How to Improve Your Writing With Freewriting: 5 Freewriting Techniques and Tips

Written by MasterClass
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https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-improve-your-writing-with-freewriting#what-is-freewriting

What Is Freewriting?

Freewriting is the practice of writing without a prescribed structure, which means no outlines, cards, notes, or editorial oversight. In freewriting, the writer follows the impulses of their own mind, allowing thoughts and inspiration to appear to them without premeditation.

What Are the Benefits of Freewriting?

- **Creative expression**. Many writers embrace freewriting as a way to find unexpected inspiration. Outlines and notes can be wonderful for the purpose of staying on task, but they can sometimes stifle the creativity that comes from free association. This is where freewriting comes in. By starting with a rough idea, but without pre-planned details, a writer opens themself up to discovery and new found inspiration.
- **Writer's block**. Writers who feel in a style rut, or even those who actively experience writer's block, may benefit from a freewriting exercise as part of their formal writing process. By forcing themselves to put words on a page, a writer may be able to alleviate their anxiety about writing and allow them to be more creative.
- **Speed**. Freewriting is typically faster than other forms of draft writing or outlining because you are simply writing without a strict form to follow and without organizing your thoughts.

What Do You Need to Start Freewriting?

It does not take much to start a freewriting session. The first time you freewrite, all you need is a writing mechanism (either a computer or a piece of paper) and an idea. From here, all you must do is gather your thoughts and start writing, allowing a stream of consciousness to inspire the words on the page.

Some freewriters set a time limit on their freewriting session. After a predetermined amount of time, they stop writing and evaluate what's on the page. If the piece of writing has yielded good ideas, then the author typically continues the process. If, on the other hand, the practice of freewriting isn't offering enough structure, the author may abandon this technique in favor of something more traditionally structured.

Like any skill set, the abilities required for effective freewriting will increase with sustained practice. The first time you attempt to freewrite, you may end up with some unusable material. But with writing practice and a little healthy self-criticism, you can use your early freewriting practice to refine your technique and ultimately unleash your creativity.

5 Tips and Techniques for Freewriting

One of the beauties of freewriting is that there are no rules to the technique, other than not being bound by previously drafted outlines or notes. However, some approaches are more successful than others. Here are some tips to making your freewriting a fun and productive undertaking.

1. 1. **Just write**. Any writing coach or writing teacher will tell you that you must segregate your writing process from your editing process. When it comes to freewriting, first drafts are repositories for every idea that comes to mind, however vague or tangential. Don't worry about word count, don't worry about market viability, don't worry about sentence structure, don't even worry about spelling. Unleash your creativity, let the ideas flow, and trust that there will be time for editing later. This rule applies whether you wish to write a novel, a play, a short story, or a poem.
2. 2. **Gather topics beforehand to avoid using outlines**. Freewriting doesn't necessarily mean you write without having an idea about your topic or story. Even the most committed freewriters tend to have some degree of a prewriting technique whereby they ruminate on their subject matter in a broad, general sense. You don't have to pre-plan details before you start writing, but it helps to know in the broadest sense what it is you think you'll write about.
3. 3. **Time yourself**. If you are experiencing writer's block, commit to getting words down on the page within the first 60 seconds of writing. Perhaps those first words will not yield anything, but think of them metaphorically as the first drops you put into the five gallon bucket that is your novel. There is nothing to be gained by staring at a page or computer screen for any great period of time.
4. 4. **Combine freewriting with traditional outlines or notes**. While it can be quite satisfying to say that one wrote an entire novel using freewriting techniques (as Jack Kerouac is said to have done with *On the Road*) what readers care about most is the quality of your writing. With this in mind, start a project with a substantive freewriting session. Depending on what you produce, you may want to use that content as fodder for a formal process that more closely conforms to the traditional rules of writing (outlines, notes, etc.). Let that outline or set of notes guide the remainder of your writing on the project. Remember, too, that you can always toggle back to freewriting at any point.
5. 5. **Do bring ideas to your sessions**. Some writers, particularly poets, begin sessions with no ideas or themes they plan to tackle—they simply begin writing with the first word or phrase that comes to mind, and then they let the process unfold from there. While you can work toward this point, if you're new to the medium of writing and are seeking to unleash the writer within, plan your freewriting sessions when you have a strong idea of your story or theme. The most effective writing has thematic or narrative consistency, and starting with a small germ of an idea may help you achieve that consistency.

Want to Become a Better Writer?

Whether you're creating a story as an artistic exercise or trying to get the attention of publishing houses, mastering the art of fiction writing takes time and patience. No one knows this better than Joyce Carol Oates, the author of some 58 novels and thousands of short stories, essays, and articles. In Joyce Carol Oates's

MasterClass on the art of the short story, the award-winning author and Princeton University creative writing professor reveals how to extract ideas from your own experiences and perceptions, experiment with structure, and improve your craft one sentence at a time.
Want to become a better writer? The MasterClass Annual Membership provides exclusive video lessons on plot, character development, creating suspense, and more, all taught by literary masters, including Joyce Carol Oates, Judy Blume, Neil Gaiman, Dan Brown, Margaret Atwood, David Baldacci, and more.

Freewriting

https://writingprocess.mit.edu/



"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*

"Don't think; just write!" —*Ray Bradbury*

Freewriting, a writing strategy developed by Peter Elbow in 1973, is similar to brainstorming but is written in sentence and paragraph form *without stopping.* Thus, it . . .

1. increases the flow of ideas and reduces the chance that you'll accidentally censor a good idea.
2. helps to increase *fluency* second-language learners—i.e., the ability to produce written language easily (as opposed to accuracy, which is of course important but which is better addressed later in the process).

As in brainstorming,

- DO write down every idea you can think of about your topic, no matter how "crazy"; you can judge later! (And no one else is going to see it)
- DON'T worry about correct grammar or spelling;

Unlike in brainstorming,

- DO write in sentence and paragraph form;
- DO KEEP YOUR HANDS MOVING. If you can't think of anything, just keep repeating your subject (e.g., "busy trap, busy trap") or something like "I'm waiting for ideas to come and they will, I'm waiting for ideas to come and they will," over and over until they do come. (They will!);
- DO feel free to use an *occasional* word from your native language if you can't think of the English word, but don't overdo this;
- DO keep going for 15 or 20 minutes or until you feel you have enough to start to build your paper or research on.
- NOTE: In Peter Elbow's original formulation of freewriting, designed to generate not only ideas but even a topic, the writer writes for a few minutes, chooses one idea or word from that freewriting and then freewrites about that new topic for several minutes, and then repeats that process again, successively refining their topic. This process can be a useful one if you are truly starting from scratch and are not even sure what you want to write your paper about.