

## *How To Do Fast-Writing*

by Mary Allen, author of *The Rooms of Heaven*

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Find a partner who has the same, or similar, goals as you, and meet with him or her regularly, maybe twice a month. During your first meeting with your partner, discuss how long you'll write during your fast-writing periods. I suggest writing for two or three 12-, 15-, or 20-minute periods during each meeting.

To fast-write, (both of you) write as fast as you can (together, at the same time) for your agreed-upon brief periods. I recommend setting down (when you start writing) in a *specific* moment that pops into your mind beforehand, perhaps in response to a writing prompt. Then stay inside the moment, writing down every detail that comes to you there, being as specific as you can. Try to be as present as you can in the moment you're writing about instead of standing outside the moment and writing *about* it, and try to ignore any thoughts or worries that come up about what you're writing. Just stay in the moment, perhaps writing in present tense.

While you write, make a concerted effort to write as fast as you can without stopping to think, edit, stare out the window, talk, or anything else. Don't even take your pen off the paper or your fingers off the keyboard. *The main object is to keep writing.* If you get stuck, write about being stuck until the writing moves on to some other place. Don't worry about quality, or whether what you're writing is coming out organized or anything else. Just keep writing, putting down whatever specific details pop into your head. This is surprisingly hard to do, but it'll get easier the longer you keep at it, and it's worth the effort (or, paradoxically, the effort not to make an effort.) The more you're able to let go of worrying about what you're writing and how good or bad it is the better your results will be. Just try to get out of the way and follow the writing wherever it takes you. I find that I have the best results when I program myself before I start to focus on concrete details rather than journal-type analysis.

After each short fast-writing period, read what you got to your partner, who also reads what she or he got to you. After your partner reads to you, be sure (this is *very* important for the process to work) that you do *not* critique what your partner wrote in any way. Do not engage in any sort of editing talk at all. Instead, tell your partner what you loved in her writing, being generous and lavish with your praise. This will give your partner the energy to go on and help her turn off her overly-critical self-editor. (And, of course, your partner will do the same thing when you read what you wrote to her.)

I've found that you can get a tremendous amount of writing done by using the above method. It also makes writing painless and fun and will lead you unerringly to your most important memories and to their true meaning in the context of your life. Once you start allowing your writing to flow freely without censoring or editing it, it will continually surprise you with unexpected leaps, amazing metaphors, vivid details, and language you couldn't have come up with any other way. If you're planning to create a finished product, you'll probably need to work with what you get via the "fast-writing" method, piecing it together into a narrative and going over it with a fine-tooth comb.

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