

Core Writing (& Reading) Practices:

1. ***Private Free Writing:*** Alone or in a group, this practice involves writing whatever you like, for a set period of time (say, 5 minutes.) Keep your pen moving across the page, without stopping to think about what you're writing. Let your thinking follow your writing. If you get stuck, put any unrelated words on the page until something like a chain of thought emerges for you. Stick with the discipline of writing to time, and push yourself to keep going even after you've come to the end of an idea and find yourself chasing after a new one. Write until the time is up. If you're writing in a group and keeping time for others, give everyone a one-minute warning before stopping. *This practice is particularly useful as a way to begin a class session or to offer a group the time to clear their heads before embarking upon a shared learning experience.*
2. ***Focused Free Writing:*** Focused free writing is what it sounds like—free writing with a focus. As with private writing, you want to keep your pen moving and write to a time limit (perhaps 7 minutes), resisting the urge to think and then write. Focused free writing always begins with some kind of directive (or focus) in the form of a text or question—you might invite students to write their first reactions to a text (or a moment, a piece of language, or an image within it), or you might offer several interconnected prompts or questions intended to help to open up a topic or text to a wider range of interpretation. *It is important to remember that focused free writing is intended to be generative and exploratory, not a carefully plotted out paragraph. This kind of writing is also often public (shared) and can be used to help students articulate and discover their ideas about a text or topic, stimulate or jumpstart discussion, or to delve deeper into specific content.*
3. ***Process (Metacognitive) Writing:*** This practice creates space for you to think about the writing done individually and as a group over the course of a single workshop session or an entire day. In other words, you might as a group to write about the writing (or their own writing) for 5 minutes. *Process writing invites us to reflect on the work we've just done in order to keep some kind of written record of thinking in action. Some common process writing prompts include: How has your perspective on a text or a question changed? What seems to be lurking for you in your writing at this point? What are you now able to notice about your own writing process, perhaps focusing on something that either surprises or puzzles you? What new ideas do you have that you want to return to in the future? How did you do what you just did? If you had more time, what would you do next?*
4. ***Text Rendering / Collaborative Reading:*** The simple practice of reading a selected passage out loud makes it possible to get both the language of the text and the voices of its readers into a room. It also helps to focus attention on voice, tone, inflection, and the acts of interpretation that underlie all of these things. Try a group reading of a longer passage of text, having each person take a line or two in sequence. When that is done, consider reading the same passage backwards by line. You might also try reading in different moods, voices, or genres (tragedy, love letter, alien visitor, jazz solo vocal). *Text rendering is a practice that invites students to collaborate and play with a text, while also encouraging the habit of reading all texts multiple times. Text rendering is also performative, inviting students to engage their bodies in the reading of a text.*

Sharing Our Writing Key to these writing practices is how the informal, often messy, texts are read out loud. In order to maintain the safe space of the classroom or workshop, students should never be forced to read anything that feels uncomfortable (and private writing is never shared). With this in mind, here are a few suggestions for how to facilitate the sharing process:

- ***Bracket & Share:*** Give everyone some time to read over their focused free write or process write (about 5 minutes) and then ask them to look for some portion of what they've written to read out loud to the group. When people find what they want to read, they should draw *brackets* around the selected language and *only read from within those brackets.*

- ***Privilege the Written Word:*** Remind the group to avoid the temptation to extemporize, or to give an impromptu spoken presentation, or to preface the selection with apologies or introductory remarks of any kind. Simply read what is on the page exactly as it is written.
- ***Active Listening:*** Remind the group to listen to each other actively—this means that everyone is concentrating fully on the person reading, and perhaps even taking note of words and phrases that they find exciting or interesting.
- ***Popcorn or Quaker Style Sharing:*** While you can certainly ask the group to share by going around the seminar table or circle, you might also suggest that the group share in other ways.
 - With “popcorning,” one student begins and others voluntarily share their writing at random, organizing themselves with nonverbal cues.
 - Quaker style sharing involves listening carefully and then jumping in to share writing when one hears something in another’s work that connects (or challenges) what they wrote themselves.