

Freewriting

For many of us, writing involves fits and starts: we start writing a sentence and decide halfway through it that we don't like it, so we go back and replace words, move ideas around, or even start again from scratch. This is perfectly natural and even has some benefits.

It also has some drawbacks: it can focus our attention on the *details* of what we're saying and we lose the "gist" – we don't get our ideas down on the page, we lose track of our thoughts, or worse: we short-circuit our thinking altogether.

Freewriting is a strategy to get yourself past that starting and stopping point. It allows you to spill your ideas over the page so that you have lots of material to work with. With your thoughts on paper, you can review them, find the useful ideas that you want to focus on, and continue with your writing. Freewriting is a way of freeing your mind from the constraints of grammar rules, complete sentences, and organized logic, so you can focus on your ideas.

To freewrite, follow these easy steps:

- First, choose your topic for freewriting. It might be your research topic, a sub-topic of a paper you're working on, or a vague idea that you want to brainstorm. Whatever it is, write a prompt on the top of the page: "The topic I want to write about is [fill in the blank with your topic]."
- Then, set a time limit. Ten minutes is a good guide: it's long enough to get your ideas flowing, but short enough that you won't lose your mind. Use a timer if you find it helpful.
- Finally, put pen to paper. Once you start writing, keep your pen on the paper – keep your writing and your ideas moving forward – don't go back and look at what you've written. Do not worry about spelling, grammar or mechanics; do not edit or proofread. Most of all, don't stop writing. If you get stuck, try thinking about what you already know about your topic and what you want to know about your topic. It's fine to ask questions in a freewrite. When your time is up, you can stop writing, then mine your freewrite for the gems.

One final note: A freewrite is not a first draft of your paper. It is a brain dump of ideas that will help you create your first draft.