Chapter One
The Sound of a Voice Thinking

The self-explorer, whether he wants to or not, becomes the explorer of everything else.
—ELIAS CANETTI

It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." In the one hundred and fifty years since he issued his once radical decree, self-trust, in the guise of "selfesteem" and "self-confidence," has become a commonplace goal. But that trust is still elusive for most of us. Despite our openness to self-exploration, efforts to acquire it often fail.

Yet so much of what is worthwhile in life is grounded in self-trust: relationships, finding the right work, your ability to learn and create, your willingness to take risks, connection with your desires and your ideals. Self-trust allows you to appreciate the quality of your own mind as well as the minds of others. Through self-trust you gain the gift of yourself.

By self-trust we mean having an intimate feel for the person you are and the way your mind works. Imagine visiting the country of You and becoming comfortable with its language, its customs and idiosyncrasies, the contours of its landscapes, its unique history Imagine discovering what it's like to be you, how it feels to be in your skin, to think your thoughts, to possess your memories, to be shaped by your stories, to be driven by your obsessions, to be happy or unhappy as only you are, to perceive yourself and others as only you do. Self-trust begins with an honest exploration of your thoughts and feelings, which are as close to you as the food you eat and the air you breathe.

Sadly, many people are too fearful, anxious, or rushed for such intimate self- exploration. They feel disconnected from their subjective experience. This condition leaves them in a state not of self-trust but of self-doubt. In fact, it was an agonizing state of self-doubt—a feeling of being completely cut off from her own inner life—that more than twenty-five years ago led Linda to create Proprioceptive Writing.

HOW IT ALL STARTED: LINDA'S STORY

If necessity is the mother of invention, it was need that forced me to invent Proprioceptive Writing. Soon after my mother died, when I was seven, I had started feeling as if I were locked inside myself and couldn't get out, or locked outside and couldn't get in. Psychologically, I was suffering from what I now call proprioceptive deficit, a breakdown in communication between a person and his or her subjective thoughts. By some strange act of compartmentalization, I kept my private thoughts secret from myself and so felt cut off from them. Most days, this condition was my prison.

A year after he was widowed, my father remarried. The tension among my father, stepmother, older sister, and myself seemed to me an unchanging aspect of life, like a gloomy weather system that blows in and won't blow out. During certain moments, however, I would feel a brief reprieve.

Before I fell asleep some nights, I entered a state of mind that compensated for all my daytime hardship and taught me how to live with it. As I lay in bed, reviewing the past day or planning new escapes, something clicked inside my head that altered my perspective on myself in a startling way. With my inner eye I pictured my thoughts; with my inner ear I heard myself speaking them, and suddenly I knew myself as a thinker thinking. "I think, therefore I am," as Descartes famously said. This spontaneous awareness brought with it a feeling of harmony and love. Contentment washed over me at those times.

Everyone has experiences of heightened consciousness; they come unbidden. Mine taught me two of life's great lessons: that as thinker I had power, and that the thinking process could be my pleasure. But this pleasure was mercurial. It came and went. Sometimes I'd lie awake for hours, waiting for that special feeling to kick in, and nothing would happen.

The first time I became aware of how cut off I was from myself I was eleven, and

all the other kids at summer camp were writing in journals. "Dear Diary," my friend Karen wrote blithely, lying on her belly in the bunk bed below and kicking her legs in the air. "Today we went on a hard hike up Mount Kildare and Andy kissed me but no one saw us. He's the best boy in the group. Maybe I love him. I'm not saying yes." I hung over the side of our double-decker, watching Karen write, and felt a stab of emptiness. Not three feet from me, she was lost in her imagination. Some kids gave their diaries names, like Louisa or Amy or Rebecca, but we all knew that when you wrote in a diary you were your own audience. Who was this alter ego to whom Karen spoke her thoughts for the pleasure of it? I hadn't a clue how to have the kind of imaginative presence to myself that my friend had that day.

Years later, when I was a college student writing papers, a moment sometimes came (rarely, but remarkably) when my thoughts absorbed me totally, and I felt engaged, both emotionally and intellectually. A warmth suffused me in that instant. I felt that universal love and personal well-being I had known as a young girl thinking in my bed. But more usually my mind felt impenetrable to me. I wanted to reflect on my thinking, carefully and deeply, but writing with the purpose of self-discovery was an alien concept then. We were encouraged to analyze, that was all. However competently I could dissect a writer's thoughts, I could not narrate my own.

How could I free my mind and become available to what actually interested me? How could I recognize desire, move on impulse, develop will? How could I exert myself on my behalf? How could I be less afraid of difficulty and choose the thing that was harder but more personally rewarding for me? Where to begin? The answers came during the summer of 1976, when the doors to my consciousness opened and the distinction between inside and outside dissolved.

I'd been teaching English literature at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn for six years and needed to write my Ph.D. dissertation to stay on a tenure track. While I was looking through my card file of authors on whom I wanted to do research, I came across a book that had struck me as extraordinary when Id read it several years earlier. We Have Always Lived in the Castle is a short novel by Shirley Jackson, best known as the author of "The Lottery," a short story originally published in The New Yorker in 1948 and frequently anthologized since then. The book is a psychological portrait of a young girl named Mary Katherine in mid-twentieth-century New England, a brilliant depiction of female terror and subverted aggression, but also a spoof of a

traditional whodunit. In this case, Mary Katherine had done what many young girls only fantasize about: laced sugar with cyanide and eliminated mother, father, an annoying younger brother, and a useless aunt, all in the time it takes to drink your after-dinner coffee. Thereafter, she remains in the decaying family estate, behind tall wrought-iron gates, along with her adored older sister. With nothing more to do than light dusting once a week, she has all the time in the world to dwell on her thoughts.

Reading the book over again brought back the sound of Mary Katherine's voice, which had struck me when I first read it and stayed with me over the years. The novel is written entirely as Mary Katherine's internal dramatic monologue. Throughout the book she is holding a silent, one-way conversation with her chief admirer: herself. To this self she speaks her thoughts in the order that they come to her, making side remarks for her amusement, rehearsing insults she'll deliver, loving whom she loves, hating whom she hates, recalling as if for the first time what she's said a thousand times before. No one notices her deceptions or self-delusions—except, of course, the reader. She's safe in her seclusion, free to travel where her thoughts take her, obsessing to her heart's content.

This thinking voice sounded amazingly alive to me. Jackson had found a narrative voice—it was the sound of a voice thinking. I repeated the phrase to myself; it was like a koan or a riddle. Back then I felt so cut off from myself that I'd forgotten the connection between silent inner thought and spoken thought that every child takes for granted and that Jackson had captured so deftly. There was something here I needed to understand. My goal, my obsession that summer, was to learn how Jackson made that connection and captured that sound for her narrative voice. It didn't occur to me at the time that I might find my own thinking voice in the process.

