . . .
- h. Next year . . .
- i. I worry that . . .
- j. I am most at ease when . . .
- k. I love . . .
- l. My favorite childhood memory is . . .
- m. My home . . .
- n. If I were to plan an ideal day, . . .
- o. The one thing I need to say right now is . . .
- p. The last thing I’d ever want to do is . . .
- q. Write about a dream you’ve had.
- r. Write about a friendship gone bad.
- s. Write about a car trip you’ve taken.
- t. Write about one of your parents.
- u. Write about the weather.
- v. Write about the first home you remember.
- w. Write about your favorite food or meal.
- x. Write about the happiest time of your life.
- y. Write about sometime when you were sick.
- z. I think . . .

Topics

These may be used for “Free to Write” exercises or for List-Making exercises.

1. Things I love
2. Things I’m afraid of
3. My favorite people
4. Character Traits
5. Flavors
6. Sounds
7. Smells
8. Things I hate
9. Favorite Places
10. Exciting Things
11. Things I’d like to try
12. Places I’ve lived
13. Things I own
14. Things I want
15. Things I don’t want
16. People who have hurt me
17. Things that make me tired
18. Holidays
19. Favorite books
20. Places I want to go