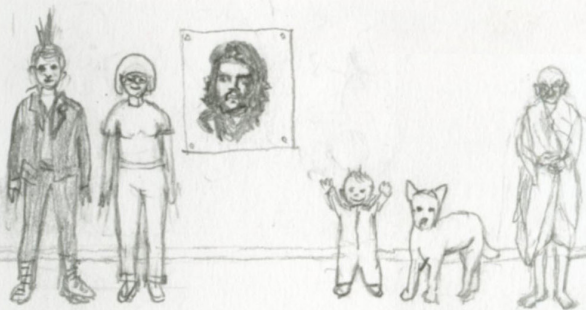


Forty-four Ways to Write:

Creative methods for making text



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For more information and to access online resources,
visit our website: <http://www.ocad.ca/students/wlc.htm>

If you have to write something and don't know
where to start, start anywhere you like.

Try hard
Try a little

Describe

Analyze

Draw

Question

Imitate

Accept

Chat

Reject

Make

Unmake

Visualize

Imagine

Try the opposite

Consider

Read

Intuit

Counter-intuit

Observe

Play

Take a break

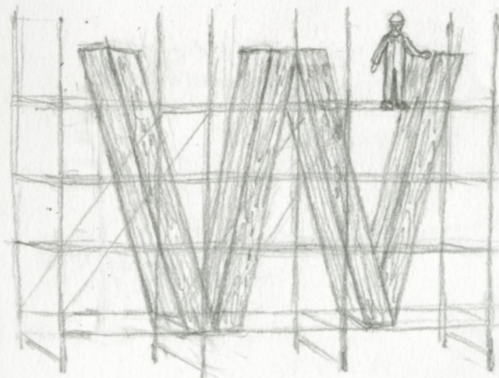
Write what you like: If you struggle with writing in a certain style or format, try another.



Write like you make:

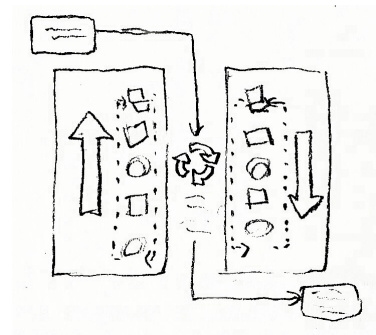
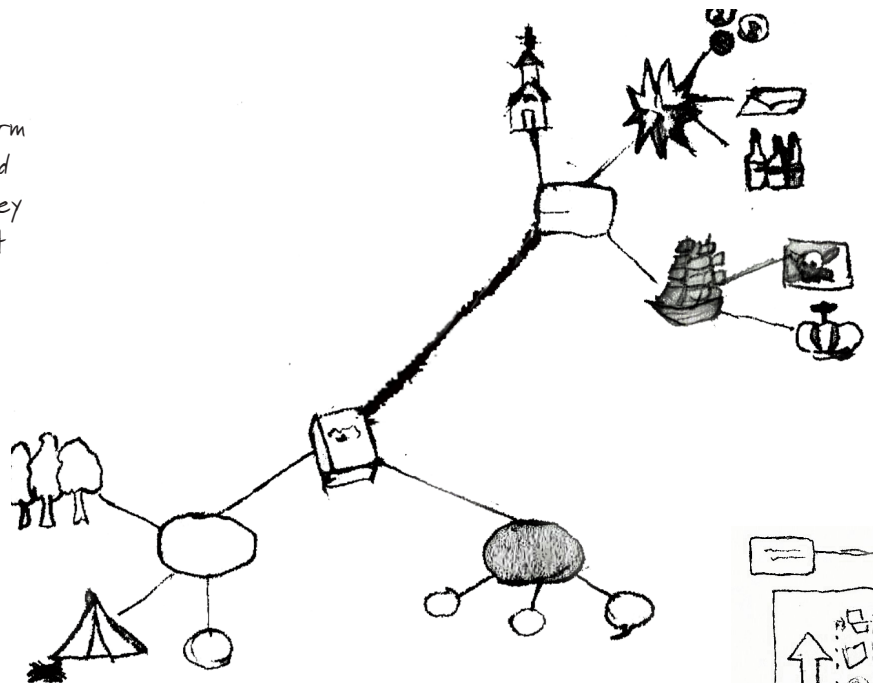


How do you do your other creative work? Do you collect, construct, subtract, reduce, exaggerate, reconfigure, research, improvise, visualize? Can you use your studio practice to invent a new kind of writing practice?

