

Lesson Plan

Any of the questions below could be prompts for in-class 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, though they might use what they've written to inform a follow-up discussion.
- Since it is a free-writing exercise, the 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—it's private!
- Writers participating in this exercise do not need to be concerned with how good the writing is: it only needs to make sense to the writer.

The only rule for freewriting is that writers 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.

How I Write, Ireland: An Interview with Tony McEnery

Below are questions that serve as prompts. The questions are specific to the interview with Tony McEnery. It is recommended that the facilitator either plays 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 sample questions that help writers think about their own writing process and what they do when they write. Some questions ask writers to think about the strategies they employ and to evaluate whether those strategies are helping them to, or preventing them from, achieving their writing goals. Please let us know if you have any questions that you thought were particularly effective for helping students to develop themselves as writers.

1. A characteristic of Tony's writing process is that he does a great deal of thinking before he writes anything. He only begins writing when he has outlined in his head what he is going to say. Others might begin writing without even knowing where the paper is going. How do you begin writing a paper?
2. Mood also plays a big part in when and in how much Tony writes: "If the muse wasn't on my shoulder, I didn't write." How much does mood play a part in your writing. What do you do when you are not in the mood to write?
3. When Tony is in the mood, he says, he can write all day. Some would refer to this as 'binging', whereas the 1,000 words a day target Tony attempted to achieve early in his writing career might be referred to as 'snacking'. Are you a 'binger' or a 'snacker'? And is the strategy working?
4. Tony says that he does a great deal of writing that never gets used because it wasn't appropriate to "the narrative [he] finally developed". The worst thing you could do, he says, is to "put everything you've written into what you ought to write". Do you write a lot of stuff that never makes it into your paper? Or do you try to make it fit somehow?
5. Tony recommended a friend dismiss the importance of an impending deadline, recommending instead that he wait until the muse bit. "Most editors will understand", he said, "if you write and ask for a short extension." Are you dependent on the muse, and have you ever asked your lecturer, supervisor, editor for a short extension?
6. Before he submits an article for publication, he asks colleagues to read it through, giving him feedback. He returns the favour by reading and giving feedback on drafts written by colleagues. Do you have such a relationship with any of your peers or colleagues? If yes, how does this arrangement benefit you?
7. Talking to colleagues about a paper he is in the process of writing is an integral part of Tony's drafting strategy. Would this be something that you practice? And what does this strategy do for you? How does it help you to achieve your writing goals?
8. Tony says something interesting about being generous with ideas, saying that if you are unable to pursue your ideas, someone else may have the time or inclination, and that we should allow for this. Do you share good ideas, or do you hoard them? Would you say that you have this "generosity of spirit of writing" to which Tony refers? If not, what stops you from sharing ideas with others.
9. Tony doesn't use drafting to develop ideas so much as he writes what he has already determined he would say, then leaves the draft for a few days, coming back to it to check to see if it still makes sense or whether his audience will understand it. If not, he re-drafts. When do you begin to think about audience? How does this consideration change the way you talk in your text?
10. Though he speaks on very complex subjects, Tony had developed an easily understood style. In your efforts to sound academic or to sound like you belong to the community that studies your subject, are you using language to make your ideas clearer or are your ideas getting lost in a tangle of complicated expressions?
11. Tony is a big fan of word processors. Do you prefer to draft by hand or do you do all of your writing on the word processor? What is the advantage of each?

12. One way that people keep track of ideas to write about is to keep them in a notebook. Tony mostly keeps them in his head, talking about them to keep them alive in his memory? Do you have a way of saving ideas for papers that you might write or would like to write?
13. Tony talks about an incident that occurred during a presentation he gave when studying for his PhD, in which he attributed meaning to a quote that was challenged by the author of the quote, who just happened to be in the audience. Tony talks about how such an incidence can potentially deliver a terrible knock to one's confidence. How confident are you in what you write, and have you had any responses to things you have written that have shook your confidence? How did you deal with it?
14. Tony gets ideas from talking to colleagues and the post-graduates he supervises. From whom do you get ideas? Do you ever engage in a collaborative paper? How did that go?
15. Tony puts his ideas on a subject down first, before he reads, so that the ideas of others do not crowd out his own initial thoughts on the subject. How do you protect the integrity of your initial thoughts on a topic? At what point do you check to see what others are saying about the topic?
16. Tony can think and develop his ideas almost anywhere, but he needs a quiet place to write. Where do you write best? In what kind of environment?
17. Tony looks at a potential publishing target before submitting work, deciding whether the article is a fit with the journal's publishing strategy. How do you prepare for submission? What is your strategy for choosing a place for publication? Does the strategy work?

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.