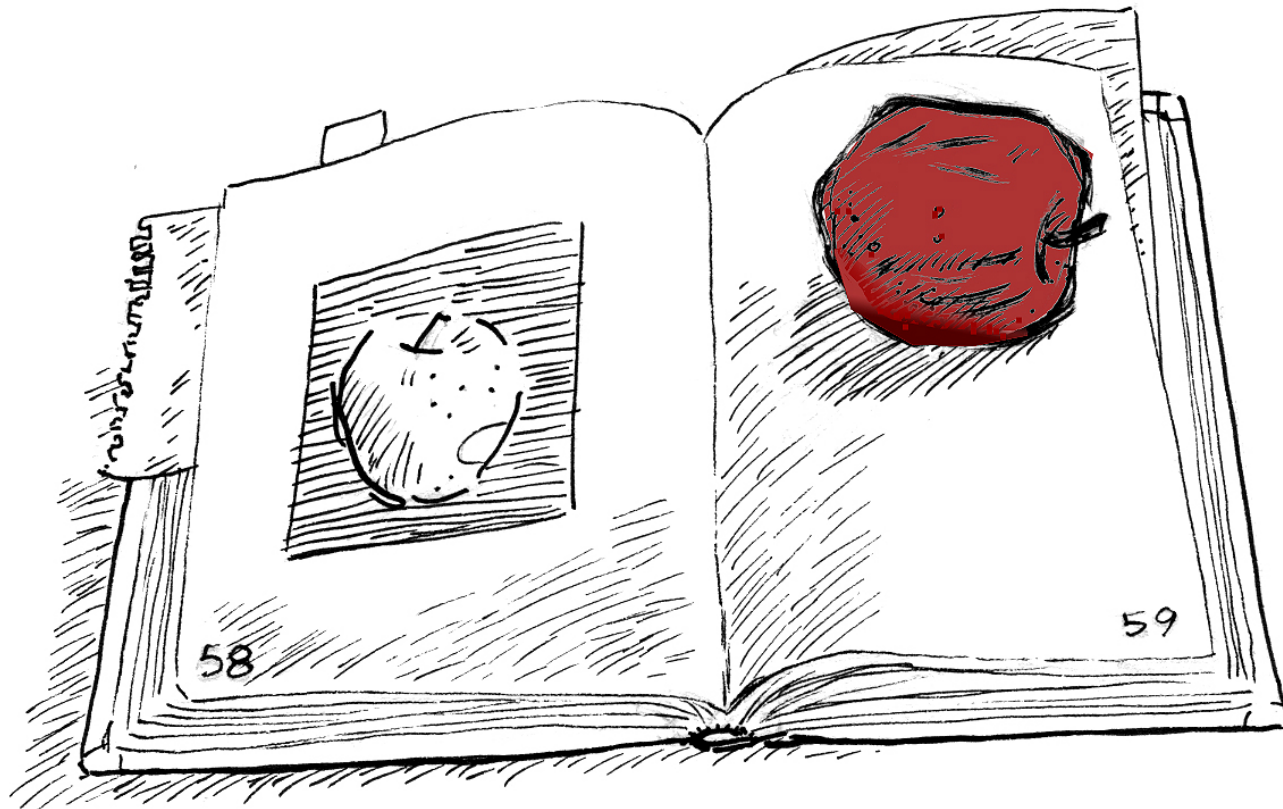


# Pre-Writing Techniques

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# *Pre-Writing Techniques*

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- Ideas need to be developed first and *then* explored in detail.

Pre-writing exercises help establish an idea before building the entire work.

- > free-write exercise
- > journal writing
- > listing
- > mapping / clustering / grouping

In the *Bedford Handbook* the editors on pages 13-15 detail additional concepts, such as:

- > annotating texts and note taking
- > blogging

# *freewriting*

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**Freewriting is one quick exercise** to help jar a writer’s imagination—likewise, it inhibits the negative reactions many people feel towards their own writing by triggering instinctive, reactionary impulses.

- The overall concept requires the individual to simply write, without ever pausing for corrections or censoring of thoughts.
- You keep writing for a series of ten or fifteen minutes talking to yourself on the page, making random associations.
- The *Bedford* editors state: “Freewriting [...] lets you ask questions without feeling that you have to answer them. Sometimes a question that comes to mind at this stage will point you in an unexpected direction” (16).
- Another form of this type of prewriting is called *focused freewriting*. In this type of situation you center your words and impressions on a chosen subject.