It was early June when I lit a candle and flipped on a tape of Bach cantatas—just an inspiration to support the morning's work. I opened the novel and began to read Mary Katherine's "uncensored" thought. Her voice came in loud and clear. Taking my cue from her, I wrote down my every thought, without letup. I interacted with Mary Katherine, reacted to her, advocated for her, and, in my fashion, imitated her as well. When my thoughts wandered away from Jackson's text to my life or emotions, I wandered with them. Without a reason to edit my thoughts, I elaborated on them

all, exploring in a leisurely fashion every psychological event aroused in my mind by my sense of the words I was using. Three hours later I awakened to the room I was in and looked around. I turned off the music and blew out the candle. I felt uncommon calm. I had lost myself in time, but never had I felt as much myself. Something wonderful was happening to me and it took place through this writing: I was writing solely for myself while addressing a listener who shared the same sense of the subject as I did. For the first time in my life I was following my thoughts wherever they led me, no matter what the terrain. I was entering into my own life by exploring my own thought flow.

Mary Katherine's every thought contained a story. Her words were charged with feeling. Her tones were fluid: bitter, haughty, ironic, evasive, fearful. She took for granted her right to think her inner thoughts out loud, obsessive and emotion-driven as they were.

Jackson had brought powerful attention to her task as writer and I took permission from her to equal that attention and turn it toward myself, to listen to my words as they spilled onto the paper, sense the feelings and motives they concealed, and amplify them. Soon enough, I was writing my own stories of experience, amazed to find I had them in me.

And so I worked, six hours each day, five days a week, for the next three months. The only sound I heard was Baroque music and the dripping of the wax. By the end of the summer, Id become a student of my own life. Just as I had come to know Mary Katherine through the stories she told about her life and the shifting tones in which she told them, so I came to know myself through my own stories and the voice that told them.

Could I have had this breakthrough without writing? I'm certain I couldn't have. Before that summer I couldn't express my feelings or understand my subjective experience. Only when I began to speak with myself, while a script rolled out from beneath my pen, did my inner thoughts become a voice that I could hear. It was as if that voice was a fictional persona and another part of me sat back and listened to it. Through writing I was creating a space between me and my thinking. Just as a narrator or character is of an author but not the author (no more than Iago is Shakespeare), so my thoughts and feelings were of me but not me. Like an author whose consciousness is larger than the fiction she creates, I found within myself a consciousness greater

than the personal experiences I recorded.

To identify with the thinker within yourself rather than with the thoughts you are thinking is like finding you have a lover by your side. Revelations come tumbling in and with them a sense of spaciousness and grace. Not since I was a child of eight, lying in my bed, dreaming my waking thoughts, had I felt such peace. The slant of light through which the world entered me widened: by gaining entry into my own consciousness I had found the means of entering the life and consciousness of others.

As the end of summer approached, I began to think about my fall classes and the students Id soon be teaching. I decided to bring my new writing practice to Pratt. I would lead my students by instruction, step by step, day by day, and by example. I vowed to hear them in their writing as I had heard myself in mine, and to show them, in turn, how to listen to themselves in a new way. Using the rules I had developed, they wouldn't need six hours of daily writing for three months to get them going, as I had needed. One half hour, when done right, would do just fine.

But first, I wanted to be able to explain why this new kind of writing worked—and what to call it. Luckily, a little-known system discovered in the nineteenth century gave me the answers to both of my questions.

WHY SUCH A FUNNY NAME?

What is "proprioception"? As children we played a little game. Palms upward, fingers knit together, we'd wiggle the finger a friend pointed to but did not touch. That we could move the finger at all amused us. We hesitated before we located it. How did we find the right one? We sensed within ourselves where it was.

The word proprioception, which comes from the Latin pro-prius, meaning "one's own," normally refers to our body's pro-prioceptive system. Just as the five senses take in information about the outer world—what we see, touch, smell, taste, and hear—and transmit it to our brains, the little-known "sixth sense" of proprioception also

gathers and processes information, but from the inner world of our bodies, the world we alone inhabit.

Within this system, actual nerves, called proprioceptors, located in the muscles, joints, and tendons communicate back and forth with the brain, orienting the body to its own movement, position, and tone. So that when we walk, we know where our legs are, and our legs know where we want to move. We can grasp a flower or a glass of water without crushing or dropping it. It's because of our proprioceptive sense that we know how to raise and lower our arm without looking at it, that our facial muscles know how to smile, that our hand can locate an itchy nose in need of scratching—automatically and without stopping to think.

Through proprioception, we are also able to synthesize emotion and imagination. When we watch a bird in flight, for instance, and "feel" in ourselves, in our muscles and our bones, the uplift, glide, and soaring movement of that bird... that feeling is a proprioceptive one. When we dance to music without knowing steps, or sing a song without knowing notes, those musical feelings are proprioceptive, too. We can dance and sing by feel. For this reason the proprioceptive system may be viewed as the interface of body and mind, as well as the source of emotional expression: by virtue of proprioception, we react to what we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, and feel—bodily, as well as mentally.

Nobel laureate and pioneering neurophysiologist Sir Charles Scott Sherrington first identified the system a little over a hundred years ago. According to esteemed British writer and neurologist Oliver Sacks, Sherrington named it proprioception "because of its indispensability for our sense of ourselves; for it is only by courtesy of proprioception... that we feel our bodies as proper to us, as our 'property' as our own." If our proprio-ceptive system were to become damaged through accident or illness, we would lose the feeling of embodiment, our us-ness, that we take for granted when in health.

In an essay entitled "The Disembodied Lady," from his best-selling book The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, Sacks describes the devastating effects of proprioceptive loss afflicting one of his patients, Christina. Because of a virus that attacked her proprioceptive nerve fibers, Christina's sensory control loops had broken down. On a physical level, described Sacks, her body lost all sense of position and tone. She could not move, sit, or stand—and whenever she tried to, her entire body collapsed. We have language to describe what it feels like to live without sight, sound, touch,

taste, or smell. But as Sacks says, no language exists to describe what it feels like to live without a proprioceptive sense of our own bodies. When asked to describe how she felt, Christina borrowed the language of emotional trauma: she felt empty and unreal, pithed, disembodied, inauthentic.

When we call our method Proprioceptive Writing, we are using the term metaphorically, comparing the mind's capacity to know itself to the body's. Through the transmission of proprioceptive information, the body has an ongoing sense of its own identity. In a similar way, the mind is also proprioceptive; it "knows" itself whenever we become aware of our own perceptions and feel their meaning to us. It is precisely the mind's need for this kind of subjective information that Propriocep-tive Writing satisfies. Although initially we called our practice the Thinking-Writing Method, the metaphor of proprioception seemed so illuminating as a model that we changed our name to reflect it.

Sacks's story brought the proprioceptive system to the attention of contemporary readers. But at least a decade earlier the proprioceptive sense was in the air and references to it turned up in the unpublished writings of the American poet Charles Olson. Olson, like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, believed that poetry, by transforming consciousness, could revitalize Western civilization. In his prose poem "Proprioception," he uses proprioception as metaphor and symbol for the unification of the mind/body split, even claiming: "the soul is proprioceptive."

