

Taking Flight: Connecting Inner and Outer Realities during Invention

by Susan E. Antlitz

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Taking Flight: Connecting Inner and Outer Realities during Invention

Susan E. Antlitz

One of the toughest challenges beginning writers face is figuring out what to write about.* Connecting personal identity and purpose to more public contexts and subjects can play a significant role in helping people to write confidently. Also, since writing anxiety is a common cause of difficulty getting started, strategies for reducing anxiety including movement, sound, intentional distraction, role playing, journaling, and prayer and meditation can help the invention process to unfold more smoothly. Electronic media such as email, messaging or texting, and presentation software also provide avenues for generating ideas. By exploring these methods, you can also increase your satisfaction with writing, and you can find new ways to build bridges between the ideas and purposes that are meaningful to you and the writing you produce for others.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE SOCIAL

Some college writers see the writing that is done for classes as separate or different from one's personal goals and interests. It can be easy to slip into the mindset that those personal activities, commitments, and

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convictions are off-topic or not relevant to class-work. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Instead of writing being driven either by individual identity or by outside criteria, both of these facets of identity are interwoven, and used in conjunction with one another, these influences act as the two wings that can help get a writing project off the ground. The sense of personal identity and having one's own goals when writing (something that waits to take flight) can play a significant role in a writer's motivation and ability to write confidently. However, a text also needs to connect with the rest of the world in ways the audience can understand if it is to be effective.

That which makes us unique also connects us to others. Our DNA is our individual blueprint, and except for the case of identical twins or clones, each person has his or her own unique combination of genes. Yet, those genes come to us through a long heritage, stretching back countless generations, and have been passed down to us by our ancestors. Much like DNA, the social world of ideas and experiences we are born into both forms the basis of our individuality and deeply connects us to larger contexts in the world around us.

The individual and the collective are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they complement and reinforce one another. The inner world and the outer world are in constant flux, shaping, reinforcing, and challenging one another into new awareness. This matters in writing because it's easy for people to think of writing as more one or the other—as being about personal expression, creativity, inspiration and communicating one's ideas, or as being a task that is required by and for teachers, supervisors, or other audiences. Neither fully captures what writing is, and indeed, these two aspects can work together in many ways.

Trying to divide the personal from the social is ultimately a futile task because they overlap and influence one another so much, but as human beings, we have a tendency to think in terms of categories, porous as they may be. The categories are an illusion, but they can be helpful as a way to get started.

The Two Wings: An Exercise

While thinking about an idea and devising a way to write about it, you may find the following exercise helpful. We can call this exercise

Taking Flight, or finding the two wings of your ideas. Since there is a personal as well as an inter-personal, or social, aspect to any idea, this is a way of mapping out those aspects of the idea.

1. Sketch out a blank diagram like the one I've drawn below.
2. Think about your interests, thoughts, activities, goals, and questions.
3. List the ideas that are mostly personal under one wing (leave the corresponding space under the opposite wing blank until step 5).
4. List the ideas that are connected to larger contexts, communities, or issues under the other wing.
5. Once you have your initial list, go back and fill in information relating to each idea under the opposite column, so that each idea now lists both a personal and a social component.

In Figure 1, I've outlined some key areas that will generally fall under each category. You might think of other key areas to include. Figure 2 shows an example of what your actual diagram might look like.

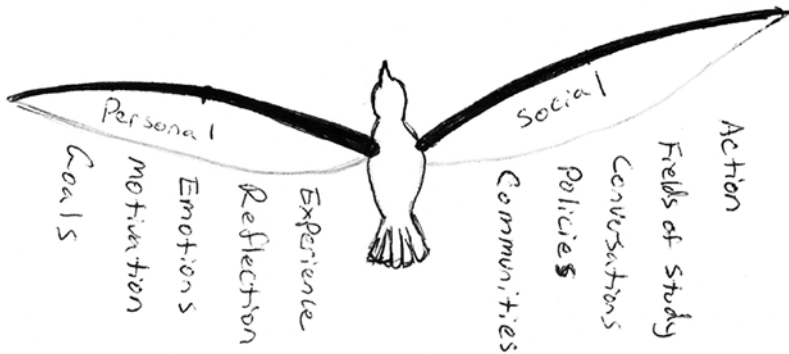


Figure 1. Diagram of Personal and Social Topical Aspects

This diagram can be used with either a list of interests you are using to try to find an idea, or it can be used to focus or develop an idea once you have a general direction.

