



Chapter One

What Is Felt Sense?

The body-mind connection.

Rhythm.

Creativity.

Deep intuitive knowledge.

Before the words come.

Being centered.

Flow.

The body's wisdom before it's articulated in words.

Felt sense is a bodily experience—endlessly describable. Felt sense is also a term, an idea, a phrase—that refers to this bodily knowing.

Felt sense points us to an aspect of our experience that often accompanies us when we are involved in a creative act. Felt sense is there, inside us, if we know how to turn our attention to it and listen to what it is suggesting. But *it's* really not an “*it*.” It is, rather, a felt experience we can access and learn from, an aspect of being human, available to all.

Experiencing felt sense takes practice in developing a certain kind of attention. Once you know how to notice it, you may conclude that the process is simple, that felt sense has always been there, available to you; you just never had a name for it.

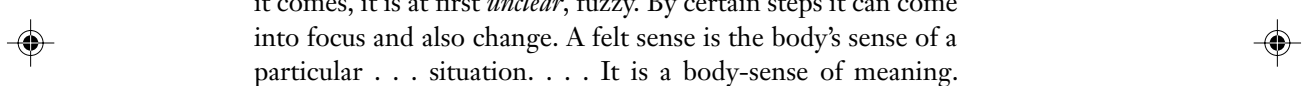
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Eugene Gendlin, the philosopher and psychologist who coined the term, describes it this way:

A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. *Physical.* A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time—encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail. Think of it as a taste, if you like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling.

A felt sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling. (1981, 32–33)

He continues,



A felt sense is usually not just there. It must form. You have to know how to let it form by attending inside your body. When it comes, it is at first *unclear*, fuzzy. By certain steps it can come into focus and also change. A felt sense is the body's sense of a particular . . . situation. . . . It is a body-sense of meaning. (1981, 10)

Notice that Gendlin uses the verbs *come* and *form* when he describes felt sense. Felt sense is not just sitting within us waiting for us to find it. Rather, felt sense comes to us as other bodily processes come—the way sleep comes, or emotions come, or tears come—as we make room for the body to express itself or by allowing the rhythm of bodily processes to take over, by making room for whatever is there to happen.

We know, for example, that we cannot force ourselves to go to sleep. But if we relax and allow sleep to come, it usually will. So, too, with felt sense: We can't force it to come into focus. But if we relax and allow it to form by attending to ourselves in a particular way, a felt sense can make its presence felt. Once it does, we can pay attention and allow it to speak, to suggest images or ideas, to point us to what



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is going on within us or to what lies beneath the words or to what lies at the edge of our thoughts. And once this happens, we can discover an endlessly rich, intricate, and open realm that leads to insight and understanding.

Picture this, for example: You are trying to write something and you know you want a specific word—you can almost feel the word on the tip of your tongue—but it hasn't yet emerged. You feel uncomfortable. Uneasy. Maybe you squirm in your chair. Or you write down a word that is close to what you want but you know, inside yourself, that this word is not right. It doesn't capture what you are groping for. You read over what you have written and you feel dissatisfied. Maybe you tear up the paper in frustration. Or you plod along, feeling increasingly disheartened. This is not an experience you enjoy. In fact, it is so unsettling, you conclude that you can't write.

Or picture this: You are drafting a paper. After an initial struggle, trying this, trying that, jotting down a few sentences and then rereading them, you hit your stride. The words are coming quickly. Everything about the composition starts to feel right. Maybe your body tingles. You lean over your paper or closer to the computer screen. Maybe you jiggle your leg or tap on the table. You love what is happening and wish there were some way to hold on to this experience, to enter this free-flowing realm whenever you want. You are afraid to say much about what is going on because you don't want to jinx the creative process.

Both of these examples describe experiences with felt sense. Notice that in each there is a connection to the body—and that the bodily connection is related to words. When the words that are emerging *feel* right, we often feel excited or at least pleased; we experience a kind of flow. Physically and mentally, we are aligned. In this instance, felt sense is a guide that lets us know we are on the right track. And as words emerge, the felt sense itself can shift and change, leading us to write and think in unexpected ways, leading, often, to discovery and to surprise. But for



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most of us this process often seems mysterious; it's not anything we count on or know how to cultivate.

When the emerging words do not *feel* right, we squirm. We feel uncomfortable. The alignment between our thoughts and our bodies hasn't yet happened; in this instance we often become frustrated, jotting down any old thing or something close but not quite right, just to escape from the discomfort. But notice, even here, we know the words aren't right. We know this because our bodies tell us so. If we learn how to pause here and wait, to attend to the wordless discomfort, often the right words can and do come.

Felt sense, then, is the physical place where we locate what the body knows. This knowing becomes clearer as words come. But more often than not, this knowing is present even *before* we have the words, before what we sense is expressed in language. The point here is that once we realize that we have access to this knowing in our bodies, we can learn to cultivate it. We can practice directing our attention to it. We can develop a way of attending to ourselves that can guide us during acts of creativity. Even though the initial experience often comes as a discomfiting one, we can learn how to welcome and cultivate it rather than avoid it, how to use our body as a touchstone, a guide, that can inform us if the work we are creating makes sense in the ways we want it to. Relying on the body's wisdom, we can set up a creative rhythm and find our stride.

At this point, I wish to pause and summarize:

- Felt sense occurs—is located—in our bodies.
- It is not automatic; it must be given room to form.
- When it does form, it may at first feel murky or unclear.
- We may, at first, experience this murkiness as discomfort.
- The discomfort is often so unsettling that to dispel it, we often say or write any old word rather than wait for the “right” word to emerge.



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- If we attend—or pay attention gently and directly—to the physical sensation of discomfort, our felt sense can become clearer and words can come that will help us express precisely what we are beginning to sense physically.
- Once words come in this connected way, we often experience relief, excitement, surprise, even pleasure. We know that we are on the right track because our bodies tell us so.
- Felt sense is connected to meaning. It establishes a link between what we think (our minds) and what we feel (our bodies). Or between what we know implicitly (before words come) and what we ultimately write or say (with words) explicitly.
- There are certain steps we can take that will help us work with felt sense.

Felt Sense, Composition Research, and the Guidelines for Composing

I became interested in felt sense after I observed college students struggle with writing. This research grew out of a movement in the 1970s when teachers of writing became interested in studying composing processes. As a group, we were curious about a range of questions:

- What happens when students write?
- What helps them move forward?
- What gets in the way?

To find out the answers to these questions, we set up situations in which we could observe students as they engaged in the writing process. This research spanned all grade levels and examined writers of different abilities. Janet Emig, the first to initiate this kind of study, observed high school seniors; Don Graves, who followed her, worked with children in second grade; Nancy

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Sommers examined the process of revision by observing college writers and professional writers; Mike Rose looked at college students with writer's block; Mimi Schwartz observed a published poet and a middle school boy.

Many others in the growing field of composition and rhetoric also became intrigued with observing and then describing composing processes. This work was so well received, in fact, that Maxine Hairston (1982), a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, claimed that we had initiated a "paradigm shift," making the process, rather than the written product, the subject of new inquiries.

My own work focused on the writing processes of college students at the City University of New York, those for whom writing was, admittedly, a struggle. I wanted to know if these students had anything resembling a composing process. Since their written products were often so filled with errors, or were, in the evocative language of Mina Shaughnessy (1970), so "stunningly unskilled," I, like many others, reasonably wondered if these students knew how to write at all.

As part of this study, I taped my students as they thought out loud while they were writing. Based on the tapes, I constructed a coding system which then allowed me to detect and document repeated patterns. I was able to show that the students I was working with did have stable composing processes. They engaged in similar composing behaviors on a variety of tasks and were remarkably consistent in their approaches and procedures. The tapes revealed that they wrote only a few words before they began to edit, and they began to edit long before they actually had a sense of what they wanted or needed to say. I was able to show how such premature editing interfered with the rhythm they needed to establish during composing and frequently just wore them out (Perl 1979).

The tapes and the coding led me to draw conclusions which shed new light on unskilled writers. They revealed



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that these students had stable composing processes; as a result, their teachers could now identify which composing behaviors were productive and which were counterproductive. Teachers could now provide students with a way of understanding the tangles in their composing processes. We could, for example, begin to teach them to separate drafting from editing. We no longer needed to blame them for the errors that appeared and reappeared in their work. These errors did not stem from a lack of care or attention to their texts, but to confusion regarding when, where, and how to use the rules and dicta their teachers taught them.

But what turned out to be even more fascinating was what my coding scheme could not elucidate. Often I would notice the following phenomenon: Students would pause in their composing, would sit silently for thirty seconds or a minute, and then would have a burst of composing energy that often led to the creation of a new idea. Something was happening in the silence. I didn't know what it was. But it made me curious. And I suspected it might be even more important than the behaviors, like premature editing, that I could more easily pinpoint.

