



Freewriting as a writing technique

by Peter Elbow

The point of freewriting exercises is not to produce something ready to read - but simply to produce something: Starting with general ideas and ending with specific points you want to work on. You take the time to sift through all the ideas that are buzzing around in your head and get them down on paper. Your first attempts at freewriting may not necessarily seem useful for an academic paper, but at least you have started writing - and thus taken the first, but crucial, step.

What can I gain from freewriting?

- Developing ideas and taking them further
- Reduce or prevent 'writer's block'
- Seemingly inadequate ideas are worked through
- Writing without 'right/wrong', without pressure to perform
- Free production of words

“It's an unnecessary burden to try to think of words and also worry at the same time whether they're the right words.”

– Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*

Tips for freewriting

- Set a specific time frame: at first it may only be five or ten minutes, later it can be more.
- Write spontaneously, go for it. Never stop writing! Don't worry about pronunciation, grammar or punctuation.
- If you can't think of anything else, keep writing 'I can't think of anything'. Just write down what's on your mind.
- Try to get and stay in the flow of writing. Just write down the words without correcting!
- Again (because it's important): Don't think about improving or being correct. Don't even think about the next word on the page; just write whatever comes to mind, even if it has nothing to do with the previous word.





According to Peter Elbow, you should freewrite at least three times a week, but even once a week is helpful. Freewriting means writing freely - without the annoying worry of evaluation or correctness. Nobody will look at what you have written unless you want them to. It's easy to write three (or more) pages of jumbled up stuff and incomprehensible sentences. However, it is possible, even very likely, that you have used a useful idea or formulation in these three pages that will find its way into a paper that will ultimately be graded or evaluated.

“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, *Writing Without Teachers*

