

ENCORE!

10 FUN WRITING EXERCISES TO PREPARE FOR THE “ENCORE!” COMPETITION



donner envie d'écrire

Context :

The title of the competition in French is a play on words with “body” (corps in French). The topic of the writing competition is sport and our bodies. Participants are invited to submit short, high-impact texts expressing the link between our bodies and the practice of a sport. Above all, the judges will be looking for originality.

Start with a short ritual

“My father taught me an ancestral ritual known as the water ritual. I gather water in the palms of my hands and, with my lips just a few centimetres away from the surface of the water so that my breath and the vibration of my voice make it quiver, I recite a text in Pulaar (rhymes and nocturnal metaphors). Then I drink the water, which has absorbed everything I have just told it.” Souleymane

Diamanka, French slam poet.

Starting with a short ritual helps get the participants’ creative juices going and opens their imagination to the words suggested by the group. Use the ritual to create a word cloud, to immerse participants in the chosen subject and to help them connect with their body and their senses. For example, they could take it in turns to complete the following sentences using the verbs “I would be...”, or “I could...”, or “I’d like to...”:

On a sport-related theme :

“If I were a sport, ...” or “If I were a famous sportsperson, ...”

On a theme related to the body or the senses :

“Today, I feel ...”, “If I were my eyes ...”, or “If I were a scent ...”.

Tips for encouraging creative writing

- Invite the participants to talk about their own experiences.
- Encourage them to write spontaneously by setting a time limit.
- Writing is a sport, so ensure students carry out writing exercises and challenges regularly.
- Encourage participants to share what they’ve written by reading aloud. Ask everyone to listen sympathetically and without judgement; it’s important to cultivate self-confidence to get people to express themselves freely in writing.
- Encourage them to write in different places.
- Don’t force things; everyone should be allowed to write at their own pace

PLAYING WITH FORMS AND STRUCTURE

Haiku

Haiku are short Japanese poems with a set structure. They are written in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables (translations don't usually meet the rule). Haiku can also be written in free verse. They paint a vivid picture in just a few words.

Here are some examples.

*A world of dew
And within every dewdrop
A world of struggle*

Kobayashi Issa

*First snow
falling on the
half-finished bridge*

Matsuo Basho

*Autumn leaves
Become ashes, snow
And lovers' tears.*

Anon

To add a sport-related touch to your haiku, you could:

- Choose a sporting accessory (a ball, a pair of trainers, a bicycle, etc.) and address it as if it were a child, or alternatively with great reverence. The key idea is to talk to the object, as if you had something important to tell it. You could repeat the exercise, this time choosing a part of the body.

Examples

*My beloved tennis racket
You're looking tired
Let's get you new strings*

*Free on the rink
Ice skates, whirl and twirl!
Later, all is silence*

- Write a haiku about your favourite sport, using at least one kigo (a word associated with a particular season). For example, shower, frost, hail, cloud, rain, wind, ocean, delta, shore, iris, flight, hut, tornado, sky, dune, strawberry, light, wave, departure... (You could prepare a lucky dip of kigos and have people pick one each that they then must use in their poem.)

Examples

*A hailstorm
My body overheats
I'm going to explode*

• Choose two words that are opposites (word A and word B). Choose two words that are opposites (word A and word B) and that are sport-related. Write a haiku starting the first line with word A and ending the last line with word B. For example, if you chose “throw” for word A and “catch” for word B, “throw” would be the first word of the first line, and “catch” would be the last word of the last line. Other word pairs could be FIRE and ICE, or BALL and FOOT, or BLACK and WHITE.

Example

*Ice on the peaks
Eternally frozen
To approach, I start a fire*

*Water, beautiful but powerful
Whether frozen or boiling
It nourishes my fire*

Quatrains and rhymes

A quatrain is a verse with four lines. To make a list of rhyming words, get the participants to work in pairs. They choose a sport and work together to find related pairs of words that rhyme. Examples could include ball and call, socks and box, etc. Then, using the words found by the pair (or by the whole class) each participant writes a verse using the rhyming words to end each line. Easy-peasy!

