

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 Tim Cunningham. 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. Tim brings up an interesting point when speaking about the difference in his routine since retiring. He doesn't necessarily get more written because he is inclined, as he put it, to give himself more time to do same amount of writing that he did, previously, in smaller spaces of time, in stolen moments. Do you produce more written work if you have lots of time? Or do you find that you get more written when you under pressure of time? Does the way that you answer that question inform how to plan for future writing occasions?
2. When working, Tim would grab half-hour openings in his schedule to write. Do you do that? Do you work on your academic papers or poems or stories whenever a moment provides? Or do you need more time? What works best for you?
3. The only aspect of Tim's writing process to have changed after retirement is that he stopped keeping note pages on the night table by the bed, in case he thought of something while sleeping. Otherwise, Tim seems to be writing in intervals throughout the day? What is your process like? Do you write every day? Twice a week? Only when there is a deadline? What changes to your routine, do you think, might make for better results in the writing that you produce?
4. Tim says that writing poetry is like fishing. Sometimes, the fish are biting. Sometimes, they are not. Are there days when you sit at the computer and come up blank? What do you do when that happens? Do you have a way to get through it, or do you just call it a day and hope that the fish are biting tomorrow? What is your strategy?
5. Tim needs to get out of the house to write. Are there places where you find it difficult to write? Where are those places? Where do you prefer to write? Or where do you do your best writing?
6. There are people that Tim brings into his writing process. His wife types up his poems; Dominic schedules his readings. Do you involve others in your writing process? Who are they, and what parts do they play? How do they help you to reach your writing goals?
7. Like many of the writers interviewed for *How I Write, Ireland*, Tim values all of his writing experiences, even those that ended in poems about which he is not proud. Every time he writes, Tim says, it's a new adventure, even when working on the same poem. Do you learn from your disasters? Papers that fail? Or poems or short stories that do not achieve what you had hoped? What are some of the lessons learned from failed writing?
8. Many of the ideas for Tim's poetry start off as memories, emotions or images, or as some profound emptiness that needs to be filled. What initiates your desire to begin to write creatively? How different is it from those factors that motivate your academic writing?
9. The late poet, Donal Ó Siodhacháin, asked Tim about any conflict experienced shifting roles between teacher (analytical, linear) and poet (intuitive, fusion), whether the way one was taught to process knowledge as a teacher benefitted or inhibited his poetry. Do you feel it difficult to switch between ways of knowing? The academic to poetic is an extreme shift, of course, but even between Sociology, for instance, and Musicology, or something similar? How does the one affect the writing for the other?
10. When asked how he knew his jottings were going to be a poem, Tim referred to Larkin, who said that 'once you have the first line, it's off'. When do you know a poem is going to be a poem or a

story a story or an academic paper a paper that will develop? How much do you write before you know the shape of the paper you are writing?

11. Tim claims that subjects influence the forms his poems take? Is that the case for you? In academic papers, do the arguments dictate the form of the paper? Or do you choose a form (a genre) and fit your poem/argument into that form?
12. Tim finds value in distractions and digressions. What role do distractions play in your process? Do you allow yourself deviation? Or do you follow the linear path to your paper's point?
13. Tim values the memorisation of poems required in his school years as it gave him a foundation for the poems he writes, because the recitation trained his ear, by which he measures the success of his own poetry. Did you have to memorise or did you choose to memorise entire or sections of great writer's texts? What value do you place on those passages you memorised? How do they function to develop your voice?
14. Tim asks, 'What originality is there?', saying everyone borrows from everyone else. How does this idea differ from the academic concept of originality? Do we borrow from others when we write? How do we do it, and how is it different, if it is different, from the way poets borrow from other poets?
15. When asked whether a person should write for others or write for one's self, Tim says that 'in the first place, you've got to write for yourself'. To what extent do you have to write for yourself and do you have to write for others? Where is the line?

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, Berkshire: Open UP, 2006. Print.