Here is the diagram I made that lists several possible ideas:

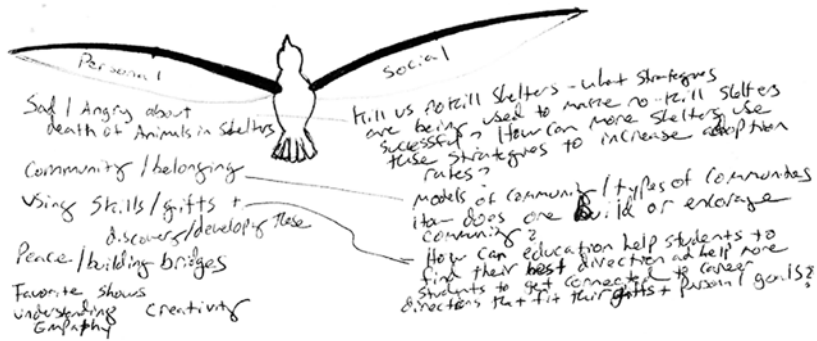


Figure 2. Diagram of Personal Interests and Social Components.

Here, I listed a few of the ideas or causes that are personally important to me, and then tried to pair those with the issues in the outside world by asking questions that I could explore in the process of building an essay. For example, an issue that I have a strong personal and emotional response to is the killing of healthy and potentially adoptable animals in shelters and animal control facilities. To link this to a context beyond myself, I listed the issue of kill versus no-kill shelters in the right-hand column, and in the left-hand column, I asked how the strategies used by no-kill shelters could also help other shelters to increase adoption rates and reduce euthanasia. I now have a question I can research and write about.

Look for Unexpected Connections

Another way to build possibilities for writing is to look over your list of ideas and create connections between options that are not deliberately paired. For example, since I already had three potential ideas and their social aspects listed in the diagram, I didn't put anything in the social column for the last few ideas I had in the personal column. One of these was "Favorite shows." If I had gone into more detail, I might have listed the titles of some of my favorite television series, and then connected that to the social aspects I had listed for other items. In this case, one that would work would be "models or types of community. How does one build or encourage community?" I could write an essay that looks at how the relationships form and change over time between the characters in my favorite shows, and then even do some research into models of community building and community formation and

see how well fiction mirrors what the relationship/community scholars have theorized.

Alternately, I could connect the subject of TV programs to the animal shelter idea. It's unlikely I'd find a direct connection, but if I alter the idea of the animal shelter to something like how animals are portrayed on screen, I could also build on that idea, or even write about the different ways our society views or treats animals.

Remember that your diagram and your list of ideas are meant to be a jumping-off place, so you can change them as needed if you think of new ideas or find a new direction you want to explore.

The openness to creating connections where you may not expect to find them can be very useful. Cultivating creativity and connection-building is a very healthy habit that can have unforeseen benefits for your writing.

Random Words

Here is a game you can use to help develop your creative flexibility. It's one of my favorites.

1. Take a sheet of paper and fold it in half.
2. On one half write a list of random words, one per line.
3. Then, with the page still folded down the middle, give the paper to someone else, with your list facing down so the other person can't see it.
4. On the other half of the paper, ask the other person to write a list of random words that he or she thinks of.
5. Then unfold the paper. You should have, on each line, a word you wrote and a word someone else wrote. These words will hopefully have nothing to do with one another.
6. And this is where the game begins: Try to find the connection between the two words on each line. Write a sentence that uses both of them in a logical and believable way.

This exercise can help to build your mental agility and help to make you more alert to forming connections that may not be immediately obvious to other people.

For example, I have picked a word, tree, and using a Facebook status update, asked one of my friends to give me a random word, which has turned out to be *svelte*. The sentence I created from these two words was, “The *svelte* tree waved its branchy arms like an ecstatic dancer.” I used the metaphor of the dancer to make it more of a challenge, but the sentence could have been simply, “The *svelte* tree waved its branches.”

Half of the game is the sense of anticipation before you know what word or words the other person will give you. It lightly mirrors the anxiety you may feel before you know what to write about. However, since, it’s also a game and the stakes are low, it begins to build an association between the anticipation of the unknown and your amusement or enjoyment. The game usually turns out to not be as hard as one anticipates. An element of play can take the edge off of writing anxiety.

Another friend gave me the word *bongo*. I admit this was slightly harder, but I came up with, “As the tree stood drinking in the sun with its verdant leaves, it had no awareness that its life would soon change forever, and that it was destined to become the frame of a pair of bongo drums for young Sally.” I saw a connection between the tree and the word *bongo* because a *bongo* is a type of drum, and drum frames are usually made of wood. I’ve embellished my sentence just to play with the language, but “The wood from the tree was used to make bongo drums” would have also sufficed. Simple or complex, poetic or plain, no sentence that connects the two words is wrong. This is also fun to do with a group of people, where everyone can share what they came up with. It’s neat to see the sorts of things people can create out of this.

