

June 2022

The **WRITE** Model

A Practical Guide

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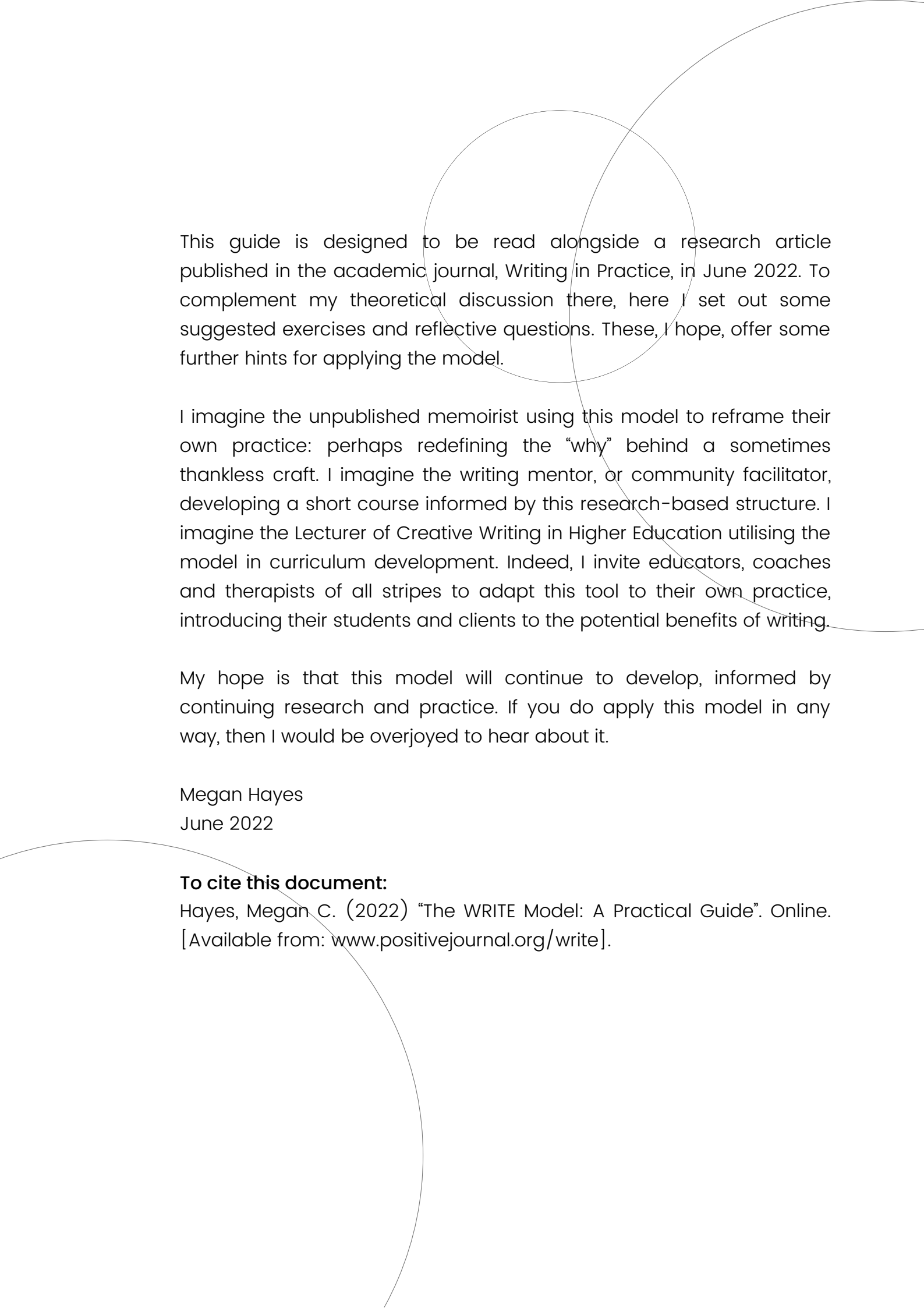
A decorative graphic featuring a purple lowercase letter 'i' on the left. To its right, two overlapping circles are shown: a smaller white circle with a thin black outline, and a larger white circle with a thin black outline that overlaps the top and right sides of the smaller circle. The word 'Introduction' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, with the 'i' from the graphic serving as the first letter of the word.

i Introduction

As a writer, researcher and facilitator of writing, I often find myself fumbling for analogies to describe this special activity. Landing on one is tricky. There are few things quite so simple and yet so profoundly complex as putting words on paper in meaningful order. Whether we write reflectively and privately in a journal, or imaginatively and publicly in more creative forms, much of our identity - who we feel we are - is involved in this process.

