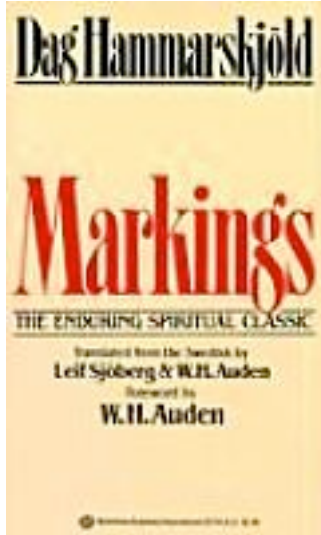


Markings



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.

57. MARKINGS for . . .

Things That Have Moved Me:

1. Great-grandmother Preskitt watching the thunderstorm's lightning
2. Anti-litter commercial - Iron Eyes Cody, Cherokee Indian with a tear
3. Vietnamese monks immolating themselves in protest against war
4. Assassinations -- JFK mostly, but King and Bobby, too
5. Mental patients -- especially the children
6. Space -- Kennedy speech, moon walk, the Challenger explosion
7. The movie *Pueblo*
8. The novel *Atlas Shrugged* -- all Ayn Rand's books.
9. Ambulance sirens
10. Thank you's
11. Those who hurt the young, the weak, the little, the defenseless
12. Real homecomings -- POW's, MIA's, hostages, family reunions

People Who Have Influenced Me:

1. Granny Alice Zem Preskitt Stowers
2. Grandpa Bert Burton Stowers
3. Mrs. Wilma Smart, junior English teacher
4. Sam Effinger, my husband
5. Martha Hallock, friend, roommate, weirdo, psychologist
6. Jackie Prickett, friend, artist, teacher, real home maker/builder
7. Coleen Oxley, my mother
8. Jim Oxley, my stepfather
9. Karen Andrews, my younger sister
10. Kim Andrews, my younger brother
11. Lewis Andrews, my father
12. Mackey Carder, first and worst love

Places in My Life:

1. Grandparents' old farm, especially the hay loft, the basement, and the top of the garage shed under the Chinese elm branches
2. Big house on Adirondack (6102) in Amarillo -- entire top floor
3. Friendship Apartments in Altus, especially poolside
4. Room 201, Muldrow Tower, OU, first college dorm room
5. McGuire Air Force base, New Jersey, transport terminal for student/emergency overseas flights -- three times
6. Yorkshire Apartments, Norman -- first apartment with friends
7. Efficiency apartment -- first all my own
8. Brandon, England, my parents' little English house
9. Sheraton/Atlantic Hotel, 34th & Broadway, New York City -- United Nations Pilgrimage
10. Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D. C.
11. Arbroath, Scotland -- cliff walks, monastery, Parliament building
12. European trains -- mainly Italian and German, small towns, Alps

Major Stepping Stones:

1. First day of school – in corner, walked home, “learning some manners”
2. Parents’ divorce – loss of trust, ugliness, violence, their remarriages
3. Moving to Altus – starting over, different kind of friends, economic loss
4. College entrance, drop-out, and return – “blonde,” drug experiments, sexual liberation, knowing what I wanted to do
5. Working in mental hospital – the mighty can fall, kindness matters, disgusting work can make me better, what really matters, “loved you but didn’t like you”
6. European trip – reborn, excitement, wrote, read, ate, drank
7. Weatherford catharsis – do you love me, no, will you ever love me, no; damn
8. Year the world tried to kill me – tornado, assault, abortion, friend meltdowns, drug overdo, car wreck, suicide
9. Marriage – you can never do anything that will make me leave you; if you are going to leave, leave
10. Teaching start – Millwood, scared in black school but belonged, made difference, lived my yearbook staff
11. First death – LaJeana Johnson, car wreck, blood clot; rearranged room, couldn’t grade papers
12. My Renaissance – weight loss, surgery, becoming active again

Soundtrack to My Life:

1. “I’ve Got to Get You into My Life” by the Beatles
2. “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen
3. “At Seventeen” by Janis Ian
4. “Reckless Blues” by Bessie Smith
5. “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday
6. “Sweetheart Like You” by Bob Dylan
7. “Doppelgänger” by Dory Previn
8. “Tears in Heaven” by Eric Clapton”
9. “Glory Days” by Bruce Springsteen
10. “Ooh La La” by Goldfrapp
11. “Fire and Rain” by James Taylor
12. “Want Me” by Red Delicious

Library of My Life:

1. *Anthem* by Ayn Rand
2. *Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley
3. *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens
4. *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison
5. *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode
6. *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin
7. *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
8. *Shogun* by James Clavell
9. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
10. *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
11. *The Writer’s Journey* by Christopher Vogler
12. *Jazz* by Henri Matisse