But the usage of the term that comes closest to our own is the one David Bohm invokes in his work On Dialogue. A protégé of Einstein and an important twentieth-century physicist, Bohm was concerned with how thought, feeling, and memory—in other words, consciousness—shape our reality. He believed that "the proprioception of thought," by which he meant "thought aware of itself in action," could change consciousness if we listen to ourselves and others openly. We believe the method we began teaching in the late seventies, and subsequently called Proprioceptive Writing, has the potential to make the change in consciousness Bohm envisioned. To understand how, we need to first explain what actually goes on during a Write—how exactly we transform our thinking into voice on the page.

PUTTING VOICE BACK INTO WRITING

People who attend our workshops bring with them a lot of old baggage about writing. A school-learned task for most, writing was often used as a measure of success or failure, like a test. To sweep away these associations, we sometimes begin a workshop by recontextualizing the act of writing, presenting it for what it is most fundamentally: a technology for storing speech sounds.

Before the invention of writing, the human voice was the only instrument for conveying thought and recording facts. With the invention of writing our way of remembering changed. Using alphabet-based writing, people recorded their thoughts by preserving the sounds of words in combinations of graphic symbols called letters. (Some written languages, like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese, and Native American scripts, developed from pictographs and ideographs but also have a strong sound component.) Little about this basic process has changed to this day: the use of writing to record sound, whether done by hand, computer, or other instrument, preserves thoughts and anything expressed by words, including feelings, observations, and information, such as when wars take place, where people are born and die, and what things cost.

Although we take it for granted now, the introduction of a technology that transcribes the sounds of speech was an astounding invention—on a par with the harnessing of fire, an event that changed forever the relationship humans had to the world. Not long ago we watched a television documentary about the destruction of virgin rain forest in Brazil, in which indigenous people with an oral tradition confronted a written text for the first time in their lives. Two literate men from a first-world country sat in a circle and introduced a little game to the people of the forest. One man, clad in Bermuda shorts, says to the bare-limbed fellow by his side: "Whisper a message in my ear." The bare-limbed man does so, and the man in Bermuda shorts writes it down on a pad, then passes the pad around the circle until it reaches

his literate partner on the other side of the room, who reads the message aloud.

The oral folk stare at the paper confused and amazed. On it they see some scraggly lines, some curves and dots, but nothing that transmits information or meaning to them. They pass the pad back and forth. They turn it over. They shake it. They throw it on the ground and lift it up again, press their ears against it, consult each other in hushed and nervous tones: "Can you hear the pad?" they ask. "Does it speak to you?" Each takes a turn listening but the pad does not speak. Why, then, will it speak to the literates? What power do they possess that activates voice without the use of sound? Nothing in nature explains what the forest people have heard and witnessed in the circle.

As the reaction of these oral folk dramatizes, the impact writing has on the psyche represents a new separation of the previously indivisible mind/body unit. This is the subject of

Orality and Literacy, a remarkable work by Walter J. Ong, S.J., internationally renowned scholar, teacher, and writer, who has written extensively on the shaping influence of the alphabet, writing, and print on human consciousness. As Ong explains, writing removes thought from its natural habitat in sound and locks it permanently into a visual field forever.

Consider this simple illustration. Imagine sending your neighbor a note with these words on it: "Come over for dinner tomorrow night." From the written words alone, the neighbor can't tell what would be perfectly obvious if the words had been spoken in person—when the invitation was made, by whom, for what evening, in what tone and spirit. When uttered by a speaker, much meaning can be derived from context. By contrast, writing separates and extends voice away from the speaker. Writing nails down on paper the words of the person speaking—but just the words. Everything else that pertains to those words, what the actual context communicates, the written message leaves out.

When you write your thoughts in Proprioceptive Writing, you bring to the visual presence of writing the aural presence of speech. We ask you to think of your thoughts in a radically new way (though it's really an ancient way as well). We ask you to imagine giving thought voice as you think it. This is easier than it sounds once you get the knack of it. You just pretend to be speaking on paper. You can always find words for anything in your mind: your ideas, feelings, mental images, beliefs, opin-

ions, doubts, questions, reasons, memories, hopes, fantasies, regrets, disappointments, suppositions, fears, longings, desires, confusions. Every form of thought you can turn into words in your Writes. In Proprioceptive Writing, voice becomes the organ of thought and every human being has his or her own.

AWAKENING THE AUDITORY IMAGINATION

When you make the shift in Proprioceptive Writing from experiencing thought as mere words in your head to a living voice in your ear, your relationship to your thinking changes. You begin to awaken what T. S. Eliot called "auditory inwardness" and what in Proprioceptive Writing we call the auditory imagination—the capacity to enter your thoughts in an interested, nonjudgmental way and gain awareness of yourself from them. In terms of your psychological and spiritual well-being, this capacity is one of the most valuable you'll ever develop.

As we saw in the last section, the first step in finding your voice through Proprioceptive Writing is capturing your actual moment-to-moment thoughts in writing. The second, equally important, part is overhearing them as if they were spoken. Everyone has the innate capacity to do both; what we "say" we can "hear." So why not make full use of that capacity? After all, if we do not hear our own thoughts and gain information from them, we might as well be thinking someone else's. If you practice Proprioceptive Writing, you'll develop an awareness of the sound of your thinking. You'll begin to imagine your thoughts as a persona with a voice.

People often report to us that though a particular story they tell in a Write may be one they've told before, perhaps to their therapists, they have a more complete emotional experience of it in their Writes. Because they hear their thoughts differently as they are writing them, they imagine them more fully And what they imagine most fully, they care most about.

The kind of hearing we do during a Write requires our total and undivided attention. To get a sense of what this attention feels like, imagine for a minute watching a

movie about a double agent on the run. To lose himself in a crowd, our hero crashes an elegant cocktail party. We see him in the middle of the screen trying to blend in; we hear the clinking of glasses and the murmur of the guests all around him. Suddenly, the agent remembers an earlier conversation that hinted at the danger in which he now finds himself. To indicate to the audience that the character has withdrawn his awareness from the surrounding crowd and is focused totally on replaying that conversation in his head, the director cuts the sound of everything else. We see the moving mouths of the animated faces in the room but we no longer hear their voices. All we hear is our hero's thoughts—remembering that conversation, realizing its importance, sensing his current danger, plotting his next move. For us in the audience it's like an intense form of eavesdropping. To overhear ourselves in Proprioceptive Writing, we must give our total attention to the sounds of our thoughts. Like our hero, we cannot hear ourselves think and listen to anything else at the same time.

NOT JUST EXPRESSING BUT REFLECTING

From time to time a student asks: If overhearing our thoughts as if they were voiced is so crucial to Proprioceptive Writing, why write down anything at all? Why not just speak our thoughts and focus on hearing them? Because by slowing thought down to the time it takes to write it, and by holding thought still, we can reflect on our thoughts.