One reigning analogy is the page as confidant, perhaps because the cathartic effects of writing are so well documented. We seem to feel better when things are shared “with” the page; our worries are taken “off” of our minds, “out” of our heads, and put “down” on the page. We are unburdened. Yet, what else goes on when we write? What is fortified? What is built? How do we resource ourselves through writing? These are questions that have guided my research, my facilitation and my own writing practice.

I have developed The WRITE Model to offer a conceptual framework for understanding what we construct in writing, not only what we unburden. It is an attempt to tease out the nuances of writing in relation to our wellbeing, and to supply straightforward language for discussing this complex process. It sets out a scaffold for better understanding our own writing journeys, as well as for structuring our teaching and research. It is perhaps best understood using the analogy of shaping clay upon a potter’s wheel; only, in writing, what we shape is ourselves.



This guide is designed to be read alongside a research article published in the academic journal, *Writing in Practice*, in June 2022. To complement my theoretical discussion there, here I set out some suggested exercises and reflective questions. These, I hope, offer some further hints for applying the model.

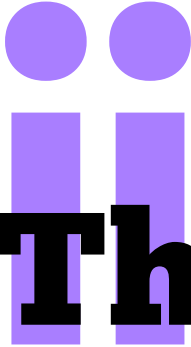
I imagine the unpublished memoirist using this model to reframe their own practice: perhaps redefining the “why” behind a sometimes thankless craft. I imagine the writing mentor, or community facilitator, developing a short course informed by this research-based structure. I imagine the Lecturer of Creative Writing in Higher Education utilising the model in curriculum development. Indeed, I invite educators, coaches and therapists of all stripes to adapt this tool to their own practice, introducing their students and clients to the potential benefits of writing.

My hope is that this model will continue to develop, informed by continuing research and practice. If you do apply this model in any way, then I would be overjoyed to hear about it.

Megan Hayes
June 2022

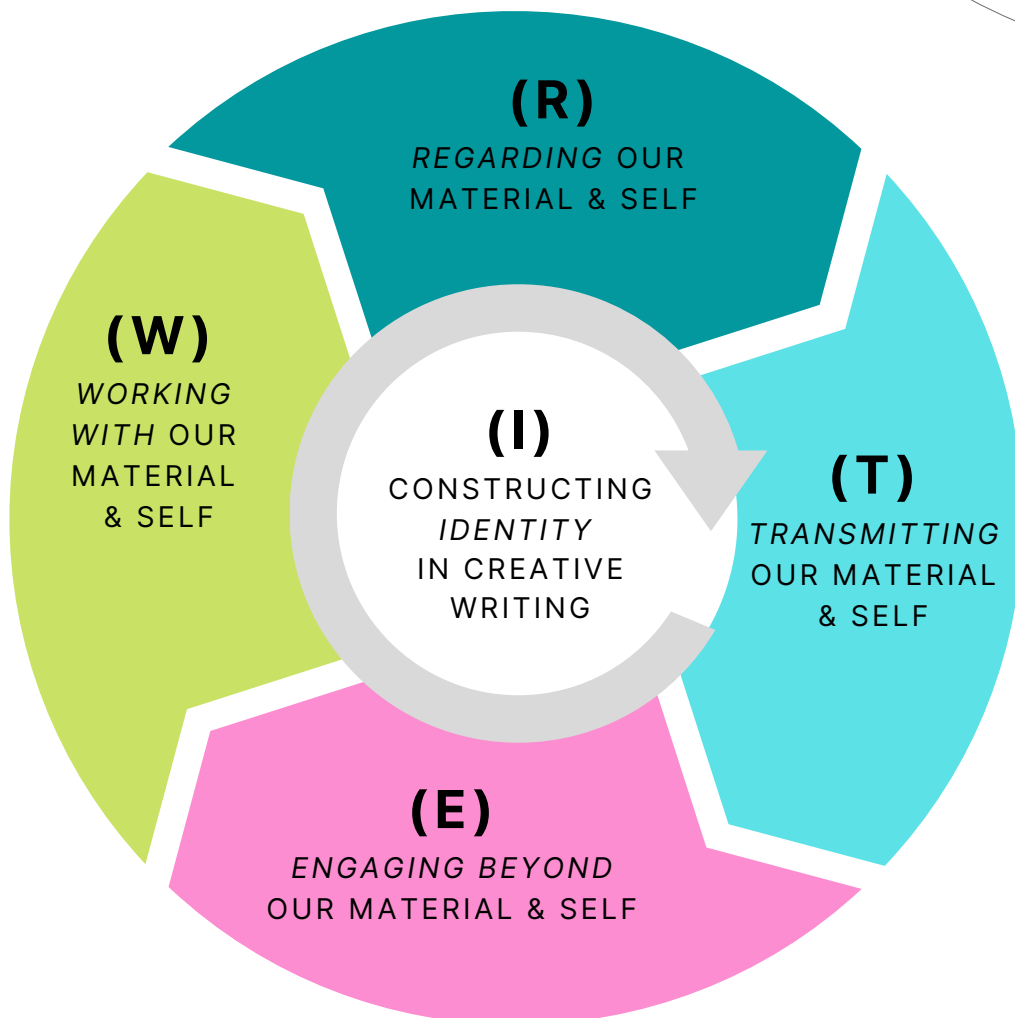
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The Model

