

### 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 Tom Moylan. 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. Tom describes his process as linear. He has to have an outline, and he has to have a beginning, middle and end. He says he could never write the middle section before finishing the beginning section. Do you write without an outline? And are you unable to write the middle or end before you have completed the beginning? What is your process like?
2. Tom plans, putting out his material in an outline, before going to bed. In the morning, he 'downloads' the work he has done in his sleep straight away. Later in the day, he edits. What is your routine, if you have one? Are you a morning or evening writer?
3. Tom's process has been heavily influenced by some of the people he has taught, including painters and architects. From painters, he has learned to layer. He says this approach has helped him to be less linear, more recursive, moving forward and backward along the text as it develops? Is your writing process influenced from other para- or extra-linguistic processes? How have they affected your writing process?
4. Tom speaks his text into a Dragon, a software programme that types the words he speaks. He describes the drafting stage as 'that stage of talking' and says that Dragon has given him a new, a livelier voice. Do you talk out your paper before you write it? Do you need to verbalise it in conversations or discussions with other interested parties before you are able to write? What role does talking play in your writing process?
5. Technology has changed Tom's writing process. The word processor and Dragon have impacted his process in specific, but different ways. How has technology changed the way you write?
6. Tom says he goes through a lot of steps in taking notes, but he is not meticulous. He writes notes on the back of books, on post-its stuck in books, on scraps of paper or in notebooks. Often, Tom would even forget when drafting that he'd even written many of the notes he had taken. How do you keep notes? Are you meticulous? And do you refer back to those notes when drafting? What role do the notes you have taken play in your process?
7. In response to a question of how he comes up with something to write about, Tom identifies requests to speak at conferences or to engage in a book project as events that motivate a focus on a particular issue in his field. Otherwise, Tom is constantly mining, reading on his topic, so he never has that 'eureka moment'. Do you have a methodical approach to finding a topic or does the recognition of a relevant topic suddenly appear? How do you identify an issue to write about?
8. One of Tom's anxieties stems from what many refer to as 'the imposter syndrome', a feeling that you are not worthy of the status to which you have attained and that any day now, someone will expose you for what you are: in Tom's case, a trucker like his dad. This anxiety stems from Tom's realisation that he grew up in a working-class house with no books and no cultural capital. What role has social or cultural capital played in your evaluation of yourself as a writer or academic?
9. Tom likes to collaborate on publications, partly because those others are motivating, but also because he trusts them to be critical, but fair respondents. Do you prefer to write alone or to collaborate with others? What roles to other people play in your writing process?
10. Tom suggests that a negative tone predominates in literary criticism, suggesting that daring to speak about something is unfashionable in academics. In the same breath, he brings up his

experience of writing his Ph.D. thesis, which he didn't really need to do, as he already had tenure. This allowed him a greater freedom, allowed him to treat his thesis as a creative act, rather than an academic exercise. Is there room for creativity in academic work? What would you do differently if you were able to treat your FYP/Master's Dissertation/Ph.D. Thesis as a creative act.

11. Tom says that there's a way of ending a paper without sounding like you're ending a paper, "without going through that kind of mechanical thing of saying: in this paper, I have just done x, y and z", but of ending with an opening up of a space for further discussion. He suggested ending with a question or with quotations or poetry. How do you end your papers? What is wrong with a summary of what you did in your paper? What other ways could your ending be an opening?
12. Finding a time for writing is something that busy people like teachers or working students confront all the time. Tom's strategy is to look at gaps and spaces in his schedule. He would write in bursts during two or three day chunks of time or periods of two or three weeks if possible. What is your strategy? How do you find time to write? Can you write in shorter bursts of two or three hours, or do you need days at a time? What works for you?
13. The concept of a 'transition day' arose during the interview with Tom, the transition between teaching and writing. When writers finally get a two or three day break from teaching, they find it difficult to get stuck in on the first day, and there is a lot of guilt associated with what they perceive to be procrastination. This might be the experience of postgraduate TAs as much as it is the experience of Lecturers. Tom recommends 'creative dithering' as an option, using the time to edit, for instance. Do you experience this difficulty in transitioning between one mode of your life and writing? Is it an emotional experience? And what are your 'creative dithering' strategies?
14. Tom finds it helpful to read aloud when revising. He says it is a good way "to catch things", but also warns against destroying something that worked real well in "the original moment", something that was said in a way that most precisely captures the meaning you want to convey. Do you read aloud to hear grammatical errors or clunky rhythms? Are you careful to preserve what sounds right to you? What is your revision strategy?
15. Tom uses deadlines and a motivator. He likes to get things done well in advance of the deadline so that he can edit and polish before submitting. Do you wait until the deadline is upon you before you get going? Or are you like Tom, getting as much done as possible well before the deadline? How do you use deadlines?

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*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open UP, 2006. Print.