Expression isn't enough; reflection is also required. Reflection is what makes Proprioceptive Writing different from automatic writing, free writing, morning pages, stream of consciousness, or any form of process writing that separates expression from reflection, encourages expression over reflection, or views thinking as a distraction. We view thinking as an act of imagination and reflection an inquiry into that act. In Proprioceptive Writing, reflection is a spontaneous response to whatever feeling or idea you are expressing, the other end of the seesaw. It's a natural gesture that allows you to elaborate your thoughts and examine their meaning in the light of

emotion and reason.

Writing supports your reflections because it holds thoughts still. A disappearing target like spoken thought is not good for reflection, but written thought stays put. When people ask us if they can do Proprioceptive Writing without writing—say, by thinking out loud into a tape recorder—we tell them no. You're expressing your thoughts in writing so you can reflect on them.

When you gain new information from your reflections, like the double agent in the movie, you make adjustments. Your point of view shifts. Your perspective deepens. Your personal intelligence expands. In this mental movement you sense your vitality. All the metaphors we've heard people use to convey the effect of Proprioceptive Writing on a sheer feeling level are ones of movement: expansion, uplift, transport, being born into or thrust into, in the flow, in the zone—and all follow from your ability to reflect imaginatively on your own thinking.

A NEW KIND OF TEACHING

We had arrived at Pratt around the same time in the late 1960s to teach in the Department of English and Humanities. We both planned to stay on the track toward tenured professorship, but everything changed when Linda began teaching Proprioceptive Writing in the fall of 1976. Soon after, she introduced the process to Toby, who became an enthusiastic practitioner and teacher. Together and separately we taught graduate students, remedial writing students, advanced placement students, and students in our humanities and literature courses. It was also around that time that we became life partners.

The effects of Proprioceptive Writing on our students was dramatic. Their motivation for learning intensified. Their concentration deepened. Their ability to express complex thoughts in writing and speech grew stronger. They relaxed, becoming more generous in their responses to one another and more open about themselves. Our classrooms became scenes of learning explosions.

We held Proprioceptive Writing tutorials with fine arts graduate students who were struggling to write their master's theses. Soon, they were producing essays on their work that not only developed their confidence but also brought us highly encouraging feedback from their art and architecture teachers who came to us to talk about the changes they were noticing in the work of undergrads whom we shared. The more adept these students became at expressing their ideas and reflecting on them in writing, the more personal and revealing their art became. As one said in a note we still have, "By learning to address important questions in my writing, I've opened up whole areas to be explored visually. Getting to know my own thinking has made clear the direction my artwork should take. Becoming a focused thinker has made me a more honest artist."

In our content courses (literature, women's studies, oriental culture, mythology), as well, students were writing their minds alive, integrating ideas into their writing with an ease we hadn't seen before. As their hearing of themselves sharpened, they became markedly better readers and appreciated literature in a new way, too. At a time when many college-aged kids were experimenting with drugs, our students were getting a natural high from their Proprioceptive Writing sessions.

We knew we'd developed a practice that, when done regularly, could be transformational. It had altered our work and enriched our lives. We'd found a calling. In the spring of 1978, we made the difficult but important decision to give up our tenure-track positions at Pratt and devote ourselves full-time to teaching

Proprioceptive Writing. Twenty-five years later, it's still our life's work.

We remember many of our students from that time, of course, but one young man in particular stands out. Jesse was in the very first Proprioceptive Writing class Linda taught at Pratt and he continued to work with us for the next several years. In his senior year, Jesse developed a brain tumor and had to leave school shortly before graduation, but he continued his practice, and after we moved to Maine his parents drove him up from New York to work with us privately. A month after our last series of Writes together, his parents informed us of Jesse's death. They told us how much

the process had meant to their son, how it helped him believe in himself during the years of his illness, and kept his spirit alive. When Jesse was doing his Writes, they explained, he was a happier person.

All human beings think, in the ordinary sense, but not everyone takes pleasure in reflecting on their inner thoughts. Such heightened consciousness is what Proprioceptive Writing develops. In the next chapter we'll teach you how to begin.

Chapter Two
Write What You Hear: How the Method Works

The true beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love.

—THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON, 6:17

While some beginners say that Proprioceptive Writing has too many rules and too much structure, others worry that it has too few rules, that there's nothing to hold on to. Every new practice seems mysterious. Think of the first time you did yoga, or meditated, or were caught up in a courtship. Though at first the process may seem unfathomable, the rewards come eventually.

Take advantage of the structure of Proprioceptive Writing. Follow the simple instructions we give you in this chapter, and start your practice. As Toby often says, all firsts are awkward... but awesome. The deeper you sink into the form, the more natural and necessary it will seem.

STARTING THE WORKSHOP

On the morning a new workshop starts, we always wake up early. No matter how many years we have been teaching, there is something stirring about that first session—the very air seems charged with possibility Whether we're on the road or teaching at our own center, the night before we put time and care into setting up our work space. Over the years we've had many different offices, but the writing room is always similar: sparsely furnished and almost entirely free of decoration, calm and quiet—more like a temple or a zendo than a place to socialize. Several long wooden tables line the walls. In the center of the room are two comfortable couches, one or two easy chairs, and a handful of colorful cushions in a circle where people sit when not writing. We try to create an inviting space where participants can feel honored, safe

—even loved.

We enjoy watching students as they first come in, smile a little tentatively at the others, and find seats in the circle. Most take their shoes off without our asking. After the last person has arrived and is seated, it seems that all at once the small talk dies down and a hush settles on the group—our cue that they are ready to begin.

Some of those present are new to Proprioceptive Writing. Others are seasoned practitioners. We prefer to avoid formal introductions and have never standardized our opening remarks. What we want to do is establish our context for being together and begin the work of thinking in writing. Sometimes we ask people to write down their reasons for attending the workshop:

I'm a journalist and would-be memoirist and have taken years of writing classes. I'm very well versed in what you might call the "confessional writing workshop." But I'm feeling a strong sense of inhibition lately in both my professional and personal writing, and I need something new to help me push past it.

I used to write a lot years ago and always enjoyed it—I kept a journal for twenty years. Now I want to go deeper in my writing, not just report the events of the day, but get at something larger.

My psychotherapist recommended this workshop. She took it herself and thought I would like it. I'm a pretty creative person, but years of working in the business environment have dulled my edges.

Sometimes we ask participants to make a wish in writing: If this workshop could give you what you most want, what would that be? If someone says, "I want to come up with an outline for my first novel," we can clarify the differences between our work and traditional writing workshops. But mostly what they seem to want is a new way of writing or a new way of thinking that can help them meet the challenges in their life.

What I want more than anything else in the world right now is the feeling that I'm moving in the right direction.

I have a strong desire to paint, to be an artist. But I never get to that place. I need a systematic, disciplined approach to find out what I want to say in my art, so I can settle down and take myself seriously.