The WRITE Model is a framework for understanding what goes "right" when we write. It outlines four interdependent processes (Working with, Regarding, Transmitting, Engaging beyond) and one central process (Identity constructing), as shown in the diagram below. For further explication of these categories and their related subcategories, see Hayes (2022).





Using the Model

As an Individual

The exercises in this guide invite reflection upon your own writing process. I advise undertaking this self-reflection before applying the model with others. Use a journal to work through each phase of the model, answering the questions for yourself, noting your own experiences, and – ideally – sharing these reflections with a trusted peer, mentor or counsellor for critical discussion. This will help to tease out any potential blind spots. By engaging in this reflective practice, your facilitation of the model is likely to be more impactful.

As a Facilitator

Depending upon the nature of your professional practice, there will be many practical and pedagogical factors to consider when applying this model. You might be working in a community setting, in a formal educational setting, within Higher or Adult Education, with young people, in a coaching or organisational context, etc. You will know your context and your people best. The model offers a set of stepping stones, not a prescription. Example questions are set out here so that this nascent model might be (safely and ethically) tried and tested in real world contexts. I hope you will not take the role of application lightly. Further, I hope that the knowledge generated from your application might be captured and shared in some way, expanding our shared understanding of writing and wellbeing.

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Safeguarding

There are several notable contraindications to the wellbeing-promoting effects of writing. Researchers hasten to warn us that writing “is not always appropriate or beneficial” and that “when writing is associated with strong negative experiences, such as being criticised at school” individuals may be “unlikely to want to try writing” (Wright and Chung 2001). Indeed, if the writing is trauma-focussed, as is the case in James Pennebaker’s (2018) “expressive writing” model, low mood and even distress are likely outcomes for many participants. With this knowledge in hand, we must tread gently with writing and facilitating writing. Sensitivity, attunement and a person-centred approach are all paramount.

One potential benefit of creative forms of writing over trauma-focussed “expressive writing” is that this style may be markedly less confrontational: joyful, even. The creative workshop can offer imaginative “roles” in the form of fictional characters and situations that simulate real life, rather than tackle it head on. This may counter some of the discomfort inherent to a straightforward recounting of a painful memory. Nevertheless, sensitivity to individual needs remains vital even in ostensibly “lightweight” activities and workshops.

Further Guidance

For those working within the UK, further practical advice and guidance for safeguarding can be sought from professional bodies including NAWA (nawe.co.uk) and The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance (culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk). For those outside of the UK, please consult local professional bodies for further guidance.

