

# Writing to Learn *Learning to Write*

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**Not everybody loves writing.** But I do. Some people know what they think before they write it. Not me. I love writing because it helps me separate myself out from the blur that a busy life often becomes. I love writing because it helps me to see myself in the crowd and to hear my own voice above the babble of competing voices. I love writing because it helps me figure out what I think and feel, to peel away the husk, and pare down to where I am most alive.

Mostly I write when I am alone, when the house is empty, or asleep. I write memoir and poems. I write bits and pieces that I throw straight into the bin and I write snippets that may grow up into a book someday. Sometimes I write on demand, "Mamma write a poem about the big bed" and I do. I read these poems to my most appreciative of audiences who laugh raucously at themselves and at me and always ask for more... "write about the time we had a fight in the shoe shop, Mamma."

I also write at work about work: I write about topics I'm researching, conferences I've attended, about projects I want to do, and projects I've done. I write about my practice and about the six months just past. I write about my colleagues and the colours of the carpet under the table in our meeting room. I write to find out; to find out more about myself and my topic and the relationship between the two. And I try to route even this kind of writing through my own experience of whatever topic I am writing about.

## What's in this paper?

I describe some of the thinking behind this approach to writing and offer some practical tips to help you write to explore, inquire and learn.

I also outline the phases of writing when writing for others. I hope this will be helpful to those interested in writing papers, articles, stories, even poems intended to contribute to other people's learning as well as your own.

## Writing to learn

Writing has become so central to how I **make sense** of what is going on in my life and my work as a development practitioner that I often ask myself, "How will I know what I think until I see what I write?" Writing to learn, or writing to find out is quite different to sitting down to record what we already know, writing down what somebody else has said, or what we have read somewhere. When writing to learn we have to adopt the attitude of an explorer, a willingness to take risks, to journey into the unknown and to discover new things, or things anew. In this approach, writing is a kind of **inquiry** process.

Writing helps us to **reflect** deeply on our experiences, personal and professional. Through writing, our return to the experience is much more vivid as we give detail



to what we remember. By describing the characters involved, the setting, the process *and* the feelings of it all – including our own feelings – we bring it alive again.

When we stop to make sense of a particular experience, or time in our life, or phase of a project, writing helps to unpack, let go and let come. By this I mean allowing ourselves to be **surprised by what we write**. It is easy to tell and re-tell our experience from the safety of the familiar point of view – even to ourselves. Repeating the same version of an experience or event confirms our beliefs about things, and reinforces our position on matters. But it also closes us down to seeing things in different ways. Writing to learn requires of us to take risks, to make ourselves vulnerable, to be uncertain, playful, creative and even uncomfortable at times. One way to do this is to pay attention to our **first thoughts**. First thoughts are those thoughts we think of first. First thoughts flash through our mind and are then quickly rejected by all the norms we have internalised, the rules about what we can and can't think, feel or say.

"First thoughts are those thoughts your mind actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see and feel." [Natalie Goldberg (1986) *Writing Down the Bones* Shambala. Boston p 8]

Writing this way helps us bypass the clever, safe or expected answers – the answers we think others want to hear. It helps us to go behind the 'correct', 'polite' or 'public' version to find our own **voice** and our own authority on the matter. It helps us to bypass cautious writing.

**Authority on a topic is often seen as belonging to the experts and the academics. It's easy to be put off writing about something because there's a voice asking... "what do you know about it?" But there is also the kind of authority that belongs with the practitioner. The knowledge-of-the-doers. And by writing to learn, we can tap that source of knowledge, making it more available to ourselves, and then perhaps also to others.**

Another way to write about our experiences is from **different perspectives**. For example, try writing a totally different opinion to your own on something that matters to you. Write convincingly, as if you really believe in what you are writing. Or write about something that happened from another person in the story's point of view. Choose someone that was part of your experience or make up a character. Imagine you are them. Write a dialogue (conversation) with one of the characters in your story...perhaps it's a difficult colleague, or a powerful person in the community you work with, or an elder you'd like to seek counsel from. 'Talk' directly with him or her. Tell them what it is you really want to say and then give them a chance to talk back to you, as if it were a real conversation. 'Talk' to each other about a situation that disturbs, puzzles or delights you. A situation or experience you want to learn from. Often, when I pose these exercises in a writing workshop, people respond by saying... "Oh, but I really don't know what she would say." Or "Gosh, I don't really know what I want to ask!" Write to find out.



