



writing drills by

ENGELWRITE.COM

TRAINING SHEETS

THE WORKBOOK

property of: _____

**SIMPLE DOCUMENTS TO CUSTOMIZE
YOUR OWN PRACTICE REGIMEN,
USING THE 7 DRILLS**



THE GUIDE

TIPS

Clearly define your drills

The clearer your custom drills are, the more likely you are to do them. If you're taking notes on your favorite novel, where will you take notes? In a notebook? In the margins? Get specific.

Create drills that last

You'll be working on the drill for five sessions in a row. Design it so that you don't finish it in session one.

Set an attainable schedule

If you do drills for three hours a day, you'll burn out fast. Start off with 20-minute sessions, daily or a few times per week.

Make training a habit

Cue, routine, reward--that's the workflow you need.

for more on creating a habit, see engselwrite.com/blogs/how-to-practice-your-writing

STEP 1: REVIEW

The Practice Regimen is at its most effective when you integrate deliberate practice into it. The [video series](#) will teach you how to do this.

You also need to review each drill's training sheet, which gives an example from my own training. Using these alongside your "Drill Sheet", you'll craft your customized drills.

STEP 2: START

Take a look at the next two pages to see the deliberate practice principles for each drill, & devise your training focus.

Next you can move to your Drill Sheet. Simply start with your first custom drill and perform it for 20 minutes. Once you've completed five sessions, move on to the next drill (aim to complete five sessions every week). When you've finished all the drills, you can restart the process, using your Training Sheets to customize a new Drill Sheet, and resuming your training at a higher level.

DRILL PRINCIPLES

In Robert Greene's bestselling book, "Mastery", he asserts there are three phases to mastery: apprenticeship, creative-active, and mastery. In this training, we're focusing on the apprenticeship phase, within which are the below three steps. The drills you customized each fall under one of these steps, and are most effective if performed in sequence. I recommend completing five sessions of a drill before moving on to the next, aiming to finish one drill per week.

Observe: the Warm-Up Workout

The following drills are in this step.

- Read
- Study
- Write (copy)
- Enjoy Art (consume)
- Live

When doing these drills, concentrate your powers of observation. Notice details and save this knowledge for your own style.

Deliberate Practice Principles

- concentrate
- evolve your mental representations

Acquire Skills: the Practice Workout

The following drills are in this step.

- Write (short form)
- Edit
- Get Feedback

When doing these drills, focus on pushing yourself. Use the stress of these exercises to strengthen the skills in your writing arsenal.

DP Principles (in addition to above)

- leave your comfort zone
- get feedback

Experiment: the Play Workout

The following drills are in this step.

- Write (long form)
- Enjoy Art (create)

When doing these drills, be intentional about developing a unique style. If you listen, you'll begin to hear your voice.

DP Principles (in addition to above)

- cultivate personalized mastery

TRAINING FOCUS

Here's how your training should go. You perform your first custom drill for five sessions, finishing by the end of the first week. You perform your second custom drill for five sessions, finishing by the next week, and so on, until you finish all of the drills. That's one cycle, and you repeat it with new drills over and over again. It's an effective recipe for improvement, but something is missing.

Your focus for this training cycle

To maximize the impact of your training, unite your drills under a common focus. Your "Read" drill should have a focus similar to your "Write (copywork)" drill, and so on. This uniting thread has an exponential effect, compounding the progress you make with each individual drill into a broader progress in the craft. When creating your own training focus, start with something broad you want to be better at, and add some specifics from there. Here's an example.

“For training cycle #3, I will focus on character development, learning how to deepen my characters and change them over time.”

For training cycle # , I will focus on

DRILL SHEET

20-MINUTE TRAININGS

OBSERVE

Read

With a focus on _____,
I will read _____, taking notes in
_____. I will then review my notes.

sessions completed:

Study

I will study _____, taking notes in
_____. I will apply my knowledge in
a _____, get feedback, & iterate.

sessions completed:

Write (copy)

I will use the _____ copy method
to copy _____ into my _____.
I will then freewrite in that style.

sessions completed:

Enjoy Art (consume)

I will thoughtfully consume _____,
watching an interview with the artist, and
writing a _____ in his/her style.

sessions completed:

Live

Plot: will seek new experiences by _____.
Character: I will seek more empathy by _____.
Setting: I will leverage my senses by _____.