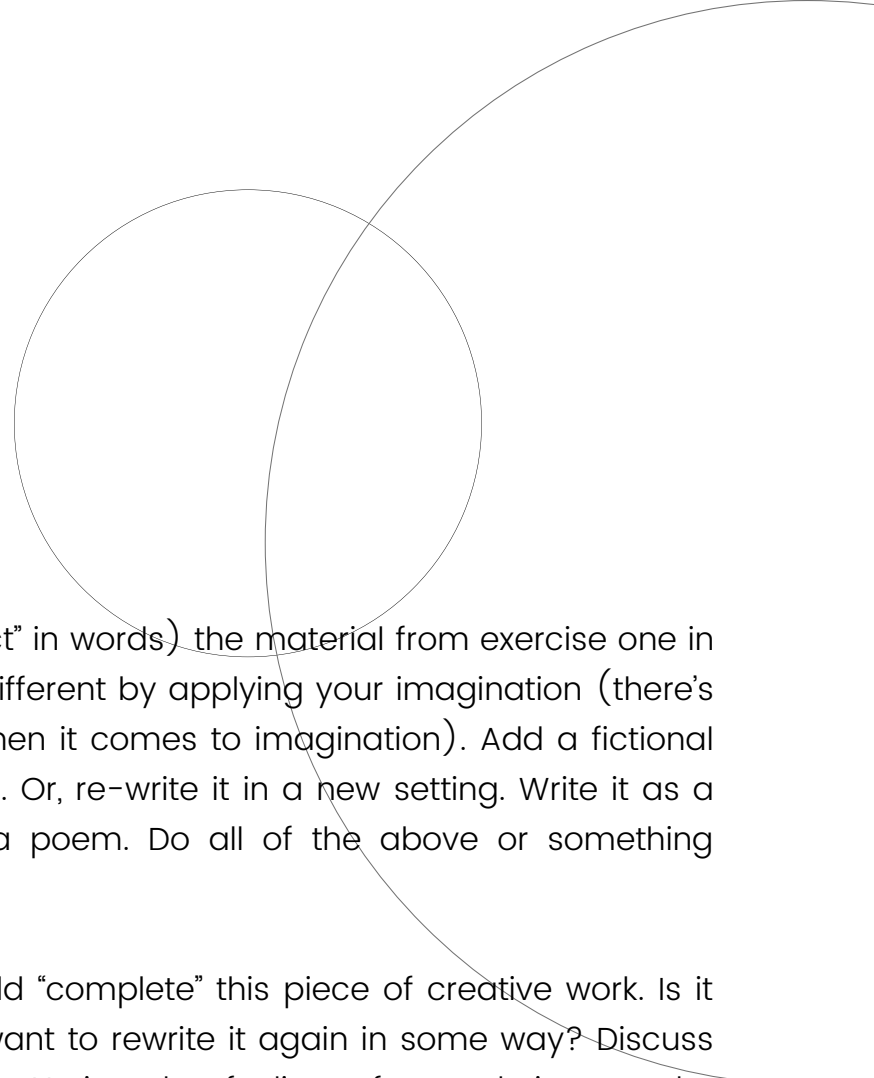
1 Working with

Words are to our writing what clay is to pottery. Writers gather their words in the form of sentence fragments, phrases, scenes (this is their clay). Perhaps this happens first in their heads, then in notebooks, in mindmaps, and in endless digital documents. This capturing phase (getting the first thought down) often comes before the constructing phase (shaping and editing), although these aren't always perfectly or neatly distinct.

What often feels heady about this process is the sense of completing something (a great sentence, a short story, a poem, or even just a block of writing time ticked off of the to-do list). How "complete" a piece of writing feels will be personal to the individual writer: it may be that the good day's work is enough, or it may mean nothing less than publication. All of this is captured in the WRITE Model as a "Working with" our material (and selfhood).

Suggested Exercises

1. Write (or "capture" in words) three things that happened today. These can be tiny things. Did it rain? Did you prepare a hot drink or meal? Did you chat with someone? Describe as many details about these events as you can remember, using all the senses.



2. Re-shape (or “construct” in words) the material from exercise one in some way. Make it look different by applying your imagination (there’s no right or wrong way when it comes to imagination). Add a fictional character to the situation. Or, re-write it in a new setting. Write it as a letter. Transform it into a poem. Do all of the above or something completely different.

3. Next, decide what would “complete” this piece of creative work. Is it finished now, or do you want to rewrite it again in some way? Discuss or write a plan for this. Notice the feeling of completing, or the anticipated feeling. What’s that like?

Reflective Questions


- Where am I - or might I - draw from life in my writing?
- How does it feel to capture fragments of my lived experience in writing, whether directly or indirectly?
- In what ways do I - or might I - re-shape these fragments (e.g. by fictionalising, utilising metaphor, re-structuring timelines etc.)?
- Having captured and re-constructed fragments of my lived experience in my writing, how does it feel to complete my work (e.g. a poem, a story, a writing session)? Does it change the way I relate to the original experience?
- Does this process of capturing, constructing and completing (i.e. “Working with” my personal material) impact my sense of self in some way? If so, how?

