

Moo of Writing: How to Milk Your Potential By Nan Lundeen

writing exercises

chapter 1

- Sit outdoors or gaze through a window for at least five minutes. Write what you observe. Keen observation enriches the imagination. For example, on a walk on the outskirts of DeWitt, Iowa, where I was visiting my mother, I was blown away by the images that fell upon my eye. They gave me a poem.

In the Distance, a Farm Yard

Take a walk with me
down the last sidewalk
at the edge of town.

At dusk
red sky bleeds
into black earth.

Look, over there
a lone pole light
casts a yellow cone
across a fallow field.

This is Iowa.

writing exercises

- Choose a piece of writing that you particularly admire. It may be fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. Decide upon one word that describes the piece, revealing what you most admire about the work. Then, reflect upon how your own writing exhibits that attribute. Here are examples Moo workshop writers chose: *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck—humanity. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston—emotion. *Anam Cara* by John O'Donohue—depth. Is expression of the attribute you admire a goal you would like to set for your work? Eventually, you will want to choose several goals, but for now, concentrate on the most important.

chapter 2

- Make an appointment with yourself for daily physical exercise of your choice and freewriting. Set a realistic minimum time. Experiment with cue-routine-reward. Begin today.

chapter 3

- Continue physical exercise of your choice. While freewriting, draw or describe your inner Child.
- While freewriting, let your inner Child speak.

writing exercises

chapter 4

- Continue daily physical exercise of your choice and freewriting.
- Gather drawing tools. Use whatever you have on hand such as, crayons, pencils, markers, colored pencils, scrap paper, or sketch paper. If you're comfortable with a drawing program on your tablet or computer, use it. Relax and use the Safe Space Meditation from this chapter. Ask your fear to appear in your mind. Without thinking, draw or sketch your fear. Name it.
- Write an affirmation to resolve your fear. Make it short, specific, and in the present tense. Examples: *I acknowledge my fear of _____ and move forward.* Or, *I write even when I feel fearful.* Or, *fear, I recognize you behind that mask of _____.* *I enjoy writing.*
- Write a letter to your inner Child describing how you are creating safe writing space for him or her. End with an affirmation.

chapter 5

- Continue physical exercise of your choice. For as long as it feels good to you, do the belly meditation (above) before daily freewriting.
- Write a love note to your belly, describing how much you admire it and why. Praise its attributes. Then, using your non-dominant hand, write a love note to yourself from your belly. Let your belly describe how much it admires you and why. Praise your attributes.

writing exercises

chapter 6

- Continue daily physical exercise of your choice and freewriting. Begin a daily Moo stone meditation. So far, you've been writing on whatever subjects appear on the page after relaxation. Now, let's try something new. Let's try focused freewriting. Following your Moo stone meditation, choose a topic and write freely while staying on the topic. For instance, you may decide to write freely on a work in progress. Choose a specific spot in your work that you want to open up with freewriting. Is there a part of your work that needs a breath of fresh air? Write for ten minutes letting words flow, but stick to the topic. If you're writing fiction, stay in the point of view and/or in the character's voice. If you're writing poetry, expand, expand. Let the words flow without internal editing, letting the lines break wherever they wish. Don't think, *now I need a metaphor or a good simile*. Just step into the flow. With poetry, your pen may veer off topic. That's okay. Let the words wander. You may discover wild connections you can rework later. Stay inside the poem, but don't think. *Mu*.
- Write on the subject: *I write because . . .*

chapter 7

- Continue physical exercise of your choice, daily Moo stone meditation, and freewriting.
- Describe the image of time you perceived in the above meditation. Let time speak on the page.

writing exercises

- Write an affirmation to express how you befriend time. Place copies of it where it will benefit you.
- Pretend nothing exists but this moment. Describe where you are and what you are feeling now.

chapter 8

- Continue daily physical exercise of your choice, Moo stone meditation, and freewriting.
- Take an 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper and fill both sides with the sentences, I love to _____ (fill in the blanks).
- Non-writing exercise: choose one of the things you love to do and do it.
- Paint word pictures. Choose pictures from books or the Internet that pique your imagination. Write descriptions that make the pictures come alive in the mind for someone who hasn't seen the visual art. Example: I found a photo of a Ural owl on the *National Geographic* website. Here's what I wrote: "The white and gray owl floated in space, her wide wings spreading through sky. A heart-shaped helmet of black and white framed her face which was dominated by small black oval eyes. I could feel her focus. A creature of stunning beauty, she intended to kill."