sessions completed:

Need help customizing your drills? I'll evaluate your writing and
personalize you a set of drills based on *your* needs. To learn more, check out
engelwrite.com/personal-training

DRILL SHEET

20-MINUTE TRAININGS

PRACTICE

Write (short form)

My short form of choice is _____.
My goal is to _____.
I will review my work with my goal in mind.

sessions completed:

Edit

My goal for this piece is _____.
I will review/create a revision plan with this goal in mind. I will execute the plan.

sessions completed:

Get Feedback

I will solicit feedback from _____, asking them to focus on _____, _____, and _____. I will then review their feedback, compare it to other feedback I've received, and incorporate it into my study plan.

sessions completed:

EXPERIMENT

Write (long form)

The "one thing" I'm focusing on for this novel is _____. I will remind myself of this by _____, and later assess

sessions completed: *work on your novel*

Enjoy Art (create)

I will create _____. I will reflect on my creation by _____, and incorporate its style into my fiction.

sessions completed: *work on in your free time*

Need help customizing your drills? I'll evaluate your writing and personalize you a set of drills based on *your* needs. To learn more, check out

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READ

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

"Read" is the one-two punch with "write". Some of the writers in the survey emphasized the osmosis benefits of reading—absorbing technique without really trying—but other writers described a more intentional process: reading like a writer. This will accelerate your improvement in the craft if you follow our two DP principles of this workout: concentrate and evolve your mental representations. Below, we'll review those principles with actions tips.

Move #1: Choose a novel

Move #2: Choose a focus

Move #3: Take notes

Move #4: Review your notes

Choose a novel

I chose Ender's Game. It's my favorite science-fiction novel of all time, and I knew I would have a ton to learn from it. Here are a few tips for picking the right book for you.

- avoid the dense and dry--entertaining=motivating
- pick something relatively short so you're not intimidated
- find a book whose style you wish to emulate

Choose a focus

While reading about Ender and the Buggers, I chose to focus on character development, tracking how Card developed Ender over time. Here are some tips for picking a good focus.

- base it off the style--what represents the style best?
- choose something that is a weakness in your own writing
- pick something specific: "description" as opposed to prose

Take notes

I'm OCD about my books (never dog-earing pages, never exceeding a 60° angle, etc.), so I didn't take notes in the margins. Here are some note-taking tips.

- in a notebook, bullet-point summarize each chapter
- batch your notes so you're not constantly having to write
- highlight bullets that relate to your "focus"

Review your notes

I reviewed my notes at the end of each chapter, and at the end of the novel, paying special attention to my focus. Here are some tips for how to make the most of your review.

- review throughout your reading, highlighting, & starring
- upon completion, make macro notes; identify trends
- with your new insights, try re-reading the book

STUDY

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

Osmosis will get us only so far; there comes a point when we have to "Study". The good news is we have options. Some writers in the survey preferred craft books, while others preferred workshops or videos or podcasts. Whatever the medium of learning, learning remains priority. To the right, we walk through a study workflow in the context of our DP principles: concentrating and evolving mental reps, to help you become a true student of the craft.

Move #1: Choose a resource

Move #2: Consume like a writer

Move #3: Apply what you learn

Move #4: Iterate

Choose a resource

I had heard great things about Brandon Sanderson's BYU course that's available for free on YouTube, so that's what I went with. Here are some tips for picking your own material.

- identify your learning style
- start small--leave the 700-page craft books for later
- to add extra structure to your studying, start w/ a course

Consume like a writer

I didn't just watch Sanderson's lecture videos. I *watched* them, taking notes, paying full attention, the whole nine. Here are some tips to optimize your study time.

- prioritize the "concentrate" DP principle
- takes notes as thoroughly as possible
- brainstorm how to apply this knowledge to your work

Apply what you learn

After finishing the course, I reviewed my notes for the wisdom most relevant to my writing, trying the techniques. Here are some tips to turn your studying into improvement.

- freewrite on the topic to broaden your understanding
- use short form to put your new knowledge into practice
- revise your attempt, then try again with something new

Iterate

After learning a particular plotting technique, I realized a more specific deficiency in my plotting, and started studying this. Here are some tips to iterate on your studying.

