

Icebreakers

Pick one, any one – it'll be fun

Tips:

The process used in these exercises is called Writing Practice in Natalie Goldberg's book *Writing Down the Bones*.

1. Keep your hand moving. Even if you have nothing to say, say that without sitting worrying about it but not writing anything
2. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, staying in the lines
3. This writing is for you alone – unless you want to share it

You will be surprised how fluid your free writing is, and how it gets you going writing about things you might never have thought of.

1. Start writing, without thinking, a free write piece that begins with a lie, perhaps one of

I am a gravedigger, I dig all day

I am a cupcake

I am six years old and I have a new dress.

I am a wheelbarrow

I am the coyote that prowls through your yard at night

I had not been out of my house for three years

I have an antique brooch I'd like to sell you

I live in a dumpster behind the 7-11

...or make up your own line and begin with that.

(This exercise helps you realize that writing in first person about different characters helps you develop different voices.)

2. Sometimes if you can't think what to write about, you can start making lists of seven:

1. Seven toys you used to love
2. Seven professions which might be interesting that you've never thought of trying
3. Seven people you haven't seen for years
4. Seven things you can see from where you're sitting
5. Seven songs or pieces of music that mean something to you
6. Seven catch phrases that people in your family use
7. Seven memorable meals (good or bad)

When you've completed your list, choose one item and write a 3-4 minute free write – keep your hand moving, don't worry about grammar, etc.

This exercise helps you develop germs for writing projects of all kinds – helps dredge up memories, interests, preoccupations, and new ideas.

3. Write a one-page freewrite about one of the following:

- Mashed potato
- Spinach
- Bread pudding
- Caviar
- Licorice
- Brown sugar
- Eggplant
- Lettuce
- Gravy

You might find yourself making up a story, recalling a childhood incident, or just daydreaming on paper. Food is a very evocative subject that forces you to write using all your sense. And food plays a huge part in socialization so often these short free writes help you start developing interesting characters.

4. Think of someone you know well and write one page about one distinctive physical feature – their hands, hair, feet, a mole of their cheek.

Use it to anchor a description of how they move, their activities, history, mannerisms.

This is a good way to learn to show not tell. You might describe how someone hides behind their hair, twiddles with it, always checking in the mirror – the reader then knows that this character is self-conscious, shy etc. without being told.

5. List:

- 9 uses for a barrel (if you can come up with more keep going)
- 7+ uses for a ping pong ball in a library
- 5+ ways to cut your lawn without using a mower
- 6+ ways to dress a baby if you have no clothes, fabric, towels etc.
- 6+ uses for a book that does not involve reading or writing
- 3+ more lists to add to this one.

Sometimes, moving from the sublime to the ridiculous forces you to work in original ways and approach things from a new perspective – it forces you out of your ‘box’. Just have fun with these lists, don’t prejudge what you come up with, let yourself go. You’re likely to be pleasantly surprised about the originality of your ideas.

These exercises are taken from
101 Writing Exercises to Get You Started & Keep You Going
by Lois J. Peterson