Examples

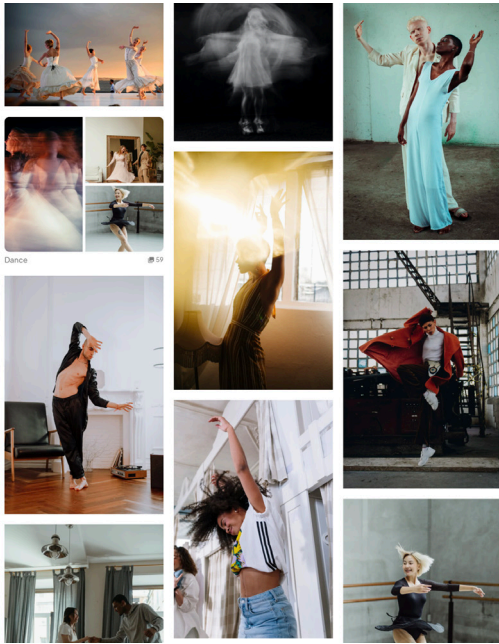
Rhyming pairs found : Bat / Hat - Feat / Beat

Used in a quatrain:

*Ready to go, I pick up my bat
The sun is strong, I'll need my hat
I'm going to achieve a feat
I can feel my heart beat*



WRITING WITH PROMPTS



Photographs

Sports photographs are a great prompt for writing stories or short poems about sport. You could choose some photos from sports magazines or art books. Or the participants themselves could select stock images from a user-friendly website such as www.pexels.com. If they initially write a text that is longer than that required for the competition, ask them to re-write it in a shorter form, keeping only the punchiest ideas and words.

Results from a search on pexels.com using the word DANCE

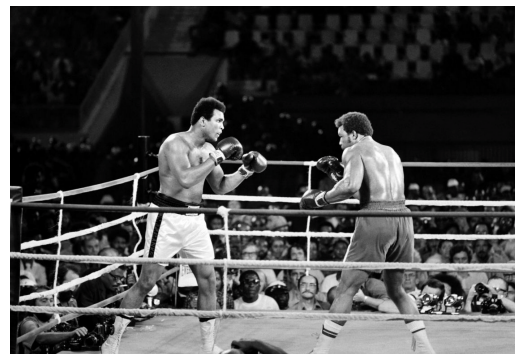
Objects

Ask each participant to think of an object, large or small, or a sporting venue (a football stadium or the gym for example). The instructions for the exercise could be: if this object could communicate with the sportsperson to spur them on to victory, what would it say?

For example, the football shirt urges on the football player, the athletics track encourages the runner, etc. There are plenty of sports-related objects you could use, including football boots, rugby balls, medals, goalposts, the stadium, the changing rooms, hockey sticks and pucks, gym chalk, etc.

You could ask the whole group to give their voice to the same object or ask each member of the group to bring in an object related to a sport and make their object talk.

Another option could be to take a highly symbolic object such as the World Cup, the Tour de France's yellow jersey, or Muhammed Ali's boxing gloves (show a video of one of his fights) and ask participants to imagine what that object might say. Find inspiration from extracts of YouTube videos of sporting events and exploits.



Quotations by famous sportspeople

Search the internet for some quotations by famous sportspeople. You could use these to kick off a debate about sporting values and then have participants write their own quotations as if they were a sportsperson.

Here are some examples:

«I came like a king, left like a legend.»

Zlatan Ibrahimovic

« Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision.»

