

Journal Writing – Thinking on Paper

Exploring Thinking Through Writing

To demonstrate to students that writers explore thinking through experimental writing, I sometimes have them “cube” a topic. Cubing is a strategy [from Elizabeth Cowan] that enables students to explore a topic from different angles (the name originates from the fact that a cube has six different sides). Here are the six perspectives students are asked to consider:

Describe It

How would you describe this topic/issue/event/person?

What characteristics does it have?

What does it look like?

Compare It

What is it similar to?

What is it analogous to?

Associate It

What does it remind you of?

How does it connect to other topics/issues/events/people?

Analyze It

How did it happen?

Why did it happen?

What are the contributing pieces/factors?

Apply It

What can you do with it?

How can you use it?

What lesson(s) did it teach?

What understanding did it generate?

Argue for or Against It

I support this because . . .

I oppose this because . . .

This is good because . . .

This is bad because . . .

Excerpted from *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, pp. 127-128

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Quickwrites

“Quickwrites—writing to find writing—are a powerful teaching tool that help students find ideas, discover their voices, and build their confidence as they discover they have important things to say.”

~Linda Rief, *The Quickwrite Handbook*

Freewriting

Freewriting, a writing strategy developed by Peter Elbow, is similar to brainstorming but is written in sentence and paragraph form without stopping.

Guidelines

Write in sentence and paragraph form.

Keep your hand moving the whole time.

Variations

- **Focused Freewriting**
The writer tries to stay focused on a particular topic, rather than letting the writing take him/her where it will.
- **Looping**
When the writer is generating a topic (rather than responding to a topic), he/she writes for a few minutes, then chooses one idea or word from that freewriting and freewrites about that new topic for several minutes, and then repeats that process again.

Classroom Rules for Freewriting

1. Keep writing the whole time.
2. Don't erase or cross out; just keep writing.
3. If you get stuck, rewrite the last few words over and over until you start writing something else.*
4. If you finish telling about one idea, just choose another idea to explore and keep writing!

**If you get stuck . . .*

- Go back to the beginning.
- Repeat the last thing until something new comes to mind.
- Write “What I really want to say is . . .”

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Natalie Goldberg's Rules from *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life*

1. Keep your hand moving.
2. Lose control.
3. Be specific.
4. Don't think.
5. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar.
6. You are free to write the worst junk in the world.
7. Go for the jugular.

A Few Famous Quotations

"The consequence [of writing] is that you must start by writing the wrong meanings in the wrong words; but keep writing until you get the right meanings in the right words. Only in the end will you know what you are saying." ~Peter Elbow

"How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" ~E.M. Forster

"Don't think; just write!" ~Ray Bradbury

"I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I wrote." ~Flannery O'Connor

A Scene from *Finding Forrester*

film starring Sean Connery and Laurence Mark, 2000

Forrester is a Pulitzer-prize winning author.

Jamal is a high school student interested in writing.

Jamal and Forrester are each sitting in front of a typewriter.

Forrester: Go ahead.

Jamal: Go ahead and what?

Forrester: Write.

Jamal: What are you doing?

Forrester: I'm writing, like you'll be when you start punching those keys.
Is there a problem?

Jamal: No, I'm just thinking.

Forrester: NO THINKING.

That comes later!

You write your first draft with your heart, and you re-write with your head.
The first key to writing is to write, not to think.