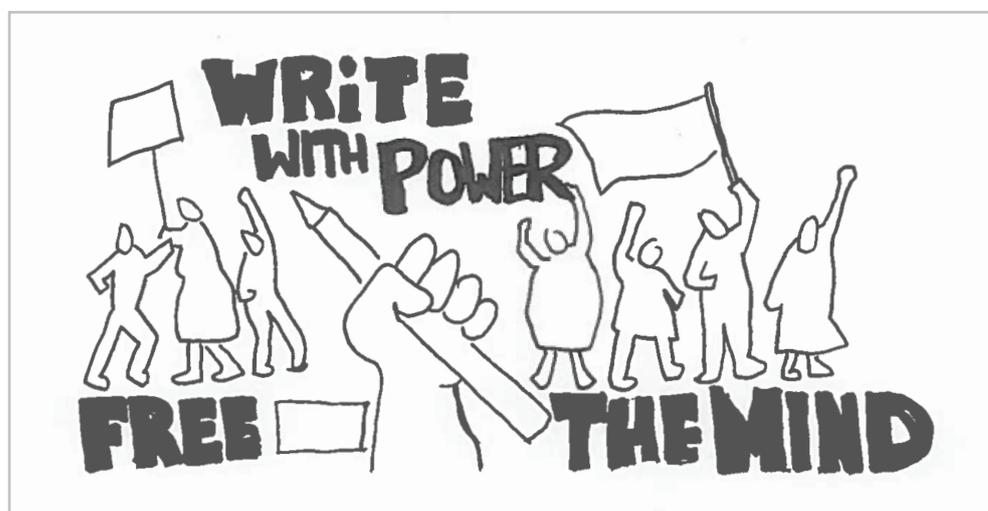


# CHAPTER 1

## DEVELOPING A CREATIVE ACTIVIST MIND - *FREE WRITING TOOL*



“The greatest weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

—Steve Biko

“Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds!”

—Bob Marley/Marcus Garvey

We begin this resource book by focusing on a powerful weapon, the mind of the activist. We suggest a way in which an activist can develop a free and creative mind using the Free Writing Tool.

The community activist engages with problems that at times appear impossible to resolve. The exploitation by corrupt political elites and powerful global corporations destroys community confidence and a community’s belief in change.

What the activist can bring into this situation is more than knowledge and skill. An activist can bring creativity and hope. To be creative and hopeful the activist must achieve a level of freedom in herself or himself. In this chapter we offer a writing tool which can help the activist grow her or his personal creativity and hope, while at the same time developing core activist skills of reflection and writing.

As Steve Biko, the South African black student leader said in the 1970's, oppression happens through the oppressor's control of our minds. In freeing our minds, we can create a powerful instrument for both our social and personal liberation. A free mind is a weapon and a tool for our liberation from oppression.

The oppression of our minds happened through colonial and race rule. This destroyed traditional Africa and created new anti-black, anti-African societies. This oppression continues in new forms today. We see the rule of the rich and powerful business and political elites over the poor, we see the oppression of women by men. The education system reinforces our 'mental slavery' as it trains us to be passive and uncritical and to accept the rule of the 'big man leader.'

These oppressions take away our self-confidence. If we do not feel confident of our abilities, if we do not feel hopeful about changing our situation, we become angry, bitter and cynical. We spread negativity and passivity around us. Our anger can cause us to make the wrong decisions and this can deplete our creative energy. Our oppression can disorganise and block creative action.

We experience many different forms of oppression. We are oppressed because we are black, because we are women, because we are gay or lesbian (LGBTIQ), because we have little education and are unemployed. All these oppressions affect us physically, socially and economically. But importantly, Steve Biko reminds us, that in addition to the structural oppression of political and economic systems there is the internal personal oppression of our minds.

As Steve Biko says, our oppression imprisons our mind. It makes us feel we are lesser beings, and that we are not able to make change happen. So alongside our political and economic struggles it is important to find a way of freeing our minds as individual activists. As Bob Marley urges us, quoting Marcus Garvey, 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery – non but ourselves can free our minds'.

How do we free our minds, so that we are able to imagine and work for a different world? How do we develop the energy, ideas and skills to bring about liberation in both our community and our personal lives?

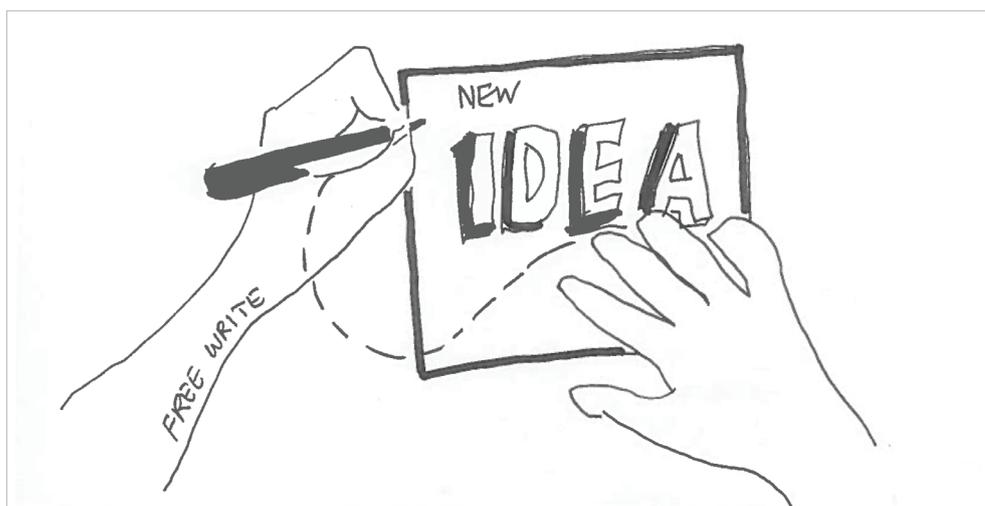
Taking the time to be personally reflective is an important way to bring about this internal liberation. Being reflective helps us understand our internal oppression and find ways to free ourselves. It helps us to think about and learn from our actions. This is the basis for creativity.

