

## Michelle Albert

Senior Instructor, Program for Writing and Rhetoric  
University of Colorado Boulder  
[michelle.albert@colorado.edu](mailto:michelle.albert@colorado.edu)

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### FIRST DAY OF CLASS: WRITING PRACTICE

I do this activity before handing out the syllabus or talking about the class. I like to get students thinking, writing, and talking right away. And I like to start off with an activity that introduces some core concepts, habits of mind, and values, that models my pedagogy, and that sets the tone for the class.

This activity introduces freewriting, and prompts students to think creatively as well as analytically.

Here's how I introduce the activity. (With plenty of flourishes and improvising, of course!)

**The only rule is to keep your hand moving.** Don't worry about grammar, spelling, logic, meaning. Don't worry if you stray from the prompt. The idea is to let go of that internal censor we all have and just see where your mind takes you. There is no right or wrong, no good or bad. It's just practice. Like with a sport or an art – you wouldn't go play a baseball game and expect to hit a homerun without having had batting practice a million times. You wouldn't go play guitar onstage without having strummed it a million times on your own. And you probably got some coaching, some feedback, some instruction. With writing, we often don't think about "practicing" like that. You often get an assignment, and a due date. You write your paper, and turn it in. School doesn't provide much opportunity just to practice. So, think of freewriting as writing practice. You get the chance to test out ideas without worrying about being judged or graded. Usually I won't collect your freewrites. I'll always tell you ahead of time if I plan to collect it, though.

Take out paper, pen. This is a two-parter.

**First, take 2 minutes** to come up with a list of words or phrases to complete this sentence: "Writing is like \_\_\_\_\_."

**Next**, shout some of your ideas out loud. (Write on board.) Now, pick one of the words/phrases on your list or one of these on the board, and **freewrite for 6 minutes** on this:

**How** is writing like \_\_\_\_\_?

**Then, I ask for volunteers to read out loud.** I almost always get volunteers. Sometimes it takes some cajoling and joking. After a few students read, we talk as a class about the whole experience of freewriting.