writing exercises

- Play with color. Pick a color you love and a color you hate. Write lines about each, explaining your feelings. Example: "I love turquoise because it carries me back on waves of memory to the Caribbean where my son lives—the sea breeze, the blazing sun, the sense of family holding me like a happy hermit crab tucked into a warm bowl of sand. Although I generally enjoy the color red, I hate red dye in pills. When I must take medicine, I fear the dye will make me sicker than I already am. They lie in my palm and wink at me with ill intent."
- Pick a word that you like. I like the word, "ring." Use it in as many forms as you can conjure up and see if anything stirs your interest. For instance:
 - a) "I'd like to hear from you, you master of illusion, so give me a ring on my cell phone."
 - b) "Why is that ring on her finger when it should be on mine?"
 - c) "A ring-tailed squirrel rang our doorbell."
 - d) "That far-off ringing reminded Grandma of the bell tolling in her village when Geraldine died."
 - e) "I rang Barry to ask if he knew who stole the statue of Mark Twain from in front of the campus library."
 - f) "Go ahead and growl at me again, but you need to know you've wrung the last ounce of tears out of my lonely eyes." Oops! Wrong rung. Oh, well, let's just clamber up the ladder of our follies one rung at a time.

writing exercises

- Write nonsense. A poem or a story could emerge. For instance, "The butterfly knew the honey should be saved for the buttercups. They always pouted when they didn't get their share."
- Rearrange words in a sentence or a stanza and see what happens. For instance, I wrote a poem that begins, "I love corn on the cob." What if I changed it to, "Corn on the cob loves me." Or, "The cob wants lots of love but she worries she'll be judged as corny." Silliness oftentimes leads somewhere, although not necessarily where you want to go. The corn progression could transition into a story about a woman who wants to risk loving someone, but struggles with her fear that her expression of love will be judged corny. She begins a search for sophisticated ways to express love, and chaos ensues.
- Page through a dictionary and pick words that appeal to you or pick them at random. Add whatever you need and arrange them into a poem, sentences, or a story. For instance, I just picked "unbolt, opiate, petite, putrid, meet, conquest, bookworm, scrag, and woozy."
- List people and/or animal companion names that appeal to you. Research their meanings. Create a poem or story peopled by characters whose actions reflect their names' meanings. Here's a sample list: Ralph (wolf counsel); Victoria (victory); Jason (healer); Barbara (strange, foreign); David (beloved); Lolita (sorrows).

writing exercises

- Play with onomatopoeia (the use of words that imitate the sound they denote). Here are a few examples: neigh, achoo, hiss, moo, ticktock, quack, zoom, ding, fizz, shush, plunk. "'Achoo!' blew Elsie the cow who had eschewed the moo ever since she learned to hiss. Her friend the duck tried to shush her, offering her a fizzy drink of ding-ding, but she plunked it on the ground and said, 'ticktock, your time of quacking at me to moo is kaput!' 'Neigh,' said the duck."
- Have fun making a list of words to play with starting with a particular letter. Here is one Moo workshop writer's list of favorite "W" words: "wonder, wish, whisper, willow, wind, want, wizard, wheel, wee, wise, wistful." Smash words you like into any order. Here are phrases Moo writers came up with that could spark their imaginations: "cracking spring, willow road river, hungry day feeling." Toss your words together with other words to make a story or a poem.

chapter 9

- Continue physical exercise of your choice, daily Moo stone meditation, and freewriting.
- Create or find an idea box. Label and decorate it. Use any container that appeals to you such as a jar, a pot, a basket, or a digital folder. When a writing idea or an observation tickles your imagination, write it down and put it in the box.

writing exercises

- Brainstorm paths for your stories to take. Ask, "what if?" as recommended by Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter in their book, *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*. If you're not sure where you want your story to go next, jot down at least five ideas. One of them will jump out at you. Do that at any point in your writing just for fun.

chapter 10

- Continue daily physical exercise of your choice, Moo stone meditation, and freewriting.
- Write an honest story to yourself about who you are.

chapter 11

- Continue daily physical exercise of your choice, Moo stone meditation, and freewriting.
- With a good, up-to-date dictionary and *The Chicago Manual of Style* at your elbow, line-edit a piece of your writing for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and flow. Run spell-check to catch spelling errors, but don't rely on it. Consult *The Associated Press Stylebook* if you're writing for news organizations. *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White is vital to your writing life.

Happy writing!
Nan Lundeen

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the moo writer's bookshelf

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about the author



Photo by Ron DeKett

An award-winning journalist, Nan Lundeen's articles on writing have appeared in *Paddock Review*, the U.K.'s *Writing Magazine*, *femalefirst.co.u.k.*, *lightboxoriginals.com*, and South Carolina Writers Workshop's *Quill*. Her *Moo of Writing* handbook was a finalist in the 2016 National Indie Excellence Awards and in *the U.S. 2017 Next Generation Indie Book Awards*.

She has published three books of poetry, and her work appears in literary magazines. She holds a bachelor's in English and a master's in communications from Western Michigan University. Contact her through her website at www.nanlundeen.com. She welcomes your comments.