

Beat Writer's Block

Not long ago, I read a forum thread on writer's block. Most of the respondents focused on why people experienced writer's block: stress, fatigue, lack of focus, and scarce time to dedicate solely to writing were all mentioned. But regardless why a person feels creatively blocked, wouldn't it be handy to have a reliable means of getting past it?

In one of my former lives, I was an English teacher. I occasionally asked my students to do a Freewrite activity. There was only one rule for this writing assignment: pencils must not stop making words during the allotted writing time, usually ten minutes. Grammar and spelling were of no consequence during a Freewrite. Sometimes I gave a springboard question or quote to get the reluctant started, but following it was not required. The writing that evolved from a Freewrite was entirely without limit in topic. Often students simply allowed their random thoughts to present themselves on paper. Words did not have to make sense together: strings of interesting phrases with no relation to each other were common.

Frequently, several students' writings started nearly the same but quickly distinguished themselves according to each writer's unique style and thoughts:

"I dont feel like writing today cause I'm so mad at my brother! We had a huge fight this morning because..."

"I don't know what to write. Write write write. Funny word. Sounds like right. Sounds like rite. Rhymes with night..."

"I hate 2 right. I wanna skate. I got some baaaaaad new decals 4 my board on my birthday...."

This exercise never failed to amaze me. When time was up, there was invariably at least one student who asked for "just another couple minutes." Once in a while, the student begging for more was the very same one who had put up the fiercest resistance at the beginning of the Freewrite time.

The Freewrite method works for several reasons:

- * Ten minutes is not too overwhelming a time block to contend with, so stress is low.
- * Because there is no pressure to product "right" words, stress drops even lower.
- * Limited time forces even the most scattered and undisciplined of minds to focus.
- * If a person is too consumed by another matter to write about a given topic, writing about that non-topic matter is perfectly acceptable.

If the Freewrite method can work for actively resistant ninth-grade students, imagine the possibilities it presents to the more seasoned writer! Next time you feel stymied by a blank page or monitor, try granting yourself a very small block of writing time, turning off that irritating self-editor in your brain, and jotting the disconnected thoughts that float unbidden across your consciousness. You just may discover you have a whole lot more to write about than you realized!

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About the Author

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