Build Ideas through Compound Topics

An important part of invention is the ability to make connections. One strategy that I find myself using is to think of my topics not as single ideas, but rather pairs of related ideas. It can be helpful to phrase your topic in such a way that it includes “and,” “or,” “but,” or other connecting words because that can shift your focus to the relationships between parts of the subject. You are more likely to end up with a more specific focus or direction that way.

An example might be to take a broad subject such as the Internet and combine it with another subject, such as the workplace, to focus on the Internet in the workplace. Bringing the two subjects together

makes me think of the following questions. How has the workplace changed as a result of the Internet? How has email changed the way a company is run? What do employees or managers need to know about digital communications technologies? What problems might they encounter, and how can those be resolved or prevented? From there, I can keep asking questions until I find one I want to learn more about and eventually write about.

The advantage of focusing your essay around a compound idea is that it will tend to make the subject and focus of what you are writing about more complex. For example, if I make up a pair of subjects like “Animals and the Elderly,” “Doctor Who and identity,” or “work as spiritual growth,” I could then build on each of these ideas and try to think of what sorts of things might be in a resulting essay.

EMBRACING THE PERSONAL

Prayer and Meditation

You may be surprised to find a reference to personal spirituality in an essay of this kind, but when you are doing the invention work for writing, you need to be who you are. If you have your own faith, embrace it as part of your thinking and writing process, and that openness can help to keep your creativity flowing. It’s much harder to be creative and generate ideas while closing off a part of yourself. Therefore, love and accept all aspects of yourself as you are in the process of creating a text.

I worked for a time at a private, religious institution, and the classes I taught there were like most writing classes in terms of the content of the class and the use of well known invention techniques for writing such as freewriting, looping, concept mapping, etc. (if you are unfamiliar with these, ask your teacher to explain them to you or look them up online). However, since it was a religious school, I had the freedom and even the institutional support to bring faith into the work the class did.

One day at the beginning of the semester after we had been discussing various aspects of our individual writing processes, I asked the students if they ever included prayer as part of their writing process, and I was surprised when no one in the class had previously thought to do that, even though prayer was a part of their lives in other ways. This

demonstrates that using one's personal and even spiritual resources is not always an obvious strategy in a formal class setting, even when it would be welcomed. Sometimes we have to bring those options out into the open and talk about them because it might not automatically occur to us that we can make those connections.

If you belong to a religion or spiritual tradition that uses prayer or meditation, then I encourage you to also include that as part of your writing process and as part of how you generate ideas to write about. Pray for insight and ideas, if that fits with your belief system, or meditate to free up your awareness. These activities may lead to becoming aware of an idea that you had not considered before, and they may help with exploring and developing an idea once you have one. These practices can also lessen anxiety since anxiety is partly about being alone when facing an overwhelming task. If you are a spiritual person who believes in a deity, then use that to remind yourself that you are not alone, even when confronted with a challenging writing task. Or, if you meditate, that can help you to relax your mind and body and let go of stress, which usually increases intellectual and creative performance. Let those parts of your life be part of your writing process as well.

I often pray for insight when I am working on a writing project. There is a certain amount of trust involved—I am generally confident that I will be able to think of something, and I always do, even if I am not sure at first what I am going to come up with. That sort of confidence helps to limit my worrying about what I am going to write, and it puts me more in the frame of mind that discovering possible ideas is an exciting adventure. Then I can't wait to see what happens. If you are a person who prays about other aspects of your life, try doing so with your writing assignments, and see how it turns out. Remember, let all of who you are be part of your inventing. What other aspects of your identity might inform your writing process?

During invention, no aspect of who you are is off limits, though you need to decide for yourself how much of that process you are willing to share publicly, and how much is appropriate to include in the final draft. The final draft should be adjusted to fit the needs and expectations of your audience and to suit the purpose of your writing. The behind-the-scenes work you do, however, is yours to do with as you will, unless an assignment also asks you to try specific invention or pre-writing strategies as part of your work.

Feelings and Ideas

I have learned that feelings and ideas are very closely related during invention, and so it's a good idea to pay attention to them. One of my hobbies is collecting gemstones and crystals, which are to me an inspiring form of natural artwork. Part of what gives me such a sense of delight when looking at stones comes from seeing them through an artist's eye. Consider, for instance, a polished stone made from polychromatic jasper and how my observations led me to think about writing.