2 Regarding

If we were to shape a clay pot upon our potter's wheel, and then take the time to harden and glaze it, we would always be its first admirers. The same is true of writing. We watch ourselves write, as captured by Kieth Oatley (2003) in his suggested term "writingandreading." Our words and stories please or displease us before they ever please or displease another. Thus writing can be a profound way of evaluating, validating and - hopefully - of valuing the self. Seeing elements of our experience and our worldview in the tangible form of type is a way of uttering "here I am." In other words, we self-affirm when we write. Writing is a "Regarding" of our material, and of ourselves.

Suggested Exercises

1. Write three pen portraits (character sketches): one for a past, present and a likely future version of you. In each portrait, you might capture this particular version of self engaged in an activity of some kind (e.g. learning to ride a bike as a child).
2. Next, write three more pen portraits, this time be imaginative and fictionalise these "selves" into different characters in some way. Place them in a different era, culture or genre, or perhaps give them a fantastical skill. Keep some "real" traits, and add appropriate new ones.



3. Now, choose one of these six portraits to develop into a narrative. Write a story or piece of narrative nonfiction in which a new challenge is met. What happens?

4. Consider the personal qualities, strengths or traits you see in each of these sketches and the final story. List them, if you like. Think up some new characters who might embody one or more of these qualities. How would they capture or represent that quality in subtle or overt ways? If you strike upon a character you particularly like, write a new story in which they feature.

Reflective Questions

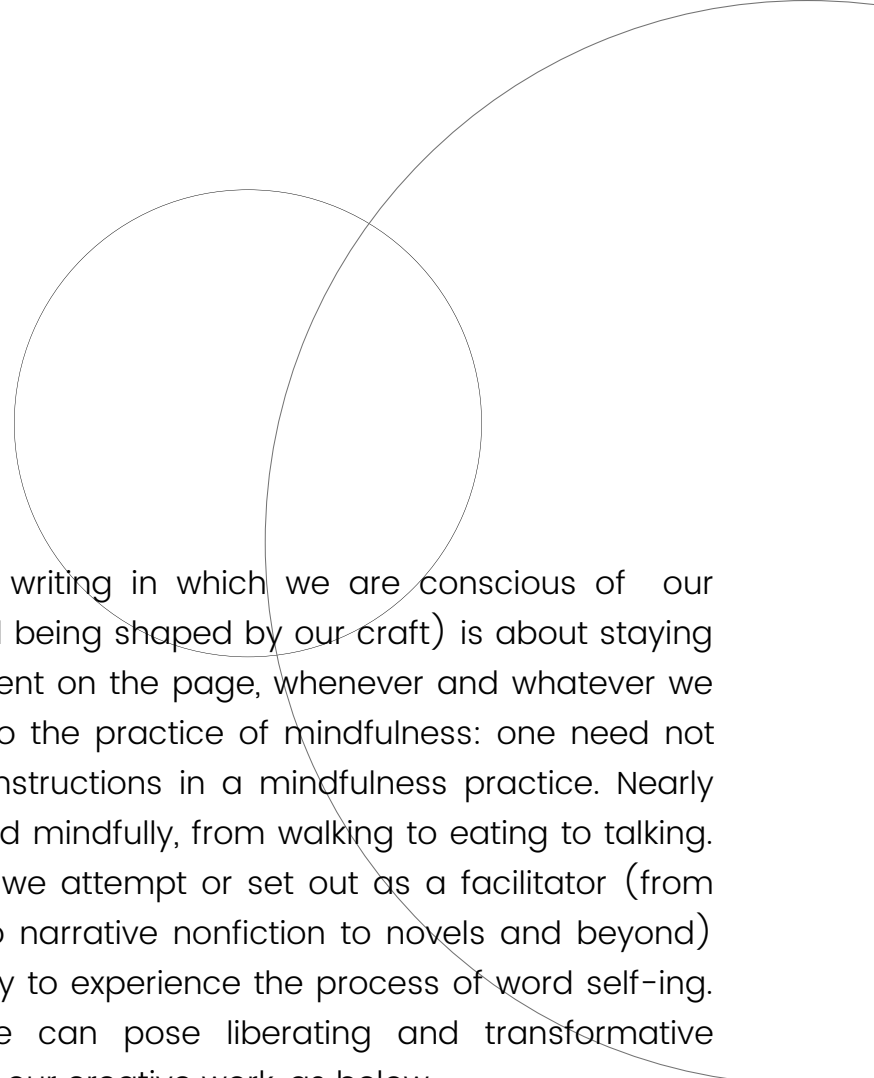
- Which elements of myself – past, present and future – are evident to me, or even recur, as themes in my writing?
- Which qualities and strengths of my own do I witness in my writing of fictional characters?
- Which traits and virtues of mine are important to me? Which were important in the past? Which are likely to be important in the future?