Mohamed Ali

«One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation. »

Arthur Ashe

« If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it. »

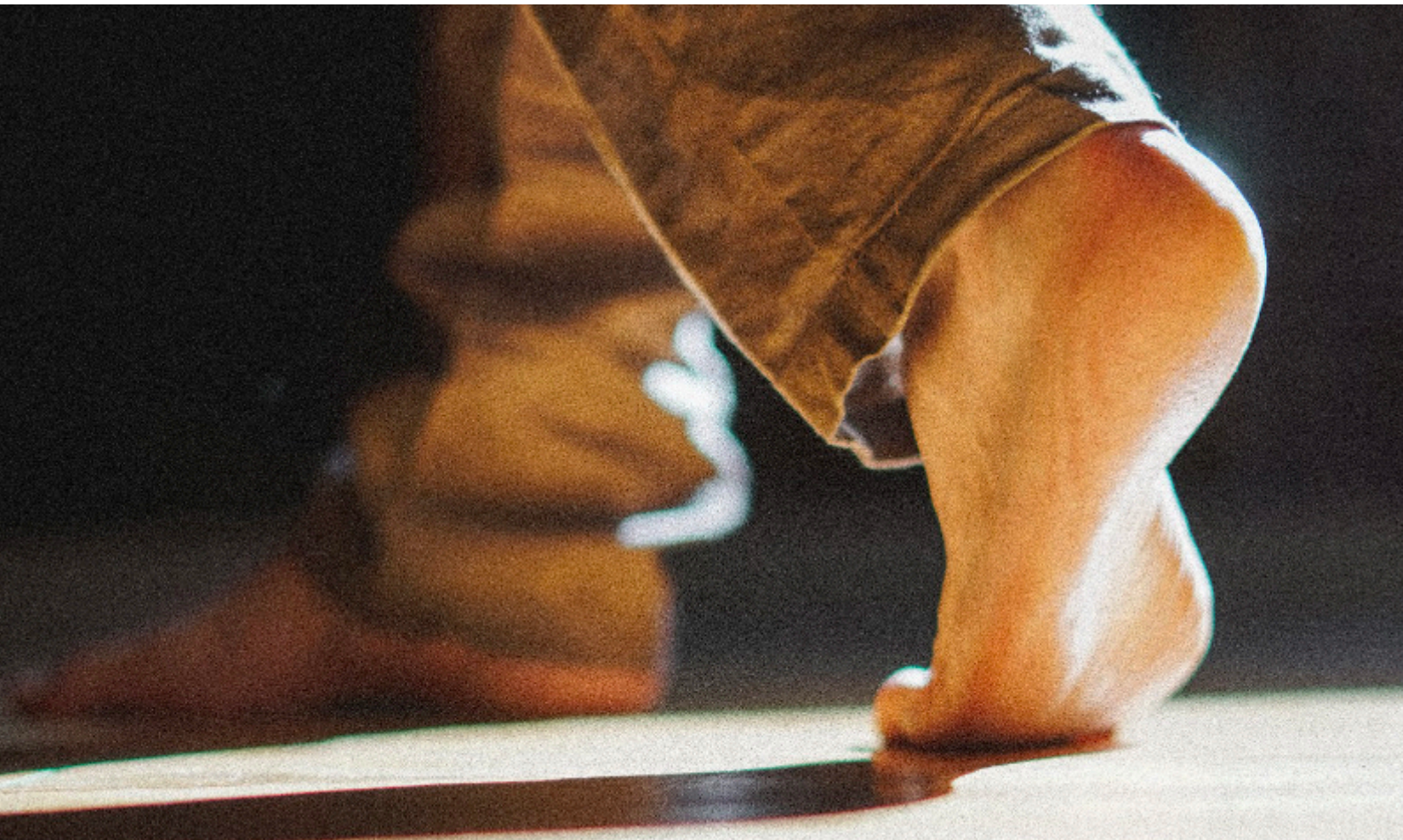
Michael Jordan

« I don't play against a particular team. I play against the idea of losing. »

Eric Cantona

«The more difficult the victory, the greater the happiness in winning. »

Pelé



STYLISH! STYLISTIC DEVICES AND VOCABULARY

Like (similes)

To get participants to work on the themes of sport and their body, use lucky dip hats to spark ideas. In one hat, put words relating to parts of the body that feature regularly in different sports, and in the other hat words relating specifically to different sports.