Somebody else might object saying "But if I make it up, then it's not real. It's just invented, or imaginary." And I reply.... "Does it matter?" You are not a minute taker taking minutes of a meeting, or a court record keeper whose records are used in making judgement and passing sentence. You are not publishing an article or betraying confidences. You are a writer writing to explore, to find out, to learn. Of course, an underlying niggle here is the uncomfortable question: "What is **truth**?"

**"Attempting to create distinction between fact and fiction is a waste of time with regards to reflective practice. Any writing is writing from the practitioner's depth of experience, knowledge and skill. This experience, knowledge and skill is as true as you can get: in the way a straight line is true."**

Gillie Bolton (2001) *Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development*. Paul Chapman Publishing. London p 145

The basic principle in this approach to writing is, write to discover what you think and how you feel. This is totally contrary to the 'think first then write' approach you were probably taught at school. How can you learn to write this other way? Here are a few tools and practical tips drawn from my own writing journey.

## Learning to write

### Free writing: a basic tool

I have found **free writing**<sup>1</sup> to be my most useful writing tool. Free writing is a simple writing technique which involves writing without stopping for a set amount of time. To begin with, write for five or six minutes, and later, after some practice, you can go on for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time. When free writing, you are not in control, your pen or pencil is. Let your pen decide what it wants to write and follow its lead – think of it as a **magic pen**. When free writing, keep your hand moving, and don't stop. This helps writing become the thought process. Usually we like to know what we are going to write before we start writing. We want to have it all figured out in our heads. With free writing we listen out for what we are meant to write, and in a way let our writing write through us. Free writing helps us write down our first thoughts before we can stop ourselves by saying, "oh that is so ridiculous". It helps us blast through the internal censor who criticises everything we write as rubbish and stops us writing even before we have begun.

When free writing, **write by hand**. It will route your writing through your heart! Try it for yourself – somehow there is a more personal connection with your writing than when writing on a computer. Writing by hand also helps keep you from worrying about spelling and grammar mistakes.....no automatic spelling or grammar check to light up your page and distract you with those red and green squiggles!

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<sup>1</sup> See Judy Reeves' book *A Writer's Book of Days* (1999) New World Library, California, for more on free writing.



Once you are done free writing, take a few minutes to read over what you have written and to underline words, phrases (3 to 5 consecutive words), or sentences you like in colour pencil. This helps to develop an appreciative eye. Also look for and underline what unsettles or disturbs you. There is often something important there. You may want to write more on one of the words, phrases or sentences you underlined. Do so, or save them as prompts for future free writing.

## Free writing with a prompt

Free writing can be open (sometimes called a writing **spree** or stream of consciousness writing) or it can be focused by a **prompt**. A prompt is a short phrase or question which sets you off in a particular direction – even if you land up going on a detour! Three prompts I enjoy are:

- Today I.....
- I remember...
- I see.....

You can also choose a particular topic or theme that you want to learn more about as your prompt. By free-writing on a topic, you can uncover what you **intuitively** know about it, what you know-you-know about it, what you think about it and how you feel about it. Free write on a real life experience, a specific example of the topic rather than a broad, generalised description. Don't write about 'ownership' or 'participation' or 'learning' in general. Write about your experience of ownership, participation, or learning. Take a specific example as your starting point. When I began to work more closely with colleagues within my own organisation, issues around relationships and collaboration became more pronounced. I found it really useful to explore what was going on by free-writing about it. Much later, I was asked to write a paper on collaboration for a client organisation – and found these pieces I had written, purely for my own learning, helpful in identifying key themes to pursue.

Before learning about free-writing I would spend way too much time deciding which example, which incident, which moment to choose as my starting point. Say for example the task was to write about a significant event.....I would either panic and go blank (I don't think any thing significant has ever happened in my life! I really only have a very boring and insignificant life.) – or I torment myself trying to figure out which was the most significant, the most worthy, the most interesting and so on. I would make a hundred false starts, skipping from one event to another and then give up defeated. With free writing the agony of choice is avoided and feeling blank is an advantage: with free writing you really have to let go and follow your pen.



