

This is a great technique to use privately for your own professional development, and also in teaching students and mentoring newer colleagues!

Freewriting 'is simply private, nonstop writing... [It] means:

- not showing your words to anyone (unless you later change your mind);
- not having to stay on one topic – that is, freely digressing;
- not thinking about spelling, grammar, and mechanics;
- not worrying about how good the writing is – even whether it makes sense or is understandable (even to oneself)'

(Elbow, *Everyone Can Write*, p.85)

Peter Elbow's 'Open-ended Writing' (in his *Writing with Power*) uses several short periods of freewriting, followed by a more leisurely crafting stage, to produce a finished piece of writing, as follows:

1. Set yourself a period of 5 minutes and just start to write whatever comes to mind – don't stop to reflect – don't go back and correct – if you get stuck, just repeat the last word until the flow starts again – the object of the exercise is to write continuously without stopping
2. Relax and read through what you have written – see if there is a centre or focus or main point here – if not, just underline anything that seems interesting or significant, whether sentences or individual words or phrases – draw something out of this piece and write it at the head of a clean sheet – do another 5 minutes of continuous writing from this new starting point
3. Go through the same process again and do another 5 minutes of continuous writing
4. Now reflect on what you have written in the last piece (or the earlier pieces too if they feel more important than the last) – pull together anything significant – arrange it in a pleasing order – can you give it a shape? Write connecting passages – spend 15 minutes on this or longer until you have a piece of writing which you would be happy to share with others.

Freewriting can be used in conjunction with Dorothea Brande's idea (in *Becoming a Writer*) for catching thoughts first thing in the morning, i.e. wake up half an hour earlier than usual and, before doing anything else, start writing whatever comes into your mind, thoughts of the day, snippets of dreams, etc. Or you could use freewriting at the end of the day, to reflect on the day's happenings, thoughts, etc. Or you could use it to brainstorm an idea you're working on for your academic studies.

You may or may not want to go through all the four stages of open-ended writing on every occasion; sometimes you might find it easiest just to freewrite for 5 or 10 minutes and put the writing away for future reference. Other times you might want to go through some or all of the stages with the aim of producing an end product.



A condensed freewriting process:

1. Give yourself 10 minutes to write down, as fast as you can, any thoughts that come into your mind on this subject.
2. Unlike brainstorming, where you just jot down any phrase, for freewriting aim to link the thoughts to some extent. Consider how one idea connects to others. Monitor, lightly, where your thoughts are going. This does not have to be a very developed process.
3. When you have finished, read through what you have written. Look for one key theme or idea. Highlight or underline this.
4. Give yourself a few minutes to free-write on only that one theme.
5. Then highlight a second theme and free-write on that.

You will find that your ideas on the subject are starting to develop.