Participants take one word from each hat. They must make up a sentence that uses the two words and that also includes the word "like". A great recipe for a poem !

Examples

Examples of words relating to the body could include arms, legs, shoulders, muscles, skin, flesh, breath, blood, veins, forehead, feet, heel, calf, neck, cramp, bruise, pain, effort, and so on. You could ask the participants themselves to choose the words that go into the lucky dip bag.

Examples of sports-related words could include throw, receive, attack, defend, outstrip, cycle, effort, supple, surpass, passion, equipment, victory and medal.



Lucky dip hats!

Playing on the five senses

Choose one of the five senses and have participants write a text concentrating on this one sense. For example, after having done some sport or having watched a sports competition or match, they could recount the scene concentrating on the sense of hearing.

What could you hear? What would the soundtrack of the scene be? If you were blindfolded, what would you have perceived?

For example

I'm obsessed by this sound, my eardrums are throbbing, there goes the whistle, it's a win for the home team, the crowd cheers.

And it's a goooooaaal!

Have the participants listen to the sports commentary for several matches or sporting events, and then ask them to write a piece in the same style. The subject could be an event they have attended, a sporting memory, or a picture. The idea is to write a pastiche of the expressions used by the commentators.

For example

And he's off the ropes, really at it now, left hook, right jab, there's no stopping him. The power in those punches! Surely victory is in sight!

How to give your writing extra impact

- Use a dictionary of idioms and phrases such as <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/> to find well-known sayings or proverbs you can creatively adapt.
- Ask the participants to write spontaneously at first, then edit their text replacing all the weak verbs (do, say, play, etc.) by stronger and more specific verbs.
- Delete any superfluous ideas and unwanted words.
- Underline three words in each participant's text that they must modify with the help of a thesaurus.
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ENCORE!

THREE SESSIONS

TO PREPARE FOR THE “ENCORE!” COMPETITION



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SESSION 1 – 90 MINUTES

LINKING SPORT AND WRITING

The aim of this first session is to make a connection between physical movement and writing. The way the two are linked will be developed throughout the workshop. Don't be afraid to get the participants to do their writing in the same place as they are doing the physical activity. The only equipment you need is pens and loose sheets of paper. People can write in all sorts of positions: sitting down, lying on the grass, standing up, etc.

