

Finding Your (Writer's) Voice

Try these techniques when you're struggling to find something meaningful to say – even before you've done any research. As with all good communication, the goal is to imagine a conversation or an argument that leads to new insights. Some of the following suggestions are discussed in more detail in Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power*.

1. List your immediate thoughts and feelings about the topic as fast as you can. Don't edit or censor yourself at this point, just list!
2. Weave together all these thoughts and feelings and write an "executive summary" of your main line of argument, an instant version of your proposed paper with gaps or fabricated facts.
3. Examine the story line of your summary to uncover your underlying biases or presuppositions, and then exaggerate your own prejudices without censorship by developing your arguments to their logical extreme. Don't be afraid to express your emotions as you argue.
4. Next, develop the opposite arguments by taking a point of view as different as possible from your own. Create an exaggerated debate, add a few more perspectives, and start to notice all the different underlying assumptions.
5. Think of stories, scenes, metaphors or visual images that will illustrate your key ideas.
6. Imagine the facts, explanations, arguments that would flesh out your main thesis, then do the research that will locate them and fill in the gaps.
7. Finally, determine the appropriate structure for the paper you're writing (op-ed, memo, research paper, etc.) and mold your arguments to fit those requirements. Just make sure the flow of your voice is clear and coherent from first sentence to last.