## Free writing without a prompt

Free writing without a prompt is a great way to begin a writing session. It helps to get the creative flow going, and provides an opportunity to write down all the stuff which is cluttering up your head and preoccupying your mind. In short it helps you to be present and attentive in your writing. Whether I am writing by myself, or running a writing workshop, I often begin with a six minute free writing spree. Once you are done, take a few minutes to read over what you have written and underline what you like. You may be amazed by what you find: a theme emerging, an important question to face or perhaps even the glimpse of an answer. You may, however, find that nothing but mixed up nonsense comes out. Or perhaps a long to-do list. It is all fine: better out on the page than taking up space in your mind.

## Writing for others

Exploratory writing is hugely valuable for people wanting to learn. But there is a second chapter to my story on writing. This chapter is about writing for others, about conveying what we have learnt in a way that is useful to and has effect on them. In this chapter, the main character (you) is now the guide, rather than the explorer. As writer Peter Turchi puts it: "...at some point we turn from the role of Explorer to take on that of Guide". In this new role, you have additional skills to acquire and work to do.

Sometimes when I am in the middle of an article, somebody will ask why I am writing about it at all when the libraries and the internet are so full of information already. It's always a bit of a discouraging question – but it's true. We live in an age of information overload, more information than we can possibly handle. But a lot of it is just that: information. When I write, I try to avoid cold, clinical, depersonalised writing. I try to write with voice, to share a bit of who I am and the sense I have made of the experience or information I am writing about. In this way your writing is more likely to engage the reader, to speak to her imagination, intellect, heart and will.

Free writing helps us find our voice. Writing with voice quite simply means putting yourself into your writing. So often we write in 'Beige'. A beige voice could be anybody's. It lacks individuality. It is stilted. Wooden. Dead. Writing with voice "means that you can get your feelings into your own words and that your words have a feeling of you about them." (Seamus Heaney)



My first writing assignments as a development practitioner were fund raising proposals and donor reports. How I wish I had known about free writing back then! And I bet the donors would have appreciated documents that weren't dense with dull motivations, dry accounts of who did what when, sickly sweet success stories – and of course all the jargon and development-speak of the day. I undoubtedly wrote in beige.

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**Here are some examples of more colourful writing taken from two different organisations' reports:**

The aim of Cape Flats Nature is to build good practice in sustainable management of the City of Cape Town's (South Africa) nature areas in a way that benefits the surrounding communities, particularly townships where incomes are low and living conditions poor. As a pioneering partnership project, Cape Flats Nature wanted to stir up and then distil ideas among conservators, planners, officials, activists and community leaders. They also needed to account to their partners, donors and community members. They decided, instead of a report, to write a booklet, including a number of very short stories. Here are two stories based on long and detailed field reports:<sup>2</sup>

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**Feathered Friends**

Holiday programme. Flocks of bored youth looking for entertainment. Calls of excitement. Bird monitoring is a scientific task. Results must be reliable. Everyone and no-one wants to be involved. Long term. Only five volunteers serve as bird monitors. But they too migrate. The monitoring group grinds to a halt before take off even happens. Another year, another group, another bird club, this one in full flight. Track down the missing monitors, bring the groups together, more training, on-going support, endless encouragement. Watch them fly.

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra Hill (2006) *Networking People and Nature in the City*. Cape Flats Nature: Cape Town



### Going shopping 1

It's about six. Getting dark. I send the kids out. For potatoes. Or cabbage. Or bread. They come back, big eyes, empty hands. Hungry. We search in all the usual places. Five Rand. Enough for something from Sparkies Corner Café. It will take me half the time if I use the path across the veld<sup>3</sup>.

### Going shopping 2

The people using the path are just going shopping.  
They are just not interested, have no idea about biodiversity.  
And they are a fire hazard.  
The path definitely has to be rerouted.

But the community reps have specifically asked to keep it. We're supposed to be attracting these people into nature conservation not shutting them out.

### Going shopping 3

Why did you change your mind?  
I read that newspaper story.  
.....?

About the girl who got mugged going shopping.  
It could have happened anywhere.  
We had another meeting with all the stakeholders:  
we decided to keep it open access.

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The Environmental Monitoring Group hadn't written an annual report for six years. Yes, they had accounted to donors and met all those requirements, but they really wanted to account to all those they were connected with. They wanted to share a little of who they are as an organisation and what they had learnt. The staff collaborated on the task, commissioned a writing workshop and help in pulling all their material together. Here are two excerpts from their organisational report<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> open ground covered with natural vegetation

<sup>4</sup> EMG Organisational Report 2007



## **What do you do?**

What do you do?

