



Some Creative Writing Prompts and Resources for Educators

Two low-stakes, fun creative writing techniques:

Freewriting: Freewriting is a technique that asks the writer to free-associate whether without a prompt or using a prompt as guidance. This technique is great for freeing up the students' mind, thinking outside the box, allowing the student to silence the inner editor, look for new ways to solve a problem or deepen their understanding of a text and themselves.

Basic rules of freewriting:

1. Write for a fixed period of time (start with 5 minutes)
2. Use either a physical pen and paper or a computer (I prefer analog)
3. Do not stop writing for the set period of time for any reason. If you have nothing to write about, write "I have nothing to write about" as many times as necessary until you do.
4. Do not erase, edit or correct anything in your writing as you write (this is why analog is sometimes easier)
5. You do not have to stick to one topic or one idea, feel free to go anywhere the freewrite takes you

Freewriting can be hard to initiate without a jumping-off point, so some potential prompts:

- An open-ended question
 - An image
- A great line/sentence of writing
 - Music/sound
- Specific directions (i.e. think of your first memory)

It is important to emphasize to students that the initial prompt is not the only thing they can write about: this is just their jumping off point, or a place they can return to if they are stuck while writing.

Cut-out/ black-out micro-fiction/poetry: This is a great technique to have students play with language, including discipline-specific language, and to form a great connection with a foreign or non-native language (helps get over the "but I can't speak it well enough to write" insecurities). Bring in, or have students bring in physical print-outs of text, magazine articles, etc. You can use discipline-specific texts, including scientific papers, popular science articles, critical reviews; or have students bring in newspapers, journals, whatever text they have writing around. For cut-out fiction and poetry have plenty of scissors on hand. For blackout fiction and poetry have markers that can completely black-out text.

Have students spend some time 10-15-20 minutes looking through the text and selecting words that speak to them to shape into new meanings. They might black out whole paragraphs and leave words that they chose. They might cut out certain sentences and recombine them. At the end, have students walk around and look at each other's work. Students can do this in groups, as well. This can be a great extracurricular one-day seminar as well, especially during high-stress times of the semester. Here are some examples of blackout poetry to give you an idea:

Some reflexive Writing Prompts for Use in all classrooms:

These prompts can be as short (5-minute freewrites) or as involved as the needs of the classroom dictate.

- **Why I write:** Why do I write in daily life? Who am I as a writer? The answers here can mix the mundane (I write text messages to get food delivered) and profound (I write to recover my history).
 - **Some great samples of Why I Write texts (in English):**
- **My name:** What do I think about when I hear my name? Do I like my name? Is there a history associated with it? Do I have history with it? What forms does my name take?
- **Inspiration from reading:** Start a freewrite or an association chain from a line from a poem/piece of fiction related to the specific discipline/ topic of discussion
 - **Here is a list of great poems (in English) about scientific discoveries/questions:**
- **Unanswered questions:** This is a great prompt to open up student engagement and curiosity: students have to make a list of questions, as long as possible, in 5 minutes that are unanswered for them and that they are grappling with. These can again range from the mundane (What did I get on the test last Friday?) to the profound (Does God hear me?) These lists can be specified more closely towards a discipline (questions about mathematics/ technological progress/ future of humanity/ biochemistry/ literature etc)
- **Haiku/Short Verse:** Having students write a haiku or another short-form poem focused clearly on a concept or a topic of study can help them engage with the material but also synthesize information and present it with succinct clarity. The structure of the haiku is broadly familiar to all, and these poems can be then shared out to enhance knowledge for other students in the classroom.

A sample schedule of a 6-week extracurricular mixed-genre introductory creative writing seminar (classes are 1.5-2 hours, weekly)

Day 1: Introductions: Introduction to basic techniques of generating material: a writer's notebook; freewriting. Introduction of the instructor and general writing philosophy of the course. Introduction of participants: how do they see themselves as writers. Share a short piece of writing with the class. Exercise: practice freewriting using guiding questions, an image, a line from a creative work. Have students select the best line from their freewrite, share it out and talk about where the strength of language lies.

Homework: Freewrite -- Why I Write? Who Am I As a Writer? What Place do Words Have in My Life?

Day 2: The Sensory World: Working with the five senses; and description. Provide examples of effective descriptions: image, sound, smell, touch, taste. Exercise: describe your childhood home using all of the five senses, with extensive detail. Have the students select one image corresponding to a given sense (say, touch) from their work and share it with the class.

Homework: Noticing: Notice 5 unusual things as you go about your day-to-day life. Write them down.

Day 3: People We Meet: Working with characters and dialogue. Discuss characters that are "alive" to the students: why are they? What makes them more real rather than fictional? Exercise: Students write a list of adjectives (3-5) describing an imaginary person on a sheet of paper (anonymously). Students select one sheet of paper from the pile (not their own). They write a short scene describing the character and having them show the characteristics described on the sheet. Have the students volunteer to share their descriptions.

Homework: Dialogue: Have the students listen to conversations around them, jot down interesting moments and phrases.

Day 4: The Symbolic World: Talk about the importance of symbols and themes in writing, a creative work as a creation of a separate world. Talk about story as meaning-making, and symbols as essential for meaning-making. Exercise: Your life as a fairytale. Talk to students about fairytales they know from childhood, what makes them memorable. Then have them write the narrative of their life as a short fairytale: who would be the hero? The villain? Would there be a moral or lesson? What essential elements would be there? This exercise generally takes most of the class.

Homework: Complete one piece to share with the class through workshop: can be in any genre the students have been working in or would like to work in. The pieces should be short (no more than 1.5 pages for fiction, 1 page for poetry) and should be sent to all a few days before class.

Day 5: Revision: Talk about the importance of revision and revisiting of one's work. In-class workshop: discuss the strengths in each piece, some possible avenues for revision, some questions the writer may consider.

Day 6: Common reading: students read a selection from either work they've completed in class, freewrites, or homework assignments. The reading can be in-class or public, depending on the wants and needs of the student and the instructor.

If you need more prompts, have questions about any of these, or would like to talk more about how to bring creative writing to your classroom, your university (or local) community, please email me: **mariya.deykute@nu.edu.kz**