Figure 3. Polychromatic Jasper.

One day, I picked up this stone and took a careful look at it. The bands of color reminded me of the seashore and a beach of pink sand. Since it was late at night, I imagined what it would be like to stand on such a beach, silhouetted by the twilight, and stare out to sea, an endless dark sky stretching into the distance with a single bright star illuminating the silent silvery waves. The scene, if one could touch it, would be soft and even soothing, like velvet. The meaning of this scene to me is one of potential waiting to be explored. It felt like stand-

ing on the shores of a world that was waiting to be created, imagined into being. And I thought about people who write stories, and how they create, in their imagination, the worlds they write into being—which in some sense is always what we do when we write. We are creating a picture of the world for our audience, and it is colored and stylized by how it emerges from our own perspectives.

The artist in me also wanted to try to paint this scene. And this is one of the most natural forms of invention of all—we see something and our imagination responds. We feel a desire to create something in response to what we have seen, whether that creation is a painting, a poem, or an essay. Often in a writing class, we are responding to texts, but our response could really be to anything.

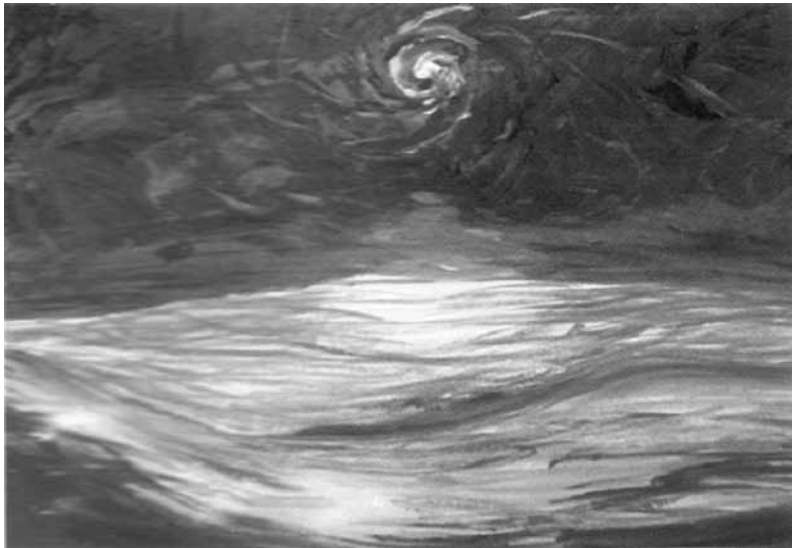


Figure 4. Landscape Painting Inspired by Polychromatic Jasper.

My quick painting is far from photorealistic, and if you saw the painting by itself, I very much doubt that “polychromatic jasper” would spring to mind. But that is the beauty of invention. As an artist, photorealism is not, and likely never will be, my style. I accept that about myself, and instead of seeing it as a limitation, I choose to celebrate my own unique style. One of my art teachers back in high school once told the class that if a perfect recreation of reality was the goal, then one might as well take a photograph, because painting is

more about interpreting the world through the artist's vision and way of seeing. I'd like to suggest the same principle to you: your writing is not about trying to recreate what is out there in the world, or to write what someone else—some imaginary perfect writer—could write, but rather to see the subject of your writing through your own vision of it. Even when we write non-fiction, we are recreating a vision of the world with our words and putting that portrayal out there to share with our audience. As my art teacher told the class that day, what you create will be unique because you are unique.

CREATIVITY AND PLAY

Having an attitude of play can help writers to be more open to creativity, and increased creativity means that ideas are likely to flow more easily. Reflective activities, such as journaling, can also lead to creative new insights. While taking time to play with words or reflect on ideas may seem like a distraction from the work of writing a paper, building one's creative fluency tends to save time in the long run.

An example of how taking the time to do some reflective writing can lead to new ideas is illustrated in the following journal entry:

July 4, 2009

Invention is more than a set of techniques—it's an attitude and an openness to inviting new ideas and experiences into our lives. A willingness to approach writing playfully, without allowing concerns about grades and even the final outcome to intrude into the time and space set aside for that thinking and play is ironically an important practical step in the work of writing. Writing certainly can be hard work, and while that may make having an open and exploratory approach to writing challenging, the play really is part of the work. This is a paradox, but the key to accepting it, I think, is often a matter of giving ourselves permission to be less than serious during the process of creating a serious outcome. Cultivating play is basically practicing generating ideas and trying out new approaches and ways of thinking, which

is what is most needed when trying to get a piece of writing started.