3 Identity

If we were to shape, harden and glaze a pot, and then place it on a workshop shelf alongside the various pots of other makers, we might – if pressed to identify which pot is ours – point to it and say “that’s me.” Our created objects act as extensions of self. In the case of writing, we create what we might call worded selves. It is this idea that is central to the WRITE Model. Constructing identity in writing is not one process among many, it is the core process at the heart of the model.

The role of identity in our writing is not easily set out in a simple suggested exercise. In using this model – alone and with others – what I do suggest is that the topic of identity is revisited as a touchstone throughout. I offer some questions here – in the “middle” of the model – in part because it is most convenient for my acronym(!) and in part because this is the beating heart – the core process – of the model.

The central “story” of the data gathered in my doctoral research was of writing as “Becoming more” (see Hayes 2022). This appeared to be a twofold experience: becoming both more oneself and more than oneself. The first two elements of the model (“Working with” and “Regarding”) reflect the practical ways in which one might feel one becomes more oneself in writing. The next two elements (“Transmitting” and “Engaging beyond”) appeared to facilitate the “more than” oneself feeling. I should stress again, though, that none of these are neatly disparate processes and that the entire model works interdependently.

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Writing word selves (i.e. writing in which we are conscious of our identity both shaping and being shaped by our craft) is about staying curious to what is emergent on the page, whenever and whatever we write. This is analogous to the practice of mindfulness: one need not follow a specific set of instructions in a mindfulness practice. Nearly any act can be performed mindfully, from walking to eating to talking. Thus, any writing activity we attempt or set out as a facilitator (from poems to short stories to narrative nonfiction to novels and beyond) might offer an opportunity to experience the process of word self-ing. To aid this process, we can pose liberating and transformative questions to complement our creative work, as below.

Reflective Questions

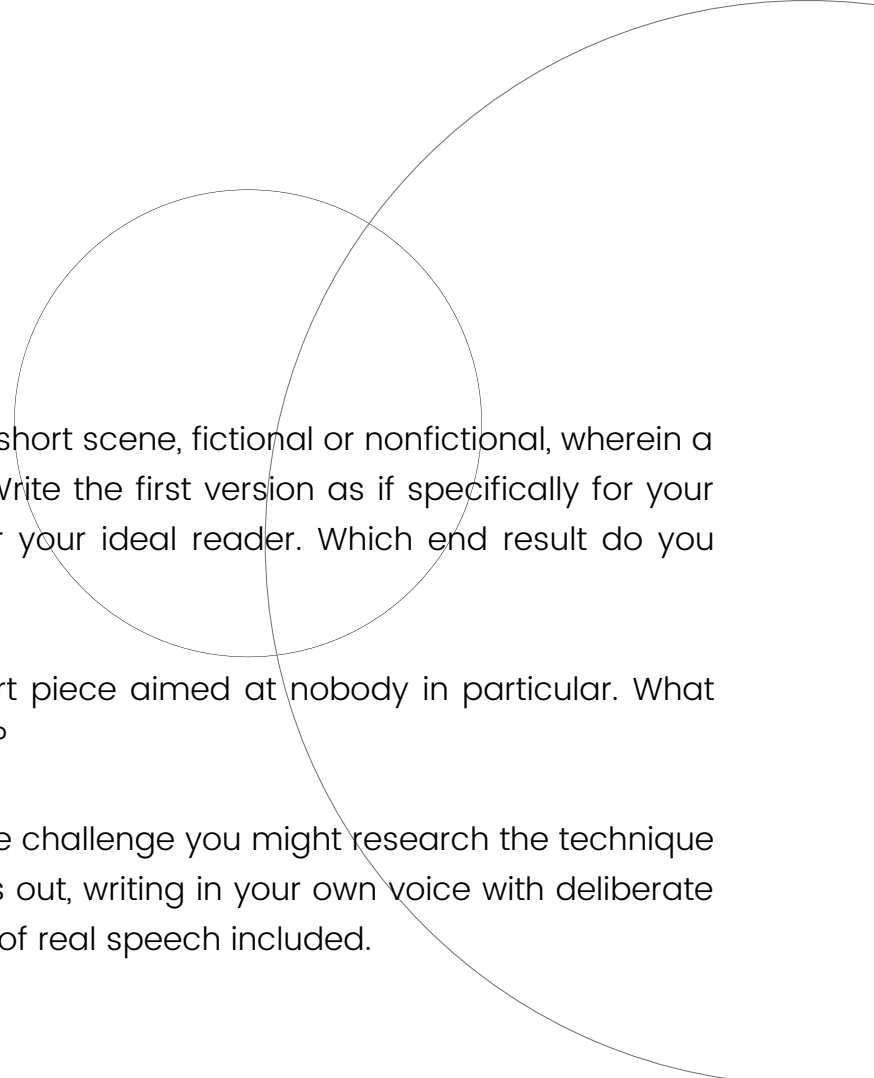
- What if now, in this moment, I were not the person I am used to being?
- What if I write with curiosity about becoming somehow different, or expanded?
- Is something else possible for me at this moment?
- Who else could I be, do I want to be, or do I not want to be? What if I write as that self? What might that self have to tell me?
- What if I let this word self go, and begin another? And then another? And then another?
- What is it like to witness myself in process, through writing?
- Do I, in some way, feel myself becoming more myself in my writing? If so, how?
- Do I, in some way, feel I become more than myself when I write? If so, how?

