



A Very Basic Writing Process

1.

I Remember

“I Remember” is an exercise that gives you access the rich visual memories that live in our brain, providing a picture in your mind’s eye from which to write.

Set a timer for 3-5 minutes. Write “I remember...” and the first memory about Covid-19 that comes to mind. Keep doing this, writing “I remember” each time, writing no more than a sentence or phrase per memory. Write quickly! Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, or the order in which the memories come. (They will be all over the place!) Don’t worry about the memories being silly or too sad or inconsequential, either. Just remember. Writing “I Remember” every time keeps you in the visual part of your brain when you write fast enough to get a rhythm going—and most if not all of your memories will have a visual, even cinematic quality. Listing shifts the task to the part of the brain that will try to bring order too soon.

Count the number of memories you have. Consider each one the first draft of a piece of writing you might develop.

Choose one to work with. Avoid memories that cover a long period of time. For example, instead of writing about the first week of quarantine, write about one small part of it—a kind of vignette..

Repeat the “I Remember” exercise for the memory, writing down as many details about it as you can remember.

2.

Standing in the Image

(Adapted from an exercise by Lynda Barry)

When you finish writing down the details you remembered, close your eyes, relax, breathe deeply, and let your memory come into your mind’s eye again. From inside your

head, look straight ahead, into the memory. What do you see? Look to the left, to the right. Look down, up, behind you.

What do you hear in the memory?
What do you smell, taste, touch?

Quickly add the new details you noted to the list from “I Remember.”

3. Freewriting

Set a timer for twenty minutes and freewrite the story of that memory, using the details you remembered (it’s okay not to use all of them) and feeling free to add new ones that come into your mind. If you get stuck, look at your list of details and just start writing about any one of them. When freewriting, the important thing is to write as fast as you can, with no judgment. Writing this way gives voice to you writing and, weirdly, often organizes itself. *Really!* So—

- Don’t worry about grammar, spelling, mechanics, or organization—and, instead, write freely and steadily about the pictures in your head. If you get stuck, should focus on one thing you saw or “experienced” during the journey and write down everything they can remember about that one thing. They can organize your first draft later.
- Avoid making cross-outs or erasures. Just keep going. If you can’t think of a word, use the best one that comes to mind—or just leave a space and come back to it later.
- It can help to write in the present tense, as if the memory is happening *right now*. This gives an immediacy to the images that makes writing easier. It can also help to pretend you’re writing what happened in a letter to a friend—someone who won’t judge won’t judge your writing.
- The only way you can fail at this exercise is by not opening your mind to it. The “logical” part of your brain will try to distract you, whispering, “This is stupid,” or “You’re not doing this right.” Ignore this! Keep writing! If you get stuck, close your eyes for a moment, get the picture in your mind’s eye again—and write from what you see.

4. Read Your Draft

Underline sentences and phrases you like, cross out things that you don’t need. Look for places that might be confusing for the reader and/or would benefit from more detail. Does something in the middle seem like a good beginning? Move it up. In fact, you might even cut the drafts into chunks and fool around, rearranging them

Who, What, Where, When, and How?

To help you deepen and enrich your writing, consider these questions to help you fine-tune your draft.

- Does your story have a strong voice?
 - The voice should sound like a person talking: you.
- Does the reader get to know the people in your story through the specific details you used to describe them?
 - Jot down additional details to bring them more alive.
- Is your setting described in a way that makes readers feel as if they're actually there?
 - Use vivid, sensory, very specific details to bring your world alive.
- How do the events of the story unfold? What got things going? what happened next and next...and next?
 - Readers should learn what's happening through action and dialogue, not just by being told.
- Is there a clear beginning, middle, and end?
 - Make an informal outline of what you have to make sure it flows.

6.

Share Your Story with a Family Member or Friend (Or Several)

Ask them to tell you what they particularly like about the story, but also what confused them, what doesn't seem to fit, what seems to be missing, and where they'd like to have more information or details. (Beware if they say, "It's perfect! First drafts rarely are.")

7.

Rewrite

Rewrite, taking into consideration what you observed yourself and the feedback from others. Let it sit awhile, then look at it again and see if there are parts that could still be improved.

8.

Proofread

Check your story for grammar, punctuation, and spelling,

Submit to spiritandplace@indianawriters.org