It was at this point that I discovered the work of Eugene Gendlin. I found that his thinking helped me grasp what was likely occurring for my students as they composed. I suspected that during those quiet moments, they were noticing and listening to their felt sense. In the midst of the rule confusion and the tremendous effort the students put into editing, they were, for a few seconds, paying attention to what they felt they needed to say. For frequently, after those moments of silence, a new idea would come—and it was often an important one.

I wrote about this phenomenon in an article called “Understanding Composing” (Perl 1980). At this point, the idea of felt sense entered the field of composition and rhetoric. It has remained, for the most part, a theoretical notion, not something easily translated into classroom practice. It seems

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that it is one thing to know about felt sense and even to call on it when we are not aware of doing so, as my students had presumably done, and another to make it a conscious part of composing and of classroom practice.

I wondered if this imbalance could be addressed, if there might be a way to teach students how to access and work with felt sense. I knew that Gendlin had created steps to teach adults how to work with felt sense in solving personal problems (1981). I wondered if Gendlin's focusing questions could be adapted to help writers solve writing problems; if they could help them discover topics for writing or help them establish a connection between their thinking and an assigned topic. If so, I imagined that such questions could help writers create a visceral connection between what they were thinking and writing, a connection that was physical, based in the body. With Gendlin's encouragement, I began experimenting, looking to adapt his focusing questions for use in writing classrooms. Through this work, I discovered that it was possible to create a set of questions, to teach students how to use them, and most important, to help them establish a vibrant connection between the body and the mind. This discovery led me to invent the Guidelines for Composing.

The Guidelines are not a set of rules to follow, but rather a set of questions that help writers cultivate a felt sense and then write with this felt sense as a guide. In essence, the Guidelines are a set of questions that writers ask themselves silently and then answer in writing. The Guidelines begin by asking writers to slow down, to pay attention to their bodies, to relax. As they progress, from simple list making to more complex imaging, writers are directed to listen attentively to what is at the edge of their thoughts, to what isn't yet in words. But how do you listen to what is not yet in words? What are you listening to and for? The Guidelines don't so much tell you as invite you to begin. And then, question by question, step by step, they accompany you through your own unique composing process.



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In some ways, the Guidelines are based on a paradox. They don't start with words but with what is prior to words, with what is unsaid, not yet said, or not yet articulated but felt in the body nonetheless. It is within this realm that we might say thought is prior to words if by thought we mean a whole incipient sense of meaning that is (almost always) present within people.

But it is also fair to say that once the words come, once we speak them or write them, we understand better what we mean. In this way, thought is articulated, developed, and made visible through our use of language. Seen in this light, it is easy to conclude that thought follows language or is, at least partially, dependent on it as in the famous E.M. Forster quote, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?"

Felt sense helps us clarify the dynamic relationship between language and thought. In fact, with felt sense we can see that language and thought are inextricably linked in the body. Felt sense exists prior to our language-ing it; it exists alongside the words that come; and it exists as a bodily physical referent after words come. By directing attention to our felt sense, we establish a living connection between what we sense and what we know or between what we sense implicitly and what we state explicitly.

The connection to words is, in other words, visceral. Bob Lazaroff, a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center, describes the bodily connection this way:

When felt sense is flowing, I am tapped into disparate parts of my being. The process feels very organic, and my physical/writing response is as if the kid inside is taunting me through the adult skin. Felt sense explores much more than writing; it's all the things we can't express in words. And maybe that's why I get physical when I write. When the words are coming out, the other parts of my body want to get in on the act. The physical aspect of writing doesn't just flow neatly between my brain and my hands. My feet get into the process, my elbows, my shoulders, my palms. I get up, I pace, I sit down. I go back



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and forth between writing, banging out rhythms on the desk, and singing and rhyming: *Good Golly Miss Molly*, *Tutti Fruitti O Rootie*, (write . . . write . . .) *Jump Back Jack*, *See ya later alligator* (write . . . write . . .). In these moments of creation, the whole nervous system wants in on the creative action.

Bob's description emphasizes the rhythmic way in which language can live in our bodies. While the tapping and pacing he describes may not fit the way most of us write, Bob does capture one of the many powerful connections between expression and bodies, between language and felt sense, between feeling and form. And no matter how it emerges in us, it is important to emphasize that felt sense comes from our bodies and that the term refers to this bodily process of knowing.

There are many ways in which to access felt sense. We can tune into it by breathing slowly, quieting down, waiting for it to form, and then allowing it to lead us to this incipient sense of meaning. We can also tune into it as the words are coming and as we are listening to ourselves write by paying attention to what we sense physically as we express our ideas on paper. And we can stay in touch with our bodily sense of knowing while we are reading our written work and attempting to assess whether we have fully or adequately captured what we are trying to say. These are moves that occur physically and mentally in our bodies and in our minds. It is this back and forth movement, in both sensing and wording, that is built explicitly into the Guidelines.

Using Felt Sense in the Classroom

What happens when you bring the Guidelines for Composing into the classroom? In most instances, students start to write. They calm down, sit quietly, and slowly begin to pick up their pens and compose. In this section, then, I present descriptions, comments, and reflections on felt sense and on the Guidelines for Composing written by stu-



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dents and colleagues who have used them. Some are from my students; others are from students I have never met. But each response will give you some idea of what comes into play when writers of different ages and experience engage with the ideas I am presenting here.

In 2002, Susan Sermoneta, a colleague, played the composing guidelines CD in her writing classroom at the Fashion Institute of Technology, a unit of the State University of New York. When asked to reflect on the process, three of these students, all beginning writers for whom English is a second language, wrote the following:

The Guidelines were helpful. They take you step by step through the entire process of private writing. I thought I would not have anything to write—as it turns out I had way too much on my mind. I'm glad I did this today. It's like a weight has been partially lifted off my shoulders.

The process for me was very new and different. I never thought that writing should connect with the body. I thought writing only have [sic] to connect with the mind. Now I understand that if you don't feel your body, then your writing won't be connected. . . . The process was like an unfolding for me.

At first it was hard to get the ball rolling but once I picked up a rhythm I was able to write continuously. One thought flowed right after the other. Numerous thoughts flooded onto the page. I was writing furiously.

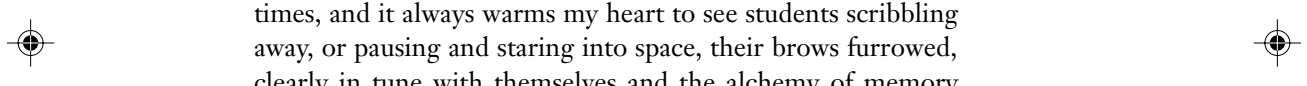
Another colleague, M. Elizabeth Sargent from the University of Alberta, Canada, also played the CD for her students. Here is what Betsy reported:

Just got back from my computer lab writing class—three Japanese students, one Kenyan, one Hispanic, and the rest students who have been told for years that their writing is substandard. Using your Guidelines, they composed at the computer steadily for the whole class—fifty minutes—and most stayed another five to ten minutes to finish up. Most of them have never written

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nonstop for fifty minutes in their lives. And I certainly needed that hour. As usual, under the composing guidelines I ended up writing about something I needed to write about but had no idea I would pursue before class began.

I, too, use the Guidelines with my students in both undergraduate and graduate courses. In recent years, some of my doctoral students who teach composition at various units of the City University of New York have also introduced the Guidelines to their students. The following three excerpts are from an online conversation that took place in the spring of 2001 when these graduate students were reflecting on felt sense in their own writing and teaching:



I've done the Guidelines about half a dozen times by now, and I'm still amazed at how powerful they are. I wonder if it's due to the creation of a safe, empty space, one where concentrated silence is encouraged (so rare in this culture), where writing is treasured. I've used them in my own English classes many times, and it always warms my heart to see students scribbling away, or pausing and staring into space, their brows furrowed, clearly in tune with themselves and the alchemy of memory and imagination. . . . It's taken me a long time to learn to let go when writing, to trust my body, my skill, my thoughts, my experiences. When I write poems or memoirs or other things just for myself, I'm giving myself more and more permission to let go, to let the garbage flow with the nuggets of gold—painful stuff for a perfectionist. But this hasn't transferred to my academic writing. Here I struggle. There are days when I feel like exploding from tension or breaking down crying from frustration at the computer. . . . Felt sense seems to work best when we have the leisure to play around with form and content. Unfortunately, our scholarly lives often don't give us nearly as much leeway in terms of what we can do. I'm very curious about how people have experienced and harnessed felt sense when it comes to term papers. How do you write when the form and the length have already been significantly predetermined? How do you use felt sense when you have to write a



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twenty-page critical paper that leans a lot on research and citation? Felt sense seems to me to be a great way to write personal essays, poems, stories, etc., but would be a lot less useful when writing term papers.

