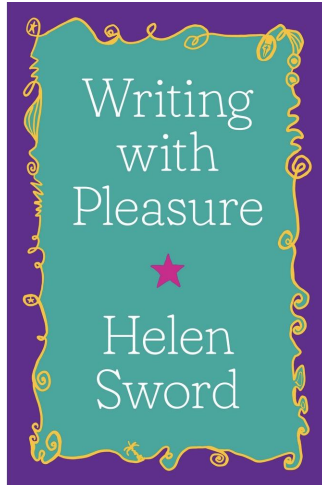


# *Writing with Pleasure*



## A Reading Group Guide

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## Introduction

In *Writing with Pleasure*, Helen Sword takes on a difficult task: “to recuperate pleasure as a legitimate, indeed crucial, writing-related emotion” (3). Based on interviews and stories collected from academics all over the world, the book advocates for cultivating writing practices that engage writers across five dimensions: social, physical, aesthetic, creative and emotional (23).

This reading group guide empowers participants to test Sword’s formula for writing with pleasure by enacting her principles and practices throughout the course of six, one-hour meetings. During each meeting, participants have the opportunity to discuss a section of *Writing with Pleasure*, and also try out 1-2 of the book’s principles through prompted, communal writing sessions.

In the final session, participants reflect on what they learned and how they might take these lessons back to their own classrooms and writing practices.

We believe that this book can support participants looking for greater awareness of their writing practices and a sense of being a part of a larger community of writers. This support strikes us as particularly important after the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## How to use this document

Reading group facilitators are invited to use the prompts and activities presented within this document verbatim or to pick and choose from the activities to create a custom facilitation plan that meets the needs of their particular group, goals, and context.

## Logistical Considerations

Participants receive a homework assignment to complete before each meeting—typically a reading from the book and a short writing activity. To keep the workload manageable, facilitators could stress to participants that the homework is optional. The activities proposed for each meeting are designed to allow participants to take part without having completed the homework.

Facilitators might encourage participants to have a notebook and writing implements available for some or all of the writing assignments to allow for experimentation in different modes. They might also consider using technological tools that enable participants to share their writing and ideas throughout the six sessions. For our reading group, we created a single shared Google doc and periodically prompted participants to contribute their writing to that document. We also made use of the chat feature in Zoom.

Our group was small enough that breakout rooms seemed unnecessary, but many of these activities would also work well for pair work or smaller group discussions.

## Reading Schedule

For our reading group, we divided the book for six one-hour virtual zoom sessions. These sessions could be held weekly or bi-weekly, or a combination of both. The chapters are typically a fast read.

- Meeting 1: Preface & Introduction
- Meeting 2: Ch 1 & 8
- Meeting 3: Ch 2, 6, & 7
- Meeting 4: Ch 3 & 4
- Meeting 5: Ch 5, 9, & 10
- Meeting 6: Conclusion & Afterword

## Meeting 1

### Overview for Facilitators

Before this session, group members will read the Preface and the Introduction of the book. Objectives for the meeting include:

- Getting to know each other and sharing motivations for joining the group
- Reflecting on our writing practices and in particular the ways that we derive pleasure from writing
- Reviewing the schedule and answering questions

In our iteration of this group, we completed Activity 1 as a written exercise in a Google Doc.

### Activity 1: Welcome/Introductions

#### *Prompt:*

Share with us your name, your pronouns (if you wish to share) and the academic discipline/s in which your writing lives most often.

Please also share with us why you decided to join this group (and/or if you have any specific goals for doing so) – Feel free to play with colors/font, if you wish!

## Activity 2: Writing (Alone) Together

### Pleasure Prompt #2

In your journal, on a notepad, or in a digital document, take **10 min** to complete pleasure prompt #2:

“PLEASURE PROMPT 2: A Time in Your Life...

Recall a time in your life when you have associated *writing* with *pleasure*. No need to overthink this exercise! The very first memory of pleasurable writing that comes to mind is almost certainly your best choice. Set a timer for ten minutes and spend that time *freewriting*: that is, writing freely and fluidly by hand, without stopping to plan or edit. Describe the scene and circumstances in as much detail as you can...”

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 18-19)

### Sharing out prompt:

We invite you to share out as much or little from your freewrite with us as you wish. Feel free to give us a short summary of the experience that you wrote about or to read a phrase/sentence/paragraph directly from your written reflection.

After you have shared, please call on someone else from the group to share. \*If you do not wish to share, you are welcome to pass and simply call on someone else to share when your name is called.

### Debrief Prompt

**Complete in a shared document, zoom chat, virtual whiteboard, or some other online tool that lets participants share their writing with one another.**

Using the **[insert name of tool]**, capture some of your observations and takeaways from listening to our group’s narratives of pleasurable writing experiences. What common threads did you pick up on? What intriguing differences did you notice? Were there any surprising absences? (*Again, feel free to play with color/font*)

## Homework for next meeting:

1. **Read:** Ch 1 & Ch 8 (pp. 22-42; pp. 170-190)

2. **Write (optional):** Complete Pleasure Prompt 4 (p. 43) – We will start our next session by sharing some of our ideas for helping ourselves (or others) attend to social balance in our (or their) writing practices.

