

Using Persona for Writer's Block



Persona, in writing, is when the tone, perspectives, and attitudes of the authorial voice take on specific characteristics and mannerisms. In non-fiction writing, persona can be adapted for:

- Academic writing
- Creative nonfiction
- Memoir
- Reflection papers
- Odyssey articles
- General class assignments

Persona in Writing

When you are confronted with challenging material or when you are uncertain of your approach, you can adopt a persona to reduce resistance. Using persona can:

- Help solidify your tone of voice and establish a point of view
- Offer an opportunity for expression and a chance to explore and experiment
- Help overcome writer's block and sidestep inhibitions
- Enable distance by temporarily suspending authorial accountability
- Allow you to push the box and explore new subjects
- Assist you in achieving objectivity, thereby easing your self-disclosure
- Help you avoid the inner critic: "should" and "must" and "mustn't"
- Encourage you to respect your own conflicting feelings

Adapting different personas is more than "playing pretend." Persona reflects a point of view.

We regularly use subtle personas to fulfill expectations in everyday life. We implement adaptations and personas to conform to changes in our immediate surroundings. We change our speech, posture, clothing, and attitudes to operate effectively in formal, informal, familial, social, and work environments.

When stuck on an assignment or unsure of how to start: Freewrite persona

Writing can be a great way to express yourself. However, sometimes you don't know what to write or you feel uncertain in your approach. This is especially true if you are addressing difficult subjects and you feel restricted.

Persona allows you to suspend all of your viewpoints and focus on a particular perspective. You can let one viewpoint flow. This is very similar to what we already do in daily life when we "dress the part," or "walk the walk," or "turn on the charm," or "keep it real," or "mind our manners."

Except that in writing we do this using words. (**See reverse side**)

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Example Assignment: *Write About A Cat* Experimenting with Two Personas

Experimenting with different personas is helpful in discovering your values, points, and purpose with a piece of writing. Internal conflicts often inhibit the creative process of writing. In real life, a person has to adjust and compromise to these internal conflicts. *A creative writing persona does not.*

- When approaching a subject, you can “try on” different personas to allow for self-discovery. Let the personas do the talking. Go along for the ride. This is fun! Who knows what will happen next? The personas encourage surprises in writing. Now you can enjoy yourself and not feel stuck or inhibited.

Sample: One writer / two perspectives

Persona 1 is interdependent and empathetic about the cat.

Persona 1 Freewrite: “I think cats are cute. I want to cuddle a cat in a blanket with a pillow and hot cocoa. I’m imagining that there’s a nice fire crackling and it’s misty outside while I’m snuggling a cat. I like warmth and companionship. I like to avoid stress and pressure. I want a cat to enjoy my presence and feel safe in my care.”

Persona 2 discloses a need for autonomy from the cat.

Persona 2 Freewrite: “Cats are a lot of work. I want the freedom to move anywhere. I want to move to New York City and live in an East Village studio. The building might not accept cats. I don’t want to limit my options. I don’t want to conform to expectations and needs. I think I could express a more unusual and spontaneous side of myself somewhere new.”

Persona 1 and 2 are expressing one author’s internal conflict. This writer has access to personas that value both comfort and adventure. Depending on the assignment, either persona could write about cats. However, the different voices could take both the writer and the audience on entirely different journeys with regard to cats.

- After you freewrite using your persona, subsequent drafts can include your inner editor in order to build a structurally sound assignment. You can then tighten up the final draft.
- You can develop familiarity with your favorite or more useful personas just as you might prefer certain subjects and genres. Starting assignments can become easier with a handful of personas in your writer’s toolkit that you have discovered and engaged over time.