—Irwin Leopando

Research involves selection. Maybe at some level we've been using felt sense to pick and choose research topics as well as secondary sources. Maybe awareness of felt sense can help us to pick better topics and choose better citations. Further, as we revise our term papers, how do we decide if the paper contains good, sound ideas? Bodily sensations as well as ideas in our heads may offer clues to how we know what we know.

—Frank Gaughan

I fully empathize with Irwin's questions on felt sense and the writing of the "scholarly paper." All I can say is that ever since I've come to understand felt sense, I have a feeling of connectedness to my dissertation that I had lost. It does have to do with what I now include and exclude as I write, but it also has to do with whose words I privilege in my own text. I had gotten to a point in my academic work in which I just tried to amass as much of other people's theories as possible because I didn't feel as if I myself had anything important to say about "my author." This, even though I am one of about five people who really knows this author's work! I had been so indoctrinated with the idea that my work needed to reflect everyone else's that I no longer had a voice. . . . Writing the diss is still hard for me, but for the first time in years I am writing from a sense of centrality, my own. Everyone else's theory and criticism are fine, and they actually support a lot of what I want to say, but I now find myself locating my message in my own sense—my felt sense—of what my author said, meant, implied, left out, etc. My experience of felt sense is more identifiable in personal and creative writing, yes, but I am using that experience to free my academic writing and make it what I hope is more creative and truer.

—Cathy Fagan

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What students and colleagues have written to me about the Guidelines no longer surprises me. I have been using them in my writing classes since 1980. I have seen, firsthand, how useful they are, especially when writers are faced with the daunting task of finding a topic. I've seen how they help writers face the blank page and how they lead writers to establish surprising and often powerful connections to topics they thought they had little or no connection to. I've seen them work successfully for writers of different ages and widely varying abilities. I use them in just about all of my writing classes: in freshman composition classes and doctoral seminars, with peer tutors and with creative writers, with novices and professionals, with people in school and out. Teachers who work with me frequently bring them back to their own classrooms and use them in their middle school, high school, or college classrooms. Most also use them at home, when they are drafting their own work. But over the past twenty years, students and colleagues have often commented to me that they wish they had a tape of my voice; that no matter how thoroughly they have internalized the process, they sometimes wish they could invite me home with them and have me ask the questions as they are composing.

With technology, I can now respond to this request. With the CD included with this book, you—and your students—can now listen to the Guidelines and write along with them.





Chapter Two

The Guidelines for Composing

This chapter takes you inside the Guidelines for Composing. I describe what you will find on the CD and provide suggestions for where you might begin and what to expect once you do. After a general overview, I include, in standard typeface, a transcript of the CD. If, after becoming familiar with the process, you want to take students through the Guidelines on your own, you can read directly from the transcript or you can modify the questions and the language to suit your students' needs. I also annotate various sections of the transcript. This additional information, presented in boldface, provides explanations about what to look for when you write with the Guidelines or when you lead students through the process.

The Guidelines are so named because I think of them as precisely that: as guides. There are three different versions on the CD: a short version, a long version, and a version designed for individual use. The purpose of each version is the same: to help writers locate a felt sense and to guide them in selecting, exploring, and developing topics that interest them.

I originally designed the Guidelines for students who, when asked to write, drew a blank, had no idea where to begin, and therefore needed guidance in discovering topics of interest. Over the years, however, I have created alternative forms to help students discover connections to topics they have been assigned. The branching options for these different paths are explained later in the chapter.



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But for now, it is useful to say that the more flexibility students have when doing the Guidelines, the more effective this process may be. In other words, since the Guidelines are open-ended, they often lead to surprises. Students often discover that there are issues or questions they feel compelled to write about—topics or issues they had not imagined prior to doing the Guidelines. If they are given the freedom to revise topics, if they can change their directions, even slightly, they may find themselves developing their ideas and their writing with surprising urgency and depth.

The difference between the two in-class versions is that the short version is simpler: the instructions are shorter, less listening is required, and less overall time is required for writing. It is designed for use in classes of forty to fifty minutes or with students who may have difficulty sitting still, listening to directions, and writing. In the longer version, designed for classes that run for sixty to ninety minutes or longer, the instructions are more elaborate, more time is allotted for writing, and the process is slower, which often allows for more depth in the writing.

The third version is designed for writers who want to follow the Guidelines on their own. After listening to the introduction on track 1, they can advance to track 36 and begin. The only time limit here is the one imposed by the writers themselves.

The Guidelines, then, are a set of questions that build on each other and are designed to help writers move their thinking and their discourse forward. The questions have an internal logic, and each question is designed as an advance on the one that came before; but they should not be treated as the kinds of questions one might find on an exam, with each requiring an answer. It is useful to follow the sequence, but if students are writing productively, missing one or two will not necessarily present a problem. It often turns out that after experimenting a few times with



the Guidelines, students learn what works best for them and they discover how best to navigate the various paths offered to them.

What's on the CD?

The CD opens with an introduction that describes the process and introduces the notion of felt sense. This track should be played before offering any version of the Guidelines in class. It takes ten minutes. I suggest playing the introduction for students and then discussing the ideas in it a day or two prior to doing the Guidelines.

Once you are ready to play the CD in class, you have one other decision to make. How much time do you have? If your class is fifty minutes or less, you should use tracks 2 through 17; if it runs fifty minutes or longer, you should use tracks 18 through 35. If students are working on their own, they follow a separate set of Guidelines which begins on track 36. On the last track of the CD, track 52, I thank students for their willingness to try the Guidelines and provide additional information on felt sense.

A diagram of the CD with various branching options can be seen in Figure 2-1.

Timing and Pacing

As the instructor, you may choose to write with your students, but you also have the added responsibility of keeping track of time. In other words, you are responsible for pausing the CD at the end of each track, remaining aware of how much time is elapsing, and then restarting the CD to move the process forward. To guide you, there are two different tones recorded on the CD. The single tone (which will sound at the end of each set of questions) is the signal to hit the PAUSE button so that students have time to write. The double tone (which will sound as soon as you

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advance to the next track) is the signal to students that you are restarting the CD and they are about to hear another set of composing instructions. *Always make sure you hit the PAUSE button, not the STOP button, or you may inadvertently send yourself back to the beginning of the track you just played.*

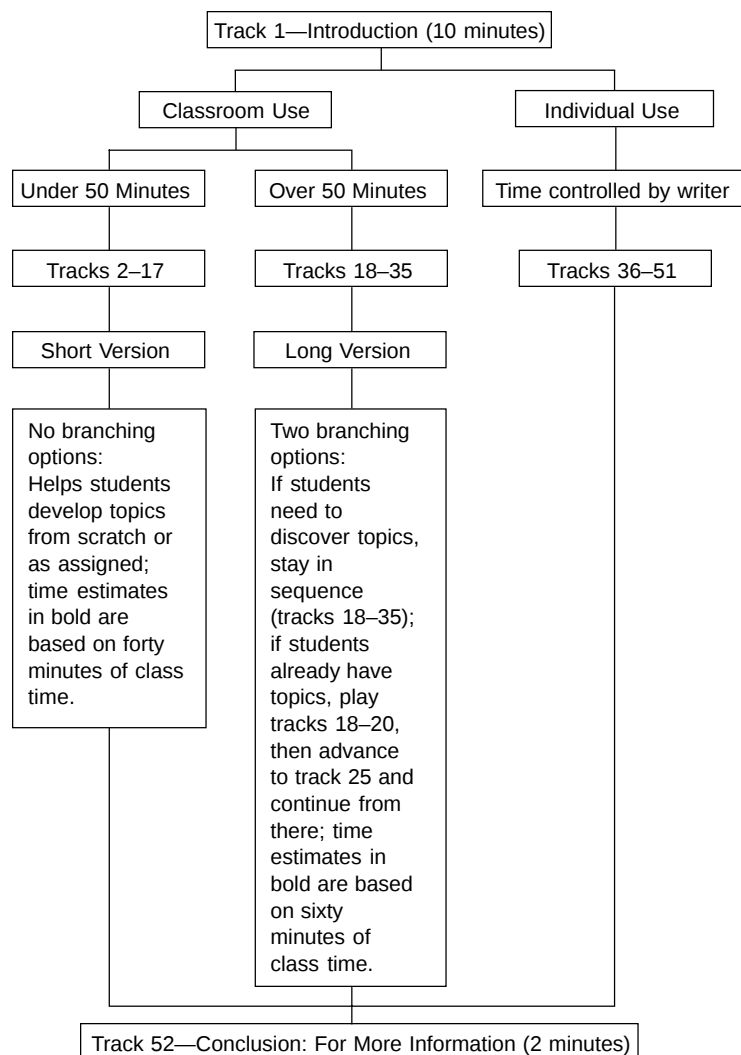


Figure 2-1.