- self-assess your attempt to apply this knowledge
- determine what you're unclear on/what else could help
- repeat this process with the new topic

WRITE (COPY)

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

Ben Franklin set a great example with his copywork habits, and he also set a high improvement ceiling—if it works as well for you as it did for him, you'll be in good shape. Copywork can take many forms, but the result is uniform: the more you copy in a certain style, the more you will adopt that style in your own writing ... that is, if you follow our two DP principles for this workout: concentrating and evolving mental reps. We discuss both in the steps to the right.

Move #1: Write (copy)

Move #2: Choose your source

Move #3: Copy

Move #4: Freewrite in the style

Choose your method

I decided to go with the simplest method: word-for-word copying, to absorb fully the author's style. Here are some tips for choosing the method most relevant for you.

- use word-for-word to capture the broad stroke style
- use rewriting-from-memory to instill the author's style
- use logic-reconstruction to mimic the author's structure

Choose your source

I chose Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, because I knew I could learn from nearly every word. Here are some tips to help you choose the right source for your copying efforts.

- find someone who is an expert in your chosen style
- find an example in his/her work that epitomizes the style
- read the passage a handful of times before copying it

Copy

I copied every descriptive passage of significance in *HoD* at least twice, then read the passage in my own writing. Here are some tips to aid you through your copying.

- copy as much at a time as possible--holding the writing in short term memory helps you absorb the style
- re-read the passage after copying it to review the style

Freewrite in the style

While Conrad's prose was still fresh in my mind, I freewrote for 20 minutes about a topic representative of his style. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your freewriting.

- do this soon after your copying, so the style is fresh
- overdo it--subtlety isn't your goal here; getting reps is
- wait a week & review your freewriting--do you hear the style?

ENJOY ART (CONSUME)

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

If we think of creativity in terms of the fire analogy from the video, we can imagine each piece of art we observe as fuel for our creative flame. For every fuel we consume--for every art form we expose ourselves to--we diversify the creative energy we release. So it's important to take in as much as possible, and to do so in the context of our DP principles: concentration and evolving mental reps. The moves below illustrate how to do just this.

Move #1: Decide on a field

Move #2: Get specific

Move #3: Apply what you learn

Move #4: Leverage learnings

Decide on a field

I love screenwriting almost as much as I love novel writing, so I've always been drawn to movies and television. Here are some tips for determining what art form draws you in.

- remember your learning style and match it to an art form
- think back to your childhood--what captivated you?
- find a form to shed new light on an old writing weakness

Get specific

I watch TV shows on a regular basis, but I wanted to choose one in particular I could pay close attention to. I chose "Dexter". Here's a strategy to help you get specific.

- whatever criteria that led you to the form, re-apply this criteria at the micro level. Eg: if you read poetry to improve your diction, choose a poet known for that trait.

Make it easy to consume

Consuming art is hardly a chore, but it's still smart to remove all friction that might impede your commitment. Here are some tips to make your consumption easy and enjoyable.

- remove barriers to consumption--enjoying renaissance painting from a high quality art book is far easier than visiting a museum to see the originals

Leverage your learnings

I applied what I learned from Dexter to my writing, Here are some tips to leverage your art consumption for your writing.

- watch interviews with the artist to learn his/her thinking process
- brainstorm ways to connect this process to your writing

LIVE

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

Ever get writer's block? Ever feel uninspired? The writers in the survey have an answer for you. You can consume art—actively watch film or listen to music or inspect a sculpture—and replenish your creative fuel. Whether we're seeking out challenging situations or unusual circumstances to evolve our mental reps of plot, traveling & taking notes to concentrate on our setting, or people watching to develop our characterization skills, we can leverage life for our writing.

Move: Plot

Move: Character

Move: Setting

Plot

As much as we try to avoid it, conflict is omnipresent in our lives. For writers, that's great, because conflict is at the heart of every good plot. Here are some tips to learn from it.

- try something difficult or confront a difficult person
- if you're laid back, try a high-strung day, or vice versa
- choose a theme for your week and live it out
- try charting a personal experience into a 3-act structure
- do something that scares you

Character

If you ever run out of character ideas, just look around. You have 7.5 billion sources of inspiration. Here are some tips for making the most of your relationships for your fiction.

