

Getting Deep with Proprioceptive Writing

Sometimes we write or make something and all the parts are there but the work feels flat or shallow. We haven't gotten to the core of it, or maybe we haven't figured out what it means to us.

Proprioceptive Writing is “a self-guided exercise that calls forth your imagination, your intellect, and your intuition all at once to open your heart and clear your mind.” As a result, you develop “a fresh avenue for personal expression, confidence in your own authority, or simply a sense of your own voice” as writers and creators.¹ Your creative work begins to express more depth and dimension, and even compassion for yourself and others.

Here's the basic setup: **1)** Handwrite on unlined paper; **2)** Play calming music—the PW folks prefer Baroque (1600-1750) like Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, or Purcell; and **3)** Light a candle. All of these create an atmosphere conducive to focus and attention. Then write for twenty-five minutes.

The Three Rules of Proprioceptive Writing:

1. Write what You Hear

PW is receptive, not assertive. Begin with whatever thought comes to you first. Listen to your thoughts as they continue, moment by moment, writing them as they come. If nothing is coming, write, “Nothing is coming.” If you're sick of your topic, write, “I'm sick of this topic.” No need to write fast, and no worries about about grammar, punctuation, etc.

2. Listen to what You Write

As you write what you hear, each sentence you write invites you to listen to it and take it from there. Develop a non-judgmental “listening presence.” No need for censors, editors, or judges. No one will see your writing unless you decide to show it to them. You are listening to yourself, your thoughts, and your writing. Listening is key.

3. Be Ready to Ask the Proprioceptive Question: “What do I mean by _____?”

The Proprioceptive Question takes you deeper. When you write a word, phrase, or expression that catches your attention, that seems to have energy or significance, follow it with the PQ. **What do I mean by _____?** For example, if you write *This class is making me anxious*, you might ask, *What do I mean by anxious?* Then answer your question. *By anxious, I mean I'm afraid my classmates will eye-roll and I won't get a good grade.*

Another example:

I feel right now that I'm somehow lacking. What do I mean by lacking? I mean, one morning I was sitting in my chair and I realized I felt there was something wrong at that moment. What do I mean by wrong? I mean something was imperfect with the morning. I searched my mind, but the family was fine, friends were fine, the job was fine, my writing was fine. I realized that the only thing that was wrong was the fact that I thought something was wrong. Like the character in “The Beast in the Jungle.” His problem is that he thinks he has a problem.

After the twenty-five minutes, ask yourself four questions and briefly answer them in writing.

1) What thoughts were heard but not written? **2)** How or what do I feel now? **3)** What larger story is this write part of? **4)** What ideas came up for future writes?

¹ Metcalf, Linda Trichter and Tobin Simon. *Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method for Finding your Authentic Voice*. Ballantine Books, 2002, New York.