

FREE-WRITING FOR YOUR THESIS:

A STRATEGY TO HELP YOU GET YOUR IDEAS ON PAPER

When you are writing your thesis, free-writing is an excellent way to unlock your thoughts and discover what you want to say. Free writing can also lessen any fears that you associate with writing, help you overcome writer's block, and help you develop ideas that you can later use when you actually compose your text. You have a chance to discover new insights and new ways to look at your project. Are you reviewing your notes from an interview or thinking about an article that you found fascinating? Try a bit of free writing to capture your impressions or any new ideas that you may have.

WRITE FREELY

- Follow a sort of stream of consciousness whereby you reject nothing but welcome anything that comes. Do not stop to correct a misspelling or to rephrase a sentence. Just keep writing.
- Keep a notebook dedicated to your project. Use it to explore relevant ideas and activities. Carry it with you so that, if an idea comes to you when you're having a coffee or travelling by Metro, you can record it while it is fresh in your mind.
- If you are composing directly on your computer or lap top, shut the screen off or hide it so that you aren't distracted by typographical errors. After you finish recording your idea, turn the screen back on and make your corrections. Your ideas flow more freely when you do not interrupt your train of thought to correct mistakes.

TRY SOME OF THESE FREE-WRITING ACTIVITIES:

1. **ANALYZE YOUR SITUATION.** Try exploring your topic by following a traditional plan.
 - **Hypothesis:** What question do you want your thesis to answer?
 - **Review of Literature:** Make a list of the authors you expect to use in your "Review of Literature" and imagine you are interviewing them. Jot down the questions you'd like to ask them and the answers you think they might give.
 - **Methodology:** Describe the steps you expect to follow in conducting your field research.
 - **Results:** Predict your findings.
 - **Discussion/Conclusions:** How do you interpret this? What assumptions can you draw?
 - **Summary:** Can you repeat all of the above in a nutshell?
 - **References:** Make a list of the references you have collected so far and write a brief paragraph to remind you why you thought each one was significant.
 - **Appendices:** List any appendices that you think you might include and explain briefly the purpose each one serves.
2. **EXPLORE AN ANALOGY.** Thinking up analogies can be a lot of fun; and the more you play with them, the easier it is to find good ones. You will come up with excellent analogies on your own, but the following might help you get started:
 - Describe** how writing your thesis is akin to white water rafting or rock climbing.
 - Compare** your thesis to something apt but unusual like a genie's lamp (revealing something new or unexpected) or a nautilus (chambers of new ideas).
 - Show** how the journey towards your goal is like the search for a rare beast like the snow leopard.

3. **FOLLOW A TIME-LINE.** There are different ways to set up a time line. For your thesis, you might describe the way people a hundred years ago viewed the subject, how people today view it, and how people in the future are likely to view it. You might describe the steps you have already taken to achieve your goal and the steps you have still to take. As well, you could answer questions linked to time past, present and future, such as:
 - Time past:** *Where did your inspiration for this topic come from? What have you written before that relates to this topic?*
 - Time present:** *What aspect of the topic are you working on right now? What problems have arisen and how are you dealing with them?*
 - Time future:** *What do you hope to do with your thesis? What do you want other people to gain from your study?*
4. **CREATE A DIALOGUE.** Imagine that you are being interviewed by your advisor or a member of the committee who will examine your thesis. Make a list of the questions that the committee might ask you. Write answers to your questions, imagining that you really are being interviewed by the committee. Alternatively, you can ask a friend to brainstorm as many questions as he or she can come up with and then you try to answer them either orally or in writing. An interviewer might ask some hard questions that put you in the position of having to defend your thesis. You may have to justify the position you take on a particular issue or explain why you ignored some aspect of the subject.
5. **FOLLOW YOUR STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS.** For 15 or 20 minutes, write non-stop about anything that comes into your head that is in any way connected to your thesis. You might write about your personal experience as it relates to your thesis. If the writing leads you somewhere else, go with it. Write whatever comes to mind. Something unexpected but pertinent might emerge.
6. **CLUSTER THEN WRITE.** Draw a circle in the centre of a page. In the circle, write the word or phrase that best identifies your topic. Radiating out from the circle, draw 9 or 10 lines of varying lengths; at the end of each line write a word that is somehow connected to your topic. Draw lines out from these words and add more ideas. When your page is full or whenever you feel ready, start to write. Use any word on your page as a prompt. If you run out of ideas, take another look at your cluster, choose another word, and use it as your next prompt. How much can you write in 40 minutes? Read what you have written and see if anything unexpected developed. Is there anything there that you might bring into your text?
7. **PLAYING DEVIL'S ADVOCATE.** The devil's advocate always takes the opposite point of view. This strategy is a great way to bring out alternative views of a topic. It works especially well if you are writing on a controversial subject. Try arguing against your own position; then switch to supporting your position. Supporting the opposite position helps you identify flaws in your argument that you might otherwise miss.
8. **WRITE FOR A FRIENDLY READER.** When you are ready to write your first draft, write it for yourself. If you write this first draft with your advisor or defense panel in mind, you will likely try to write what you think they want to hear. This may seem like a good idea, but actually it tends to make you nervous and blocks creativity. Your words may come out sounding awkward and your ideas may lack originality. If you find it easier to write with a real reader in mind, then make each chapter a letter to a friend. Discuss the same points that you plan to cover in your thesis. When you write to a trusted reader, your writing tends to sound more natural and your ideas flow more freely.