- transcribe an interview to understand verbal ticks
- learn a person's past; use that to understand their present
- chart your relationship with a friend to see the arc
- watch a friend's face when you're talking--how does their expression contrast with their words--internal conflict?

Setting

We may not live in Middle Earth or Narnia, but we can still draw inspiration from our surroundings. Here are some tips to help you do just that.

- describe your immediate surroundings using all senses
- travel somewhere and describe those surroundings
- note how the weather and time affects people's actions
- go to a place that feels alive to you; describe it as a character and capture its mood

WRITE (SHORT FORM)

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

Writers in the survey usually said more than just “write”. They said to do *focused* writing, and more specifically, to focus on short stories, fan fic, and freewriting. Shorts allow you to concentrate on one thing, a weakness or something that will push you from your comfort zone, and they have quick turnarounds on feedback. Those are our Deliberate Practice Principles for this drill: leave your comfort zone, and get feedback.

Move #1: Choose a form

Move #2: Start with a goal

Move #3: Concentrate on the goal

Move #4: Review your work

Choose a form

Between short stories, fan fiction, and freewriting, I chose short stories, mainly so I could submit my work and build some publishing credits. Here are some tips for picking a form.

- choose fan fic to understand how great stories function
- choose freewriting to stoke your creativity and find a style
- choose short stories to practice from the ground up

Choose a goal

My goal when I started writing shorts, above and beyond racking up publishing credits, was to improve my writing at the line level. Here are some tips for choosing a goal.

- get specific; "write better characters" is less effective than "write characters with more interwoven backstory"
- match your goal to a weakness in your writing

Concentrate on the goal

I paid extra attention to my line-level prose while writing my short stories, and that concentration paid off. Here are some tips for keeping your goal top of mind.

- type the goal into the .doc header so you see it every page
- over-execute--don't worry about subtlety
- set mental triggers to execute on the goal when possible

Review your work

After finishing a short story, I went back and scrutinized each sentence with my goal in mind: to improve my line-level prose. Here are some tips for judging yourself against your goal

- ascertain where you succeeded and where you failed
- use this information to plan your next short and zero in on a more specific goal

EDIT

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

We normally think only about editing ourselves: polishing our old work to make it publishable, but there's another side to the coin. Editing other writers, or, "critiquing", opens a whole new dimension of improvement ... if you go about it the right way. So follow the moves in this training sheet, and keep in mind our four main DP principles: concentrate, evolve your mental representations, leave your comfort zone, and get feedback.

Move #1: Review revision plan

Move #2: Make the first pass

Move #3: Execute revision plan

Move #4: Make the polish pass

Review your revision plan

While I write my first draft of a story, I make notes about things to change during revision. I call this a revision plan. Here are some tips for creating/reviewing *your* revision plan.

- to create s a revision plan: take notes during your first draft, or consider your overall impressions after finishing
- use those impressions to brainstorm specific revisions

Make the first pass

The first time I go through my stories, I keep a bird's eye view, reading as a reader to refresh myself on the story, and fixing trivial prose problems. Here are some tips for the first pass.

- focus on the surface-level--let bigger issues marinate
- take more notes and add to your revision plan
- organize your revision plan, grouping related changes

Execute revision plan

I start with the easiest problems, the ones I know how to solve. The bigger issues usually work themselves out as I go. Here are some tips to smooth out your revision pass.

- remind yourself what the small things build toward, ie: tweaking bits of dialogue to alter a character's voice
- cross off items as you go to keep yourself motivated

Make the polish pass

This is where I put on the final coat of paint, a little sanding, a little glossing, and smooth together the separate revisions. Here are some tips to make the most of your polish pass.

- keep the goals of your revision plan in mind
- read your work aloud
- make note of your recurring ticks and tendencies

GET FEEDBACK

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

This is the most overlooked part of a writer's improvement. Because of our insecurities or perfectionism, we're tempted to keep our work to ourselves or to rush on to the next project, but without feedback we have no way of learning from our work. So let's really dig into this training sheet, bearing in mind our four main DP principles: concentrate, evolve your mental representations, leave your comfort zone, and, of course, get feedback.

Move #1: Decide on a type

Move #2: Decide on a source

Move #3: Be specific

Move #4: Study the feedback

Decide on a type

You can get feedback from editors, beta readers, and fellow writers. If you can, get feedback from all of these people, but if you have to choose, here are some things to consider.

