

DAY 3: MUSICAL DRAFT

Day 3 isn't as tightly structured as Days 1 and 2; there aren't multiple iterative stages of many small exercises, just a gulp and a dive and a draft.

Tuning

Before you start, freewrite for 4 minutes about what you care about in this emergent thing. We won't write our musical drafts with any feeling of obligation to achieve any destination in particular, but it's helpful to remind yourself about what is alive for you in this project. What matters? Bring it into your mind before you begin this improvisational draft.

Warmups

(5-10 minutes)

If you find them helpful, choose some warmups from the following, or invent your own. If you don't want to warm up, go directly to the draft preparations.

Word Brain

Choose four or five options from the list below. Set a timer for one minute. For each list, write for exactly one minute, listing any word that comes to mind, even if it's wrong. When the timer rings, move immediately to the next list.

—words that have a K in them

—words pertaining to a trade or area of expertise that shows up in your play

—full names of people you knew before you were seven years old

—names of real cities

—names of imagined cities

—names for new paint chip color swatches

—names for streets in one of those themed cul-de-sac housing tracts

—words whose meanings you don't really truly know

—words that are fun to say

—alphabet word list: cycling through the alphabet twice, write a word that begins with A then a word that begins with B and so on.

Hand Brain

List 7 things you saw in the last 24 hours and choose one of them to draw. Don't spend more than a few minutes drawing. Draw it fast, draw it poorly, doesn't matter. What does matter is that you include as much detail as you can summon in the time frame. And you can draw, so don't say you can't.

Memory Brain

Write down whatever you can remember of something you once memorized—poem, lyric, monologue, famous speech.

Day's Overview

Today we'll write our musical drafts—the first in the sequence of musical, architectonic, and textile approaches. The musical draft is an improvisation. Start at the beginning and write until you reach the end, allowing yourself to be led by your writing's music (more on that below). Whenever you are stuck or looking for assistance, go to the material you have transferred forward from the first two days of work (more on that below).

Preparation: Transfer

Before you write, transfer forward anything you want to preserve from the first two days. This can include shiny lovely things you circled, or whole passages from the voice writing you did on Day 2. You are licensed to copy and paste but be softly selective—don't just transfer everything. Choose what really has energy for you. Try to avoid augmenting or editing as you transfer. This shouldn't be a big part of your time today. I recommend transferring everything to a new file, and then printing it out so you can have it at hand to flip through as you write your draft, while also having easy access to use cut and paste for longer passages.

Note on length:

The piece is as long as you want it to be, but remember that we entirely rewrite it tomorrow and again the next day, so do what you can manage in the amount of time you have to spend. If that means that your next few “days” of the workshop are going to stretch to longer periods, that's fine, but be realistic about your available time and work in a scale that will allow you to actually finish all three drafts.

Musical Draft Values

There are no procedures to follow today. Instead, here are some values to hold for the next few hours:

—Resist giving your mental energy over to story or plot. Keep your head in the weeds. Valorize sonority, image, and local pleasure. Stay with voice. On Day 4 we'll think a lot about shape and story form and narrative structure so trust that it's coming and let your musical draft be heapy, baggy, and gloriously indirected. You may find that a story is emerging, but don't spend any musical draft energy on elaborating causal connections or tying things together. Let events emerge without worrying over how to introduce them or resolve them.

—Don't yet worry about whether things go together—whether what you're writing is all of a piece. At the same time, let yourself start tuning into the way things go together. Try to hold those two directions at the same time. (If you're a dancer, you know what I mean. If you're not a dancer, consider becoming one.) What that really means is this: if your brain starts telling you that you need to problem-solve a logical sequence or reject something because it's irrelevant, tell that part of your brain to come back tomorrow. But if your brain starts telling you that a voice from one place might be really interesting overlaid on a list of words from another, give it your attention. Thinking musically, this is about harmony. Yes, you can play a root note that matches the chord on top, but sometimes what's interesting is the conjunction between things that produces new sounds, new relations.

—Let the thing sprout as many limbs as it wants. Superabundance is a keyword for the day. Let your play make noise. Be wild and joyful. You'll probably toss much of this draft out anyway as you go forward. Don't pause to rewrite anything today. Get to the end of the draft.

On the Musical

Here are some ideas about the music in the musical draft. Think of writing musically as a function of attention. What do we give special attention to?

pattern

- of sound
- of textures
- of thinking
- of sentences
- of recurrence and iteration

refrain

as a recurrent strain of sound
in a character's speech (a tag line, a speech habit)
in the play's ways of opening and closing beats or scenes

tempo

of thinking, of speaking, of transitioning
relative speeds and slownesses of adjacent scenes
points of tempo change

sonority

how things sound apart from their sense

lyricism

the bridge from prose to something song-like or elevated or soothing
also the music in the plain prose, your ear for exactitude

voicing

the way you choose different speakers to solo, harmonize, combine,
the way the play sounds when played in a low register or a high register
(how to transpose the idea of "register" to your play is a riddle)

harmony

as the consonance or dissonance between neighbors
as the sense of landing in sweetness or landing in an open, unresolved place

A reminder

Almost every writer who ever was reports that their first drafts are really bad. Delight in the license to leave everything on the page.

Share

If you're sharing with a pod, here is where things get serious. Share your draft. If you don't have a pod, read your draft aloud or silently with your mouth moving (really), and then go through the response questions as your own interlocutor. (If you are working solo, as with Day 2, I recommend doing this part of the work after a palette cleansing break, or at the end of the day. Don't try to respond to yourself immediately after your writing session.)

Response

The sole task of your response is to articulate what the thing is. Resist giving both praise and criticism and avoid the terminology of "working" or "not working." This is a newly growing thing and it doesn't yet know what it wants to do, what its terms are, how it will define its own success or failure, how it will work. Instead of saying YES and NO, try to offer a description without adding values. Use the following questions as guidelines for offering a phenomenological description of the draft on its own terms, without reference to existing narrative values or orthodoxies even of the shit-talking counter-orthodoxy you-are-so-badass-you-are-my-hero kind. Read all the questions below. Give a moment to each in your thoughts, but limit your actual response to three or four simple things to convey to your podmate.

What does it do?

What are its verbs? (This is a great way to discern pattern, i.e. it loops, it stutters, it soothes then obliterates...)

What are its materials (what kinds of images, what vocabulary, what palette of actions)?

What is it made of? What are its units or elements of measure?

What does it ask of the audience?

What space(s) does it propose we inhabit together?

What traditions or forms does it draw on or make reference to?

What are its energies?

What is its mood or temperament?

How is it theatrical? (In the experience of it in time in the imagined room.)

How is it dramatic? (In its condensing and containing some amount of life process in a figure.)

How is it comic? (In its way of acting on the nervous system.)

What else is it?

What latent patterns does it hold that give clues to possible structures it might eventually inhabit?