Play, and giving oneself the permission to play, is also part of lessening anxiety, since worry about how a text will or will not turn out in the end, or how it will be evaluated, can lead one to second-guess one's work. I often feel like writing is like building a house of cards—when I'm focused on putting one card on top of the others, the house gets built, but when I start worrying about whether it is good enough, whether readers will like it or not, how long it needs to be, or whether I can finish or not, it's like the wind that comes along and blows the house of cards apart, all collapsing in on itself. Some patterns of thinking are not helpful during the early phases of a writing project. It's important to catch these negative patterns and purposefully move oneself back into the mindset of building the house.

What I did when writing these last few paragraphs was to think of the first sentence, and then write to elaborate on it. Be open to the possibility that a text, especially during its generative moments, does not need to conform to a traditional format. Give yourself permission to write an early draft that is a combination of prose, snippets of thoughts, images, or even audio or video, if you have access to those technologies.

It might be helpful to think of your early work on a text as a collection of all sorts of documents and items. Don't limit yourself just to paper. Let your thinking grow, without regard to traditional formats. Once you have a grasp on the ideas and direction for your writing, you can make the final draft fit the guidelines you have been given and the expectations of your audience. Working with non-traditional formats can be helpful when generating ideas for a traditional paper assignment.

WRITING ANXIETY

The idea-based play writers engage in can serve a dual purpose. It helps to generate ideas and possibilities for writing, and it can also help to alleviate writing anxiety. Even for experienced writers, the pressure to produce something substantial can be intimidating. I think one's expectations for oneself grow proportionately to one's abilities—as human beings, I think we tend to always be looking ahead, envisioning the level we would like to be at.

I know for myself, I can imagine what I want a text or a painting to be, and the way I picture it often exceeds what I know how to produce. It's not a weakness, *per se*, but rather, a tendency that shows how we are always growing into something new. I'd be more concerned if my ideas never pushed the limits of my current abilities. So, if you get frustrated because your writing is never quite how you want it to be, just accept it as a sign of your potential to grow. I think over time, we move ourselves closer to what we envision.

One can be a successful writer and still experience moments of anxiety or frustration. I have known students who were very anxious writers, but produced wonderful texts despite those feelings. Feeling stressed or overwhelmed when faced with a writing assignment does not mean that you are a bad writer. It means that you are a writer who needs to learn, and can learn, ways to overcome those challenges. The strategies in the following sections can help you to work around any writing anxiety you may have; however, these strategies can be used by any writer as part of his or her invention process.

Anxiety and Procrastination

Anxiety can be a cause for procrastination for me. I don't panic, really. I get just nervy enough to not be able to concentrate. And so I'll put off writing. I have, however learned something along the way: whether I write a text weeks in advance or the night before, it still takes the same number of hours to write it. If you find you tend to procrastinate, it may be possible (though not optimal) to write a paper the day before it is due. But make sure you block out the hours you will need, say about eight hours for a five-to-seven page paper. And make sure you have access to sources and other people to talk to and get feedback from if you can—the conversation helps to break up the time, and other people can help keep you motivated if they are there to help.

A very common recommended strategy is to put a draft away for at least a few days and then reread it and make changes. Keep in mind that you will miss out on that if you do wait until the last day. But if it can't be helped, and you find yourself having put off the paper until the end, then at least make sure you have enough hours available to put a solid effort into the paper. I'll confess to having put papers off to the last day before, but I will also admit that I always ended up wishing that I had more time to work over the finished draft than what I ended up with. Planning ahead can spare you some anxiety if you don't respond well to feeling rushed.

INVENTION AND ANXIETY REDUCING ACTIVITIES

Journaling as a Way to Reflect on Writing (and to discover new ideas)

The following is a brief journal entry I wrote while gathering my ideas for this essay that reflects on the connection between feelings of anxiety and other related emotions that can affect one's writing processes:

Notes: April 18, 2009 (Visual Feelings)

