



FREEWRITING, WRITING PROMPTS, AND THE WRITING PROCESS

How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing.

Annie Dillard, The Writing Life

FINAL THOUGHTS ON FIRST DRAFTS AND THE CRAFT OF WRITING

Freewriting

The concept of freewriting is to allow your words to flow onto the page, uncensored. Read a prompt, put pen to page, and write. Don't stop to think... just write what comes to mind based on the prompt. Allow whomever you draw your creativity from (the Universe, your Muse, God) to speak to you. Use the prompt to conjure up sensory details from all 6 senses (see, smell, touch, hear, taste and "feel" emotional connections). Be spontaneous, expansive, and fluid. Write first thoughts. Freudian slips are okay, even welcomed, as they often take us where we *really* need to go.

Writing Prompts (or Assignments)

Writing prompts are intended to trigger your mental archive. Use them as a springboard from your personal experience into writing. All of us carry around images, emotions, and feelings that connect to past experiences, current situations, and future dreams. Allow the prompt to "inform" your writing, but not "define" it. The prompt may tell you to write something a certain way, but what comes to mind for you is something different. Great! Fine! Write what your creative spirit tells you to write. Anything you write is wonderful – neither good nor bad, it just is.

Allow yourself to be surprised. Use the prompt to draw out your creative spirit and allow her writing to show up on the page in whatever form you choose. Welcome short bursts – small pieces of 100 words, for example, can always grow into big pieces too. Just get something, anything, written down.

Prompts as Writing Practice

I believe there are two kinds of writing: writing for process and writing for product. While the two go hand in hand, I believe what comes first is writing for process.

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Consider: where do you get the seeds for a new piece of writing? how do you get from a series of thoughts to a fully polished piece that's ready to send to a publisher?

In my experience, working with prompts and writing practice is a natural stepping stone on the path to publishable material. Our first step is to write based on inspiration triggered by a prompt, allowing our writing to flow with personalized intention.

I call this "writing for process." You may not be able to see where this piece of writing is going, but what you're doing is tapping into your mental and experiential archive. You're getting thoughts and ideas down on paper. You're strengthening your writing muscle. You're acknowledging your writing voice and personal style.

I believe as writers we need to collect a good sampling of these "writing for process" pieces. They are the springboards for larger projects and help point us in directions we may not have seen or acknowledged before.

Once you have a collection of "process pieces" you can then begin to shape for publication the ones that interest you. Here's where your "process pieces" turn into "product pieces." These "product pieces" become the writings that you actively "work on" and polish. With the "product pieces," you begin to look for suitable markets, honing and refining to publisher guidelines.

The Well of Creativity

I believe the well of creativity is always full—there for our taking, waiting patiently for us to dip in. Using the writing prompts as mini-assignments gives us the dipper to draw our personal connections from the deep recesses of the well. If you're looking for writing inspiration, trust the prompts to trigger fresh possibilities.



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Suggested Steps

1. Read the writing prompts.
2. Quickly, write down anything that comes to mind for each. First thoughts... uncensored. (My recommendation: a writer's notebook or journal as a tool you use consistently for recording these first thoughts. The writer's journal becomes your personal written archive for more material and personalized writing prompts.)
3. If one of the prompts spurs you to write more, go for it! Don't stall. The Muse is speaking now! Don't let her get away.
4. Over the next few hours or days, allow the prompts to germinate. Revisit them daily. New thoughts may come. Through your reticular activating system (RAS) the prompts will attract new material for you. Allow the prompts to inspire your daily writing practice in unforeseen ways.
5. Find a quiet place (or if you prefer raucous, then turn on the stereo, way up loud). Practice a combination of: Breathing - Stillness - Listening
6. Move. Go for a walk. Practice yoga. Leave your desk. Sit in a comfy chair. Go out on the porch. Take a drive. It's often here where you'll "hear" fresh ideas too.
7. Write. Write. Write. Return to the prompts and to your initial thoughts. Set a mini-goal to write 500 words on a selected prompt. Then another... Keep writing as long as you are inspired.
8. Add to, refine and polish those that seem to have promise for "product pieces."
9. Trust the process.
10. Make writing for practice, for process, or for product a priority for every day.
11. Enjoy the journey!