Pause time is actual writing time. Throughout the transcript, in bold, I include suggestions for the amount of writing time that works well (given the time constraints of either a forty- or a sixty-minute class period). As long as you keep track of how much overall time you have, you are free to experiment with longer or shorter time periods for writing, but you want to be sure to complete the Guidelines in one sitting.

In adjusting time, it will be useful to keep the following overall time frame in mind (time allocation is based on the short version of the Guidelines on tracks 2 through 17).

The first six questions (tracks 3–8) are “Opening Questions.” Each time you pause the CD, students need only a minute or two of writing time as they are either sitting quietly or making lists of possible topics for writing; on the longer version, they are given an extra minute or two.

The next four questions (tracks 9–12) are the “Deepening Questions.” Each time you pause the CD, students need at least three minutes of writing time and can benefit from being given five or even ten minutes each, if time allows. In this part of the Guidelines, they have selected topics to write about and are now deepening their understanding of their topics and generating material.

The final three questions (tracks 13–16) are the “Surfacing Questions.” Now when you pause the CD, students can be given less writing time, a minute or two (more if time allows). Here they are beginning to think about closure and about possible forms they might use or points of view they might employ as they draft their work.

The final question (track 17) is the “Reflecting Question.” Students need at least three minutes of writing time and more if possible. It is during this time that students have the opportunity to describe what happened during the Guidelines. They discuss how and in what ways the Guidelines worked and whether they are feeling unsettled or concerned about what emerged. These reflections can lead

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to fruitful and invaluable discussions about composing and the many ways in which the writing process unfolds for different writers.

TRANSCRIPT of the CD

Note: Comments in bold are written for instructors and are not on the CD.

INTRODUCTION

10 minutes time:

Track 1



Hi. My name is Sondra Perl. I'm a writer and a teacher of writing. On this CD, I will take you through a process I call the Guidelines for Composing. You can think about this process as embarking on a journey. Often when we write, we're not sure where to start. Facing the blank paper or the computer screen can be daunting. I've designed this process to provide company for writers as they face the blank page. You can think of this as my guiding you through those first attempts to put words on paper and have them mean something—at least for you.

On this first track, I explain how the process works and what you should expect. If this is your first experience with the Guidelines, you should listen to this introduction. In the future, you can skip this track and go directly to the composing activities. For now, though, you'll need ten minutes to listen and orient yourself to the process.

The Guidelines are designed to do two things. If you already know what you want to write about, they will help you develop your ideas. If you're not sure what to write about and you're looking for a topic, they will help you find one. Either way, they will guide you through the writing process so that you can discover your unique view or your personal stance on whatever you end up writing about.





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Here's what to expect: At the beginning of each track, I'll give some brief instructions. Then, I'll ask a series of questions. Your task is to repeat each question silently to yourself. When you notice yourself responding, you jot down whatever comes. When you hear this sound, ****, it is the signal for you or your instructor to PAUSE the CD and leave time for writing. When you have finished jotting down your responses, you or your instructor will advance to the next track. You repeat this process until you have completed responding to all the questions. It's important to press the PAUSE button—not the STOP button—or you could be sent back to the beginning of the track.

Since I don't know you, I can't be sure that my words will fit perfectly for you or your writing situation. But as my purpose is to help you write, keep in mind that if something is working for you, stay with it. And if something doesn't quite fit, feel free to ignore it and move on. You don't have to respond to every question for the Guidelines to be successful.

I've often thought that the most important aspect of the Guidelines is the overall accompaniment students feel during the process. When you set this up and guide students through the questions, it is as if you are holding their hands and letting them know they are not alone. This seems to give them permission to compose and a degree of comfort with *not yet knowing* what they will write. Hearing and responding to every question is not as important as finding a place to begin that comes directly from students' felt interests.

Now about the timing. To complete the entire process in one sitting, you'll need at least forty minutes, not including time spent listening to this introduction. If you have more time, say an hour to an hour and a half, you'll be able to discover more, explore more deeply, and write in greater detail. Clearly, if you're working on your own, you can control the pace to suit yourself. If you're in a classroom, your instructor



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will control the pace for the group. At the end of the introduction, I will tell you where to click next depending upon how much time you have and whether you are in a classroom or working on your own.

You will find specific suggestions for timing as you proceed through the transcript.

But before we begin, I want to provide some background about this process. The Guidelines are based on what I call a *felt sense*—a way of knowing that relies on listening to your body. The idea here is that your mind and your body are connected and that you can discover new ideas and fresh ways of expressing your thoughts by paying close attention to what you sense occurring physically within you. Here's a simple example of how our bodies and minds are connected:

Imagine that you have just gone out. All of a sudden you feel uneasy. Something is nagging at you. You realize that you've forgotten something. You instinctively search your pockets. Is it your keys? No, you have them. Is it that letter you wanted to mail? No, you did forget the letter but that's not it. The letter doesn't satisfy or match the physical sensation. You try to imagine what else you might have forgotten. What could it be? Maybe you shake your head. Or you just stop in your tracks and pause for a minute. Suddenly, an answer emerges that feels just right: it's that book you promised to return. That's it. Your body relaxes. You let out a sigh of relief.

This example has the elements of felt sense in it. First, you notice the presence of this kind of bodily knowing that begins as something puzzling. You're not sure what it's about. But at some point you have a hunch and fairly soon you realize that you forgot something. You don't know precisely what it is, so you try out several possibilities. Notice here that while you explore the options in your mind, your body tells you if you are right or wrong. Or more precisely, your body responds one way when you are wrong and



another when you are right. When you do finally remember, when you come up with the right word, you experience an easing in your body or a shift in the felt sense, a shift that, if put into words would say, “Yeah, that’s it.”

I have discovered that a similar process can occur and can be surprisingly productive when people are writing. The idea here is that you write not only with your hands and your brain but also with your body. But for this process to work, you need to slow down and pay attention to your felt sense—to that place in your body where you sense an idea beginning to form—even before you have the words to express it. During the Guidelines, then, I will direct you to listen to your body. I will be asking you to wait for a felt sense to form and then to listen to what it is saying. In this way, you will be calling on and developing your own bodily intelligence.

Usually, students understand felt sense from the previous example. If you are introducing the Guidelines for the first time, it is helpful to pause the CD now and to discuss the ways in which the body and the mind are connected. It is also important to distinguish felt sense from feelings. Feelings can be identified fairly easily; we know, for example, when we are angry or happy. But felt sense is not so readily identified. It comes first as something vague, puzzling, or murky. To make the most effective use of the Guidelines, students will need first to contact and then to stay with what is puzzling to them. Doing so becomes easier with practice, so after some classroom conversation, let students know that working with felt sense will become easier with time. For now they should just follow the instructions, write whatever comes, and talk about the process afterward. Experiencing the process for themselves and hearing from their peers should help clarify how to make effective use of the Guidelines.

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Since I've used the Guidelines for many years, I'd also like to respond now to the five most frequently asked questions.

1. *What if I make a mistake?* I want to assure you that there is no right or wrong way to do this. The Guidelines work differently for each person. They even work differently for the same person on different occasions. Sometimes they lead to surprises and insights. Sometimes they evoke strong responses or emotions. Sometimes they don't. The best advice I can give you before you try them is to expect the unexpected, to trust what emerges, and to give yourself permission to experiment.
2. *Do I have to share what I'm writing?* Absolutely not. The writing you are about to do is private. It is for you—and for you alone. During the Guidelines, you need to feel free to write without worrying what a teacher or friend or colleague might think. Near the end of the exercise, you will find questions designed to help you shape your ideas. But whether you choose to develop this work or to share a later draft is up to you. For now you should just write without censoring your thoughts, knowing that what you write during this session will remain private.
3. *What about correctness?* There is certainly a time and a place for grammatical and factual accuracy. But not now. When I ask you, from time to time, to pause and to check if your words are right, I'm asking you to go back and forth to check the fit between your felt sense and the words that are emerging. I'm *not* asking you to check if your spelling or grammar is correct. Such concerns need to wait for another time.
4. *What happens at the end?* When you're finished, I invite you to step back and to reflect on your writing process. If you're using the Guidelines as part of a



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classroom exercise, I encourage you to talk about the process with your instructor and with other students in the class. On the last track, I also provide information about where to go if you're interested in learning more about felt sense.

5. *Is there anything else before we begin?* Just be sure to set things up so you won't be disturbed. If you're writing by hand, you need to have paper and pen ready and to be seated in a comfortable position. If you're working on a computer, you need to select your word processing program, open a new file, and give it a title. It's also a good idea to disable the programs for spell check and grammar check so that they do not distract you and to remember to save your work after each set of questions. If you're in a classroom with other students, try to focus only on your own writing and filter out, as best you can, any extraneous noise. If you're at home or in a dorm, it's best to close your door, turn off your phone, and to ask others to leave you undisturbed for forty minutes or longer.