When I think about starting to write, I feel both an excitement about the possibilities, but also some uncertainty as well—some anxiety about creating an actual text that resembles the one I can imagine. The feeling of potential often comes to me as a vague sense impression of a visual image. For example, around 2:00 A.M. yesterday as I was thinking about writing this, what I felt was an image of a starlit midnight with crickets chirping and perhaps a moon in the sky, or a streetlight. And I suppose that image makes sense as a way to think about the feeling of anticipation that comes with starting to write—the very early morning hours tend to be cool and crisp, and one tingles a bit as a result of that coolness. Anticipation or the sense that one is on the verge of creating a text that is somewhat stirring or artistic has the same kind of tingle to it. Sometimes, creativity feels like an eagle

soaring or like a bright, warm sun. These feelings and faint visual impressions are almost always part of what's going on in my mind and spirit when I am planning a piece of writing. Once, when I found myself with only two hours to write a seven-page paper, my feeling was that of being like a racecar driver, with the keyboard as my steering wheel. (Incidentally, my limited time wasn't because I procrastinated—it was because I had thought so much about the topic that I couldn't get the ideas organized, and so, even though I had put a lot of hours into the paper, I found myself running out of time.)

I had little idea what I would write in that journal entry when I first touched pen to paper, but while writing, I became consciously aware of the way anticipation and excitement feel very similar to anxiety. And that gave me an idea—what if there was a way to turn one emotion into another? Essentially, this is what many of the activities I use to reduce stress do—redirect the emotions into a more constructive direction.

Just as it did for me, taking the time to journal about your thoughts and feelings related to the activity of writing and to specific writing assignments can help you to gain insight and find new ideas and directions.

Be a Star

Even though you may not think of writing as fun, try to enjoy it and role-play having a positive attitude. The following role-playing activity may help you:

1. Pretend you are an established writer, that everyone loves your work, and that your audience is eager to read your next exciting publication, which they will love simply because they adore you. You have to do the work of writing eventually anyway, and optimism yields better results than worrying. Staying positive gives you the best chance of doing your best. So, imagine an audience that will be delighted with everything and anything you write.

2. If this is hard to imagine, ask a friend or two to role-play your adoring public and make the whole thing a game.
3. Pretend you're giving them the press release about what your next book will be about. Let them ask questions, and let it become a conversation.
4. Let yourself be over-the-top with the ideas you share, and have a good time.
5. Dress up in pretentious or obnoxious clothing and pretend to be more eccentric than you actually are if this helps to create the mood and make you feel more outgoing.

If you are anything like me, you and your friends will likely find yourselves laughing at some point during this activity. Laughter is a great way to beat anxiety and build a positive attitude. You'll be re-training your gut response to writing tasks, and you may even find yourself looking forward to these sorts of fun interactions with your friends or classmates during the early stages of writing. Take turns being the star and audience. A more serious peer review can be done later, after you actually have a completed draft.

If You Can't Avoid Distractions, Use Them

I find that being slightly distracted helps with invention, and that sometimes, it's helpful to watch TV or a movie while thinking about a writing project. Doing so lets me take micro breaks and keeps anxiety to a minimum. It can be counterproductive to see all distractions as a problem—rather, use and even create distractions to consciously adjust the emotions you feel when trying to get started with writing. It may help to have a couple of fun objects within reach. Items that light up and make sounds are great for this. Small puzzles can also help, especially the kind where you try to fit different plastic geometric shapes together to form a particular outline. A glass of water to drink or a healthy snack can serve as a brief distraction.

I do find that activities involving sound can help. I have a Bodhran, which is an Irish frame drum, and a singing bowl. If I seriously need to de-stress, I go and bang on my drum. Both of these instruments require movement to produce the sound. The drum has to be stuck with fast, rhythmic movements using a stick called a cipin or beater, and

the singing bowl is made to sing, or produce harmonic tones, by rubbing the outside rim of the bowl with a suede covered striking tool or mallet. Listening to the drumbeat or whirring of the bowl is calming, giving the mind one thing to focus on, and the arm movement releases tension by using up excess adrenaline.



Figure 5. Bodhran



Figure 6. Singing Bowl

Once you've indulged in a few of these methods of intentional distraction, bring yourself back to the page or screen. I have found that it is important to make the very small step of writing something, even if it is not much. Even if it is only a word or two, or one sentence, write it down. Take a break, and come back in five minutes and write down another few words or another line. Eventually, you'll find you have more to say.

Movement

Movement helps. With as much work as I often do, it is very easy to be sedentary, and sitting for long periods of time each day can lead to sluggishness and fatigue. Students with a full load of classes and the accompanying hours of studying are likely to face similar issues. Getting up and moving gets the circulation and adrenaline going and can sometimes build enjoyment. I find that I become more excited about my writing projects—usually because I will have had a mini-epiphany by then—after I take some time to engage in some type of physical activity, whether it is taking a walk or doing some manual labor around the house. If you feel nervous, physical activity like lifting weights or taking a walk can help. I like to go for a walk or a drive and listen to music just to unwind and think. Getting the circulation moving improves thinking for me. When writing, I often feel the urge to get up and pace for a few minutes before getting back to work. It's both a way to release excess energy as well as to celebrate the energy that writing tends to generate for me. Keeping the adrenaline regulated can help you to avoid getting too worked up, or feeling too overwhelmed.