1- Warming-up and writing down words

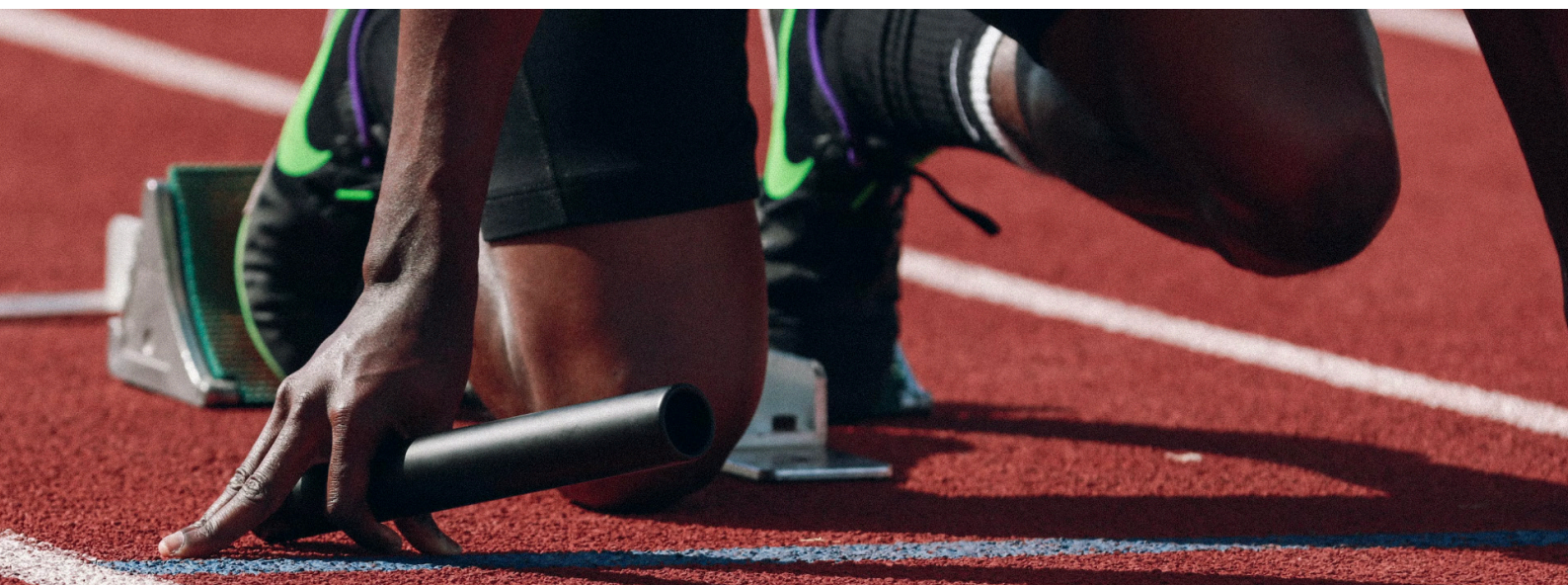
Regardless of the sport or activity you have chosen, you always start with a warm-up. You can alternate physical activity with writing – for example, 10 minutes of sport, followed by 5 minutes of writing; then 5 minutes of sport, followed by 2 minutes of writing. In this warm-up session, the writing exercise could simply be to ask participants to note down words and phrases describing their physical feelings. They can write what they like, or you could suggest some guidelines, such as:

Note down how you feel:

- *your breathing*
- *your head*
- *your legs*
- *your arms*
- *your body in general*

2. Do some sport and write about how you feel afterwards

Organise a physical activity (skipping, a ball game, running around the room, a hopping race, etc.). Afterwards, invite the participants to draw a shape on their sheet of paper (it could be the outline of their foot or their hand, the shape of a drop of water, a circle – any shape, it's up to them). Ask them to write, inside the shape, what they are feeling (heart beating, sweaty, tired, exalted, joyful, stiff, flushed, etc.) and then to write, outside the shape, their perception of what was going on around them (the other participants, the surroundings, etc.).



3- Describing physical actions in different imaginary settings

Instead of starting with a physical activity, this last section of the workshop starts with an exercise calling on the imagination. Ask the participants to imagine themselves in a real or fictional setting: at the beach, in a desert, in a city centre, at home, on Mars, in the water, etc. Once everyone has found their imaginary setting, name a sport or physical activity that they must imagine themselves doing in that setting.

The exercise can be guided as follows : start by saying,

Imagine yourself in a different or fictional place (such as a huge glass of water, a busy market, on Mars, in a space rocket, on a frozen lake, or on a small square of grass from which you are not allowed to move).“ Allow the participants a few minutes to settle themselves into this imaginary place and absorb its specific characteristics. Ask questions such as, “Is it very cold, or very hot? Is the ground solid or are you on a moving surface? Are you in a blinding light or is it completely dark? What sounds can you hear?” Once the participants are familiar with their imaginary environment, ask them to imitate the movements of a runner, a cyclist or a swimmer in their fictional setting. Their gestures should be slightly different depending on the setting they have chosen.

After this exercise, ask the participants to describe in two sentences the movements they made, what they felt or what they observed other people doing.

Keep all the texts written by participants during this first session.

