**Exercises**

**1. Free writing: improve your ability to write on demand**

There's a concept called [Morning Pages](http://lifehacker.com/write-morning-pages-by-hand-every-day-to-boost-produc-1623157620) heralded by Julia Cameron that suggests you write 750 words (roughly three sheets of paper) every morning. The idea is that you write without stopping—a stream-of-consciousness about whatever's on your mind. There's even a web app to help you stick to this goal called [750 Words](http://750words.com/).

But 750 words takes a lot longer than 10 minutes for most of us. That doesn't mean you shouldn't aim for 750 words, but you might want to start with a 10-minute exercise if you're short on time.

Still, the idea of [free writing](https://medium.com/100daysofwriting/day-100-what-i-learned-writing-750-words-every-day-for-100-days-1f43d62e34c9) can be beneficial. Personally, I'm not a fan of spending time writing when I know I'll throw away the results. I've learned to maximise the efficiency of the time I spend writing, and to treasure every word I squeeze out.

If you're like me, and you think it's a waste of time—even for 10 minutes—to waffle on about your breakfast (see what I did there?) in a journal every morning, here's what free writing could do for you that you're missing:

**It teaches you to write on cue.**

If you're a writer, you know how useful this could be. How many times have you sat, staring at a blank page, willing the words to come? Often it's not for lack of inspiration that I can't write—I just can't find the right mood to get me going.

Wouldn't you give up 10 minutes a day to stop wasting hours staring at a blank page?

See, writing works like a muscle. The more you work it, the better you get at it. And the cool thing is, you can train it to work how you want. So if you sit down at the same time every day for 10 minutes to write, it'll start coming more easily as your brain gets used to that schedule. You're training yourself to be able to write on cue.

I've actually [done this in the past](http://blog.crew.co/wake-up-early/) without focusing specifically on free writing. For a few months I made myself write (drafting only, no editing) from 6-7am every morning. Once it became a routine I got used to being able to pour out the words on cue and my output increased due to all the early morning drafting.

**Instructions**

Write for 10 minutes, stream of consciousness, about any subject, fiction or non fiction. ANY subject. This is something you should start to do every day from now on.

**2. Editing: improve your writing by editing someone else's**

Now that you’ve gotten some words on your screen, the next important step is to learn to edit. The best way to learn to edit your writing is to edit someone else’s writing.

**Instructions**

Exchange documents with someone in the room. You will be editing your peer’s writing for 10 minutes.

Read through the document once. Then go back through it and look for as many ways to improve it as you can. Keep an eye out for the following:

* spelling or grammatical errors
* unnecessary words ("that" or "the" can often be removed without ruining a sentence)
* long sentences that can be split up or shortened
* confusing or vague points
* anywhere you can add formatting to improve clarity (e.g. bold, italics)
* anywhere an image could aid the reader's understanding
* anywhere an example could add clarity

Don't forget to notice what the author's done well as you're editing, too. If they have a style you particularly like, or they've made an especially good choice of words, take note of that so you can learn from it.

When this exercise is complete, there will be some discussion, first between the two of you, then you will speak about the experience to the class.

**3. Extend and advance: improve your storytelling**

There's an improvisation game I played in an acting class once that's equal parts hard and hilarious. We called it "extend and advance". It's a storytelling game that requires one person to tell a story based on a prompt like "holidays" or "camping" either verbally or through mime. Their partner tells them to **extend** when they want more detail on a particular point, or **advance** when they want the storyteller to move on to something new.

Both actions are tricky for the storyteller, who has to maintain a coherent narrative while advancing to new aspects of their story every time they're asked to. They also have to find enough off-the-cuff material to extend on any point when asked.

This can be a little easier when you're working with a partner who suggests when to expand and when to advance, but you can set up a solo version of this exercise to help you improve your storytelling skills.

**Instructions**

Plan your intervals like this, and keep track with a timer or by watching the clock:

* 30 secs: **Free talking** to get the story going.
* On my instruction, the next person will either:
  + 1 min: **Extend** on whatever point you're up to when the timer beeps.
  + 1 min: **Advance** the story to a new point.
* Last person has 30 secs to **Wrap it up**.

You don't have to use this for fiction, even though it's a story-based exercise. If you'd rather, write about something happening in your own life, or a topic you're interested in.

<https://blog.ghost.org/10-minute-writing-workouts/>