



School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center

"Because writers need readers"

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Freewriting

Many students are fearful of picking up a pen to begin writing: "I don't have anything to say" is a common reason for the trepidation. One method of getting words down on paper is freewriting. This pre-invention technique is one of the easiest ways to get started writing and to open up subjects of interest.

Freewriting means writing without stopping for a prescribed ten-minute period. You may stay on one subject, vacillate between subjects, or produce a stream-of-consciousness. You may write in single words, non-sensical successions of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. If you get stuck, you can repeat the last word written until something else comes to mind. The content and form are not the point: the single, mechanical goal is to continue writing without stopping for ten minutes. The goal of freewriting is not the product of the writing but the process of doing the writing.

Freewriting addresses the basic difficulty of finding words in your mind and putting them down on a piece of paper. Daily use of freewriting helps you get over the block of getting started, over the worry of not having a good enough idea or the right words. Freewriting is an ideal way to separate the invention process from arrangement and revision activities. Ideas emerge with greater ease after you have some words on paper. Freewriting gets the process started **before** you try to formulate ideas. Considerations of spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and arrangement of ideas are not important; in fact, they are detriments in freewriting. Instead of questioning, "How should I write that idea?" you are discovering ideas after you have written down the ideas. In what Peter Elbow in Writing With Power (Oxford University Press, 1981) calls "this special mode of focusing-but-not-trying,... words are chosen by the sequence of the words themselves or the thought, not by the conscious self"(p.16).

If you have difficulty continuing to write for ten minutes, just write about what you feel—"I feel funny doing this"—until you think of something else to say. Or after five minutes, continue to write while shifting to describing the room or complaining about inflation. Remember, don't "grade" freewriting. Because the process is the goal, freeing yourself to write is all that matters. You may, however, benefit from reading immediately what you have written. Look for and underline an idea you like or words that fit well together. If writing about one subject comes very easily, consider how you might approach that in an essay. Your fluency probably indicates the kind of interest and knowledge which create good writing.

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