So, if you are working on your own and ready to begin, advance now to track 36. If you're following the Guidelines in a group, your instructor has a choice to make. If you have fifty minutes or less, advance now to track 2; if you have over fifty minutes, advance to track 18.



The Guidelines

For Use in a Classroom/Short Version: Fifty minutes or less/Time estimates in bold are for a forty-minute class period/(Tracks 2–17)

Track 2

If you're starting here, you're in a classroom or a computer lab, your instructor is in charge of playing the CD, and you have at least forty minutes to complete the process. Before we begin, be aware that people write at different paces. As a result, some of you may find the pace too slow while others may find it too fast. Since there isn't anything we can do about this, don't worry about it. Just write whatever comes to you and let your instructor keep track of time. This short tone, ****, signals that your instructor is about to pause the CD and give you a minute or two to write. The longer tone, +++, signals that your instructor is about to play the next set of questions. When you hear it, you will have about five seconds to find a place to pause in your writing. It is important to pause, especially if you're typing, so that everyone in the room can hear the next set of instructions. Once you hear the short tone again, you can continue writing. If you're ready, let's begin.

After each track, you will find, in bold, suggested times for pausing the CD. This pause time is actual writing time. The suggestions are based on a forty-minute class period. If you follow them, you will have three minutes at the end of class to discuss the process. If you have more than forty minutes, you can and should increase writing time. You may also find that you need to move more slowly or more rapidly than my suggestions; if so, you should adjust the writing/pause time to fit your classroom situation and your students' needs as writers.

Track 3

Find a way to get comfortable. Stretch your body, put your feet on the floor, and begin to notice what is going on within you. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, then look down



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or away from any distractions and attempt to create your own private space wherever you are—knowing that you will just sit quietly for a minute or two. This is the first step as you begin your journey into writing. Now, with your eyes closed, focus on your breathing. As you inhale, see if you can feel yourself sitting in the chair. And as you exhale, let go of any tension or discomfort you might be feeling. Inhale again and direct attention to your hands or your arms. As you exhale, shake out your hands or your wrists. Inhale again and bring your attention back to yourself. Know that you're about to go on a writing journey by paying attention to your ideas as they unfold. It may turn into a journey of discovery. As you exhale, get a sense of what it is like for you just to sit here, breathing quietly and slowly, until your teacher advances to the next track. And as we go through the process, I will remind you, from time to time, to return to this quiet place. ****

Time: Thirty seconds or less of silence/No writing/Advance to the next track once students appear to be quiet and settled.

Track 4

Now, I'm going to ask you some questions that you then ask yourself silently. When you hear yourself answering, make a list. Do not delve into any one item on the list. Just keep compiling as if you are making an inventory. Begin by asking yourself, "How am I right now? Is there anything in the way of my writing today?" Jot down whatever comes. ****

Time: Thirty seconds

Track 5

++++Set aside what you have just written so that you can have a clear space in which to explore. Whatever is there will remain there and you can return to it later on. Now, though, you're going to create a list of possible topics for

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writing. Inhale deeply and relax. With your eyes closed, ask yourself, “What’s on my mind? What am I interested in?” When you hear yourself answering, open your eyes and make a list.****

Time: One minute

Track 6

++++Now, ask yourself, “What else is on my mind? Is there a topic or issue I’ve been thinking about lately that I might want to write about? Does a particular person or place or image come to mind? Are there memories or situations that strike me as interesting or compelling?” If so, jot these down. If you came here with an assigned topic or a topic you know you want to explore, make sure you also add that to the list.****

Time: One minute

Track 7



++++Now that you have a list—it may be long or short—ask yourself, one more time, “Is there anything I’m overlooking, maybe even a word I like, a color, an object, an event, a line from a song, something I’ve read or seen, an image or a dream, a question or a project I might at some time want to write about that I can add to this list?”****

Time: One minute

Track 8

++++Now, you may have one definite idea or a long list of items. Look over this list and ask yourself, “Which one of these items or topics draws my attention right now? Which item or group of items seems to stand out? Is there one that has more energy or says, ‘Me, choose me?’” If so, mark it in some way. If nothing stands out, then choose one topic or item you’re willing to work with for now.****

Time: Thirty seconds. A nice moment to watch as students identify topics or issues that interest them.



Track 9

++++Write the idea or the item you have chosen at the top of a clean page. You can save the list for another time, but for now you are going to develop the topic you've just selected. So take a deep breath, close your eyes, inhale, relax your body, exhale, and settle comfortably into your chair. If you think about it, you already have some ideas about this particular topic or issue or item. So, without delving into any one idea, see if you can jot down your associations or your thoughts on this topic. Ask yourself, "What are all the parts I already know about this? Which bits and pieces come to mind?" Jot down whatever comes.****

Time: Three minutes

Track 10

++++At this point, I'm going to interrupt you and ask you to set aside everything you've just written. I want you to set aside the bits and pieces and take a fresh look at the topic or issue, to grab a hold of the whole topic and see if you can connect the topic to your felt sense. Stop writing now for a moment, close your eyes, and imagine that the whole topic is right here with you, in the room. Breathe deeply, repeat the topic to yourself, sense into your body and without writing, see if you can locate where this topic lives in you or what the whole of this issue evokes in you.

Thirty seconds of silence on the CD.

Now, ask yourself, "What makes this topic or issue interesting to me? What's important about this? What's the heart of it?"

Five seconds of silence on the CD.

Wait patiently for a word, a phrase, or an image to arise from your felt sense of this topic or issue. . . . And now, or when you are ready, write down whatever comes.****

Time: Four minutes. This small, inner move leads people to the edge of their thoughts, to what they have not yet said (or possibly discovered) about the

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topic or issue. It's where felt sense and emerging meaning come together.

Track 11

++++Let the writing go now wherever it wants to go. Take whatever you've written so far and ask yourself, "What's this really all about?" Keep writing and as you write, let your felt sense deepen. Pause occasionally to see if you're on the right track. Ask yourself, "Is this right? Am I getting closer?" See if you can experience the inner shift that tells you, "Yeah, these words feel right," and then continue writing. If, for any reason, you are unable to write right now, sit quietly and wait for the next set of questions. ****

Time: Four minutes

Track 12



++++Ask yourself, "What, if anything, makes this topic or issue hard for me? What's the crux here?" Or, "What, if anything, is difficult about this?" Pause and see if a word or a phrase or an image comes to you that captures the difficulty or the hardness in a fresh way. Write whatever comes. ****

Time: Three minutes



Track 13

++++You can continue along now writing what comes to you. When you find yourself stopping, ask, "What's missing? What haven't I said yet?" And again, return to that quiet place and look to your felt sense for a word or an image. ****

Time: One minute

Track 14

++++Now, ask yourself, "Where is this leading? What's the point I'm trying to make?" Again, write down whatever comes. ****

Time: One minute



Track 15

++++Ask yourself, “Does this feel complete?” Look to your sense of it all, how it feels to you in a bodily way as you try to answer. If your answer is “Yes, this feels complete,” ask yourself, “How do I know that?” Write about where in your body you found this answer. If your answer is “No, this isn’t complete,” pause, and ask yourself, one more time, “What’s missing? What might I need to write or to do to complete this, at least for now?”****

Time: Thirty seconds

Track 16

++++By now, you may have from one to several pages that can serve as the basis for a piece of writing. So it’s time to consider what form these ideas might take. You want to see if what you have written so far suggests a shape and a point of view to you. Ask yourself, “What form would work best for what I’m trying to say? Is this a story? A poem? An essay? Is it an argument? A personal narrative? A report? Could it be a dialogue, a play, a series of letters? Or something else?”

And also ask yourself, “Who’s talking here? Whose point of view is emerging? Might I take a different point of view? If it’s a story, might someone else serve as narrator? What would happen then?” Ask yourself, “Can I hear a possible first line? Can I see a new possibility or a new shape for this piece?”

Make some notes now about possible directions your piece might take so you have a place to begin if you choose to develop what you have written here. ****

Time: one minute

Track 17

++++You have just completed the Guidelines. Now, I’d like you to look over what you have written and to write a short description of what this process was like for you.

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Although the content can remain private, I encourage you to share your observations of the process with your instructor and your classmates. So, look over your notes and ask yourself, “Where did I start? What happened? Where am I headed?”****

Time: Three minutes

I prefer to have students reflect in writing about their experiences with the Guidelines, but with only a minute or two of class time remaining, I invite them to talk instead. Frequently, they have strong responses. Some may report that they have topics they are excited about developing; others may say that they prefer not to continue working with the topic they selected; still others may say that the process didn’t work, they are unsettled by what happened, or they feel stuck. Instructors need to be prepared to listen to these concerns, to be mindful of the fact that the Guidelines can evoke strong emotions, and to help students decide what to do next. In the end, the choice to develop a particular piece of writing belongs to the student.