There are many practices that can help us to reflect. Spiritual practice, writing, music, art, poetry, can all help reflection. What all these activities have in common is that, for brief moments of time they release the mind from obsessing over our problems and allow us to generate new energy and creative ideas for change.

In our Community Monitors Schools in South Africa we have focused on Free Writing as a tool and a practice to help us to be personally reflective. We introduced the free writing tool as a way for quiet and calm reflection and to build a fresh and creative mind. We focus on free writing to build activist skills as well as to build the personal self-confidence of activists.

# 1.1

## The Free Writing Tool



Free writing is talking to yourself on paper and keeping your mind as free as possible.

Free writing helps you to freely express what is in your mind. This writing is free because you write without judging your writing. This writing is for yourself. No one needs to read it. Even you do not have to go back to read your free writing. It is a form of practice to be free. It can also be a practice to help you to develop your ideas. And it can be a writing practice to develop your skills as a writer.

Free writing will work for you if you do this regularly almost every day. Set yourself a time limit for your free writing. You can start with four minutes, then build to ten minutes, to half an hour. Some people free write for up to three hours or even longer when they have got into the practice.

Your free writing will look rough and may have spelling errors and incomplete sentences. Do not worry about that. The aim is to express your thoughts freely from heart to mind to paper. Here are some tips in the two boxes below to help you get into free writing. As you will see there are more don'ts than dos. This is because there are more things blocking our freedom than enabling our freedom!

## THE DO'S OF FREEWRITING

### When you free write

- It helps to have a free writing prompt – that is a word or a sentence to start off your writing – but you do not have to stay on topic, you can let your mind take you wherever it wants to go
- Relax and let the free writing stimulate your mind with whatever comes up.
- Give yourself permission to jump all over the place regardless of logic.
- Keep your hands moving even when words do not come, keep your hand moving anyway. Write spiralling lines, write nonsense words, or write the word you got stuck on (“ on . . . on . . . on”) — until your mind clicks back into action and more words come. You can write, My hand is tired, my hand is tired; you can leave blanks, make up new words, whatever keeps your hand moving and your mind free of the judges.

## THE DON'TS OF FREEWRITING

### When you free write

- Don't stop writing even for a microsecond – keep writing until the end of the time you set yourself for your freewriting
- Don't try to mentally control what you write, don't start with outlines or plans.
- Don't try to be “logical” or “good.”
- Don't cross out or change anything.
- Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- Don't restrict the language you write in – write in any language or in as many languages you want to.
- Don't restrict your mind, let your mind go wherever it wants, let your mind shift topics.
- Don't try and be good or proper in your thoughts. Honour your own ‘craziness’ even if your thoughts are wild, scary, risky or dangerous.
- Don't worry about your words and sentences being logical or making sense. Let the words come out the way they want.
- Don't worry about what other's (your mother, your teachers) may think about your ideas – this writing is for you to explore your own thoughts.
- Don't judge yourself.

# 1.2

## The 4 minute Free Writing activity

### Activity Steps

- STEP 1** ..... **READ THE GUIDELINES ON FREE WRITING ABOVE.**
- STEP 2** ..... **SET A TIMER SO THAT YOU KNOW WHEN 4 MINUTES ARE UP.**
- STEP 3** ..... **START ON A FRESH PAGE**
- a. Write down the following words as a freewriting prompt to start you off  
*“When I was four years old...”*
  - b. Start writing and only lift your pen off the page after your 4 minutes are over
  - c. Keep your hand moving
  - d. Write the words that come to mind, let your mind go wherever it wants
  - e. Do not pause to think, don’t cross out words or correct mistakes or spelling errors.

Try this again for 4 minutes with another free writing prompt. As you get more confident with your freedom to write in this way you can increase the time to 6 minutes, 10 minutes and 15 minutes of free writing. Below is a list of other free writing prompts you can choose from for your free writing practice:

**“things that make me happy ....”**  
**“growing up....”**  
**“I like the smell of ....”**  
**“oranges.....”**  
**“I am feeling .....”**  
**“chocolates ....”**

# 1.3

## Regular Free Writing of Your Thoughts

Writing your thoughts down regularly can be a powerful exercise to help in your personal development. Writing regularly in a diary gives you time to reflect on your thoughts and feelings. This has the effect of making you calm and reflective. From this position of calmness you will see problems and issues, whether personal or work related, more clearly. Clear thinking helps you make better decisions. Regular writing of your thoughts also helps you develop your skills as a writer.

1. Choose a regular time of day when you can be alone and when you will not be disturbed. Many people choose the early morning, soon after they get up.
2. Choose a quiet place to write where you will not be disturbed.
3. Choose a length of time over which you will write for, or the number of pages you will write. If you choose a length of time, you can start with 4 minutes on the first day and increase the time to around 20 minutes by the fourth day. If you choose the number of pages, you can start with a quarter page on the first day and increase to one page or more by the fourth day. Be practical – start with a few minutes or a few lines each day. Do not choose a time or page length that you will not sustain over time.
4. Start each days writing with writing down the date and time.
5. Choose a trigger word to start your writing. This could be:  
“Yesterday....”  
“This morning .....”  
“Today.....”
6. Follow the don'ts and dos of free writing as described in the guidelines above.