## Meeting 2

### Overview for Facilitators

This session addresses two chapters **Ch 1** - “Society and Solitude: Social Principles” - (pp 23-43) & **Ch 8** - “Wind, River, Stone: Processes” (pp. 170-190).

Objectives for this session include:

- Reflecting on the role that others play in our writing process and how we can adapt our current practices to ensure social balance in our writing
- Considering our own writing process and reflecting on the variety of ways that we can benefit from the steps in that process

In our iteration of the group, we began this session with a second chance for introductions. Since one of our goals was to build community around writing, we wanted to ensure that group members had multiple opportunities to connect. The Welcome prompt was a popcorn activity (each person spoke to the group, and then chose someone else to follow them). Activity 2 was a whole group discussion. We also had a group debrief of Activity 3: after participants had completed both prompts, we invited them to share their observations, reflections, thoughts, and questions with the group.

### Activity 1: Welcome!

- Prompt: Share with us your name, your pronouns (if you wish to share), and your answer to the following question: What metaphor would you use to describe your writing process, and if you wish to share, tell us why that metaphor is apt.

### Activity 2: Discussion (on previous reading)

- Pleasure prompt 4: In the chat, please share your ideas for helping yourself (or others) attend to social balance in your writing practices.

## Activity 3: Writing Together

- Pleasure prompt 12.1:

In your journal, on a notepad, or in a digital document, take **5 min** to complete pleasure prompt 12.1:

"Freewrite or mind map about how and where you already find pleasure in *brainstorming*, *drafting*, and *crafting*..."

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 190)

- Pleasure prompt 12.2:

In your journal, on a notepad, or in a digital document, take **5 min** to complete pleasure prompt 12.2:

Keeping in mind the ideas and experiences shared by others in the group, make a list of ways that you could "ramp up your enjoyment in writing while minimizing your frustrations..."

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 190)

## Homework for next meeting:

- **Read:** Ch 2; 6 & 7 (pp. 44-63; pp. 131-169).
- **Share:** A picture of your writing space in our Google Doc
- **Write:** Complete Pleasure Prompt #5 (pp. 62-63): Either choose one of Sword's suggestions (or another idea of your own) to experiment with making your writing more physically engaging or engaged. We'll start our next session by sharing with one another how our experiments went.

## Meeting 3

### Overview for Facilitators

This session covers Ch. 2 - "Body Basics" (44-63); Ch. 6-"On the Ground" (131-151), Ch. 7 - "In the Sky" (152-169).

The objectives for this session include:

- Thinking about ideal writing spaces
- Bringing awareness to the ways our bodies engage in writing
- Discussing different tools for writing and how we use them

For Activity 1, we used a group Google Doc for sharing images. Activities 2 and 3 were whole group discussions.

## **Activity 1: Share a photo of your writing space!**

Use the space below to share a picture of your writing space (if you wish!).

## **Activity 2: Welcome!**

*Prompt:* Remind us of your name and institution. Then, describe your writing space (or the picture you submitted)

## **Activity 3: Discussion**

*Pleasure Prompt 5:* (pp. 62-63): What did you try this week to make your writing more physically engaging or engaged? How did it go? Did it change your relationship to your writing? Would you try it again or possibly adapt that practice for next time?

## **Activity 4: Writing Together: Reflection**

The tools we use to write: What are you writing right now? How are you incorporating different tools—analogue and/or digital—into your writing process? Which tools are serving you best for which tasks? (and more...)

## **Homework for next meeting:**

- **Reading:** Ch 3 & 4 (pp. 64-102)
- **Writing:** Complete Pleasure Prompt #6 (p. 81)

## *Meeting 4*

### **Overview for Facilitators**

In this session, participants reviewed Ch. 3, "On Beauty" and Ch. 4, "The C-Curve" (pp. 64-102).

The objectives for this session include:

- Reflecting on ways that beauty plays a role in our writing
- Sharing strategies to spark creativity.

We completed Activity 1 popcorn style; Activity 2 was a whole-group discussion (with the option to participate in the Zoom chat).

## Activity 1: Checking in!

- Reminder of who you are (name, institution, pronouns)
- What are you writing right now?
- How has reading this book influenced your approach to this writing?

## Activity 2: Discussion

### Pleasure Prompt 6

"Freewrite or mind map about what beauty means in your world: your values, your taste, your sources of aesthetic enjoyment..."

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 81)

## Activity 3: Writing Together: Creativity

### Pleasure Prompt 7

"Freewrite or mind map about how you can bring more creativity to your writing practice, with a focus on the pleasure of cognition, challenge, and choice..."

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 101)

## Group Debrief

What did you choose to write about? What role do cognition, challenge, and choice play in your considerations?

## Homework for next meeting:

- **Reading:** Ch. 5, 9, & 10 (pp. 103-125; pp. 191-227)
- **Writing:** Complete Pleasure Prompt #8, (p. 125)



## Meeting 5

### Overview for Facilitators

This session addresses Ch. 5, “States of Mind: Emotional Principles” (pp. 103-125); Ch. 9, “Star Navigation: Identities” (pp. 191-209); and Ch. 10, “Island Time: Balance” (pp. 210-227).