It is always important to ask for the range of experiences. It is also useful to remind students that there is no correct way to do the Guidelines and that each time they go through the process, they may experience it differently.



The Guidelines

For Use in a Classroom/Long Version: Fifty minutes or longer/Time estimates are based on a sixty-minute class period/(Tracks 18–35)

Track 18

If you're beginning here, you're in a classroom or a computer lab, you have an instructor in charge of playing the CD, and you have at least fifty minutes or longer to write. The longer you can spend on the Guidelines, the more you will be able to discover. But be aware that people write at different paces. As a result, for some of you the pace may seem too slow while for others it may seem too fast. Since there isn't anything we can do about this, don't worry about it. Just write whatever comes to you and let your instructor keep track of time. This short tone, ****, signals that your instructor is about to pause the CD and give you several minutes to write. This longer tone, +++, signals that your instructor is about to play the next set of questions. When you hear it, you will have about ten seconds to find a place to pause in your writing. It is important to pause, especially if you're typing, so that everyone can hear the next set of instructions. Once you hear the short tone again, you can continue writing.

Now, before we begin, you have a decision to make. If everyone in your class has already selected a topic or question to write about, then after playing the next two tracks, your instructor should advance to track 25. If there are people in your class who aren't sure what to write about or who have a few ideas but would also like to see if there is something else they might want to explore today, your instructor should stay in sequence. If you need time to discuss the appropriate starting place, you should do so now. When the class is ready, you should begin with the next track (19).

Most often, you will want to stay in sequence (tracks 19–35). This entry point gives students the broadest range of options for finding and developing topics—and often, even when they enter the classroom with a topic in mind, they find that it changes as

they go through the Guidelines. For this reason, advance to track 25 only if you are sure that there is no flexibility in the choice of topics or if students are convinced they have ideas worth pursuing and don't want to search for new ones.

Track 19

Find a way to get comfortable. Shake out your hands, stretch your body, put your feet on the floor, and begin to notice what is going on within you. If you are holding a pen, please put it down. If you're ready to type, please take your hands off the keyboard. If you're comfortable doing so, close your eyes. If you have classmates near you, trust that they are also closing their eyes. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, then look down or away from any distractions and attempt to create your own private space wherever you are—knowing that you will just sit quietly for a minute or two. As you breathe, I am going to ask you to focus your attention on different parts of your body. This is the first step as you begin your journey into writing.

Now, for some of you, these breathing instructions may sound like those used in classes on yoga or meditation. But, while the purpose of those practices is to assist you in letting go of your thoughts, here, you want to hold onto them. So, if you are an experienced meditator, see if you can follow my instructions in a way that allows you to remain focused on both your body *and* your mind; our purpose is to have both here at once: to establish a living connection between them.

Now, with your eyes closed, focus on your breathing. As you inhale, see if you can let your breath reach down into your feet. If your legs are crossed, please uncross them. As you exhale, notice if you can sense your feet on the floor. Inhale again. See if you can notice the air going in and as you exhale, see if you can bring your attention from your feet up through your lower legs to your knees. See if you can sense your knees and your thighs. As you inhale again,



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take a deep breath into your stomach, and as you exhale, see if you can feel yourself sitting . . . right there on that chair. How does it feel to sit quietly, paying attention to your body? Notice how you are sitting, how your body meets the chair, how you are supported.

Now, inhale again, and direct attention to your lower back. And as you exhale, let go of any tension you might feel or any discomfort. Again, take a deep breath, inhale and direct attention to your hands, your wrists, your elbows, and your lower arms. Shake out your hands if you'd like and as you exhale see if you can get your upper body comfortable. Breathe quietly, inhale again, direct attention to your shoulders, your upper back, and your neck; you might want to roll your shoulders or to twist your neck from side to side. As you exhale, let go of any tension in the upper part of your body. Inhale again and this time bring attention to your face, to your jaw muscles, to your cheeks, to your eyes (which I hope are closed), and to your forehead. Again, if you experience any discomfort or tension, see if you can breathe into it and let go.

And now, just sit quietly inhaling and exhaling and know that you are going to spend some time thinking and writing; you are going to spend some time listening to yourself by paying attention to your ideas as they emerge. You are, in fact, going on a writing journey. It may turn into a journey of discovery. And as we go through the process, I will remind you, from time to time, to return to this quiet place.****

Time: One minute of silence/No writing

Time estimates are based on a class period of sixty minutes. If you follow the suggestions, you will have about three minutes at the end of class to discuss the process. If you have less than sixty minutes available, you will need to shorten the time devoted to writing; if you have more than sixty minutes, you can increase it proportionally.

Track 20

++++In a minute I'm going to ask you two questions that you repeat silently to yourself. When you hear yourself answering, you make a list. Don't delve into anything on the list. Just keep asking and compiling as if you are making an inventory. Begin now by asking yourself, "How am I right now? Is there anything in the way of my writing today?" Jot down whatever comes. When you have finished, draw a line under this list.****

Time: One minute. Advance now to track 25 if students already have topics they are committed to; stay in sequence if they want to discover topics to write about.

Track 21

++++Now, you are going to create a list of possible topics for writing. Inhale deeply and relax. With your eyes closed, ask yourself, "What's on my mind? Is there a topic or issue I've been thinking about lately?" When you hear yourself answering, open your eyes and make a list.****

Time: One minute

Track 22

++++Now, ask yourself, "What else am I thinking about? Does a particular person or place or image come to mind? Are there memories or situations that strike me as interesting or compelling?" If so, jot these down. If you came here with a topic you know you want to explore, make sure you also add that to the list.****

Time: One minute

Track 23

++++Now that you have a list, ask yourself, one more time, as if you are taking a general inventory, "Is there anything I'm overlooking, maybe even a word I like, a color that intrigues me, a line from a song, an object, an event, some-



thing I've read or seen, something else in the back of my mind or the corner of my heart—an image or a dream—a personal experience or a project I might at some time want to write about that I can add to this list?" ****

Time: Two minutes

Track 24

++++Now, you may have one idea or a long list of items. Look over this list and ask yourself, "Which one of the items or topics draws my attention right now? Which one could I begin to write about even if I'm not certain where it will lead? Is there one that has more energy than the others, that says, 'Me, choose me'?" If so, mark it in some way. If nothing stands out, choose one item or idea you'd be willing to take further.****

Time: One minute. A nice moment to watch as students focus in on a topic that speaks to them.

Track 25

++++Write the topic, issue, item, or question you have chosen to work on at the top of a clean page. Take a deep breath, close your eyes, inhale, relax, exhale, and settle comfortably into your chair. If you think about it, you already know a great deal about this particular topic or question. In a minute, I'm going to ask you to jot down your associations or the things you already know, the things that come most immediately to mind. The idea here is to welcome each bit without getting too caught up in the details. Just note down the parts as if you're making a map or surveying the territory covered by this topic. So now, ask yourself, "What are all the parts I already know about this? Which bits and pieces come to mind? Which people, books, events, or questions are connected to this issue?" When you hear yourself answering, open your eyes and jot down whatever comes.****

Time: Five minutes

Track 26

++++At this point, I'm going to interrupt you and ask you to set aside everything you've just written. I want you to take a fresh look at the topic or issue, to grab a hold of the whole topic—not the bits and pieces—and see if you can connect the topic to your felt sense. Stop writing for a minute, close your eyes, and imagine that the whole topic is right here with you. Maybe you can imagine holding the whole topic in the palm of your hand. Or maybe the whole of this topic is so large that it is floating somewhere above you or sitting next to you. But wherever it is, it's a whole. So now, breathe deeply, repeat the topic to yourself, and see if you can contact a direct bodily sense of just where this topic lives in you. Go to that place where you just might sense the edge of this issue or the puzzle of it and stay there, without writing, for a minute or two.****

Time: One minute of silence. If you have more than sixty minutes, you can pause the CD for another minute and give students more time to focus their attention on their bodies or on what is *not yet said* about their topics or issues.

In order for students to contact a felt sense of the whole topic, they have to take some time to sense into their bodies. This is a small inner move that only happens if people are quietly attentive to themselves for a minute or longer. It is here that they are looking to contact that puzzling or murky edge of their thoughts.

Track 27

++++Now, I am going to ask one question in three different ways. As I do, I want you to stay in touch with the physical place you have just contacted, and to linger there, without writing, as you ask these questions to yourself. With your eyes still closed, ask yourself, "What makes this topic or issue important to me? What draws me to this topic? What's the heart of it?"



Ten seconds of silence on the CD.

If you have more than sixty minutes, this is also a good place to pause for a minute or two.

