

Pre-Writing Workshop – **Script**

Open up with a variation of: It's 1am. The clock is ticking. A fresh can of Monster fizzes on your desk. You ask, "How can I get started on this paper?!" Relate to them how we've all been there, staring at a blank screen or piece of paper, but assure the students they **do** have options. Maybe speak with them while you're handing out a blank sheet of paper, culled from the printer, which they'll need for this workshop. You will also need a piece.

- Ask the class (2-3 students—cold-call if necessary) if they've 'been there'. Lecturing loses your audience; active participation keeps them interested!

This workshop will cover a few (but by no means all) strategies for common pre-writing techniques. Additionally, these strategies can work in a group setting or alone. Mention by name: Freewriting, Bubbling, and Brainstorming.

- Ask the class (2-3 students—cold-call if necessary) what pre-writing strategies they've used in the past. Ask those students who've used pre-writing strategies if they found them useful. Why or why not?

Now that the students have been loosened up a bit, it's time to begin the workshop.

Time

Speak with the students about ways they can utilize their time wisely. Show them how they can maximize their efforts before the writing process begins so when it comes time to write, they already have material to pull from.

- I put ideas into my phone all the time. It's always with me and the nifty ideas I come up with while waiting in line for lunch in Mort's have a place to live until I get home. I don't know about everyone else, but when I forget something, it's usually gone for good.
- **Tell them:** Don't feel obligated to start at the beginning of the paper. Knowing that takes pressure off of the students. I relate my compulsion to start with the thesis and **then** began to write, but abandoned it because it wasn't productive in higher-level courses. Ask 2-3 students where they start.
- **Suggest:** A buddy system where the students find a friend from class and they commit to sitting down for 15 minutes and writing the opening paragraph. Or the conclusion. Or something from the middle. Their interview partners would be ideal in this situation. **Another idea:** Find a friend from the class (or the interview partner) and commit to writing for an hour, then compare word counts. **Another idea:** For a starting point, find a quotation from the book and analyze that quote.
- Write down quotes in a notebook while reading. Highlight important passages. I use a little pencil dot by key passages while reading. Whatever works for you! Use sticky notes to flag important quotes or ideas (Ask the students their strategies—you might learn something as well!). All of these ideas are better than trying to recall the page number of that "perfect quote" (Mime flipping through a book—"It's here *somewhere!*"). When it comes time to write the paper, they have a motherlode of information to pull from.

Freewriting

- Ask if anyone in the class has tried/heard of it before. If yes, follow up and ask the student(s) what they thought and how it worked out (or didn't) for them.

Tell the class: don't try to realize fleshed out concepts because that part comes later when they're writing the paper. All ideas are legit, even if the student writes "I don't know what to write" for a line or two. If they try it on their own at home or elsewhere, recommend they set a time limit—5 minutes, 8.5 minutes, or whatever—and then begin! Tell them not to worry about grammar rules because this exercise focuses on idea-generation.

- For this part, set a time limit of 5 minutes. Tell to imagine they had to write an interview about a person, the person can be fiction or real; for example, a friend, an idol, or a favorite character (I usually use Luke Skywalker). Have them write about that person for 5 minutes, you do the same. After 5 minutes, stop, then read what you've written aloud. I deliberately put in a "I don't know what to write"-type of sentence or two just to show it's ok. Ask 1-2 (or cold-call if no one volunteers) to read theirs aloud.
- Have them underline key ideas they can expand on later.

Bubbling/Diagramming/Mapping: Another useful exercise as it permits the students to see results, immediately. It also keeps them in the game—the workshop is not designed to be a lecture.

- Ask if anyone has done the exercise before. If so, have them explain what he/she/they have done in the past. Did they find it useful? Why or why not? **Demonstrate** a bubble-map on the whiteboard. Use the same person you used in the freewriting section to 'tell a story' via the bubbles. Have them bubble for 5-7 minutes on the other side of their freewriting sheet. Students should start to see how ideas separate themselves and group into categories.
- Discuss the results. Explain how each bubble *could* merit its own paragraph within the paper. Some bubbles just won't make it into the paper, and that's ok (I include an irrelevant or bad detail in my bubble map for this). Links between bubbles can help provide transition ideas between paragraphs. Again, this exercise allows the students to have something tangible to take home with them and refer back to at 1am, if need arises. **Get them involved:** have a "volunteer" replicate their diagram on the whiteboard. Once their story is told, ask him/her if ideas are starting to percolate.

Brainstorming (Sort of)

Ask the class if anyone has used brainstorming to generate ideas. If so, ask them to relate the methodology—what happened? Were they in a group? Have the student describe the dynamic.

- Discuss the idea behind brainstorming with the class. Talk about how it is great to do on your own and just list every idea that comes into your head, it really works to have a sort of conversation with yourself. However, this strategy works particularly well in a group. Having people to bounce ideas off of and ask questions can really get the ball rolling for papers.
- Time permitting, break them into groups and have them discuss their characters amongst each other. Have them create diagrams or take notes: who is the most compelling character? Are they different or similar? Discuss the results.