

PREWRITING—LOOPING AND CUBING

Elizabeth and Gregory Cowan, in their new textbook, Writing (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1980) provide two prewriting strategies that work well. The first technique is called “**looping**”.

As the Cowans explain, “Looping is a writing activity in which you start with a subject and, without planning or consciously thinking, writing anything that comes into your mind on the topic” (p. 9). Here are their four rules for looping:

Rule 1: Begin with a Specific Topic.

At the top of the page, put down the subject (topic) you are going to write on in the loop. This allows your mind to focus on one particular thing at the beginning. As you write, you may discover that your mind gets off the subject and you are writing about something else entirely. When this happens, go ahead and finish what you are writing about and then go back to the subject you listed at the top of the page and concentrate on that subject . . . the “off-the-subject” writing is valuable because either it gets whatever is on your mind (and in the way of your sticking to the subject) out onto paper or it gives you an idea that you didn’t at first think was connected to the topic. . .

Rule 2: Write Nonstop for X minutes . . .

Do not take your pencil or pen off the page. Keep it moving the whole ten minutes. You can write things like “I can’t think of anything on this topic . . .” You may even draw circles or make chicken-scratch marks on the paper, but you must keep the pen moving. This is to keep your thoughts stirred up and your mind open to whatever ideas may occur on the topic.

Rule 3: Make No Corrections . . .

Rule 4: Write a Center of Gravity Sentence for Each Loop before Going on to the next One.

Looping is designed to help you produce an idea to write on. It differs from free writing in that there is a broad focus to the writing; that broad focus is the general subject area on which you are going to be writing . . . stop when you have finished each loop, read what you have written, and decide what main thing you seem to be talking about in that loop. What comes up again and again? What is the drift of that particular piece of writing? When you’ve read your writing and thought about it, express in a single sentence a statement that catches the “hot spot” or essence of what you said in that loop. This activity lets you see what seems to have the most potential at this point. The center of gravity sentence for each loop will give you a starting place for the next loop, a focus for the next piece of writing. The ultimate result is a zeroing in of your thoughts of the subject as you write.

The Cowans' second technique, **cubing**, provides a way of “swiftly considering a subject from 6 points of view. The emphasis is on swiftly and 6” (p. 21).

Do each of the 6 steps in order, spending no more than 3 to 5 minutes on each.

Step 1: Describe it.

Look at the subject closely and describe what you see. Colors, shapes, sizes, and so forth.

Step 2: Compare it.

What is it similar to? What is it different from?

Step 3: Associate it.

What does it make you think of? What comes into your mind? It can be similar things, or you can think of different times, places, people. Just let your mind go and see what association you have for this subject.

Step 4: Analyze it.

Break it down into parts. Tell how it's made. (You don't have to know; you can make it up.)

Step 5: Apply it.

Tell what you can do with it, how it can be used.

Step 6: Argue for or against it.

Go ahead and take a stand. Use any kind of reasons you want to—rational, silly, or anywhere in between. (p.22)