

The Writing Center @ KUMC

PREWRITING

Call it rehearsal. Or call it prepping. In any case, prewriting is a process of discovery. You begin this process before you write a word of your paper. It's a thinking stage, even an organizing stage. You don't have to rely on anyone but yourself to undertake this process. There is no time limit. There is no preferred tool. Paper and pen or computer will do. There is no single required medium. In fact, there are several.

Many writers think of prewriting as seeding the soil. The water is provided by the writer in the form of ideas, questions, lists of words, images, connections, and more. Many of these same writers who use prewriting religiously believe it is the most important stage in the writing process because of the spontaneity involved and thus the deterrence to writer's block. Some writers call it a "word vomit" or "dumping," but whatever the nomenclature, prewriting is both a strategy/technique and a philosophy of sorts. Here are five popular forms of prewriting:

Freewriting

A freewrite begins with a blank page, but it doesn't need a beginning. The writer simply puts down whatever is in his/her head. It's supposed to be a mess. You don't want the inner editor/critic interfering with this process. Many writers start with a prompt to generate ideas, memories, impressions, guesses, and so on. A typical freewrite is 10 minutes in which you create a flow and go with it, not stopping to think/search for words or "meaning." You forget spelling grammar punctuation. It's all tailored to your abilities that can grow the more you freewrite.

Looping

Created by writer-teacher Peter Elbow. Looping is one high-speed freewrite followed by another and another. It's a way to expand a point of view, to uncover a thread in your thoughts when you're not able to think of what to write or stuck with a boring topic. The process: freewrite 10 minutes. Look at your freewrite. Choose a part that interests you or ask a question and start another freewrite. Elbow calls this process the voyage out and back. It's connection-making! You can be wild and free going out, and you can be more conscious and selective coming home. Looping is messy and much stuff is thrown out, but it creates dialogue that's never a waste.

Clustering

An activity in which you choose a word central to an assignment or project. You write it on a page and circle it. You think about it, and as ideas come to you, you draw a line from the circle and write another word in its own circle. The more ideas you generate, the more lines and circles you create. This visual strategy (aka mind-mapping) helps you see relationships between ideas.

The 5 Ws

Who? What? Where? When? Why? And sometimes How? These are the journalist's questions you can use to explore a topic. They are flexible since a "who" question may be obvious or not so obvious. In any case, the 5Ws can generate a lot of useful info quickly.