Change of Scenery or Method

Another strategy that I find helpful is periodically moving to a new location. If I am writing at the table downstairs and start to get stuck, I'll take the laptop upstairs, or take it to the office and work there instead. Changing the scenery every few hours helps. Also, even though my composing primarily takes place on the computer, I do switch back and forth between the computer and paper if I am at a sticking point. Usually, the change is all I need to get going again.

Describe Your Plans—Even if You Don't Have Any Yet

One strategy that I often use is to write a brief summation of what I plan to do with an essay I am starting to work on. I am someone who usually doesn't have more than a vague idea of what I will write until I actually start writing. The activity of writing a plan jumpstarts that process. I make up my plan as I start to put it down in writing. I recommend that you try this and write a paragraph or so about what you plan to put in your paper, even if you aren't sure where you are going with your general idea yet. At first, this may sound like a paradox, but for some people this will get the ideas flowing. Some writers are more comfortable with paradox than others, but it can't hurt to give it a try.

ELECTRONIC STRATEGIES

Email and Messaging

Email or instant messaging can be used as part of this planning and reflecting. I have even used my Facebook wall in this way. The exchange that follows was prompted by a document I wrote while just playing around with ideas. I wrote my 1400 word essay because I thought my sister and sister-in-law would find it amusing, and I am aware that other people in my field have presented conference papers that link science fiction or fantasy programs to theoretical concepts. You might try to pair one of your own favorite programs to theories from psychology, sociology, or from your major area of study for one of your papers, if your instructor allows you to develop your own topics for class papers.

Susan Antlitz

Wrote 1400+ words on the spiritual aspects of technology in Torchwood and Doctor Who yesterday evening. Starting a new status here for comments from the readers. I must say that I really enjoyed exploring the theme of the interplay between technology and humanity.

Laurel Antlitz at 11:09am April 21

I read the whole paper and it is very inspirational

Susan Antlitz at 12:26pm April 21

Tell me more about how it inspired you. I want to develop it some more and maybe turn it into something.

Laurel Antlitz at 1:00pm April 21

Let's see what inspired me. I need to think about this some then I will give you an answer

Laurel Antlitz at 3:15pm April 21

I have thought and thought about this. I like the way that you described each show and the technology that goes into what each character portrays. I am also inspired by the fact that you outline certain show in detail and especially the characters role in each show

Debbie Antlitz at 5:30pm April 21

My feeling on RTDs stuff is he is never talking so much about what the technology makes us do or not. And in many instances it is not the *technology* but the concept behind the technology which is just a carrier (a magic potion would fit the same bill if he were writing Harry Potter). For example, Cybermen are not about ear buds, but about emotionless conformity.

The bliss patch that killed the senate in [the episode Gridlock] was not about drug abuse, but about mood-motivation detached from a community sense. The general gist of RTD is that humans are/should be responsible for their own actions—never say the technology, or the Devil, or the Doctor made you do it . . .

Susan Antlitz at 5:34pm April 21

well, what you said is pretty much what I was saying. The technology brings the human tendencies to the surface and amplifies them.

Susan Antlitz at 5:35pm April 21

it doesn't cause them, but rather creates the occasion.

Debbie Antlitz at 5:44pm April 21

Yeah, but the technology is also a distraction. It's like writing a thesis on "uses of muscle mass in Spirit Stallion of the Cimarron"

Laurel Antlitz at 5:45pm April 21

True the technology does bring the human tendencies to the surface but it also shows how each character is portrayed in their role

Susan Antlitz at 6:04pm April 21

But I think I am most interested, as I said earlier, in how shows, as a technology in themselves, present ways of thinking and imagining the human. I'd probably be most interested in the cohesion and disintegration of group identity and identification.

Laurel Antlitz at 6:05pm April 21

write about group identity and identification of technology in shows.

Susan Antlitz at 9:18am April 22

The group dynamics are interesting.

Debbie Antlitz at 6:33pm April 24

Like at the end of *Journey's End* you have a very happy and dynamic family group bringing the Earth Home. Then they peel off one by one leaving him alone, like the whole group was “about” him but not about “him” Except for the one with Wilfred at the end. At the end, community comes down to the resonance of the person.

