

Worksheet | Zero Draft

Source: Br. Tom Murphy, O. Carm.
<http://www.brtoom.org/assign/zerodraft.html> (last accessed 15/02/2019)



What is a Zero Draft?

A Zero Draft is your first attempt to assemble thoughts related to your research topic or question. It is a more or less unstructured piece of writing that flows quickly from your own mind as you reflect upon your topic, your questions, and your reading. A Zero Draft is focused freewriting ... or the very next step.

A Zero Draft is not unlike two steps Peter Elbow uses in his "Direct Writing Process":

- Write down as quickly as you can everything you can think of that pertains to your topic or your theme.
- Don't let yourself repeat or digress or get lost, but don't worry about the order of what you write, the wording, or about crossing out what you decide is wrong.

(Elbow, P. *Writing with Power*. New York: Oxford U P, 1981. 30-31.)

How does it work?

- Begin by placing your topic in mind. Focus.
- Begin with a question, a wonder, or an insight.
- Begin by writing what you think you know about this subject.
- Begin by wondering about what you need to know for this subject.
- Begin by arguing with yourself or one of your authors.
- Begin by remembering a key moment, image, or idea from your reading.
- Begin by explaining why you chose this topic.
- Begin by pretending that you have all of the answers, that you know much more than you actually do.
- Begin by imagining that you are explaining all of this to a very young person.
- Just begin.

Does it have to be typed?

No it doesn't, but it should be legible (for your sake as well as any reader's). Many people prefer the speed of a keyboard for this process, but you may be one who needs the tactile stimulation of pen in hand.

How long does it have to be?

Because it is the outpouring of your brain as it zeros in on your subject, it should be a substantial reflection of all that your brain can generate about that subject. Much, most, or all of what you write in this draft may be eventually trashed. This is part of a discovery process. The more you write here, the better will be your chances of uncovering good stuff, real thought-treasure.