

## Sacred Writing

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Sacred Writing is a sustained silent writing strategy popularized by the National Writing Project. It is called Sacred Writing because while using this strategy, which was created with face-to-face instruction in mind, there is no walking, no talking, and no distraction of any kind, including the use of technology. Everyone within the context writes silently for a specified amount of time without interruption. In some courses, particularly writing seminars, this strategy is used at the beginning of every class meeting, thus adding another definition of “sacred”--No matter what else is planned for that class session, the silent writing comes first.

Sacred Writing can be used in any course, at any time during the semester. The instructor may want to use prompts initially, later choosing to continue to supply prompts, ask students to supply prompts, or doing away with prompts. A middle-of-the-road approach is to supply a prompt each time, with the understanding that students may always choose to write about something else if it is important to them in that moment. Some guidelines that may be useful:

- Ask students to challenge themselves to write for the allotted time; if they run out things to write, they should keep their writing tool moving to keep their mind engaged. More words will come if they are patient. Some people allow drawing and some do not. Some only allow it after students have written something.
- No talking -or texting or chatting - The goal is to communicate with the page.
- No walking or any type of distraction to the self or others allowed.
- Some people ask if students want to share what they have written and some do not. The main thing is not to force anyone to share.
- Start with 5-minute sessions of Sacred Writing time and build up to 10- or 15-minute sessions as you feel it is appropriate.
- Students are free to follow or ignore grammar rules – Ex: incomplete sentences okay, misspelled words okay, unless they stop the flow of thoughts. Along these lines, be as “messy” or “neat” as you like.
- The instructor/TA writes, also. Everyone within the context writes. Stick to the prompt or wander. Take the braces off your brain.
- What is written is Private. No one will read it, so feel free to express yourself. May write in whatever language(s) desired.
- \*Write with pen, pencil, marker, and paper. No typing allowed because writing with the hand causes a different interaction with the words. (Today’s students aren’t used to writing this way for extended periods, so again, starting with 5-minute sessions is advised.)
- You might choose to have students write at the beginning of a class session and review what they wrote at the end of the session to see if their thoughts have changed, grown, or deepened.

“How can I know what I think till I see what I say?” is a well-known quote which has been attributed to multiple writers. No matter who first used it, the thought is universal--Seeing our thoughts on paper can help us to make sense of how we feel inside and why. Sacred Writing can create a safe space for students and instructors to vent feelings, deconstruct thoughts, and reflect.

### Some Ideas for Prompts, Related to Social Justice

What do we owe each other?

What  $x$  means to me

$x$  = access, accessibility, The American Dream, class, cultural capital, diversity, enough, equality, equity, fairness, 400 years, freedom, friend, gender, hate, inclusion, individuality, justice, love, neighbor, opportunity, peace, power, privilege, purpose, race, responsibility....

## **Grading**

If you wish to attach a grade to Sacred Writing, a participation or completion grade is probably appropriate. Part of the Sacred element is that no one reads it except the author.

You are invited to join the CTLE Brave Space Coffee Hour sessions at any time for more ideas on incorporating Sacred Writing into your course, or to learn about and practice other strategies to use in your courses.

Finally, if students like and want more Sacred Writing time that you can fit into your course, you might encourage them to look for Bullet Journaling online. This may provide a good substitute for them and encourage them to continue writing to make sense of their world.

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## **\*Some Benefits Of Writing By Hand:**

### **1.Stress relief**

The act of writing itself can reduce stress, which helps improve focus and attention in the classroom.

### **2.Creativity and Learning**

Making writing a regular habit has been shown to increase creativity and deepen thinking, keeping the brain sharp.

### **3.Memory**

Writing by hand is also shown to increase memory and retention. The act of putting pen to paper activates areas of the brain that helps student increase their comprehension. It also involves more senses and motor neurons than when typing on a keyboard.

### **Feelings**

Writing about feelings can improve mood and give a sense of well-being—putting pen to page helps flesh thoughts out in an orderly manner, leading to burdens feeling lighter.

### **4.Gratitude**

Some studies show that writing about being grateful, especially before bed, can help improve sleep, which leads to better classroom performance as well as a sense of well being.

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## **References**

Oxford Learning Centers. (2015, May 6). 5 Reasons writing by hand is good for the brain and for well-being. Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://www.oxfordlearning.com/writing-by-hand-is-good-for-the-brain/>

The National Writing Project. <https://www.nwp.org/> .