I began with the idea about the way the technology relates to humanity, but by the end of the Facebook thread, I realized what I was really interested in was the social dynamics among the characters. Exchanges like this can happen through message boards, Instant Messenger, text messages, email, Twitter, or other social networking tools.

When I was a graduate student, I used to use instant messaging to talk with one of my friends from my undergraduate years after she had moved away to Tennessee. I would message her about my work, and we would chat about it online. In addition to the feedback, it really helped me to put my plans into words. Usually, by the time I had finished explaining to her what I was writing, I had a much clearer idea about it. I find I can get a lot more done than I think I can by taking a little time to explain to myself or someone else, in writing, where I am at with my work. Usually, in the process of explaining it, the next idea or next step will occur to me, and then I can move forward with the writing.

Another strategy I use is to send my notes to myself on email. I will write just a short paragraph or so of the ideas I have so far, and hit send. Then, later when I've had more time to think about my project, I'll reply to my message with additional notes and ideas, and I'll do that several times over the course of a few days. The paper begins to emerge from my collection of notes and reflections. It's kind of like a journal, only it's on email.

Using PowerPoint as an Invention Space

Presentation software such as PowerPoint can also be used as a space for invention. If you find you have a vague idea of what to write about, or if you have many ideas but aren't sure how to bring them together into enough focus for a rough draft, creating a slide show presentation of your ideas may help.

- Put each main idea as a heading on a slide
- List your thoughts about each point, using more than one slide per point when needed.
- Add images, audio, or video when these capture an idea you haven't yet put into words but want to eventually address in your rough draft.
- Add Web links to your slides if there is online content you think you may want to eventually cite within your document. Since school libraries often provide students with free access to full-text databases for professional journals and other periodicals, you are likely to find that a good many of your sources can be linked to. This way, you will be able to find them quickly when you need to.
- If you aren't sure what order to put the points in, or which points should be main or sub-points, that's okay for now. PowerPoint makes it easy to reorder slides and move the content around later.
- While not directly related to the content of your writing, choosing a slide design template or color scheme can make your presentation-draft look more visually appealing and help to reinforce a certain tone or mood while you are generating your ideas and sense of direction.
- Making your ideas literally look good on the screen may help to boost confidence for anxious writers or provide a welcome change from the typical black text on a white screen.
- While the traditional background and text color will be required in the final draft that you turn in to your instructor (unless your assignment guidelines specify otherwise), your behind-scenes invention work can be much more flexible.

PowerPoint or other software designed for presentation has potential as an invention tool because it helps us to work with the overall points or ideas in a text rather than becoming focused on the minute details. If you haven't used PowerPoint before, or if you are unfamiliar with some of its features, there are several free tutorial videos available on YouTube.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

While I enjoy concept maps and am very good at creating them, they aren't one of my primary invention strategies anymore. I used to love them. When I was in high school, I once made a concept map that was an arm span wide and an arm span tall, filled with intricate detail. I filled the entire page with miniscule writing, ovals, squares, and webbed lines. I even wrote all of the connections on the lines between the bubbles. It was an exquisite masterpiece, and it helped me to write a very detailed paper. However, over the years, the techniques I use have changed, and now my invention work typically includes listing, journaling, prayer and reflection, and instant messaging. I don't think the methods I used to use have lost any of their value, but rather, the ways of thinking and connecting ideas they represent have become second nature, making it easier to make intuitive leaps. When one uses a particular strategy frequently, it can become intuitively ingrained and become instinctual.

When I am inventing, I don't try to make my notes fit into any particular form, and I allow them to switch form as I feel moved to do so. I often do still use a form of freewriting. I also use other ways of keeping the ideas flowing, like taking a short break, getting up and moving around, taking a sip of water, rereading what I have written and then adding more, or switching from writing on the computer or writing on paper or vice-versa. If you use a variety of strategies and write regularly, over time, your fluency and ability to keep generating text will grow. And as it does, you are likely to find that the strategies you use also change over time, and you'll probably even develop some of your own.

DISCUSSION

1. Name something in your environment that inspires you. What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you look at it or think about it? What objects do you encounter throughout a usual day that are meaningful to you? Take some time to describe them and their significance.
2. What emotions do you experience when you begin to write? One a scale of 1–10, how much anxiety do you tend to have about writing? What aspect of the writing concerns you the

most? What additional strategies can you think of that might help to lessen or redirect nervous energy?

3. What strategies have you used to generate ideas in the past? What has worked or not worked for you? Try several of the strategies discussed in this essay. Which ones appeal to you most, and why?