# *freewriting*

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Peter Elbow, a published instructor of writing, notes in his essay “Freewriting” that by listening to the critical voice in your head, and not paying attention to your instincts, results in an individual locking him/herself into an angry cycle of revision and rewriting, rather than getting words down on the page.

- He declares that “premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard.

It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the interruptions, changes and hesitations between the consciousness and the page. In your natural way of producing words there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm— a voice— which is the main source of power in your writing. I don’t know how it works, but this voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you, the energy that drives the meanings through his thick skull” (70).

Elbow, Peter. “Freewriting.” *The Arlington Reader*. Third ed. Lynn Bloom and Louise Smith, eds., Boston: Bedford/St. Martin. 2011. Print.

# *Journal Writing*

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## **Keeping a journal:**

This is another method allowing you to talk to yourself, primarily, through the pages of a notebook.

- you develop the restrictions or the formula
- record highlights of day to day events
- generate notes and ideas for possible future writing
- practice techniques with your writing style
- create meditation exercises / word games
- show a writer's concepts and experiments: a record of intentions left behind

# *Locus Communis*

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**In English, the Latin phrase *Locus communis* means commonplace.**

In terms of writing and history, the phrase represents a commonplace book, or scrapbook, which compiled various ideas, poems, informational scraps and sayings, all following a common, general theme.

- “a place to collect common items or thoughts.”
- developed in the early history of Europe before printed books were commonplace items for the average person
- in some ways, these books proved the intellect of the owner
- in the same fashion, a large, personal library proved how well-read an individual was, how intellectual, and how wealthy

***A good resource for more information can be found at:***

<http://www.squidoo.com/commonplace-books>

# Zuihitsu Writing

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**Similar in concept to the European tradition zuihitsu is a Medieval Japanese style of writing.**

Like *locus communis*, this type of writing reflects a personal collection of miscellaneous ideas; can be contradictory; random jottings.

- presented in an essay-like style and organization
- overall presents a general theme or reflection for further discussion
- can include lists, observations, poetry, reflections, journal entries— all in a variety of combinations; notice these are all *personal*, honest declarations of a writer
- emotional *reactions* to a theme, or a series of random thoughts on a theme
- *The Pillow Book*, by Sei Shōnagon is the best Japanese example of this style

***A good resource:***

<http://poetart.wordpress.com/2012/04/26/zuihitsu-japanese-style-poem-prompt-workshop/>

# *Sei Shōnagon (c.966-c.1017)*

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*The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* || Translated by Ivan Morris

**These writings serve multitude of purposes.** They act as:

- a collection of memories
- character sketches
- short prosaic writing
- developments of ideas for future poems
- historical document

> The writings represent the point of view of a noble lady in the 11th century.

Little is known of Shōnagon's life other than the sparse details provided in the passages. The entire book covers ten years in the court discussing scandals, gossip, opinions of the upper class.



# *Sei Shōnagon (c.966-c.1017)*

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She does manage to promote a strong feminist attitude:

she believes her writings are equal to men, even those of higher rank.

*Most important is the fact how this project began. Shōnagon herself states that the Empress of Japan gave her a series of blank notebooks, resulting in:*

I now have a vast quantity of paper at my disposal and I set about filling the notebook with odd facts, stories from the past, and all sorts of other things, often including the most trivial material. On the whole I concentrated on things and people that I found charming and splendid; my notes are full of poems and observations on trees and plants, birds and insects. (263)

Shōnagon, Sei. "It Is Getting So Dark." *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*. Trans. Ivan Morris. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. Print

# *Sei Shōnagon (c.966-c.1017)*

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She catalogs intimate details of her life, small occasions and ceremonies.

The lists often transcend from the ordinary mundane experience to elaborate, detailed poetry.

It was common during her lifetime for individuals to record stray experiences or sexual encounters; the writer stored the material in drawers kept under pillows— thus the title “pillow book.”

Shōnagon’s words are among the oldest collection of personal writings to survive from the culture; her unique perspective takes the concept of pillow books into a new territory.

# *Sei Shōnagon (c.966-c.1017)*

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## *Squalid Things*

The back of a piece of embroidery.

The inside of a cat's ear.

A swarm of mice, who still have no fur, when they come wriggling  
out of their nest.

The seams of a fur robe that has not been lined.

Darkness in a place that does not give the impression of being very clean.

A rather unattractive woman who looks after a large brood of children.

A woman who falls ill and remains unwell for a long time. In the mind  
of the lover, who is not particularly devoted to her, she must appear  
rather squalid. (170)

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Shōnagon, Sei. "Squalid Things." *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*. Trans. Ivan Morris. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. Print