

ACE Quick Guide to Generating Ideas Through Writing

What is Generative Writing?

After completing an assignment plan, it can be difficult to translate your research and intended arguments into a first draft. Generative writing is therefore an **informal, exploratory technique that can be used to promptly draft assignment content**. It involves undertaking focused, timed writing exercises – typically on paper – **circumventing the urge to stop and edit** your work, even if mistakes occur.

The Benefits of Generative Writing



It can **reduce writing anxiety**! When undertaking generative writing exercises, there is no need to worry about the work being 'correct' or presented in full, grammatical sentences; it is more about translating your initial thoughts into words on the page.



Generative writing can help to **pinpoint what you do and do not know about the assignment topic** – identifying opportunities to undertake additional research.



Similarly, it can also direct you towards previously unexplored aspects of the topic and **lead to new questions and discoveries**.




Generative writing can **streamline the drafting process**, allowing you to focus on and produce small, manageable sections of an assignment within a fixed amount of time.

(Adapted from University of Illinois, 2025)

How do I Undertake a Generative Writing Exercise?

1. Identify a Topic of Focus



Prior to undertaking a generative writing exercise, it is important to establish a small, manageable topic of focus. You will therefore need to **identify a particular sub-heading or argument** within your assignment plan to write up.

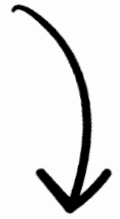
For further guidance, please see the [ACE Quick Guide to Assignment Planning](#).

2. Set Up the Exercise

Next, **locate a pen and a blank sheet of paper**. You can then **title the page** with your chosen sub-heading or argument. This will keep you focused as you write!

You will also need to decide on the length of your generative writing exercise, **setting a timer on your phone or computer**. As you will be writing continuously once the timer is active, we recommend starting with **15-25 minutes**.

However, you can adapt the length of your generative writing exercises according to preference as well as your commitments at work and home.



3. Write Continuously

Once prepared, **start the timer** and write continuously on your chosen sub-heading or argument until it has elapsed.

The purpose of a generative writing exercise is not to produce immaculate academic paragraphs. Your aim is to **keep the pen moving for the duration** of the exercise, efficiently translating your initial thoughts into words on the page.

As such, it is essential to **put aside the urge to edit or proofread as you write** – even if this means producing sentences that are nonsensical or deviate from your intended point.

There will be time to improve your work and, where necessary, exclude superfluous content when the exercise is complete. However, your writing may well reveal new questions or previously unexplored lines of reasoning!



4. Assess Your Work

After the timer has elapsed, **read over your work – underlining relevant points that may warrant further research, expansion, or inclusion in your first draft**. These can subsequently be typed and polished.

At this stage, you may also reject some ideas completely!

The objective is to think *through* writing, efficiently producing content for editing whilst identifying gaps in your knowledge and dispelling your fear of the blank page.

Variations on Generative Writing

Generative writing exercises are **typically undertaken on paper to minimise potential distractions** and encourage a stream of consciousness approach. The physical act of writing by hand can also promote creative thinking and aid memory retention (University of Illinois, 2025). However, you may find it helpful to **try the following variations** on generative writing – reflecting on which method best suits your learning style.

1. Microsoft Word	Open a blank document and follow the method previously outlined. Try to minimise distractions by closing unnecessary programmes and applications such as your email inbox or internet browser prior to setting a timer.
2. Notes	If you prefer writing on the go , you can undertake generative writing exercises by using the notes application on your phone. Experiment with different locations such coffee shops, public transportation on the way to or from work, or local parks until you determine which is most effective.
3. Voice Memo	Set a timer and record yourself speaking your ideas aloud in a voice memo. Afterwards, you can either transcribe the recording or take notes as you listen – identifying potential strengths and limitations. As you can record a voice memo anytime and anywhere , you may find it productive to walk or undertake simple household chores as you do so, clearing your mind and alleviating the pressure to compose fully developed thoughts.
4. Speech-to-Text	If you find it challenging to write on paper or in a document, you can also use a speech-to-text application (such as Microsoft Word's 'Dictate' function) to transcribe your ideas .

Reference List

University of Illinois (2025) *Freewriting*. Available at: <https://www.uis.edu/learning-hub/writing-resources/handouts/learning-hub/freewriting> (Accessed: 17 July 2025).



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