4 Transmitting

If we find ourselves with a finished clay pot on the workshop shelf, the time may come to transfer it to the gallery display. Both in pottery and in writing, we invite others to see our material; we invite a part of ourselves to be seen. This can feel terrifying. We hope to “say” something, and we can not always ensure this will be “heard” in the manner we intend. In the words of creative writing researcher, Celia Hunt (2000: 50), “any kind of writing involves self-exposure; we place ourselves and our views not only on the page but ‘on the line.’”

Suggested Exercises

1. Picture your most critical reader (a real person, or a combination of real people, or simply someone you imagine might one day read your work such as a newspaper critic). Write down who they are and what you envisage would be their reaction to your writing.
2. Next, do the same for an ideal reader (i.e. someone kind, accepting and who would praise your work alongside constructive comments).
3. Optionally, write two dialogues, one between yourself and each imagined reader: critical and ideal. Begin with “I know you think my writing is...” Have the reader respond in some way. Try to ask at least five questions of this imagined reader, and also write their responses.



4. Write two versions of a short scene, fictional or nonfictional, wherein a person wins something. Write the first version as if specifically for your critic, and the second for your ideal reader. Which end result do you prefer?

5. Now, try to write a short piece aimed at nobody in particular. What happens? Is this possible?

6. Optionally, for a creative challenge you might research the technique of skaz writing and try this out, writing in your own voice with deliberate colloquialisms and errors of real speech included.

Additional Exercise

- Choose a piece of your writing (about which you are feeling confident and safe to share). Read aloud to an individual or group, or record it to share online in some way.