Sometimes a participant asks a question right off the bat that serves as our introduction. More often, we ask questions that reflect on our subject indirectly: Isn't it

odd, we might ask, that you can not know yourself? That you can have experience without knowing it? That you can think without hearing yourself think? That you can have feelings you're not aware of? Sometimes we begin by discussing the distinction between process writing, of which Proprioceptive Writing is an example, and formal writing, or writing intended for a reading public.

When we sense that the group is beginning to think along with us, we turn to the heart of the matter. Briefly and concretely, we tell them how to practice Proprioceptive Writing. We give the essentials. We know that after they have been writing awhile, the process will become clear. We answer a few of their questions, promising to answer more later. Then we invite them to the table.

It's an intense moment—everyone feels it. The quiet of the room is deep. The seriousness of the participants is palpable. They rise and make their way across the room slowly and choose their places. We light the candles. As the music starts and they take up their pens, the atmosphere is as electric as it was in the first workshop we held, more than twenty-five years ago. This moment, this beginning, is a new beginning—and we feel joy and gratitude in it.

PRACTICING ON YOUR OWN

First, you need to get comfortable being alone with yourself You need to create a sense of solitude. Solitude is less a physical condition than a state of mind in which you can be yourself, whoever you are. You can set yourself up in a room alone, write in a journal, or do morning pages, and still live uncomfortably with judgment figures in your head. If you have internalized prohibitions against self-expression, solitude will be difficult to feel, even if you're a hundred miles from another human being.

Each time you begin a Write, you're crossing a threshold into a place of utter safety, where you are free not only of distraction but, ideally, of judgment, censorship, the expectation of performance. You want to become absorbed by your thoughts, whatever they are, unconcerned for the moment about anything else. Look at this absorp-

tion as prayer space, meditation space, art-making space, anything that helps you thirst for that solitude in which you can hear yourself think. This is your sanctuary.

We know how difficult it can be to create a sanctuary in your home even under the best of circumstances, but especially if you have children or share a small apartment with someone. The first step is to find space you can use privately. It can help a great deal to talk to the people you're living with, explain to them how important it is for you to have this one half hour without interruption. Most people will honor that need if they understand it. You can find private space in surprising places. When we first taught Proprioceptive Writing to groups of college students, we were amazed at how resourceful they were in ferreting out space for their practice. They set up their candles and tape decks in empty stairwells, in dormitory laundry rooms, in the bathrooms at night! We hope you won't have to go to these extremes, but here are some guidelines to cut down on distraction wherever you are.

Even if you live alone, try to work in a room with a door that closes. Remove the telephone from the room or unplug it—you want to be "off the hook," literally and figuratively, for the next half hour. Do not bring coffee or tea or even water into a Write with you; stopping to sip is a distraction. You will be working at a table or a desk, seated in a chair, so you can assume a study position—comfortable, but not too comfortable. Attentive. Inward is a gesture, not a place, and to make it you need to feel relaxed, but also braced, self-contained.

CREATING RITUAL

Part of the power of Proprioceptive Writing lies in the beauty and safety of ritual. To create your own ritual, you'll need either a tape deck or CD player in the room, and a recording of Baroque music, preferably the slower movements—largos, adagios, and andantes—that you'll play for roughly twenty-two to twenty-five minutes. On the table place a candle, which you'll light just before the music begins and blow out at the end of the Write. In front of you should be a small stack, perhaps four to eight

pages, of white unlined paper. The least expensive you can find is perfectly adequate. You may want to keep a stapler and a folder nearby for the finished Writes.

It is these outer aspects of the practice—freedom from interruption, the soft intensity of the burning candle, the beautiful rhythmic quality of the music, even the whiteness of the unlined paper before your eyes—that set this off as a time and place in which to establish intimacy with yourself, to gather up attention. You don't need a workshop to create this ritual. You can do it on your own where you live.

WHY BAROQUE MUSIC?

Even in antiquity, music was recognized as a bridge to altered states of consciousness. In their 1979 book Super Learning, Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder discuss the various roles music plays in our ability to learn. They report studies showing that Baroque music has a calming effect on the body, including lowering blood pressure; that its slower tempos, which have roughly the same number of beats per minute as the human heart, shifts the brain off its everyday beta rhythms to alpha rhythms, which are more conducive to creativity and learning. According to the authors, composers of Baroque also wrote music with the idea that it opened the doorway to the mystery of God and the cosmos—not a bad preparation, in our view, for spiritual renewal.

When Linda first started writing proprioceptively, Baroque music—and in particular, Bach—was what she selected, and it felt right. When she asked a friend, a Vermont painter, why he painted to Bach, he told her it was because he liked to think his ideas were as good as Bach's! For the first two years after Toby started doing Writes, he tried different forms of music but kept coming back to Baroque. Occasionally a student may complain that the music gets in the way of his or her writing at first. If you feel that way, we suggest you push ahead anyway. No doubt by the third or fourth Write you'll forget all about it. That's probably when you'll also begin to derive its benefits.

WHY THE CANDLE?

Candles are often used as a focusing tool in meditation forms, as well as in religious devotions. In Proprioceptive Writing, lighting the candle at the beginning of a Write is a way of creating a sacred space for your practice.

Even a single candle will generate a luminous glow that can quiet your mind, focus your attention, and help you turn inward. As you write, you want to be like the flame and burn with intention. Light the candle when you begin a Write and blow it out when you finish—this establishes a clear opening and closing to the session. Some proprioceptive writers like the ritual so much that they report having pulled off to the side of the road while on a long drive and having a Write in their car... complete with candle and music!

Here's a revealing experiment: After practicing with the candle for a while, try doing a Write without one. We guarantee you'll miss it.

WHY TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES?

Back in the seventies, when we were first experimenting with the structure of a Write, we chose twenty-five minutes primarily for convenience. Most people still used audiotapes, and one side of an audiotape was twenty-two to twenty-five minutes of music. But coincidentally, in many forms of meditation, including Zen and Transcendental, the suggested length of a sitting practice, especially for beginning students, is also twenty minutes to a half hour. Experience in those traditions show that if the practice period is extended much beyond that time, attention slackens.

Once the mind loses its focus, you may start to think of the practice, even if subconsciously, as time-consuming or tedious and may be inclined to do it less regularly, or burn out altogether.

The same is true of Proprioceptive Writing. Better to establish a regular practice—at least five times a week—of shorter sessions than to do longer sessions less frequently. It's always easier to find a half hour during a busy day than an hour. Think of how many times you've talked yourself out of going for a swim or a jog because the whole process (warming up, getting dressed, etc.) would take an hour or more.

On the other hand, there's no need to be overly rigid. When the music ends, don't stop in the middle of a word. Finish your thought, or the sentence you're writing, and wind down to what feels like a natural close. Once you've established a good regular practice, occasionally you may want to try a longer Write—say forty minutes. But as a rule, we think you'll find that twenty-five minutes is sufficient.

WHY UNLINED PAPER?