SESSION 2 – 90 MINUTES

WRITING BASED ON AN EXPERIENCE

The aim of this second session is to rework the texts written in the “Linking sport and writing” session.

1- Based on their own text

The participants re-read what they wrote in the previous session. Their texts may be made up of just a few words. They can choose the most compelling words and put them together in a new sentence or a short poem. There are many forms of short poems, including:

- **The monostich** : a poem consisting of a single line used to express a thought or tell a story.

Example : Can there even be a winner in this tornado?
or: Your royal demeanour and my crushing defeat.

- **The tercet** : a three-line poem.

Example : Arms tensed, stretched out / I seek balance / And victory.

2- Based on other people's words

Hand out at random the sheets of paper on which participants wrote texts inside and outside shapes. Each participant selects 5 words from the sheet they receive and incorporates them into a short text or poem. Forms suggested could include the haiku (set form or free verse), the quatrain, or a short text beginning with And then, ... or Suddenly, ... or One day, ... or I feel ...

Reminder of the verse forms :

Haiku (set form): 3 lines of 5 / 7 / 5 syllables

Haiku (free verse): 3 lines

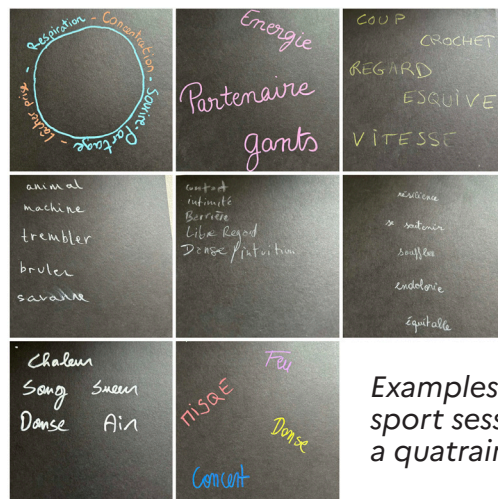
Quatrain: 4 lines of verse (with or without a rhyme scheme)

For example :

Using the words "preparation", "win", "competition".

After months of preparation,
Body never giving in.

It's the day of the competition
I so want to win!



Examples of words written down during the sport session that can be used in a haiku or a quatrain.



3- Working in a group

Using the sentences written after the imaginary settings exercise, participants could work in groups and have fun summarising the stories, writing what happens next, improving the vocabulary used, or adding details such as colours, adjectives, physical sensations perceived by the body, or elements relating to sound, etc.

How to give your writing extra impact

- Use a dictionary of idioms and phrases such as <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/> to find well-known sayings or proverbs you can creatively adapt.
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SESSION 3 – 90 MINUTES

FINALISING

It's time for each participant to write up their favourite text. Remember: the texts submitted to the competition must be no longer than 250 characters, including spaces, and they must be submitted in French AND in the participant's native language.

STEP 1: TYPESCRIPT

A typescript is a typed manuscript. The texts entered for the competition must be typed on a computer. At this stage, you should check grammar and spelling. You also need to check that the number of characters (including spaces) complies with the competition rules. There's still time to make last-minute changes if necessary.

STEP 2: TRANSLATION

Remember to translate the text into French or make sure that it is written in the native language and in French. Translating a text is also an exercise in creative (re)writing! Take your time, and make sure you do the translation alongside the author of the poem or text. It's important to retain the sense and the choice of words.

STEP 3: ENTERING THE COMPETITION

Involving the participants in the process of entering the competition and sending the texts can be an interesting exercise. Congratulate everyone for getting this far.

STEP 4: TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER

Options for taking the process a step further include getting the participants to illustrate their texts, organising a group reading of all the texts, or displaying the texts in the sports venue or gym that you worked in.

What is important is that each participant expresses what they think or feel in a piece of writing that reflects their personality, and that they have complete freedom to play with the words.

The writing process is not over; even at this stage the text can still be modified.