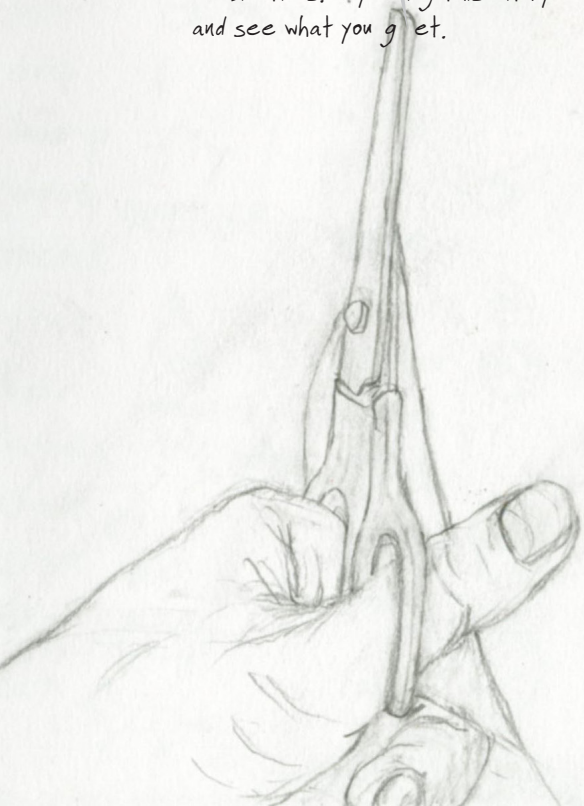


Mind map:

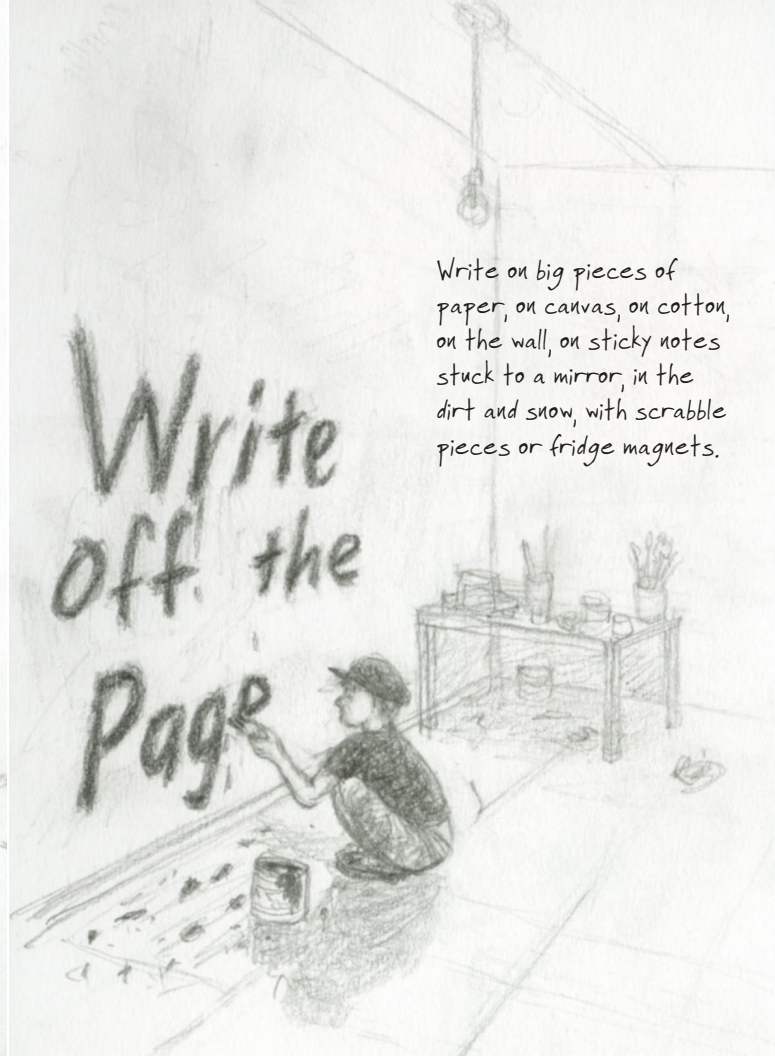
Mindmaps are a good visual way to brainstorm ideas, connections, and relationships. Also they can help short-circuit the pre-editor in us.



