

Lesson Plan

Any of the questions below could be prompts for free-writing exercises. Peter Elbow defines freewriting as "private, non-stop writing" (85).

- Developing writers are not required to show what they've written to anyone.
- Since it is a free-writing exercise, writer is free to deviate or digress.
- Free-writers should not censor themselves: they can say whatever they like, and grammar, spelling, coherence are non-issues.
- Writers participating in this exercise do not need to be concerned with how good the writing is: it doesn't even need to make sense.

The only rule is that they have to keep writing for the prescribed time: five, ten or fifteen minute periods. A monitor or facilitator chooses the prompt and sets the time.

Elbow distinguishes between *pure* freewriting (described above), *focused* freewriting (where writers try not to digress unless the digression somehow informs the topic) and *public* freewriting (where writers are asked to be prepared to share with others whatever they have written) (86).

Rowena Murray suggests that free-writers write in complete sentences, expressing complete thoughts (88), and lists a number of uses for freewriting (94):

- As a warm-up for writing
- To look for topics
- To sift through topics
- To write in short bursts
- To get into the 'writing habit'
- To develop fluency
- To clarify your thoughts
- To stop yourself editing too soon
- To find or choose between topics
- To do incremental writing, in stages
- To increase confidence in your writing
- To overcome obstacles by articulating them
- To put the 'personal' voice into impersonal research

For our purposes, in this exercise, freewriting is used in order to encourage developing writers to explore their process and the feelings, thoughts, behaviours that accompany the process in its various stages and iterations and that sometimes prevent them from reaching their writing goals. Also, freewriting is used here to acknowledge the value of drafting-just putting ideas down on paper without wasting time or energy with audience-based concerns.

Below are questions that serve as prompts. The questions are specific to the interview with Jo Slade. It is recommended that the facilitator either play the entire video for their class or else show the parts that are relevant to the questions assigned as prompts. Give one prompt at a time. It is recommended

that the writing session be followed by an opportunity to share thoughts or responses, either as a class, in small groups or in pairs.

Facilitators are free of course to come up with their own questions. What follows are samples.

1. Jo says that, when she was at university, she wrote creatively first, then edited her work into an academic form. When you write academic papers, do you immediately try to write it in the form it will eventually go into or is it easier for you to write it in another form first, then write it again in an academic form? What form is most comfortable for you to draft in? And what strategies do you use to transform it into a form appropriate to an academic audience?
2. How playful are you with your academic writing? How does that playfulness manifest itself in your papers?
3. Do you write creatively, and how does your academic writing benefit from your creative writing?
4. Jo's dad told her that she had to keep her pencils sharp because she wouldn't know when an inspiration would visit. When thinking about how to approach an assignment, do you ever suddenly get an inspiring idea about how to go about writing the paper? Tell us about that.
5. Jo keeps her pencil sharp by writing a little every day, keeping her hand moving. How do you keep your pencil sharp? What do you do when not writing, to prepare yourself for when it is time to write?
6. As a young mother, Jo's life was very hectic. She found that the best time for writing for her was early in the morning when the children were asleep. What is your life like, and given daily routine intrusions on your time, what is your plan? When is the best time for you to write?
7. Jo needs silence to write and has marked off a space that is specifically for her to write in. Where do you write? Under what conditions do you write best? In what environment are you a most productive writer?
8. When Jo had difficulty getting started, she would write the same sentence over and over until words and ideas began to flow. When you are stuck, what do you do to get the pen moving?
9. Jo could look back at poems she'd written years earlier and rediscover them, realising that she had not really understood the poem when she had written it or re-evaluating it and wanting to rewrite it to a higher standard. When you look back over papers you had written in previous years, what goes through your mind? Do you sometimes wish you had it to do over again? And what would you do differently?
10. Jo doesn't like to write into forms. She prefers to gather thoughts in large notebooks and to discover a form from the lines within. Do you write into a form for college? Like, say, the five paragraph format? What other forms do you find yourself writing into? Do the forms make it easier to write? Or harder? And do you ever feel the form is an imposition? Elaborate.
11. Jo talks about developing her ideas organically, in her head, maybe even her subconscious mind. All the while, she reads many books on diverse subject matter. Work is being done unbeknownst to her, she says. As she reads and thinks and talks to others, she is "bringing the thread through", she is tying it all together. How do your ideas develop? Do you ever write as a way of developing your ideas?
12. Growing up, Jo tells us, it was not unusual to write creatively. Was writing encouraged in your home? Creativity? What emotions emerge when you write about this?

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13. Jo wishes at times that there was no such thing as punctuation. How do you feel about punctuation?
14. Jo talks about how at some point her writing is ready to show to others. Do you ever feel like you'd like others to read papers you've been working on? Can you tell us about one of those papers? One of those experiences?
15. There were many questions about Jo's reference to "the words behind the words". Her final words on the matter seemed to indicate that the play of words was less important than the perpetuation of the dialogue. In your opinion, what goes into word choice? What is the most important consideration when making word choices?

Works Cited

Elbow, Peter. *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Murray, Rowena. *How to Write a Thesis*, 2nd ed. Maidenhead, Birkshire: Open UP, 2006. Print.