

Writing Activity

Materials Needed:

Pen and paper (you can print this PDF or use your own writing notebook)

or

Computer and keyboard

and

Stopwatch/timer

Directions: Read the following quote and complete the activities that follow:

"Now, when my mother got to be eighty-five years old her memory failed her. She forgot little threads that hold life's patches of meaning together."

Mark Twain, from his speech *Morals and Memory*

1. Choose which tool you will use to write down your thoughts (pen and paper or computer/keyboard).
2. Set the stopwatch to zero as you prepare to start writing.
3. I want you to think about your own memories and people that give meaning to your life. Choose one person and one important memory about him or her. It should be one of "life's patches of meaning". Start the timer and start writing about this memory/patch of meaning. Stop when you are finished. Record the time spent writing.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reflection

So what is the point of this exercise? There are several reasons why this writing exercise is pertinent to your understanding of the craft of writing.

First and foremost, you should have a better understanding of how you write – how you get words on the page. When given the choice between pen and paper or computer and keyboard which did you choose?

You have to know how you get words on the page. I once read a book about the craft of writing and the author stated that he wrote everything out by hand – pen and paper. Old school. Someone wrote a review of the book and stated unequivocally that this was ridiculous nonsense. In this modern age of computer and keyboard, there was never a reason for anyone to ever use pen and paper to write.

Unless, of course, that is how you get words on the page. Everyone is different.

You may use pen and paper because that was how you were raised. You may use pen and paper because the brain works differently when using pen and paper. And you may use pen and paper because the act of transferring what you've written on paper to the computer adds a step to the editing process.

Does this mean that you should always use one tool or the other? Of course not. Even though I tend to do most of my writing with pen and paper, I still use the computer for some of my primary work.

Lastly, you should now have a better idea of how many words you can get on the page in however long it took you to finish the writing exercise. Also, it is worth noting that you should pay close attention to how long you can write before the need arises to take a break. How long can you sustain your concentration on the page? This will impact how many words you can write in a day.

What do you have at the end of this lesson?

An understanding of how you write. How do you best get your thoughts on the page?

An understanding of how much you can write. If you wrote 75 words in 5 minutes, then you could conceivably write close to 1,000 words in an hour.

Something to use later on in your own writing. Keep what you have written and save it for later. Chances are you have written something worth reading. So use it. Anything that reflects humanity is worth reading. This is what makes writing worth reading.