



Freewriting

Freewriting is a brainstorming technique and the basic technique for “thinking on paper”. You write down your thoughts as quickly and uncensored as possible.

What is freewriting?

Many writers censor their thoughts or formulations even before or while writing them down or they check and correct everything they wrote instantly. This behaviour quickly leads to blocked thoughts or to the refusal of ideas that could have been important. Freewriting offers the possibility to think and write simultaneously. This way, the “inner critic” is silenced, and you can write down everything that comes to mind. The result is a text in your own words containing new ideas, interesting trains of thought as well as apt formulations that can be used while further working on the writing project.

What is freewriting good for?

- starting point for a period of writing or to find your way into the flow of writing (the method can be integrated as a set part in your writing routine, for example)
- coping with difficult emotions (e. g. a conflict occupying your thoughts) (cf. Girgensohn and Sennewald p. 104)
- getting rid of unrelated thoughts (e. g. your other plans for the day ahead)
- developing or investigating ideas (e. g.: Do I really want to write about this? Do I have any other ideas?)
- clarifying your own goals (e. g.: What do I want to show with this paragraph?)
- getting clarity on what you have read (e. g.: What are the most important points for my work? What does the author want to tell us here?)
- reflecting on what a chapter should contain and how it should be structured (e. g.: First of all, I would like to say that...; followed by a paragraph on...; the transition must include...)
- planning your writing project (e. g.: What do I still need to clarify for myself? Are there better ways to structure my day? How can I make better progress?)
- as a basis to a draft structure of your writing project

Open freewriting and focused freewriting

In open freewriting, you write completely freely. In focused freewriting, you focus on a specific topic or writing assignment.

Open freewriting is ideal for processing emotions, for example, while focused freewriting can be used to reflect on your writing project.

Instructions

- Set a time limit: 5 – 10 minutes (Set a timer!)
- When doing focused freewriting, set a topic beforehand and write it down as a heading. When doing open freewriting, just start writing.
- Write down spontaneously what comes to mind – there is no right or wrong, nothing is unimportant or nonsensical. Write full sentences (cf. Girgensohn and Sennewald p. 104).
- Do not look back on what you have already written and do not cross out anything.
- Linguistic correctness, grammar and punctuation are not important here (cf. *ibid.*). Think: I am talking to a friend (write in your own words).
- Do not stop writing during the set time! As soon as your writing flow stops, write something like “What else? What else?” The writing hand should always be moving (cf. *ibid.*)!

What else can you do with freewriting?

- Read your text again and mark things you think are interesting.
- Do you notice any new ideas? Are there any interesting aspects? Is anything left unclear?
- Looking at your text, can you deduce which step to take next?
- Which phrasings or paragraphs can you use further?
- Can headings for an outline be derived from the text you have written?

Format examples for open freewriting

- Type your text on a computer and set the font color to white. This way, you cannot keep correcting your text.
- Start writing with pen and paper, just as with a diary.

Format examples for open freewriting

- "Letter to a friend" (As you know, I am currently working on my bachelor's thesis. I am stuck on a particular problem and I wanted to tell you about it...)
- "Dialogue with the inner critic" (Me: I could start with explaining what an open freewriting is; critic: Are you sure you do not want to start off with the benefits? The advantages are...)
- "My desk reports" (Today, Anna had trouble focusing again, I think it is because of...; Maybe she should try making it her desk more comfortable or...)
- "Reflection on my writing project" (What did I succeed at today? What do I want to keep working on? What other ideas do I have?)

Our reading tip: The method of freewriting was first introduced by Peter Elbow. You can find out more about the method in his book *Writing without Teachers*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Sources:

Girgensohn, Katrin, and Nadja Sennewald. *Schreiben lehren, Schreiben lernen: eine Einführung*. WBG, 2012.

Compilation: Writing Center of TU Dresden, 2020.

Revision: Sharon Király, typesetting, accessibility, and translation: Leonie Reuter, 2023.

License: [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/), except for quotations and otherwise marked elements

This document can be accessed in the web area of TU Dresden tud.link/y70d or via the QR code:

