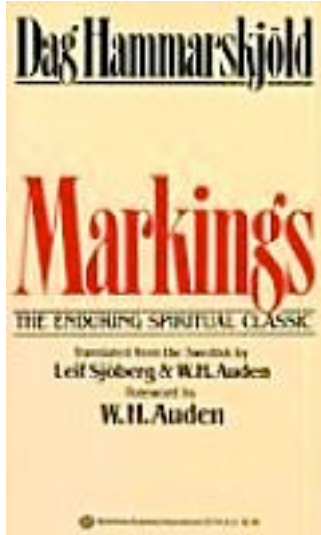


# Markings



I credit Lee Nelson with this prewriting strategy, which is useful, just as a critical thinking strategy, even if it doesn't lead to a completed piece of writing. In 1978, she derived the activity from Dag Hammarskjöld's autobiographical fragment, *Markings*. The basic premise is that arbitrary restrictions on a brainstorming list force such critical thinking that it almost always produces thoughtful writing topics.

Suppose you were asked to list objects that are important to you.

- ✓ Listing only one or two would keep you from thinking more expansively.
- ✓ Listing too many would keep you from carefully considering which ones are truly important.

**The magic numbers are 8 to 12.** That's it. At least eight of *whatever*, no more than twelve. And it works. Try some of the following ideas and see what happens.

- Objects that have symbolic meaning for me
- People who have influenced me
- Places that make me happy
- Places I want to visit
- Things in people that I like
- Things in people that I dislike
- Things that worry me
- Things that cheer me up
- Things I would like to know how to do
- Things that have moved me
- Things I want to do before I die (yes, a *Bucket List*)
- Things I never want to read, eat, hear, see, do again
- Things I want to remember about who I am now
- Most valuable lessons I've ever learned
- Ideas that intrigue me
- Quotations that speak for me
- Words that belong to me
- Songs that reflect my life
- Books I can't live without (or movies or poems or songs...)
- My personal favorites

AND if a particular list speaks to you, you'll have a thoughtful, personal topic.