

9 Wordplay Game Cards

INSTRUCTIONS

These 9 wordplay game cards are meant to get you started. I am always on the search for more games to add to my collection. I suggest you add to your own collection, too.

Use these cards in conjunction with the principles outlined in my blog post, [3 Powerful Ways to Use Scrap Paper During Revisions](#) found at jenmanuel.com. It's most effective if you are surprised by the game you ask yourself to play. Therefore, cut out these game cards and place them in a small jar or tea cup. Keep them close at hand in your writing space.

Do not question yourself as you play these games. It does not matter if you are technically "correct" about the associations (or dissociations) you make. If you wish to use a timer, go ahead and set it for no more than ten minutes. However, I prefer to stop each game as soon as I feel my energy and sense of spontaneity fading (usually around the five-minute mark). I believe this increases the chance that the words I generate spring from my subconscious rather than from my logical consciousness. I find that I usually generate about a third to half of a page of words or phrases before I stop.

Credit: Many of these games and the examples are from Hazel Smith's brilliant and highly original book, *The Writing Experiment. Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing*.

| ASSOCIATION BY IDEA | ASSOCIATION BY EAR | DISSOCIATION |
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| <p>1. Write down a word from the page you are revising. Any word that grabs you.</p> <p>2. Write down as many words as you can that connect to the first word by idea or meaning. Every time you attempt to generate a new word, rewrite the original word you picked first so that you end up with several pairs of words.</p> <p>3. Strategies might include definition, antithesis, slang associations. But don't think too much about strategy. This should be "what's the first word you think of when you think of _____?" Over and over.</p> <p>E.g., Green sick Green grow Green inexperienced</p> | <p>1. Write down a word from the page you are revising. Any word that grabs you.</p> <p>2. Write down as many words as you can that connect to the first word through sound. Sound relationships produce unique combinations of words. Every time you attempt to generate a new word, rewrite the original word you picked first so that you end up with several pairs of words.</p> <p>3. Strategies might include alliteration, assonance, or half rhymes. But don't think too much about strategy. Go with your gut—er, your ear.</p> <p>E.g., Green ghost Green knee Green agreeable</p> | <p>1. Write down a word from the page you are revising. Any word that grabs you.</p> <p>2. Write down as many words as you can that seem to have NO apparent connection to the first word. This produces original combinations that sometimes in fact reveal a unique connection.</p> <p>E.g., Green puddle Green impulse Green truth</p> |

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| <p>CHAINLINKING</p> <p>1. Write down a word from the page you are revising. Any word that grabs you.</p> <p>2. Write down as many words as you can that connect to the first word either by idea/meaning association or through sound. This time you'll take the new word you generated and that will become the new source word.</p> <p>E.g., Greenpeace Peace talk Talkback</p> | <p>ECHO POEM</p> <p>1. Take no more than 30 seconds to scan the page you are currently revising. Select the opening 2-4 words of a sentence on the page. Whatever jumps out at you, you don't need to question why. (E.g. At the store)</p> <p>2. Write a short poem in which those opening words are echoed at the beginning of each line. Take no more than 5 minutes.</p> <p>E.g., At the store _____. At the store _____. At the store _____.</p> | <p>FADING AWAY</p> <p>1. Write down a word from the page you are revising. Any word that grabs you.</p> <p>2. Use a mixture of association (connections through meaning or sound), dissociation (no apparent connections), and chainlinking (using the last syllable or part of the last word as the start of the next one) to generate a list that fades away from the original word.</p> <p>E.g., truth, ruthless, mucus, mindplay, playback, falsehood, hoodwink...</p> |
| <p>PHRASE RESHAPING</p> <p>1. Write down a phrase (not a whole sentence) from the page you are revising. It can have a verb in it, but it doesn't have to. It should be 3-9 words long.</p> <p>2. Write down as many new rearrangements of the phrase as you can, simply moving the position of words in relation to one another.</p> <p>E.g., This example is part of a poem, "Under the Tree," by Myron Lysenko:</p> <p>They stood under the big tree and talked slowly</p> <p>Under the tree they stood and slowly talked big</p> | <p>ADDITION AND SUBSTITUTION</p> <p>1. This is like phrase reshaping except you can add or subtract words to make the phrase even more plastic. Write down a phrase (not a whole sentence) from the page you are revising. It can have a verb in it, but it doesn't have to. It should be 3-9 words long.</p> <p>2. Write down as many new rearrangements of the phrase as you can, by moving the position of words in relation to one another and by adding or subtracting words in the phrase each time.</p> <p>E.g., Silence is a searchlight The search for silence lights the day</p> | <p>WORD POOLS</p> <p>1. Write down 5 words from the page you are revising. Write these words down not in a neat list, but randomly around your scrap piece of paper. Try to include a mix of nouns, verbs, adjectives.</p> <p>2. Based on these starting words, brainstorm several other words and add them to the pool. Do not try to create associations. Instead, just jot down whatever words spring to mind.</p> <p>3. After, create word pairings from the word pool. Try to pair words whose combinations strike you as powerful, interesting, or unusual. You are welcome to use joining words like "of" or "is" or "like."</p> |