

The following are a series of freewrites: preferably written by hand, without pauses, as quickly as possible, trying to out-speed your mind. Use a keyword like *yes* or *abcd* to keep yourself writing during any mental blanks. There may be some repetitions in your answers. That's okay. In rewriting them, you'll refine them, or push yourself to a new place.

These exercises are meant to help you write beyond and around the essay itself. Though you might end up generating material that you do want to include in the final version, this shouldn't be taken as the original goal. The goal is to use writing as a tool to move more deeply into your essay's storytelling space.

Freewrite in response to at least 2 of the following for 8-10 minutes each:

- a. Why are you writing about this particular topic? You might start with the surface answers, and then follow them more deeply.
- b. Why does this story matter? To you? To the larger world?
- c. What contemporary connections do you see to your subject? How does your position as a person living right now inform your interest and perspective? What contemporary analogues or repercussions of this issue might draw a lay reader in?
- d. What do you hope to discover, in the act of writing this essay? What questions drive you, and what questions do you still have? Or: What *did* you hope to discover, when you began this research, that you now know? How can you take this idea-journey with the reader in hand?

Freewrite in response to at least 2 of the following for 10-15 minutes each:

- a. Write a portrait (or "profile") of your central character(s) in the most traditional sense. What do they look like? Who and what do they love? Who are they, outside of the context of this story? If you see them walking down the street, what do you see? If you *are* them walking down the street, what are you thinking and feeling? Feel free to speculate: though you may not want to include speculations in your essay itself, the imaginative exercise will likely enliven the next version of your essay regardless.
- b. "Zoom in" on a single moment—an exchange between two individuals, or an instant during an important event—in the story you are telling. Linger there as long as possible, seeing, hearing, smelling, and otherwise experiencing the moment as you write. Then, reflect a bit: What drew you to this moment? Consider emotional and intellectual registers. What makes it compelling?
- c. Think of a close friend or family member—someone outside your field, whom you don't talk to frequently about your work. Write this person a letter, beginning Dear So-and-so, telling this story as tenderly as you can. Write in first-person—you want them to remember who's talking, after all.
- d. Find a food- or sense-oriented moment in your essay, and linger there, zooming in. You might put yourself in the shoes of one of your characters, tasting (or otherwise experiencing) this food. Then, you might try this exercise as yourself: How do you and your character's experiences of the food differ?

10-minute freewrite: Once you've completed these generative prompts, revisit the who-what-where-when-why of your story, writing out these basic facts. What do you hope a reader will walk away knowing, thinking, and feeling?

Guided Peer Feedback for Early-Stage Work

- 1 “*Pointing.*” Repeat lines, phrases, and ideas that struck you, without explaining why or how so—just re-enter and allow the writer to re-experience her work through the lens of her readers.
- 2 “*Sayback.*” Tell the writer what you hear.
- 3 *What is lurking?* What is almost said, and what do you want to hear more about? (Try to phrase these as questions.)
- 4 *Questions about content.* Readers, aim to be generous and generative: Where is your curiosity piqued? What details do you want to know more about? What big-picture idea-questions do you have? Writers, don’t answer, or not at first—start by listening and taking notes.