

The writing strategy 'freewriting' can be traced back to the end of the 19th century. According to Scheuermann (2013), this so-called 'automatic writing' method was first used in psychology to access unconscious thoughts, until it was discovered by French surrealists in the 1920s (*écriture automatique*) and developed by Peter Elbow in the 1990s into what we call 'freewriting' today.

The aim of freewriting is to help you to

- get into the flow of writing,
- develop ideas,
- discover what you want to say/do,
- focus on higher order concerns (eg. clear aim and well-developed content of your writing) rather than later order concerns (academic style, correct spelling and grammar), and
- lower unrealistically high demands you may direct at yourself to write 'perfectly' from the beginning.

How does it work?

This exercise is meant for your eyes only. You do not have to share it with anyone.

Set yourself a time frame (and a timer) for a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 20 minutes. During this time, your aim is to keep writing – also and especially if you run out of ideas, or when you catch yourself hesitating in an attempt to find the perfect phrasing.

Allow yourself to write down everything that comes to your mind, without correcting or censoring your thoughts! While doing so, it is important to keep your hand moving: if you use a pen and paper for this exercise (which we recommend), try not to lift your pen from the paper. If you choose to write on your PC, keep your fingers moving on the keyboard.

You can also set the font colour to white and turn off the spell-checking function, so that you are neither tempted to dwell on what you have already written, nor to be reminded of where the text program thinks there are spelling mistakes. If you run out of ideas, write "what else?", or repeat your last word or sentence, until a new thought comes along.

When the timer rings, you can read what you have written and use a coloured highlighter to mark the words, phrases or passages that are most interesting to you.

Note down what you would like to do here: maybe research a concept in more depth, ask a question about it to your peers or professors, or use it as a draft for a section of your paper?

You can also try summarizing your freewriting into one sentence.

Writing relay

Another possibility to approach freewriting is in the form of a 'writing relay', in which you set yourself not only a timeframe, but also a specific topic that you want to write about. The aim is to challenge yourself to a series of freewritings in direct succession.

A writing relay works similar to the regular freewriting: write down everything that comes to your mind, however this time only about this topic. Begin a short freewriting (approx. 5 minutes) as explained above. When the time is up, either summarize what you have written or ask a question based on this freewriting. Either of these then becomes the heading for your next freewriting.

Proceed by beginning a new freewriting with this header for another 5 minutes and continue these steps, so that you have a minimum of three freewritings and three summaries (or further questions) at the end of your writing relay.

Translation and compilation of this handout by Kai Fleischer and Juliane Homann (studierendenWERK BERLIN).

Source:

Scheuermann, Ulrike. (2013). *Schreibdenken: Schreiben als Denk- und Lernwerkzeug nutzen und vermitteln*.

Opladen und Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

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