Many things at the same time

Today you are here, tomorrow you are there

Most days I am supposed to be everywhere

This meeting and that meeting

This person and that person

What do you do?

Many things at the same time

This document and that document

This website and that website

This email and that email

This book and that book

What do you do?

Many things at the same time

This call and that call

This workshop and that workshop

This conference and that conference

This seminar and that seminar

What do you do?

Many things at the same time

This EIA and that EIA

This training and that training

This funder and that funder

This injustice and that injustice

What do you do?

By Thabang Ncqozela

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## **Two wives, one roof**

I'm sitting on the ground, in the cool shade of a tree in a village in rural Uganda. Next to me is a young woman, beautiful in her best floral dress. Then an older woman joins us. There is a clear tension between them that I can feel but don't understand. There are children all around. Godfrey, my guide and translator, explains to them that we are here to listen to their story, and that we would like to take photographs. "I have been here before" I said, "and I took photos then." That was five years ago. I tell them how I have used those pictures at conferences



and workshops – to try to show how stupid and insensitive educated 'decision-makers' can be, to show how worthless a policy paper is when it is not translated into a language people can understand, to show the difference between good intentions and the dismal failure of their actual implementation.

I am sitting on the ground, under a tree. The young woman next to me has three children. She is the second wife, sharing one house. Now I understand the tension between her and the older woman. They begin to talk. "When the American company built the resettlement village they said we would only get one new house per family, no matter how many of our houses were flooded by the dam. But what is a family? Is it a man and his many wives or is it a woman with her many children?"

I had extended my stay in Uganda to revisit this village. It had been built to house people who had to make way for the rising waters of the new dam, people whose lives and communities were turned upside down so that the city could get more electricity. I was here to listen and to take the photographs that I hoped would speak louder and more clearly than my words ever could – about life as it should not be.

My colleagues from the African Rivers Network and I had arrived to a day filled with so much ceremony. The beautiful children in their shiny dresses and not so shiny shorts sang "This land is my land, this land is your land, from the Ruwenzories to the Eastern Highlands, this land belongs to you and me".

And I wished it did. This land they just lost. This land that was taken away from them – close to the river, close to the road, close to the fishing grounds and markets and relatives and graves and shrines and clinics and history and schools and all the things that make everyday life worth getting out of bed for to say "I will live another day".

The World Bank, who financed the dam, said that the people would be better off than they were before the dam was built, and that adequate compensation would be given – land for land. But the people say a structure for a structure. A school for a school. A clinic for a clinic. A fruit tree for a fruit tree. It's so obvious. You don't need degrees or pieces of paper to understand this, to put yourself in their shoes. You just need common sense, wisdom, compassion.

"Can you image what it's like living with two wives under one roof?" The man showed me the tiny bedroom where one wife sleeps and the open-plan living room where the other wife sleeps. He talked about his former spacious homestead where each wife had her own hut, now drowned by the dam waters.

I asked the two women under the tree: "What is it like?" "Difficult", they said, not looking at each other. "Very, very difficult", the older wife said when the younger wife had walked away. "Very difficult."

By Liane Greeff

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## The writing process

One of the things that discourages novice writers is the high standard of writing they see around them, in books, in journals, in pieces *other* people have written. What they often don't consider, is that they are seeing the **finished product** and have not been party to the endless drafts, the tears, the frustrations, the pages tossed in the bin. If you don't expect to write your final product the first time you sit down to write, you will be a much happier writer.

Writing for others is a process. Of course the process takes different shapes for different writers. After a while you may begin to recognise your own preferences, patterns and approach to writing. Some people have a favourite time of day to write, some a favourite place or a favourite pen. Some like it quiet. Some like to write in a busy restaurant. Some write it in one go then leave it lying for weeks before going back to it. Some people work steadily on their writing project. Some people feel compelled to write about something – as if it were inside them banging to get out. Others may have a strong urge to write, but have no idea what about. Some people are reluctant writers, obliged to write for work purposes, looking for any and every possible distraction to postpone it until tomorrow.