See if a word, a phrase, or an image arises from your felt sense of this topic or issue. . . . When you are ready, write down whatever is here for you.****

Time: Five minutes

Track 28

++++Let the writing go now wherever it wants to go. Take whatever you've written and ask yourself, "What's this really all about?" And keep writing. But pause occasionally to see if you're on the right track. Ask yourself, "Is this right? Am I getting closer?" See if you can experience the inner shift that tells you, "Yeah, these words feel right," and then continue writing. If, for any reason, you are unable to write right now, sit quietly and wait for the next set of questions.****

Time: Five minutes

Track 29

++++Now, ask yourself, "What, if anything, makes this topic or issue hard for me? What's the crux here? Or, what, if anything, is difficult about this?" Pause and see if a word or a phrase or an image comes to you that captures the difficulty or the hardness in a fresh way. Write whatever comes.****

Time: Five minutes

Track 30

++++You can continue along now writing what comes to you. If you find yourself stopping, you can ask, "What's missing? What haven't I said yet?" And again, look to your felt sense for a word or an image.****

Time: Four minutes

Track 31

++++Now, ask yourself, “Where is this leading? What’s the point I’m trying to make?” Again, write down whatever comes.****

Time: Two minutes

Track 32

++++Ask yourself, “Does this feel complete?” Look to your sense of it all, how it feels to you in a bodily way as you try to answer. If your answer is “Yeah, this feels complete,” ask yourself, “How do I know that?” Write about where in your body you found this answer. If your answer is “No, this is not complete,” pause, and ask yourself, one more time, “What’s missing? What might I need to write or to do to complete this, at least for now?”****

Time: One minute

Track 33

++++By now, you may have from one to several pages that can serve as the basis for a piece of writing. So it is time to consider what form these ideas might take. You want to see if what you have written so far suggests a shape or a genre or a point of view to you. Ask yourself, “What form would work best for what I’m trying to say? Is this an essay? A story? A poem? Is it an argument? Or a personal narrative? Could it be a series of letters? An editorial? Or something else?”

And also ask yourself, “Who’s talking here? Whose point of view is emerging? Might I use or invent a different point of view? If it’s a story, might someone else serve as narrator? What would happen then?” Ask yourself, “Can I hear a possible first line? Can I see a new possibility or a new shape for this piece?”

If you have time now, start drafting your piece while these ideas are fresh in your mind. If you don’t have time,



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jot down key words and phrases and some possible directions your piece might take so you have a place to begin if you choose to shape this work into a fuller draft.****

Time: Two minutes for jotting notes or longer if students have time to begin drafting.

In a two- or three-hour workshop, students can seek quiet places and begin composing their drafts. When they return, they should listen to the next track (34) and reflect, in writing, either now or within a few days, on the process.

Track 34

++++This is the last set of questions. They ask you to reflect on your experience with the Guidelines. To do so, you need to review your work from the beginning of the process until now—starting with your initial list. You can do this in one of two ways. You can do it now using the questions on this track. Or you can wait a few days or a week and use the questions on track 35. If you have time now, look over what you have written and record your reflections. You want to describe how you experienced the process without necessarily describing what you wrote about. You can begin by asking, “What was this process like for me?” And then, write about what happened from the beginning of the Guidelines until now.****

Time: Five minutes

Track 35

Welcome back. If you’re tuning in here, you completed the Guidelines a few days or a week ago and you’re ready now to go back to your work and think about what you want to do with it and what the process was like for you. So, now, read through what you have written and describe what you recall about your writing process while doing the Guidelines. You can begin by asking yourself, “Where did I start? Where did I end up? And what, if anything, did I discover

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during the Guidelines?” After that, you can write about what has happened since you did this writing. You might ask, “Do I still feel the way I felt when I was writing? Has anything changed since I wrote? Do I remember writing all these words or do they seem surprising or unfamiliar to me? What is it like for me to read this now? And what do I see myself doing with this work? In other words, since doing the Guidelines, where have I gone and where does the writing seem to be going?”****

Time: Ten minutes



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For Individual Use/Minimum Time Necessary: Forty minutes/Writers working individually set their own pace/(Tracks 36–51)

Track 36

If you're beginning here, you have a copy of the CD and are working on your own. As a result, you'll be able to set your own pace and spend as much time as you like on each question. At a minimum, you'll need forty minutes to complete the Guidelines, but clearly the more time you can devote to writing, the more fully you will be able to explore and develop your ideas.

The way this process works is that at the beginning of each track, I'll give some instructions. Then, I'll ask a series of questions. Your task is to repeat each question silently to yourself. When you notice yourself responding, you jot down whatever comes. When you hear this sound, ****, it is the signal for you to PAUSE the CD and write. When you have finished jotting down your responses, you advance to the next track. You repeat this process until you have completed responding to all the questions. Be sure to



hit the PAUSE button—not the STOP button—or you might find yourself back at the beginning of the track. The process will likely be most effective if you can work in a place that is quiet and free of distractions. When you are ready to begin, advance to the next track.

Track 37

Find a way to get comfortable. Shake out your hands, stretch your body, put your feet on the floor, and begin to notice what is going on within you. If you're holding a pen, please put it down. If you're ready to type, please take your hands off the keyboard. If you're comfortable doing so, close your eyes. If you prefer to keep your eyes open, then look down or away from any distractions and attempt to create your own private space wherever you are—knowing that you will just sit quietly for a minute or two. As you breathe, I'm going to ask you to focus your attention on different parts of your body. This is the first step as you begin your journey into writing.

Now, these breathing instructions may sound like those used in classes on yoga or meditation. But while the purpose of those practices is to assist you in letting go of your thoughts, here you want to hold onto them. So if you are an experienced meditator, see if you can follow my instructions in a way that allows you to remain focused on both your body *and* your mind; our purpose is to have both here at once: to establish a living connection between them.

Now, with your eyes closed, focus on your breathing. As you inhale, see if you can let your breath reach down into your feet. If your legs are crossed, please uncross them. As you exhale, notice if you can sense your feet on the floor. Inhale again. See if you can notice the air going in and as you exhale, see if you can bring your attention from your feet up through your lower legs to your knees. See if you can sense your knees and your thighs. As you inhale again, take a deep breath into your stomach, and as you exhale,



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see if you can feel yourself sitting . . . right there on that chair. How does it feel to sit quietly, paying attention to your body? Notice how you are sitting, how your body meets the chair, how you are supported.

Now, inhale again, and direct your attention to your lower back. And as you exhale, let go of any tension you might feel or any discomfort. Again, take a deep breath, inhale and direct attention to your hands, your wrists, your elbows, and your lower arms. Shake out your hands if you'd like and as you exhale see if you can get your upper body comfortable. Breathe quietly, inhale again, direct attention to your shoulders, your upper back, and your neck; you might want to roll your shoulders or to twist your neck from side to side. As you exhale, let go of any tension in the upper part of your body. Inhale again and this time bring attention to your face, to your jaw muscles, to your cheeks, to your eyes (which I hope are closed), and to your forehead. Again, if you experience any discomfort or tension, see if you can breathe into it and let go.

And now, just sit quietly inhaling and exhaling and know you are going to spend some time thinking and writing, that you will be listening to yourself and paying attention to your ideas as they emerge. When you feel settled and ready to write, you can move on. If you are looking for a topic or you are not sure what you want to write about, advance to the next track; if you are committed to a specific topic and you don't want to change it, advance to track 42. As we go through the process, I will remind you, from time to time, to return to this quiet place. ****

Track 38

Now, you are going to create a list of possible topics for writing. Inhale deeply and relax. With your eyes closed, ask yourself, "How am I right now? What's on my mind?" When you hear yourself answering, open your eyes and make a list. ****



Track 39

Now, ask yourself, “What else is on my mind? Is there anything I’ve been thinking about lately or a topic I’m interested in that I might want to write about? Does a particular person or place or image come to mind? Are there memories or situations that strike me as interesting or compelling?” If so, jot these down.****

Track 40

Now that you have a list, ask yourself, one more time, as if you are taking a general inventory, “Is there anything I’m overlooking, maybe even a word I like, a color that intrigues me, a line from a song, an object, an event, something I’ve read or seen or overheard, something else in the back of my mind or the corner of my heart—an image or a dream—a question or a project I might at some time want to write about that I can add to this list? It can be large or small, seemingly insignificant or of major importance, but is there anything else I’m wondering about that might be the starting place for a piece of writing?”****

Track 41

Now, you may have one definite idea or a long list of items. Look over this list and ask yourself, “Which one of the items or topics draws my attention right now? Which one could I begin to write about even if I’m not certain where it will lead? Is there one that has more energy or that says, ‘Me, choose me?’” If so, mark it in some way. If nothing stands out, choose one item or idea you’d be willing to take further.****