Cut it up: William S. Burroughs used to take a newspaper and cut it into pieces, then rearrange the pieces at random to generate unexpected combinations. Try doing this with your own writing and see what you get.



Write on big pieces of paper, on canvas, on cotton, on the wall, on sticky notes stuck to a mirror, in the dirt and snow, with scrabble pieces or fridge magnets.



Exhaustive description:

Whatever it is you're supposed to write about, try describing it in extreme detail. You can do this with an object, a place, an activity, even an abstract idea. It's not easy but it's an excellent way to start thinking analytically about the world.

The north and so
container gardens
and are bounded
to the east a
Georgian-style
has an addit
to be the 8

Make lists: Start from a single word and then use dictionaries, thesauri, Web searches, or free association to generate long lists of words. These lists can be used as a kind of collection of vocabulary to build a text.

Nouns:

paint, drip, bump,
wood, metal, glue,
hair, hands, chair,
grass, dog, cat,
figure, ground,
perception, thought

Verbs:

scrape, smear,
break, make, join,
place, balance,
orient, relate,
change, look, move,
utter, laugh

Adjectives:

big, small,
funny, strange,
disconnected,
dumb, obscure,
yellow, ugly, lovely,
soft, sharp, high,
low

Try "Mad Libs": Once you've got some lists of words to use, invent sentence structures (or adapt existing ones) to make different combinations.

1/ My work makes _____ .
(verb) (noun)

2/ In my studio, I _____ .
(verb) (noun)

3/ I create _____ that are _____.
(noun) (adjective)

4/ _____ .
(adjective) (noun) (verb)

Start with the five Ws:

Who, What, Why, When, Where
(and maybe even an H: How)?

Ask more questions:

List everything you don't know about a subject in the form of questions. Each one of those questions is now a starting point for research.

How does the dictionary define _____ ?

What earlier words did _____ come from?

What is _____ similar to / different from? How?

What causes _____ ?

Who is responsible for _____ ?

What are the effects of _____ ?

What is the purpose of _____ ?

How does _____ work?

What qualities, conditions, or circumstances make _____ possible or impossible?

Where can I find out more about _____ ?

Loop it:

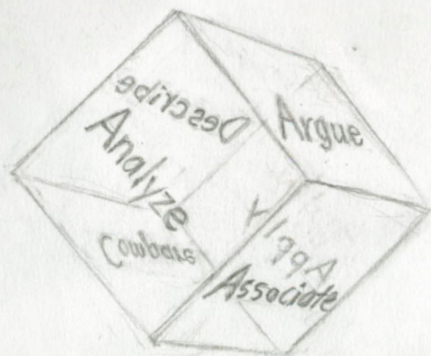
Set a timer for five minutes. With a topic, idea, or key word in mind, write whatever comes out without stopping, even if it's repetitive or nonsensical (only you will ever read it). Don't let yourself stop. After filling a page or so, read it over and find just one or two worthwhile ideas.

Repeat as needed.