When writing something for others, you may find it helpful to think of the writing process as a journey with a beginning, middle and end. In the **beginning** the writer's emphasis is on exploring her topic by writing about it, reading about it, speaking to others about it. It includes all the research she needs to do – but most importantly it's about actually beginning to write (not just thinking about writing or planning to write, or tidying her desk, but actually writing). In the **middle** of the writing process the writer reworks his draft having read it with both an appreciative and a critical eye. It may be necessary to rework it a number of times. Feedback from trusted others helps him see his writing with an outside eye. Perhaps his main points are not clear. Perhaps they are lost in too many words. Perhaps he is writing in beige and needs to let his own voice and personality into his writing. At the **end**, the writer's focus is on polishing her text. She pays attention to small, but important details and gets it ready to be printed, published or distributed.

These three main phases are sometimes known as the down draft, the up draft and the dental draft.<sup>5</sup>

## The down draft

When writing something for others to read, I begin with exploratory writing. For example I might free-write for 6 minutes about my feelings on the topic (feelings, not thoughts), beginning with the prompt "I feel..." Or I might begin by free writing a story, taking a specific example as my starting point.

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Lamott (1994) *Bird by Bird*. Anchor Books. New York



Other prompts I find really useful at the beginning of writing a paper, article, or report for others are:

- I really want to write this story because...
- The real issue I want to capture or explore is in this article is...
- The questions my report answers are...
- The purpose of this paper is to.....

You can also begin by brainstorming a list of words or phrases associated with your topic. Choose 3 or 4 of the most important or significant words and/or phrases and free write for 6 - 10 minutes on each of the words or phrases you have chosen. After each piece of writing, stop and read over your work, underline what you like, what surprises or bothers you. Then write a 20 - 50 word summary of all your free-writing, beginning with the prompt "My topic (or story) is about" Writing a title for your article, report or story will further help to identify the crux (heart) of what you want to say.

I sometimes use a timed mind-mapping exercise<sup>6</sup> at the beginning of a writing assignment. It's timed so that I am under pressure and have to work with first thoughts and random associations. To create a mind map, draw a circle in the centre of your page and write your (topic) key word or phrase in the middle. Then radiating out from the centre circle write words or short phrases you associate with your key word, drawing linkages where appropriate. Mind maps don't generate the depth or quality of writing free-writing does, but it is a great technique for creating an overview and for visualising all the interconnecting parts of your topic. It may even help you see connections you never thought of before.

It is really important to stop and think about who you are writing for. Ask yourself: "Who is my **audience**?" Free write a brief description of the people you are writing for. Be specific. Or free write from the prompt "My reader is..."

Finally I begin writing the down draft (first draft or rough copy). I try to write it fast without too much agonising about whether it is coming out right or not. The down draft is about getting everything you want to say down. If you remember information you want to include, but can't remember all the details, make a note to yourself in the margin or on a separate piece of paper (for example look up Margaret Wheatley's stuff on communities of practice; or Add more about theories of change; or Ask Nathi about her workshop on gender) – and just keep going. Although you may be writing a lot of stuff you won't use in your final paper, think of what you are generating as raw data, or **source material**. It is better to write too much and then cut down your writing rather than trying to stretch it out later.

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<sup>6</sup> See Gabriele Rico's book *Writing the Natural Way* (2000) Tarcher/Putnam, New York, for a more detailed explanation of and guide to these kinds of mind maps.



Working on your down draft is a very creative stage in the process. Keep the critic out of it. Don't worry about spelling and grammar either. Don't worry about form, logic or sequence (order). Concentrate on content and meaning – what is it you want to convey? What's on your heart?

Once you have a couple of pages, it's a good idea to leave your writing for a while and take a break.

Then go back to your paper as its first friendly reader. Read your draft looking for and underlining what you like in colour. Then read it again, noticing where it is strong, where it captures your attention, and where your interest begins to droop. Use a different colour pencil to underline things that disturb you, gaps and areas that need further attention. See if you can identify the key message/s in your draft. Ask yourself, "Is this what I want to say?" "Is it serving the purpose I intended?"

Go back to your notes and, if necessary, do some more 'home work' – read, look up references, or speak to colleagues.

**It is a good idea to keep a list of anything you read on your topic, detailing the author, title, date of publication, publisher and page number of quotations. You will need this information if you want to reference your paper properly.**

## Up draft

Rework your paper, based on your own critique of it. Write and rewrite until you are reasonably happy with what you have.