Reflective Questions

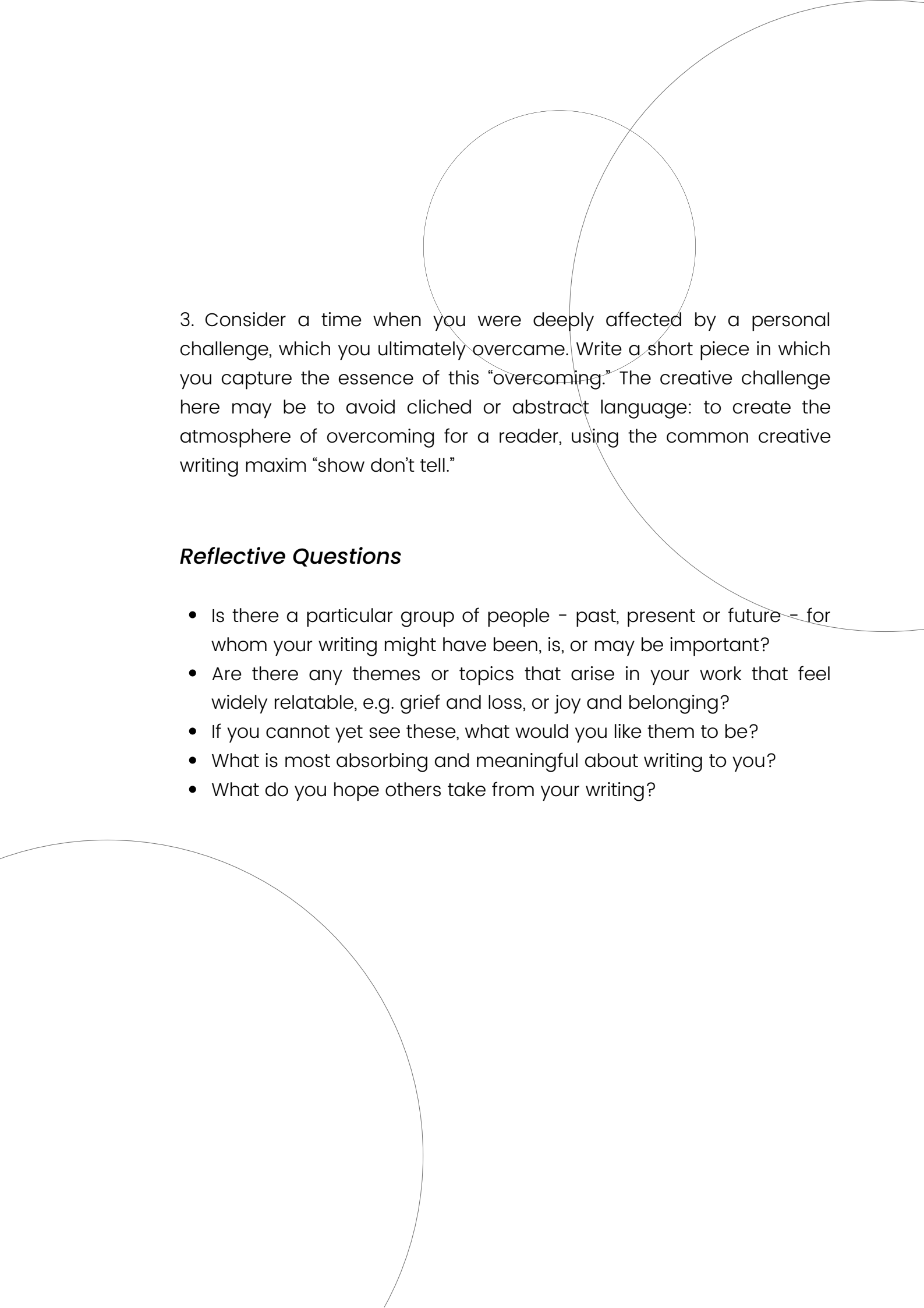
- Who do you tend to “talk” to when you write?
- Might your writing change if you “talked” to someone else?
- Does your writing aim to help someone in some way – if so, whom? And how? Why is this important, or not, to you?
- What kinds of longings appear present in your writing, or is this indiscernible? What excitements? What fears? If discernible, what does it feel like to be sharing, or thinking of sharing, these with others?

5 Engaging beyond

Our clay pot analogy might be concluded in multiple ways, just as there are many ways we leave a legacy in our writing. Perhaps the pot is bought by a kind stranger, put on display in a museum for years to come, or simply left behind to decorate the lives of our children and grandchildren. The important point is not what actually happens, but that many potentialities are felt and anticipated throughout the creative process. We are, at an imaginative level, sharing from the moment our palms touch the clay, or pen meets paper. We do not share only as a final step. In writing, unless we work in a fabricated language entirely our own and indecipherable to others, the step of sharing is implicit from the moment we start: someone may read this. Thus, Engaging beyond is an intrapersonal as well as interpersonal experience.

Suggested Exercises

1. Write a dialogue between a teacher and a learner. You are free to interpret this as broadly as you like. These people might be fictional or nonfictional. Importantly, the two must swap roles by the end of the piece.
2. Think of a topic or social cause you find personally meaningful, e.g. loneliness, or the climate crisis. Write a short fictional scene in which two or more people are discussing this topic but never refer to it directly. Ensure the atmosphere of it can be felt in some way.

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3. Consider a time when you were deeply affected by a personal challenge, which you ultimately overcame. Write a short piece in which you capture the essence of this “overcoming.” The creative challenge here may be to avoid clichéd or abstract language: to create the atmosphere of overcoming for a reader, using the common creative writing maxim “show don’t tell.”

Reflective Questions

- Is there a particular group of people – past, present or future – for whom your writing might have been, is, or may be important?
- Are there any themes or topics that arise in your work that feel widely relatable, e.g. grief and loss, or joy and belonging?
- If you cannot yet see these, what would you like them to be?
- What is most absorbing and meaningful about writing to you?
- What do you hope others take from your writing?



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Thank You

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