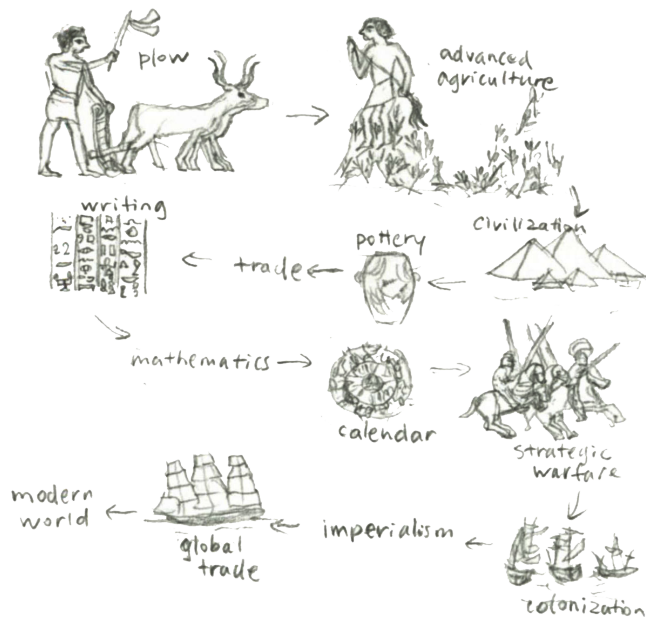
Cube it:

This is a way to come at an idea from different directions:

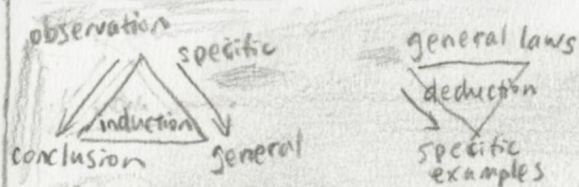


- Describe it physically or conceptually
- Compare/contrast it to other things.
- Apply it (asking how it is used and what it tells you about the world).
- Associate it with causes, effects, people, places, partner concepts etc.
- Argue for and/or against it.
- Analyze it (break it into parts and consider its cause and its effects).

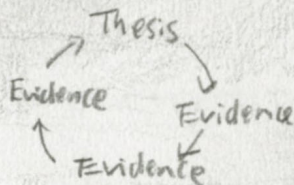
Make connections:



There's a great British TV show called Connections where the host, James Burke, looks at a particular object or event and connects it to a chain reaction of cultural and material changes through history. Can you find connections that will help develop your topic?



Description
Analysis
Evaluation
D
A
E
D
Conclusion



Q
A
Q
A
Reflection

Try different models:

There are a lot of ways to organize a paper:

- pyramid vs reverse pyramid
- deductive vs inductive
- persuasion vs discovery
- describe-analyze-evaluate
- compare-contrast
- pros-cons
- question-answer etc...

* These are just some suggestions; to investigate further try books on writing, check online, or ask the WLC about different organizational models.

Make an outline in reverse:

In the margins of a rough draft, label each paragraph, saying what it says and how it functions.

Describes
painting
+
basic info.
to evaluate
argument

Summarizes
Cubism
+
establishes
context for
discussing the
work

claims the
work in
question
breaks from
Cubism's
conventions.

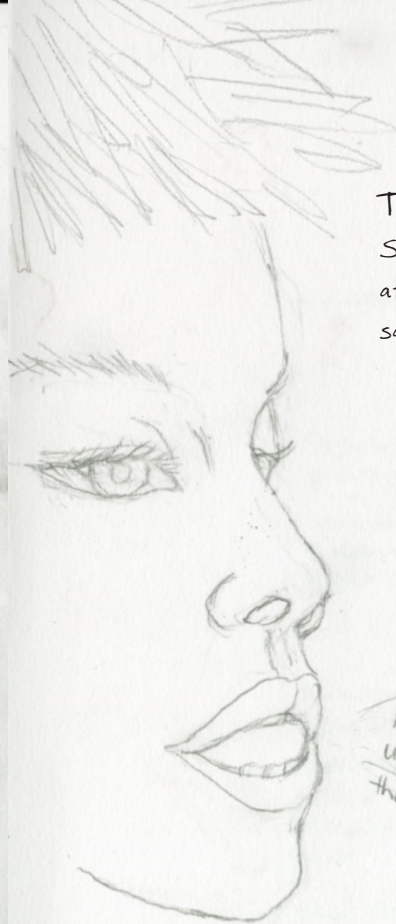
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OK

here's the idea: I'm researching the New-Cube, a new design for open-concept office furniture. The questions are, Is this an improvement over the cubicle model; if so, how; and finally, how can the New-Cube be improved?