Focus on content but now also on how you present your content. The shift from exploration to presentation, from being the writer-explorer to writer-guide, becomes more of a priority in this phase of the process. The information you have written may be important, but is it inviting to read? Will it touch your readers' heart, intellect and will? What's the **pace** like? (Do you cover too many points too quickly or is it very wordy and long winded?) How have you **hooked** your reader's attention? Are you spoon-feeding your reader, or is there enough 'space' for him to draw his own conclusions?

Check if the way you have ordered the information needs changing, if paragraphs or sentences need moving around. Check if you are repeating yourself and whether some sentences could be deleted altogether. What kind of language are you using? Is it appropriate for your audience? Is it full of jargon or short-hand names of organisations? Is there too much detail? Or too little? Can you hear your own voice or is it too impersonal?



Share your up draft with two or three others you trust. "Oh, how lovely" or "This is the worst thing I've read in years" is not helpful feedback. You want them to be **critical friends**, people who will make the time to engage with your writing thoughtfully and honestly. It's pretty scary handing over a paper you've been labouring over for days, weeks or months. I always feel vulnerable. I am learning to ask for the kind of feedback I find useful, and the more specific I can be about what I want or need, the more useful the feedback I get.

From: Sandra Hill (sandra@cdra.org.za)  
Sent: 2010/08/24 02:57 PM  
To: Vuyelwa Jacobs (Vuyelwa@cdra.org.za)  
Subject: Feedback wanted

Dear V

Thanks for agreeing to have a look at my paper *Writing to Learn. Learning to Write*. It is still very much in draft form and I would really appreciate some feedback, especially as you have tried this approach in your own writing. Apart from any general feedback you may have, please can you comment on the following:

I would like an overall comment on the paper.

- Does it do what it sets out to do (i.e. explain the thinking behind the approach and give practical advice to help people get writing)?
- Does the order of paragraphs (i) flow and (ii) make sense?
- Does it inspire or bore you?
- What do you read/see as the key points of the paper?
- Is it helpful?

Then I would also like comments on specific parts of the paper:

- Where is the writing strong?
- What parts/lines/paragraphs do you like best and why?
- Where is it too wordy or repetitive?

Thanks again!!

Sandra

Remember you are not obliged to follow other people's feedback. The final decision as to what to cut out, what to change and what to keep the way it is, is yours.

## If you get stuck: a word on writers block

Some days the words just pour out of me and writing is a pleasure. Other days it is a complete struggle.

If I get stuck on a particular section, I go back to free-writing about it; if I hit writer's block, I free-write about it. If I hate writing the paper, hate the paper, hate the computer.....I free-write about that too. It's cathartic and hopefully gets the creative juices flowing again....or at the very least it fills up the time until I feel justified to take another break! Then I get on with the job. Or I give up; sometimes it is better not to fight it, but to go for a walk, a coffee, a sleep. Take a break.

Sometimes I feel inspired. Sometimes not. But I have been told that as a writer, your job is to show up at your desk, to show up at the blank page or computer screen, and write – never mind how you feel. The artist Picasso said, "Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working."

When feeling stuck, all you do is write one paragraph. Not the whole paper, just that one paragraph, that one idea. And then the next one. "Writing is like driving a car at night. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way."

E.L Doctorow [source [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)]

## Dental draft

It's time to polish and print. Enough is enough! At some point you have to stop writing and hand over your paper. It is always a good idea to have a third party read it carefully, looking not at content, but at grammar, spelling, layout, numbering, consistency, etc. This is often called proofreading or copy editing. It is particularly a good idea if you are writing in a language other than your mother tongue. Make the corrections indicated and avoid the temptation to fiddle with your paper. Print it, and hand it over to whoever you wrote it for or to whoever is publishing it.

## In conclusion

On our way to a 2010 Soccer World Cup match at the Cape Town stadium, my eight year old son casually announced that he was going to play for Brazil when he grew up. I agreed it was a fantastic idea, but pointed out that he would need to begin practising now. He was astounded by the very idea! I have met many want-to-be writers, grown-up people, who are similarly astonished by the idea of having to practise writing. Sure, talent helps, but even the most talented of writers, like musicians, dancers, even soccer players, have to practise. So, if you want to write – whether it is for yourself or for others – make time to write. If not every day, then every week.