- fellow writers: best for early drafts and works in progress
- beta readers: best for re-calibrating on a 2nd draft
- editors: best for already polished projects, but expensive

Decide on a source

Before giving my manuscript to someone, I consider if they can be honest with me & if they're a good match for the story. Here are some tips for choosing the right feedback source.

- for your beta readers & fellow writers, consider who matches your target audience, and who will be honest
- for editors, get references and review their writing

Be specific

When I send something to my beta readers, I do more than "ask for feedback". That's too vague. I'm much more specific with that, and with these tips, you can be too.

- tell your feedback source what you're concentrating on
- ask specific questions--see engelwrite.com/blog/how-to-get-feedback-on-your-writing for an email template

Study the feedback

I'm not fishing for praise with my feedback; I'm fishing for problems. Only by acknowledging these problems can you fix them. Here are some tips for leveraging the feedback you get.

- read and re-read the feedback; find patterns
- accept concerns; be wary of proposed solutions
- apply what you learn to new projects as well as the WIP

WRITE (LONG FORM)

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

We've finally gotten to the good stuff--writing a great novel is what we've been building toward. All the more reason to do it the right way. Of course, "right" means something different for everyone, but below, we'll outline some guidelines to keep you on track, not only with our DP principles: concentrate, evolve your mental reps, leave your comfort zone, and get feedback, but also with some strategies to develop personalized mastery.

Move #1: Find your story

Move #2: Choose a focus element

Move #3: Focus on the element

Move #4: Judge your progress

Find your story

I start with a premise (nefarious company selling smart contacts), but I then ask myself what the story is *about*, what I'm trying to say. Here are some tips for finding that clarity.

- consider the origins of the premise or idea: the story's roots will inform the form it takes
- identify themes and how they build toward a Truth

Choose a focus element

My writing improves the most from writing a novel when I write with a focus in mind (character development, dialogue, etc.). Here are some tips for choosing your own focus.

- choose a weakness to improve or a strength to stylize
- review feedback from previous stories for ideas
- choose something specific ("descriptions", not "prose")

Focus on the element

I concentrated on my deep POV exposition while writing my most recent novel, using it to distinguish my voice. Here are some tips for keeping your focus top of mind.

- type the goal into the header so you see it on every page
- over-execute--don't worry about subtlety
- set mental triggers to execute on the goal when possible

Judge your progress

After finishing a novel, I go back and scrutinize each sentence with my goal in mind. Here are some tips for judging yourself against your own goal.

- ascertain where you succeeded and where you failed
- use this information to plan your next novel and zero in on a more specific focus

ENJOY ART (CREATE)

TRAINING SHEET



Summary

Writers need a creative outlet. That might sound odd right now, but the next time you're blocked and tired and under deadline and generally feeling the pressure, think about it again. Creating a different art form is more than an escape, though, especially if pursued in the context of our DP principles: concentrate, evolve your mental reps, leave your comfort zone, and get feedback. It can also clarify your trajectory toward personalized mastery.

Move #1: Decide on a field

Move #2: Get specific

Move #3: Make it easy to create

Move #4: Process and iterate

Decide on a field

I wanted an artistic hobby that would directly contribute to my writing. Because I want to write in a lyrical style, I chose music. Here are some tips for choosing your own field.

- remember your learning style and match it to an art form
- think back to your childhood--what captivated you?
- find a form to shed new light on an old writing weakness

Get specific

Music is a pretty broad category of art. So I considered what kind of music would best help my lyricism. The answer was rap. Here are some tips for zeroing in on a particular form.

- let your interests lead you; this should be fun, not a chore
- start broad, experiment, and move toward a niche
- learn from professional artists in that niche

Make it easy to create

Lucky for me, I have two good friends who are music producers, so whenever I want to write/record, we hang out, and we create. Here are some tips for making your art form a habit.

- reserve a space in your home for this activity
- prep in advance to decrease recurring set-up time
- go to this form if you ever feel blocked in your writing

Process and iterate

I always try to tie my music back to my writing--what does a recurring flow in my rapping mean for the flow of my writing? Here are some tips for relating your art to writing.

- watch an interview with an artist in your chosen niche to understand his/her creative process
- watch how your writing voice evolves as a result of the art