Using plain, unlined white paper for your Write is a gesture of freedom. With it, you are departing from the schoolroom that straight lines suggest and becoming the author of a more complex, perhaps messier, but inherently richer script whose movement and direction is entirely your own.

Part of what you're doing in a Write is discovering what you really think and feel as distinct from what you feel it's permissible to think and feel. If your thinking is riddled with "shoulds" and "oughts," you need to know that. Those little words are like the gnarled roots of a mangrove swamp; they twist around each other, threatening to cut off our air. As we like to remind our students now and then, thinking proprioceptively can be a subversive activity—you can use it to break out of this gnarly prison. You may find inspiration on this matter, as we do, in the words of Virginia Woolf, who said in an essay called "Street Haunting": "What greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those foot-

paths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men."

We also recommend using only one side of the page. This gives more flexibility in organizing your Writes, as we will discuss in Chapter 6.

Use the moments just before the Write to slow down and turn inward. As you start the music, light the candle, and settle into your seat, you might say to yourself: Now I am about to write. This time is for me. What's on my mind right now? Is there a story I've been waiting to tell, an event I've been thinking about that I want to look into? A feeling I need to vent? A memory I want to explore? A puzzle I want to unravel? These questions can help gather your attention.

Once you're seated, but before you begin to write, take a moment to relax. Close your eyes and cup your hands over them gently. Wait till a black velvety curtain or purple field appears on the insides of your eyelids, or take several long breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly. Many people find these moments an exciting part of the ritual, full of mystery and potential. We never rush through them, but savor them. This is your passageway into the Write, a time to become conscious of your opportunity. Now begin to write, following these three rules.

THE THREE RULES

1. WRITE WHAT YOU HEAR

Imagine your thoughts as spoken words and write them exactly as if you could hear them, as they occur to you moment by moment. This may be a little tricky at first because much of the time we go about our business unaware of our thoughts—though, like currents in the sea, they're always present. You may not think in words but you can always turn thought into words. Anyone can learn to do this. So become an ear, a receiver of voice, a scribe to your thoughts. Slooooow down and turn up your hearing.

If you're having trouble writing what you hear, or even understanding what we

mean by that, reread the section called "Putting Voice Back into Writing" (page 13). Think of thought as anything you might or could say, and say it in writing. For example, let's suppose you're confused about what you're doing in the Write. Treat confusion as a thought and say in writing something like "I have no idea what I'm doing here." If the subject on your mind is one you're already sick of or it disgusts you, treat that feeling as a thought and say it in writing: "I'm so sick of it!" You may be worrying, lamenting, complaining, scheming, boasting, defending, or accusing yourself or someone else, or simply noticing something—you can give voice to it all. Anything you think, you can say—however imperfectly. You have nothing to lose, since nothing you write will be judged.

Don't try to actively direct your thoughts or push them around; give the boss in charge of banishing socially unacceptable thoughts the night off. While the Master's away, become a receiver—receive, receive, receive.

Don't be concerned with grammar, punctuation, consistency, logic, fairness, eloquence, or any of the usual things you worry about when writing for an audience. Forget about introducing, concluding, or organizing your thoughts. To begin, don't wait for a special or important thought, one that is "worthy" of being written. Just start where you are. As we say to our students, "make a middle;" in other words, begin with whatever thought happens to be passing through at the moment.

2. LISTEN TO WHAT YOU WRITE

The skill that's most actively engaged during a Write isn't the writing skill at all. It's the hearing skill. It's hearing yourself To hear your own thoughts and to awaken your auditory imagination, you must develop within yourself your capacity to listen. Thought can always be voiced, but to hear it requires a certain kind of intense, focused listening, a quality of attention: curious, patient, even-tempered. We call it the "listening presence." It never judges, edits, censors. It hears every thought— profound or foolish, hardheaded or emotional—with the same undivided attention. During the

Write, you will be one or more of your thinking voices. And you will be that listening presence to yourself. This active relationship between thinking and listening is one element that makes Proprioceptive Writing different from other forms of process writing.

How do you delve deeper, get clearer about the meaning each thought holds for you? Sometimes you need a strong tool to help you stay attuned to your thinking and ask questions of it. The listening presence has only one tool, but it needs only one: the Proprioceptive Question.

3. BE READY TO ASK THE PROPRIOCEPTIVE QUESTION

The Proprioceptive Question is simple: "What do I mean by?" Into the blank goes whatever word, phrase, or ex-pression that catches your attention. This word or phrase will change as you go along, but the Proprioceptive Question itself is mantra-like; it never changes. Always be ready to ask this question at any moment during the Write, of any word or phrase you have written. Always write out the question, and write what you hear in response to the question.

The PQ, as we call it, is an attention-focusing tool. It helps you to amplify your thought, express it more accurately, and reflect on it more meaningfully. Like a magnet, it attracts thought. It draws out concrete details buried within thought. One student, Martha, compared the PQ to the lamp on a coal miner's helmet:

Whenever Linda and Toby talk about using the question to shine a light on something we've written, I have the image of myself wearing a hard hat with a light attached, like the ones Carter and I wore when we visited the mine in Bisbee. But in my Write I'm descending into the darkness alone, there's no tour guide, not knowing what I'll find. I hear a sound coming from the corner—a scraping sound. What do I mean by scraping? Maybe something frightening, like a rat. I turn my head toward the sound to light up the corner. I don't have to do anything else— the light is part of the hat, part of the turning. The question itself is that motion.

When you ask the PQ, you are inquiring into the psychological or emotional sense the word has for you. Certain words Linda Trichter Metcalf and Tobin Simon arouse memories, feelings, attitudes in your consciousness; they are "charged" for you by your experience. The sound of a lover's name, for instance, carries emotional weight. If you're afraid of flying, the words takeoff'and passenger may be loaded for you. The PQ enables you to unpack and investigate them, leading you down a path toward story.

Sometimes the PQ can lead into story with amazing speed, despite daunting barriers. Such was the case for David, a childhood refugee from Nazi-occupied Poland, who wanted to write a memoir of his early life but faced a real obstacle: He barely remembered anything about it.

We were aware of David's presence in the first few sessions of the workshop. He sat on the outside of the circle, concentrating hard and listening intently to others, but he had a dark and worried air about him. Then one day, in the opening passage of one of his Writes, we heard what David was feeling: "What will they think?" he wrote. David understood that in Proprioceptive Writing he was to write whatever he was thinking and probe his thought with the PQ. But as an accomplished scientist and teacher, he considered it vain and beneath him to care about other people's opinions. He was ashamed even to own up to it, much less explore it. Realizing that this reaction to his own thought was self-censorship, he didn't know how to proceed.

Finally, after a few Writes, David realized the importance of his mundane concern and heard that the word they was loaded. "When I worry about what they think," he wrote, "what do I mean by they? Who are these others with such power?" The specificity of the PQ immediately opened David's mind to his traumatic past and returned his shocking memories to him.

There is a large cast of them.