Do the "elevator pitch":

If you bumped into a friend on the elevator how would you very quickly explain the question, curiosity, goal, or argument of the project you're working on?



Talk it out:

Speak your idea without looking at your writing. Record what you say or have a friend transcribe.

memo to self:
Rembrandt's portraiture
uses more detailed line-work
than Lucien Freud's



Switch up the words:

Translate your own sentences by

- a) replacing every noun with another related noun (or a random one),
- b) every verb with another,
- c) every adjective and adverb.

Transform the syntax:

Translate your own sentence by splitting it in two, making it twice as long, or otherwise reorganizing it. For example, take a word from the middle of a sentence and begin with it instead.

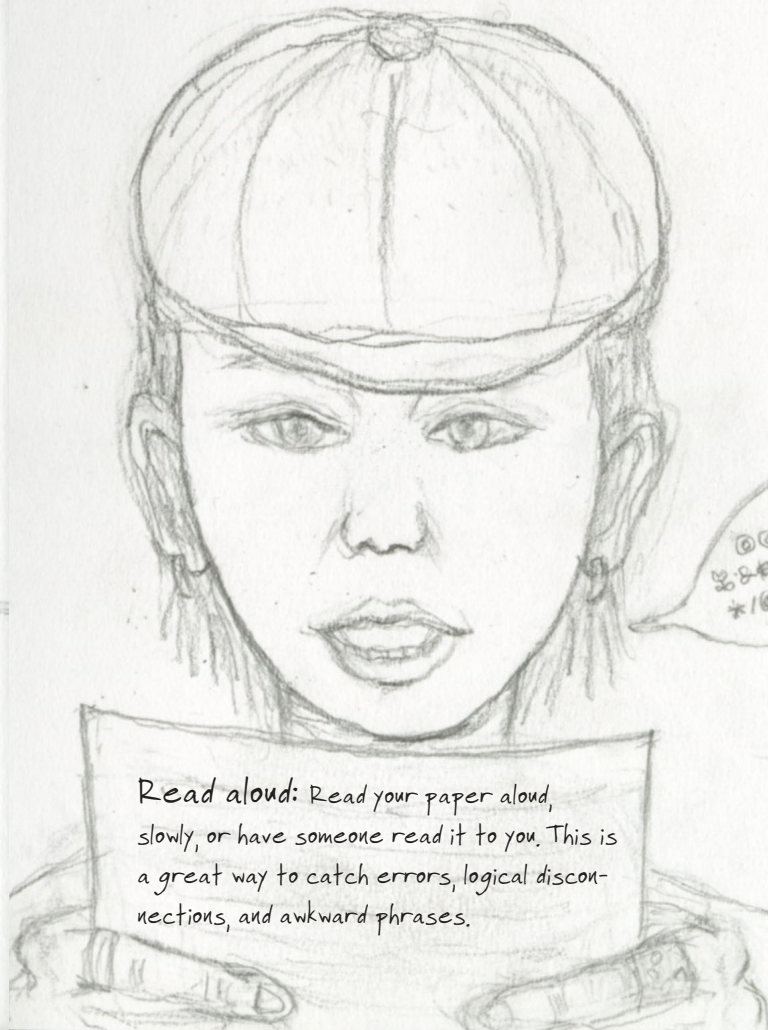
Change perspective:

Translate your own sentence so that it reads as though written from a fictional or historical character's perspective.

Change the audience:



Try writing a passage as though it were to a pen-pal, now try writing as if to your biggest hero, now to your future child. How does the language shift? What is the appropriate audience to imagine for your project?



Read aloud: Read your paper aloud, slowly, or have someone read it to you. This is a great way to catch errors, logical disconnections, and awkward phrases.

Credits:

The methods suggested in this booklet owe their inspiration to the OULIPO, Elizabeth Cowan, and writers and writing instructors everywhere.

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