

# Making use of Freewriting as a teaching tool



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# Our starting points



- What kinds of writing do your students do?
- What do your students enjoy about writing?
- What don't they enjoy about writing?
  
- How would you describe your own approaches to teaching writing?

# Common attitudes to writing



- *It is difficult*
- *I don't like it*
- *I am not creative enough*
- *It's boring*
- *I'm not a good writer*
- *I have writer's block*
- *I don't have time*

# Writing in Language Classrooms



- Writing is often:
- done outside the classroom
- a solitary activity
- high status and graded
- meaning carrying
- ‘testing/assessing/evaluating’ target language
- ‘serious’ , ‘final’, ‘finished’
- permanent

# What people like and don't like



- Getting stuck
  - Feeling inadequate
  - Finding time and being able to concentrate
  - Fearing feedback and being exposed
  - Finding your voice
  - Csikszentmihalyi (1990); Murray & Moore (2006); Murray and Newton (2008)
- Enjoying the 'flow'
  - A sense of progress
  - Feeling empowered
  - Getting lost in the ideas

# Creating flow



“According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), there are eight conditions that prepare the ground for an experience to be enjoyable, intrinsically motivating or ‘flow- like’ in nature. Activities which involve flow are characterized by:

- 1 inherent challenge;
- 2 the fusion of action and awareness;
- 3 clear goals and feedback;
- 4 full concentration on the task;
- 5 some sense of control;
- 6 a feeling of effortlessness;
- 7 a lack of self-consciousness;
- 8 a lack of awareness of the passage of time.”

- (Murray & Moore 2006:30)

# Binge or Snack?



## Binge

- Waiting for the right moment
- Writing for a long time
- Waiting for more time to be available

## Snack

- Writing in short bursts
- Writing everyday
- Finding short periods to write
- Writing in 20 minutes chunks/snacks
  
- Murray and Newton 2008
- Boice 1987, 1990
- Elbow 1973

# What writers say about writing



- **“A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper”** E.B. White
- **“You can’t edit a blank page”** Jodi Picoult
- **“Enjoy writing badly”** Karen Russell
- **“You have to write whether you feel like it or not”** Khaled Housseni



- “The first time I write a draft of a paper . . . I totally let go and rant and rave and say unprofessional things, including swear words. Later I go back and change it to something more acceptable for my academic audience. My theory is that the new, more professional words will still carry the original energy of the first draft, and so even my final ‘academised’ version will have more oomph than if I tried too hard to control my initial reactions the first time round.
- (Cassidy via Elbow and Belanoff, 2000: 387)”  
(Murray & Moore 2006: 13)

# Brown & Lee (2015: 438-447)

## Principles for teaching writing skills

- Incorporate practices of “good” writers
- Balance different approaches
- Account for cultural/literacy backgrounds
- Connect reading and writing
- Provide as much authentic writing as possible
- Design prewriting, drafting, and revising stages of writing
- Strive to offer techniques that are as interactive as possible
- Be a facilitator, not a judge, in responding to students’ writing
- Explain rhetorical, formal conventions of writing

# Teaching writing example:



## **FREEWriting**

**WHAT IS IT?**

**WHAT WOULD/COULD YOU USE IF FOR?**

# What is Freewriting?



- “A strategy that can get your writing juices flowing, and involves short private writing sessions (5 to 10 minutes in duration) in which you respond in writing to your own prompts as continuously as possible in order simply to get your ideas down on paper. This type of writing ignores structures, genres, and conventions in order to give rise to a more fluent approach to any writing task”

(Murray & Moore 2006:13)

- Flower and Hayes (1977), Elbow and Belanoff (2000), and Murray (2004),

# Freewriting as part of writing



- “Freewriting has been incorrectly categorized as a prewriting exercise, but I find that freewriting is itself a writing performance albeit with looser constraints. The workshop participant is set the task of continuous writing for a prescribed period-usually ten to fifteen minutes-denying any impulse to pause in this continuous writing to check on spelling, grammar, and vocabulary or to revise ideas, as is the wont in the normal writing process. The goal of freewriting is to produce material-ideas, images, expressive language, stories, language- if not a stream of consciousness at least in a stream of written text”
- (Geok-lin Lim 2015:265)

# Freeing yourself to write



- “Academic writing is not the printed display of one’s fully formed thoughts. It starts with flawed, incomplete, vague hunches, ideas and concepts” (Murray and Moore 2006:6)



- “In getting ready to write, there need to be periods of productivity in which you must write *before* you’re ready, or at least before you *feel* ready, in order to overcome obstacles to your fluency, your generation of ideas, and your confidence as a writer (Boice and Jones, 1984; Murray, 2004)”  
(Murray and Moore 2006:22)

# Free writing



- Set goals for yourself/contract with a partner
- Set a timer
- Start writing and don't stop
- Don't worry about grammar, spelling, tenses etc.
- Don't worry about writing in full sentences, full themes
- Keep writing !
- Don't edit!

# Free writing activity



What kind of writing teacher are you?

(5 minutes)

# Feedback



Discuss with your partner

- How did you find it?
- Was it easy, difficult, uncomfortable?
- How much did you write?

# Free writing activity 2



- How could you use freewriting in your classes?

(5 minutes)

# Possible freewriting cycle

Activity	Focus
Prompt + Peer conference/contract	Students are given a prompt and discuss their writing goals/aims with a partner
Freewriting	Timed writing (no internet, no phones, quiet focused writing)
Peer conference/feedback	Discuss what was written (not asked to show the writing)
Freewriting	Same topic/extension New topic
Peer conference/feedback	Discuss what was written (not asked to show the writing)
Freewriting	Continued writing Review, organising themes, re-organise edit
Peer conference feedback	Summary of writing, goals for future

# Possible ways of carrying on



- Identify opportunities for 'snack writing'
- Set clear and manageable objectives/goals
- Set clear times for breaks
- Schedule regular freewriting slots
- Find writing 'buddies'
- Write in groups
- Encourage freewriting as homework

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