It is the winter of 1942. The ground is frozen. My mother and I just arrived in Mielneze. We found a room in a boardinghouse. I am outside. I am surrounded by four boys all older than I am. We are standing in an inner courtyard of the old town. The boys are all urging me to pull out my penis and masturbate along with them. I know that what they really want to see is if my penis is circumcised. Then they will know I am a Jew. I run to tell my mother. She examines my penis, tries to pull the skin down. She manages to squeeze the skin together. She holds it down. Perhaps if she ties it

down it will form itself into a permanent covering. This does not work. There is no way around this. My mother cautions me that I must keep my penis hidden. So this worry about "what they will think" is connected with fear of being found out. This is a repeating pattern.

We arrive in another town. A group of boys are playing on the street. They come up to me. Do you want to play blindman's bluff, they ask. I am really happy that they want to play with me. They blindfold me. They hand me a stick and tell me that I should start chasing them. I feel something wet and slimy on the stick and it stinks. I realize that the end of the stick I am holding is covered with shit. I am embarrassed by my trustfulness but also I am overwhelmed with rage. What do I mean by embarrassed? It's the feeling of being found out, that I am defenseless, that I can be had. What do I mean by rage? Rage for me comes in various grades from one to ten. A one is when people are chewing popcorn while I am trying to watch a movie. A ten is shoving a shit-covered stick in my hand.

Now other memories flood my mind—the German soldier; the man who pushed me off the train; the man who shot my father; the other side of the story—the cast of people who saved me.

By imagining himself as a boy in the midst of boys and the object of his desperate mother's tactics, David learns what he means by they. The concern with what people will think was no mere vanity for a Jewish boy trying to pass as a non-Jew in Poland, 1942. That younger David had to keep his head or risk disaster. "What will they think" was a life-and-death question. Amazingly, asking the Proprioceptive Question of the simple word they threw open the doors of memory, and stories began to flow.

How often should you ask the PQ? As many times as you want or need to. Ask it whenever you sense emotion or story in a word or phrase you have written, when you want to analyze your thought, or simply when you have a hunch something juicy is lying in wait for you. Over the years, hundreds of people have come to us because they wanted to go deeper than they had been able to go with other forms of process writing. Time and again they tell us that it's the Proprioceptive Question that makes the difference, that allows them to dig deeper and answer that desire.

At the end of twenty-five minutes or so, the music should stop. Finish writing out your last thought. Don't worry if you haven't tied everything up neatly or didn't say everything you wanted to say. You'll have many more Writes and many more oppor-

tunities to return to those thoughts if you wish.

THE FOUR CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Before blowing out the candle, write down the following four questions and answer them in writing. Sometimes your answer will require just a few words, and sometimes you'll want a fuller response. This is often where revelations occur in the session. Take the time you need for this. These questions are an important part of the Proprioceptive Writing ritual, so don't hurry through them or cut short your answers. Remember the joke about the airplane pilot who contacted the control tower. "I'm lost," he reported, "but I'm making good time."

1. WHAT THOUGHTS WERE HEARD BUT NOT WRITTEN?

Cast your mind back over the last twenty-five minutes. Did a thought or a feeling come up during the Write that you didn't or couldn't get down initially? One that maybe you didn't feel comfortable with? Or dismissed as trivial or irrelevant? Or simply didn't notice? Remember, flashes of feeling or quick visual images are among the forms thought takes, and should be mentioned. This question is not asking what you might have written, but what in fact you thought and did not write. Ask this question in the same spirit as you might ask yourself, when writing down a dream in a dream journal, "Did I get all the parts of the dream?"

2. HOW OR WHAT DO I FEEL NOW?

Find the word or phrase that comes closest to your emotional state at this very moment. Do you feel drained, angry, stirred up, ashamed? Or calm, as if you'd just exhaled deeply? Are you more confused and muddled than before? Chances are you're not, but be honest with yourself. Don't always expect to feel better after a Write than you did before, especially at the beginning. You may have mixed emotions about what you've just written, or feel disturbed, or a little surprised at what just flowed from your pen. Think of it all as grist for the mill and write what you feel.

3. WHAT LARGER STORY IS THE WRITE PART OF?

Every thought is part of a larger thought. Every story is part of a larger story. This question asks you to imagine the larger container of personal meaning to which the thoughts you've just written belong. For instance, if part of your Write includes an argument about money you had with your husband the night before, what larger story might you be hitting on? Is it one of control between you and your husband? Is it the resentment you felt as a child because you never had "enough"? Is it a political story about power, a gender-related issue? Even if you're not sure, write down what your gut tells you.

4. WHAT IDEAS CAME UP FOR FUTURE WRITES?

In the course of asking and answering the previous questions, did any ideas or feelings come up that you might want to explore in a future Write? Put them down here. Though you should never hold yourself to a subject just because you decided in advance to think about it in your Write, you might find it helpful to begin a Write with one of these ideas. A student of ours once referred to this process as a "daisy chain of connection."

These final four questions complete the Write. Now blow out the candle, staple your papers together, date it at the top, and place it in a folder that you use only for this purpose. If you were writing in a workshop, you could now read your Write aloud to the group if you wanted, listening to the reading with the same focused attention you used as you wrote. Often, when you hear yourself speaking your thoughts aloud, emotions are aroused that were not called up when you were writing. Even if you're alone, we suggest you read your Write aloud so that you can hear your thoughts again in your own voice.

THE WRITE IS PERFECT, EVEN IF THE FEELINGS ARE NOT

Don't worry if you're not happy with your Writes when you first begin to practice Proprioceptive Writing. People sometimes view first attempts as meandering, uninteresting, or just plain badly written. Some are embarrassed or guilty about something they wrote. They may feel they have betrayed someone they love, or spoken

too harshly. They may want to distance themselves from the feelings or attitudes the Write expresses, or disown them altogether. Such fear of expression is remarkably common; it stems from the unconscious assumption—really a superstition—that we alter circumstances by expressing or denying thoughts. In Proprioceptive Writing, the expression of thought is always valuable for its own sake. Like biofeedback, it transmits information from ourselves to ourselves. Expression is the route to discovery. Enid, for example, discovered that her daughter's unfeeling response to her was something she learned from Enid herself. After railing against Amanda for several Writes, on the fourth Write Enid got the message:

What do I mean by wrong? It was wrong for Amanda not to call me when I broke my leg. How much have I ever asked of her? Now that I really need her attention, she's too busy to answer my phone calls, let alone run the simple errands I can't do for myself. Doesn't a mother have any rights at all? What do I mean by rights? Listen to me carrying on. I sound so bitter. So hard-bitten. Boy, is that voice familiar! It's my own voice. Oh, I'm quick to get up on my high horse and complain about my daughter, but how do I respond whenever Amanda asks me to baby-sit for her? I'm always too busy. I have a book to write.