Objectives for this session include:

- Reflecting on our identities as writers and on the ways that we can cultivate balance in our writing practices
- Sharing strategies for making our writing practices more emotionally fulfilling
- Taking stock of current practices and brainstorming ideas for new ways to intentionally integrate regenerative rest into our writing routines
- Identifying ways that the prompts from these chapters could be translated into our classrooms or applied in our work with student writers.

We completed activity 1 popcorn style; Activity 2 was a whole-group discussion (with the option to participate in the zoom chat); Activity 3 was completed independently in writing journals with participants given the option to verbally share their reflections; Activity 4 was a whole-group discussion (with the option to participate in the zoom chat).

### Activity 1: Checking in!

- Reminder of who you are (name, institution, pronouns)
- Share (if you wish):
  - One thing you do for “regenerative rest”
  - Some initial thoughts about the chapters we read for today.
    - Some ideas:
      - Did one of the chapters resonate with you or surprise you? If so, which one and why?
      - Have you implemented or tried anything suggested in the chapters? If so, what? How is it going?
      - Something else?

### Activity 2: Discussion

Prompt 1: Sharing homework

Pleasure Prompt 8

“Freewrite or mind map about **how you can make your writing practice more emotionally fulfilling...**”

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 125)

### Prompt 2: Group discussion

In Ch. 5, Sword asks: “How can we cultivate a culture of praise in academic and professional settings dedicated to learning and improvement?” (p. 122) She goes on to suggest that ‘when we hold the door open to praise, we create space for its shy younger siblings, *confidence* and *pride*, to slip into the room as well” (p. 124).

- Let’s discuss Sword’s question for a bit. **What are some ways that you could (or already do) support a culture of praise in your work?** In your department or office? In your classroom? On your campus? In your discipline? In your professional organizations? etc.

## Activity 3: Writing Together

Prompt: Identity and Balance

**Choose one of the following prompts to focus on during our writing session today:**

1. Pleasure Prompt 13:

“Freewrite or mind map about **your identity as a writer:** where you have come from, what you stand for, and how your own personal and cultural compass points help you find your way...”

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 209)

2. Pleasure Prompt 14

“Freewrite or mind map about **what work-life balance looks like to you...**”

(Helen Sword, *Writing with Pleasure*, pp. 227)

### Sharing out prompt:

We invite you to share out as much or little from your freewrite with us as you wish. Feel free to give us a short summary of the experience that you wrote about or to read a phrase/sentence/paragraph directly from your written reflection.

## Activity 4: Discussion

Group Discussion:

Let's shift our focus to our roles as teachers and consider Sword's question: "How can we kindle our students' passion and pleasure in writing rather than fanning the flames of their anxiety or, worse yet, snuffing out their desire to learn?" (p. 205)

### Homework for next meeting:

- **Reading:** Conclusion & Afterword (pp. 231-247; pp. 251-256)
- **Writing:**
  - Please complete **Part 2** of *Pleasure Prompt 15 (p. 237)*:
  - Then, complete *Pleasure Prompt 16 (p. 241)*:

## Meeting 6

### Overview for Facilitators

This session addresses the Conclusion: "Making Space" (pp. 231-247) and the Afterword: "The Road Ahead" (pp. 251-256), and also provides time for participants to reflect on and identify their key takeaways from the book.

Objectives for this session include:

- Reflecting on our writing processes and what new tools or ideas we can take from our reading of this book to support those processes
- Reflecting on our experiences within this group and what new tools or ideas we can take with us back to our teaching or to our colleagues.

This session includes several opportunities for participants to write reflectively and then share those reflections with the group. For Activity 1, we had participants write directly into our shared google doc for prompt 1 and write in their journal for prompt 2. After each prompt, we invited participants to share their observations, reflections, thoughts, and questions with the group. For Activity 2, we had participants write in their journal and then we invited them to verbally share that writing with the group.

## Activity 1: Discussion

Prompt 1:

In the space below, share your personal metaphor by completing the following sentence: **When I am writing at my best, I am like...**

Prompt 2:

**Freewrite or mindmap in response to the following question:** Brainstorm or describe how this particular metaphor might inform your current and future practices as a writer. You might consider how the metaphor points you towards achieving the various aspects of the SPACE framework: social balance, physical engagement, aesthetic nourishment, creative challenge, and emotional uplift.

## Activity 2: Reflective Writing Loop

Prompt 1: Individual Reflection

**Freewrite or mindmap in response to the following question:** Describe your personal arc throughout the reading of this book and/or across the six meetings of this group. (or at least the meetings you were able to attend).

Prompt 2: Collective Reflection

**Freewrite or mindmap in response to the following question:** Describe the collective arc of our group throughout the reading of this book and/or across our six meetings (or at least the meetings you were able to attend).

Prompt 3: Takeaways

**Freewrite, mindmap, or make a list in response to the following question:** What will you take away with you (from this book, from others in this group, from our meetings, from your pleasure writing journal, from the reflections above, etc.) into the other spaces in which you write, teach, and/or work?