

Creative Writing Invitation #4: Free-Writing—Knocking Down the Walls

"Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds."

- Bob Marley, "The Redemption Song"

To fully explore your imagination, you need to free your mind from clutter or obstacles that impede the creative flow of your thoughts. Like many student writers, you may sometimes think, "I'm just not creative" or "I don't have a good imagination." Such comments seem to be the result of being raised in a society that, from the moment you were born, has been building a wall around your mind, sealing in your creativity with mental barriers such as rules, laws, "acceptable" ways of thinking, peer pressures, and black-and-white "either/or" thinking.

Yet, we are all capable of creative expression. To be human is to possess imagination, whether you're tinkering with engines, solving a complex math problem, or painting masterpieces. So, one way to knock down the walls might be to see creativity as an integral part of your daily life, part of dreaming, writing, running, or whatever else makes up your daily routine.

Picking up your pen or sitting down to the keyboard to exercise your creativity can become a daily habit. Novelist Natalie Goldberg calls this "writing practice," which she likens to athletic training. Sprinters need to work out every day. If they don't, their muscles cramp when they try to run. Writers need to work out every day, too. If they don't, their writing gets blocked.

When free-writing, keep in mind that you are performing a mental exercise, so you shouldn't be afraid to write down whatever is running through your mind. Although the first three invitations in this sequence asked you to think consciously about creativity and your creative writing, this invitation asks you NOT to think consciously. If you stop to censor your thoughts, you're simply adding another layer to the wall instead of taking one away. This invitation asks you not to think but to keep your pen moving or to keep tapping away at the keyboard. Don't scratch anything out! Don't stop! Go for at least 10 minutes. To get started, you can make up a "scenario"--put yourself in a situation that doesn't really exist--and go from there.

You and your tutor can work together to help you brainstorm ideas. Here are a few examples of scenarios that may help you get started on your free-writing journey--taken from *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers* by Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter (the book is in the Writing Center; take a look at it for more topics):

- Using the first person ("I"), describe an event or action you're fairly sure you will never experience first-hand. Be very specific. The more details you incorporate, the more likely it is that your reader will believe you. Include your feelings and reactions.
- Write three short paragraphs, the first on "fear," the second on "anger," and the last on "pleasure," without using these words. Try to show these emotions by describing physical sensations or images. If you want, write mini-stories dramatizing these emotions. Try to make your language precise and fresh.

"Rules" about Free-Writing: It may seem a bit hypocritical to mention rules just after telling you rules impede the creative process, but hopefully these rules will help you break down the barriers:

- No stopping! Keep writing. Don't worry if what you're writing doesn't seem to make sense, or if it doesn't go in the same direction as when it started out. It's not supposed to. Afterwards, you might be amazed at what you've written, happily surprised that it actually came from your mind.
- Don't scratch anything out! For one, this means that you've stopped. It also means that you're "thinking" about what you're writing instead of writing what you're thinking.
- No stopping!