

Free Writing

Often when we write we are trying to communicate something to someone in an organized way. Free writing is not this. It is more a process of self-discovery. Allowing yourself to be surprised by what comes out. With mind off the result, new doors can open that we didn't know were there. As Leonard Cohen puts it: "You lose your grip, and then you slip/Into the masterpiece."

Set a timer for 5, 10 or 15 minutes and choose a prompt below and start writing continuously and without censoring yourself. You can also make up your own prompt. No one else will read this. Be as unfiltered as possible. Let it be bad and jumbled. If your writing deviates from the prompts at some point, that is OK. At any point while you are writing, you can change to the prompt: "What I really want to write about is..."

Free writing is the practice of writing spontaneously and continuously without any concern for 'correctness' or 'getting things right.' It is to write or type your stream of consciousness continuously without interruption. As you write to one of the given prompts below, give yourself permission to allow whatever arises into your awareness find its way to the page. There is no need to censure or control your self-expression in any way. No one else will read it. This is a simple and powerful way to free creativity by sending the inner critic on vacation. If you run out of things to say, just write..." I can't think of anything to say right now.... I can't think of anything to say..." until a new idea arises in your awareness.

As you write listen deeply to yourself. Sense into your emotions, inclinations, images, energies and fresh thoughts. Free-writing can help break open the tried-and-true world by giving us the space to simply allow things to come without plan or censor. For something new and innovative to come in, we need to leave our usual pathways and methods, risk feeling awkward and lost and unsure of what we're doing. In other words, we have to give up control. Powerful writing comes from 95% listening to ourselves, 5% recording accurately what we are taking in. Otherwise, we are in danger of recording only our assumptions, our judgments, our unexamined social conditioning. So this is about tuning in and listening to the longings of your heart, the musings of your soul. With free writing, we want to create space for something new to surprise us. We think of writing and listening as two different things, but entering into real relationship with ourselves and our world requires the receptive attitude best described as deep listening. We want to deeply listen to the intuitions buried underneath that can arise if given enough space.

To write what matters to us most, we have to be willing to go to dangerous places in ourselves and say dangerous things. It's far easier to write only around the edges of what matters, avoiding the dark center of our caring where there are unmet, unwanted feelings — rage or grief or forbidden attractions — that are sure to shake up our sense of who we are and reveal the unstable ground we stand on. It takes courage to tell our deepest truths, first to ourselves, then to the world. In reflecting on his writing process, the author Hermann Hesse said: "My story isn't sweet and harmonious like invented stories. It tastes of folly and bewilderment, of madness and dream, like the life of all people who no longer want to lie to themselves." As you write you can notice if there are things bubbling to the surface that you would rather not admit to yourself. Some things might feel uncomfortable or risky to say. Let them all pour forth. Write freely...

It took courage...
I don't want to look at...
What matters most...
Stuckness feels like...
I want it, but I don't want it...
I don't know...
I am confused by...
Love is...
The goodness in me...
Without the burden of tomorrow...
Hidden in the ordinary...
Hope breaks open...
I want to ask my father...
Happy for no reason...

My real obsession...
I'd love someone to know this about me...
At the peak of my life...
In the forest...
Right now...
My work is...
I'm reluctant to let others know that...
What I love about my work...
My biggest challenge at work is...
I am tired of...
I am looking forward to...
I would like...
I love giving...
What I really want to write about is...