

Free Writing

Free writing is done in the following way:

1. Write whatever comes into your head without any judgment that it's good or bad, too intense, ugly or weird – just write!
2. Your pen or pencil must never leave the page and you must not stop writing – even if you simply write, “I don't know what to write.” Just write.
3. Don't worry about spelling or grammar, or punctuation or how neat your handwriting is – just write.
4. Don't stop writing if you become upset, scared, angry, bored or excited – just write!
5. Write from a prompt (a given topic) or just whatever comes to mind but set a clear time limit of four minutes or ten minutes or two minutes and set a timer or look at your watch and when time is up, stop writing.

Of course, since no one will read this you are free to recycle it, or burn it or frame it and hang it on your wall.

Why Writing?

Writing is something you can do anywhere, anytime; at three in the morning while everyone else is asleep, while waiting for the dentist or at the laundry or in the kitchen. It is cheap, portable and quiet. It can help you figure out how you feel, what you think, what you need, what you want to say or how you handle a situation. It can surprise you or shock you. And it can achieve all of these things even if you do not think of yourself as a writer or if you don't like writing. We think and feel different things when we write to when we talk or listen. Don't worry about your spelling, or your level of education or your handwriting. We all have a deep need to express ourselves and writing can achieve this. You may also want to draw, or stick down magazine pictures or copy interesting quotes made by other people. But always try to include your own words as well if you can.

Journal Writing

Journal writing is like free writing without a time limit. Try to choose a time and a place that is quiet and where you won't be interrupted - half an hour is usually enough. It may be hard for you arrange this but remember how important it is to give yourself time and how much you deserve it. Try to forget everything that you have ever been told about writing. You are not trying to use perfect grammar or your neatest handwriting or even something that makes complete sense to others. Write without stopping and go at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you get stuck and can't think of what to write next then just write that: “I can't think of what to write next.” If you are hating the exercise then write: “I am hating this!”. Allow yourself to take it a step at a time and maybe you will go forward. You can spell badly and not put the full stops and commas in the right places, just get it down. And when you have finished spend some time thinking about what you wrote and reading it over to yourself.

You don't have to but if there is someone you feel like sharing this with then read it aloud to them. This person should be someone you feel you can be completely natural with and who will not be negative about what you write. Tell them that you'd like them not to criticise what you have written and explain to them what these writing exercises are about for you in this course. If you feel vulnerable or upset or angry you may need that person to comfort you and you need to tell them this so they know what you need. Or you might need to write more.

If ever you feel silly about your writing then remember the words of a famous French woman writer of the last century, Collette, who wrote very finely in a style all her own uninfluenced by any other writer. She said:

"You will do foolish things, but do them with enthusiasm."

We hope with this in mind you will enjoy your writing unselfconsciously and in doing so reflect and learn from all that writing has to offer.

References:

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Julia Cameron, The Artist's Way, p. 101, Macmillan Publishers, London, 1994.

Anne Schuster, To the Islands: A Creative Writing Workbook, Siber Ink, Cape Town, 2014.