

Like Lightning

The Magic of Freewriting

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Have you ever listened to yourself think while your brain is wandering? It happens sometimes when you are trying to fall asleep. Say you've had a busy day and you can't stop thinking about everything that has happened to you. You find yourself imagining all sorts of wild things.

You remember when you were at a friend's house and his grandpa burped so loudly that it woke the dog from his nap. As you toss and turn, you wonder why on Earth your brain conjured up such a random

moment. Suddenly, another nutty thought crosses your mind. You see an elderly man standing on a corner, waiting for a bus and humming sweetly. The tune is cut short as the picture morphs again. What do you see?

The human brain can get a little crazy from time to time, which is an excellent vehicle to take advantage of in your writing. Here's how: Anytime you find yourself with a case of the dreaded writer's block, grab a crisp, clean sheet of paper and take a deep

breath. Now just start writing. This thought-provoking rollercoaster ride, known as *freewriting*, might help you discover what you really care about.


With freewriting, you can write about anything. If you have nothing to write about, write about that! Throw any thoughts of structure out the window, and focus on remaining *unfocused*. There are no rules; anything goes. As fast as you can, jot down every word, idea, or image that pops into your head. Don't worry about sticking to paragraphs or proper grammar. This is just an exercise to get your pen moving. There will be time for editing and revising later.

STEP ONE: FREEWRITING

This is stupid this is stupid. I'm writing and writing and nothing sounds like anything. I smell dinner downstairs. It smells delicious and I should probably go ask Mom what's cookin'. It smells like fish which is weird because I don't really like fish. Dad took me fishing once. We cleaned the fish that we caught and the smell was vile! But maybe that's just because it was disgusting. What am I talking about? What is going on here? Nothing's going on. Nothing ever happens anymore. I miss Daniel. He's been gone for a while now. He moved to Nebraska which is only about a million miles away. I've talked to him on the phone but it's just not the same. He's having fun and I guess he's making new friends but meanwhile I'm stuck here with nobody and nothing to do but write about how this makes me feel ... which is angry by the way! Whoa. That's not bad. I should write about that. Where should I start? Daniel and I used to spend every single day together. We were up at the crack of dawn and riding our bikes. Daniel's only flaw was his annoying

little sister, Jaime. She was always hanging around and bugging us with all her dumb little 7-year-old problems. Our problems were older and much more important. But we always had each other to gripe to and now that he's gone, my biggest problem is that I miss him.

See how easy it can be? The author started out writing about absolutely nothing, and soon, by writing every single thought that occurred to him, he came up with an excellent story idea. The author could then go back and take his time with his thoughts and shape his writing to tell the tale of his lost friend.

Anytime you feel you have something to write but just don't know exactly what, you can try freewriting. It won't always produce the results you expect, but that just makes it even more fun! When you surprise yourself with words that you didn't even know you had, you are on your way to becoming a writer. 

STEP TWO: THE STORY

I miss Daniel. I miss waking up at sunrise on Saturdays. I miss plowing through breakfast and rushing out the door. I miss jumping on my bike and flying down the three blocks to his house. Our bikes' brakes were useless to us—we had taught ourselves how to throw our bodies from our speeding vehicles. When I got near his yard, I would settle into a smooth coast and right myself carefully with both feet on one pedal. With the plush lawn in sight, I'd take that acrobatic plunge with no fear, hit the ground gracefully, and collapse immediately into a tumble roll to safety as my bike crashed into a tree or a mailbox, or just ran out of steam.

On the few mornings Daniel was not already outside to meet me, I would stand up, brush myself off, and walk to his front door. I never made it close enough to knock or ring a bell; in fact, I couldn't even tell you if he had a doorbell. My friend would always be there, waiting for me. Somehow, he always managed to throw open that door before I got anywhere near it. All worries vanished as we rushed off to do whatever it was that we were doing that day.

Now his door is closed, and I want to stand up and brush myself off but just don't know how. I was over there the other day, seeing the moving vans again in my head and fighting back the memory, when suddenly, in the distance across the lawn, his front door did open. Some weird-looking kid stepped out into the sunlight and waved at me. I took off like lightning and didn't look back.

I remember he was smiling. I wonder what he was so happy about.

I wonder ... should I ask?

by Bryon Cahill