

Getting into “Writing Mind”

Spend ten or fifteen minutes closely observing your surroundings. You might choose to go for a walk along the river and see what there is to see/hear/smell there; or sit on a bench in a park, or spend a little time in a store or a coffee house or the library or some other public spot, or simply stay in your house and look out the window or stare up at the ceiling. Or you might choose a moment when you’re stuck in traffic or standing in the line at the bank or cleaning up dog poop or doing something else that feels difficult or boring or unpleasant. Whatever you’re doing, try to practice “mindfulness”—notice everything you can, as specifically as you can. (What’s the exact shape and color of that tree trunk? What do the petals look like on that flower? How does that dog act when it sniffs that park bench? What does the inside of this store smell like. etc.) Observe everything very closely, including how you feel and what you think as you’re observing, but don’t write anything down. (You might try telling yourself a story of what you’re seeing and feeling as you observe.)

Then at some point, perhaps immediately afterwards or later in the day or even the next morning or week or year, spend fifteen or twenty minutes writing about whatever you noticed, using only specific concrete details (for example, “the store smells like cardamom seeds mixed with mildew” instead of “the store smells strange” etc.). Include yourself, how you felt, both physically and emotionally, during the time when you were observing, again being specific about what you noticed (about your own thoughts, reactions, feelings, physical sensations.)

Do the description in the present tense, as in, “I’m sitting at a table in the back room of the Java House.” However, don’t do the writing and observing simultaneously. Let the details of what you observed percolate a little and then write about them at some point later.

During the writing time, try to write as fast as you can without stopping to think, edit, stare out the window, 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 – using complete sentences, putting down as many specific concrete details as you can.* If you get stuck or you’re having a hard time not editing, write about that, exploring how you feel in this moment—for example, “I feel self-conscious writing this now, I’m searching for perfect words and worrying about how good the writing is...” —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 the specific details that pop into your head from the time when you were observing.