Resist the temptation to revise your Write while reading it through. The Write is perfect no matter how it comes out and no matter how you feel about it. It's only a snapshot of your thoughts at a particular moment and doesn't represent your considered judgments on the subject. As we say to our students, you're not responsible for your thoughts. You don't choose them, so don't feel guilty or sorry about them when you report them. If at the end of a Write you find you touched upon something that feels uncomfortable—or wonderful, for that matter—you can say so in the four questions. You might in a later Write find yourself exploring the same thought or feeling from a different angle, one that brings up a different set of associations and observations.

SOME COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT PROPRIOCEPTIVE WRITING

Even after you've learned the basic structure of Proprioceptive Writing, you may feel for a little while that you're not "doing it right." Try to relax. You can't learn anything new if you're tied up in knots about how you're performing. Try not to think of your practice as a performance at all, but as an organic process from which you will learn over time. Still, important questions do come up. Here are some that people often ask at the beginning.

IS THE GOAL OF A WRITE TO GET PAST SELF AND WRITE OF OTHER THINGS?

No, you never "get past self" when you are writing proprio-ceptively What you want to discover in Proprioceptive Writing is how you experience your life, what you've thought and felt in other times and places, and what you think and feel now. You want to stop reacting and start reflecting, stop hiding and start revealing. You want to use your own thought-flow and the feelings it carries in its stream to gain self-knowledge.

WHY SHOULD I GO THROUGH THE RITUAL AND WRITE DOWN MY THOUGHTS SINCE I ALREADY KNOW WHAT I THINK?

The mind contains depths and mysteries that may not be readily known. How do you remain open and attentive, day after day, month after month, to the subtleties of your thoughts? Even if you're absolutely sure in advance what you'll produce in a Write, you may be surprised to find something else emerging. If you become an em-

pathetic and curious listener overhearing a speaking voice, an unexpected aspect of yourself may surface. If you listen imaginatively and ask the PQ, you may discover unsuspected motives, conflicts, emotions, or attitudes.

CAN I MAKE AN AGENDA FOR THE WRITE BEFORE I BEGIN?

Yes, you may make an agenda, but be willing to let go of it if your thoughts take you in a different direction. As we often tell workshop participants, "make sure it's a personal agenda"— that is, one that comes out of an emotional need to say what you're feeling or hear what you're thinking, rather than a subject for a composition.

WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

It's that little word about that makes this question tricky. Every piece of writing intended for an audience is about something. But a Write is a literal record of your reflections and reactions, written as they occur to you, moment by moment, during a particular half hour, not a deliberated essay. So write what you're thinking. Write what you're feeling. Write what interests or concerns you. Write your explorations into meanings. Examine your associations to your thoughts and write them. Whatever you think: write!

WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE WHAT I'M THINKING? WHAT IF IT BORES OR FRIGHTENS ME?

In Proprioceptive Writing, we define feelings as forms of thought. Like attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and judgments, feelings can be expressed as words. If you are reacting to your own thoughts with fear and boredom, express these feelings first. Then get active with the PQ. Keep in mind that you don't have to like your thoughts to benefit from writing them down. Make up your mind to simply accept whatever impressions, ideas, judgments, or fantasies come to you when you do Propriocep-tive Writing, no matter what. Some days your thoughts may strike you as boring; other days they produce Writes that may bowl you over with their power. Don't keep score. What you'll learn through a longer Proprioceptive Writing practice is that every thought has its place.

SHOULD I KEEP THE PEN GOING ALL THE TIME?

It's not necessary to write nonstop. Don't push the pen; let the pen respond to you. Some people pause briefly if a number of thoughts are competing for their attention and they're not sure which one to pursue. When the music changes mood or tempo, some people pause briefly to find their direction. What's important is catching what you're thinking, whatever it may be—not producing a constant gush of writing.

DO I HAVE TO WRITE OUT THE PROPRIOCEPTIVE QUESTION EACH TIME I USE IT?

Yes, write it out. This simple task helps you to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n. When you think something you do not write, you make a little hole in your mind that other thoughts can fall through. So treat every thought with equal importance and try to catch everything.

HOW MANY DETAILS DO I WRITE DOWN AFTER I'VE ASKED THE PQ?

There's no right number. We often tell our students that they have to find a balance between going forward and going back—that is, between writing what they hear and asking the PQ_. If details are coming, stay with them until you're next ready to ask the PQ of another word or phrase.

CAN I WRITE FOR MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES?

Yes, but there's no need to do more. On the other hand, if momentum is moving you, allow it to carry your writing along for a few extra minutes. When it levels off, complete the Write with the four questions. Always bring the Write to that formal

close.

DO YOU EVER GO BACK AND EDIT A WRITE?

No, never. The Write is perfect as it is. Editing is a very important task in formal writing but it has no place in Propriocep-tive Writing. Though you can sometimes lift from a Write an idea or string of sentences to develop into a piece of formal writing, the two kinds of writing are quite distinct, as we've said before.

WHAT ABOUT READING MY WRITES TO SOMEONE WHO HASN'T WRITTEN WITH ME, OR DOESN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT PROPRIOCEP-TIVE WRITING?

To read a Write to another person is risky, in our opinion, especially to someone who isn't familiar with the process of Proprioceptive Writing. Mostly, their comments are not very useful to you and may even do you harm ("You sound depressed. Are you?"). One misguided response—even a seductively positive one such as "Wow, that's good writing!"—can undo the work you've just done. Proprioceptive Writing isn't about good writing.

If you must read from a Write to someone else, at least be clear to your listener why you are doing so—for example, to share a thought; not for advice or approval. One exception: It is sometimes helpful to bring Writes into psychotherapy sessions, as some of our students do, since Writes contain information that may be useful to your work there.

CAN I USE OTHER KINDS OF MUSIC?

Try practicing with Baroque for the first three months, for the reasons we discussed earlier. Then, if you like, experiment. A number of people we know have used Indian ragas with good results. Avoid music with words since lyrics compete with your own thoughts.

CAN I USE A COMPUTER?

Only if you experience discomfort holding a pen or pencil in your hand for twenty-five minutes. The computer encourages speed, not the slowing down needed for reflection. What you need to do in Proprioceptive Writing is slow down, not dash ahead. Being a bit of a purist about the practice also helps to separate it from everyday, businesslike work.

CREATING A PRACTICE

Now you know how to have a Write. To begin a practice of your own, try to write at least five days a week for three months. Doing it less frequently makes it difficult to see changes in yourself You want Proprioceptive Writing to become a positive addic-

tion, and regularity is part of the process.

Another way to reinforce your habit is to practice Proprioceptive Writing at roughly the same time each day Many people find mornings best, when their minds are clearest and before they've gotten tangled up in other events and responsibilities. Others look forward to doing it after work. The important thing is to be intentional about it. Plan for it and protect your time vigilantly. You will soon find yourself hooked. Once this happens, the practice will nourish you and make you strong. You'll stop fighting the form. You'll stop wondering if you're doing it right. Your life will become a moving path. You will write because you need to, because your happiness and serenity depend upon it.