

# Timed Writing Workshop – Freeing Up the Subconscious in Writing

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I am indebted to Natalie Goldberg, author of **Writing Down the Bones**, for what has become one of the staples of my own writing practice. Though I don't do timed writing quite the way she says most of the time, I still find it essential to cutting through the murkiness of my own mind when I'm stuck, and for sharpening images while I'm working on a book.

Here is timed writing my way.

I prefer working at a keyboard to writing in longhand, so I almost always type my timed writings directly into the computer. If you don't like doing raw material at a keyboard, try it anyway for a while. You can always go to a notebook and pen when you're waiting at the dentist's office—timed writing is much more interesting than reading the June, 1974 issue of *Field and Stream* that he still has in there. (After you've read the [Patrick F. McManus](#) article, anyway.)

In either case, sit. Note the date and the time you start at the top of the page, and your topic, whatever it might be. As soon as you've done this, throw words on the page. Do not stop to correct typos or change words, do not second-guess the images spilling out onto the screen, do not stop to think of what comes next. If ideas follow that make no real sense, or if words hit the page that seem unconnected to anything, that's fine. Let them. If you write things about people that you know they would never want anyone to know, that's fine too. You don't ever have to show anyone your timed writings. Natalie Goldberg says, "Keep your hand moving." If you're typing, it's 'keep your fingers moving,' but either way, write

steadily for the time limit you've set for yourself. Try for at least ten minutes—you can usually get into serious meat in that length of time. Go for half an hour sometime, or for an hour straight just to see what it feels like.

This is [regular timed writing](#), (the link leads to examples that will give you an idea what to expect) and Goldberg recommends that you do it every day. I do my novel pages every day, so I only do timed writing when I'm having trouble with my pages, or when what's hitting my pages feels stiff and stilted, or false.

If you're doing timed writing in that latter instance, you do it a bit differently. Directly on the page where you're working (or on a separate sheet of paper if you aren't doing your book or story on a computer) write down the problem that your story is giving you, in three or four words. Drop down a line, check the time, and timed-write on that problem for ten minutes. Go get a drink of water when you're done, give yourself a few minutes to relax, then sit down and read what you wrote. More often than not, when I do this, I find the solution to the problem in the block of timed writing.

Finally, here is a partial list of the topics that I write on when I'm doing regular timed writing. I hope these spur your ideas, and get you writing. (Feel free to cut and paste these to get yourself started).

### Some Topics for Timed Writing

The past	A color	Hurt
The future	A smell	Dreams
Ghosts	Water	Reality
Anger	Weather	What feels good
Hope	I fear ...	What feels bad
Peace	I love ...	Family
Rage	I hate ...	Who I am
Today	I want ...	Who I wish I were
Yesterday	Wind	What I am
Tomorrow	Walking	What I wish I were
Food	I Remember	Who I was
Fantasy	Places	What I was

NOTE: I offer a comprehensive introductory class based on my fiction-writing and publishing experience. [It's called \*How to Write Flash Fiction that Doesn't SUCK\*, and it is no-strings-attached FREE, including a private classroom, downloadable lessons, and a friendly, well-moderated forum where you can work with other students. I hope you'll try it out.](#)

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