



Freewriting

Most of us have internal editors—voices in our heads that tell us we’re doing something wrong or that what we’ve written sounds silly. When you’re in the invention stage, turning off that negative voice is very important. As writer Anne Lamott reminds us, writing is primarily about getting a first draft down on paper. The first draft is what leads to a good second and great third draft. Here are some activities for moving toward a first draft.

Freewriting (Peter Elbow):

1. Find a quiet spot where you feel comfortable and relaxed. Be sure you have a clock or watch with you.
2. Try to write for 5 minutes without stopping. The only rule of freewriting is that your pen can’t leave the page and it must keep moving. Don’t worry about grammatical rules or even what you’re writing about. If you get stuck, just write anything—even “I’m stuck I’m stuck I’m stuck”—until you become unstuck. Write whatever is in your head: ideas, questions, song lyrics, etc.

Focused Freewriting:

This is a version of freewriting, but with a little more structure to help you focus your ideas. Here you give yourself a prompt—maybe it’s “things I want to write about” or “why writing is so hard” or a part of the assignment your instructor has given you (taking on the whole assignment will likely be too much). The point here is to generate material without yet judging or editing it. If you find even one useful idea or sentence, you’ve made progress!

Looping:

1. Here you can use your previous freewrites to generate some more focused text.
2. Begin with your freewrite. Now, reread it and underline an idea or image or even just a phrase that intrigues or surprises you.
3. Write your underlined phrase or sentence or paragraph on a fresh sheet of paper and use it to begin a focused freewrite.
4. Repeat this process two or three times, always beginning your focused freewrite with something you’ve taken from the previous freewrite.
5. Once you complete this process, it may be wise to let the writing sit for a bit. When you return to it, see what connections you can draw as you reread. Are there any patterns or trends? Can you see yourself looping toward any ideas in particular? What does this exercise teach you about where your interests and passions really are? What writing, or what ideas, can you keep as you push your piece forward?

Lee, Amy and Chris W. Gallagher. *Engaging Writing*. White Plains, NY: Longman Press, Forthcoming.