Track 42

Write the topic, issue, item, or question you have chosen to work on at the top of a clean page. Take a deep breath, close your eyes, inhale, relax, exhale, and settle comfortably into your chair. If you think about it, you already



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know a great deal about this particular topic or issue or item. In a minute, I'm going to ask you to jot down your associations or the things you already know, the things that come most immediately to mind. The idea here is to welcome each bit without getting too caught up in the details. Just note down the parts, as if you're making a map or surveying the territory covered by this topic. So now, ask yourself, "What are all the parts I already know about this? Which bits and pieces come to mind? Which people, books, events, or questions are connected to this issue?" When you hear yourself answering, open your eyes and jot down whatever comes.****

Track 43

At this point, I'm going to interrupt you and ask you to set aside everything you've just written. I want you to take a fresh look at the topic or issue, to grab a hold of the whole topic—not the bits and pieces—and see if you can connect the topic to your felt sense. Stop writing for a minute, close your eyes, and imagine that the whole topic is right here with you. Maybe you can imagine holding the whole topic in the palm of your hand. Or maybe the whole of this topic is so large that it is floating somewhere above you or sitting next to you. But wherever it is, it's a whole. So now, pause for a moment, breathe deeply, repeat the topic to yourself, and without writing, see if you can contact a direct bodily sense of what the whole of this topic evokes in you. Go to that place where you might just sense the edge of this issue and stay there for a minute or two before you advance to the next track.****

Track 44

Now, I am going to ask one question in three different ways. As I do, I want you to stay in touch with the physical place you have just contacted and to linger there as you ask



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these questions to yourself. With your eyes still closed, ask yourself, “What makes this topic or issue important to me? What draws me to this topic? What’s the heart of it?”

Five second pause on the CD

See if a word, phrase, or image arises from your felt sense of the topic or issue. . . . When you are ready, write down whatever is here for you.****

Track 45

Let the writing go now wherever it wants to go. Take whatever you’ve just written and ask yourself, “What’s this really all about?” And keep writing. But pause occasionally to see if you are on the right track. Ask yourself, “Is this right? Am I getting closer?” See if you can experience the inner shift that tells you, “Yeah, these words feel right,” and then continue writing.****

Track 46

Now, ask yourself, “What, if anything, makes this topic or issue hard for me? What’s the crux here?” Or, “What, if anything, is difficult about this?” Pause and see if a word or a phrase or an image comes to you that captures the difficulty or the hardness in a fresh way. Write whatever comes.****

Track 47

You can continue along now writing what comes to you. When you find yourself stopping, ask, “What’s missing? What haven’t I said yet?” And again, look to your felt sense for a word or an image.****

Track 48

Now, ask yourself, “Where is this leading? What’s the point I’m trying to make?” Again, write down whatever comes.****

Track 49

Ask yourself, “Does this feel complete?” Look to your sense of it all, how it feels to you in a bodily way as you try to answer. If your answer is “Yes, this is complete,” ask yourself, “How do I know that?” Write about where in your body you found this answer. If your answer is “No, this is not complete,” pause, and ask yourself, one more time, “What’s missing? What might I need to write or to do to complete this, at least for now?”****

Track 50

By now, you may have from one to several pages that can serve as the basis for a piece of writing. So it is time to consider what form these ideas might take. You want to see if what you have written so far suggests a shape or a genre or a point of view to you. Ask yourself, “What form would work best for what I’m trying to say? Is this an essay? A story? A poem? Is it an argument? Or a personal narrative? Could it be a series of letters? An editorial? Or something else?”

And also ask yourself, “Who’s talking here? Whose point of view is emerging? Might I use or invent a different point of view? If it’s a story, might someone else serve as narrator? What would happen then?” Ask yourself, “Can I hear a possible first line? Can I see a new possibility or a new shape for this piece?”

If you have time now, start drafting your piece while these ideas are fresh in your mind. If you don’t have time, jot down key words and phrases and some possible directions your piece might take so you have a place to begin if you choose to shape this work into a fuller draft.****

Track 51

This is the last set of questions. They invite you to reflect on your experience with the Guidelines. To do so, you need to review what you have done from the beginning of the process until now—starting with your initial list. You



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want to describe how you experienced the process without necessarily describing what you wrote about. It is useful to share your observations about the process with others who know the Guidelines. And it is also useful to keep a record for yourself on how you are developing your own facility as a writer. You can begin by asking, “What was this process like for me?” And then, write about what happened from the beginning until now.****

Conclusion: For More Information

Time: Two Minutes

Track 52

Here, I provide some history about the Guidelines and where you can go to find out more about felt sense. My work on felt sense is an outgrowth of the work of Eugene Gendlin, a philosopher from the University of Chicago. Gendlin coined the term *felt sense* in the 1960s and first wrote about it in his book, *Focusing* (1981), which has been translated into many languages and is available in bookstores and online. Gendlin has also created a website where visitors can have access to a worldwide network of people who use felt sense in their lives and work. Go to www.focusing.org to learn more about this network and to read more about Gendlin’s work. My book, *Felt Sense* (2004) can be bought along with this CD. It is written for people interested in understanding felt sense from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. It can be located at the Heinemann/Boynton Cook website at www.heinemann.com.

Finally, I thank you for letting me accompany you on your journey into writing. I hope I’ve been of some assistance to you and that the Guidelines will become a tool you can call on and also adapt in whatever way fits for you as you continue to write and to explore your writing process.



Chapter Three

Embodied Knowing

What happens when we reach the edge of our thinking? From where do new thoughts come? How do we go from what we know to what we don't know? Or from what we don't know to what we know?

Felt sense—as a concept and an embodied experience—offers a way to answer these questions. It also takes us one step further. Felt sense shows us, experientially, that human beings can make new sense, can come up with statements, ideas, words, and phrases that speak freshly, compellingly, and provocatively. Given this understanding, felt sense allows us to examine concepts such as language, the body, and situation and to theorize about them in new ways.

In this chapter, my aim is to use the concept of felt sense to enter the realm of theory. I want to suggest an approach to knowing that explicates how language and human beings develop together, an approach that has far-reaching social, philosophical, and political implications. These ideas are derived from a philosophy of experiencing that has been proposed and articulated by Eugene Gendlin. The notions I present here represent my attempt to honor and extend Gendlin's work and to make it accessible to writers and teachers of writing.

Felt Sense and the Creation of Meaning

Let's begin with a symbol that Gendlin uses in his philosophic writing to refer to felt sense. It looks like this:



This symbol stands for a space that is open but not blank.
It also stands for:

- the place in our bodies where we contact a felt sense
- what happens when we contact a felt sense
- the string of words that might, could, and will ultimately fit or fill in the open space when they do come.

The symbol suggests a space that has within it all that is *not yet said*—all that awaits implicitly before words come.

This notion—that within a felt sense lies the implicit—is key. It invites an entirely new way of seeing how meaning develops. But to get there, we need to start here: *That new ideas, or fresh ways of speaking, thinking, and writing will come to us if we pause and wait patiently . . . if we contact a and allow it to open.*

To see this concept in action, Gendlin asks us to imagine a poet in the midst of writing a poem. She has a sense of what is to come . . . but the exact phrasing hasn't come yet. She sits there, rereads, pauses, . . . she rotates her hand in the air. . . . And with this gesture, she implies that something will come but hasn't *yet*.

Notice that in this example, the blank is not yet filled in. It hangs there—a blank on the page and also this wordless space inside the writer. The poet trusts that the words she wants will come in time. When they do, she will recognize them because they will feel right—an internal *click of rightness* will occur in her body. If they don't come, she might choose any old word or a word that is just close enough to keep her going, or she just might wait, preferring to keep the poem unfinished, preferring to trust this pregnant pause.

But whether the poet moves forward or stays put, the point here is to think about what this experience implies about human beings and the creation of meaning. If it is accurate to say that new ideas, or fresh ways of speaking, thinking, and writing will come to us if we *pause* and wait patiently, if we contact a and allow it to open, it

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becomes possible to conclude that one crucial and often ignored source of new thinking is at this edge; that insights, creative answers, new steps—in living and thinking—lie implicitly within the

Felt Sense and the Body

This process of creating new sense, of saying something fresh from all that came before and from all that lives within us, is a bodily one. In other words, knowing is embodied. But bodies—or human beings—do not exist in isolation. We are enmeshed in situations, and both situations and human beings are shot through with language. It is from within this interconnectedness of bodies, language, and situations that a theory of embodied knowing is derived.

According to Gendlin, we know our situations by living in them. In other words, it is our bodies that inform us of what is going on at any given moment. Gendlin writes, “The body implies and comes up with our words and actions. It knows (senses, feels, is . . .) the language and the situation. All day long, it is as a body sense that we know what we do and say, what situation we say it in, and how it makes sense” (1991, 104). In other words, it is not just with our minds or our eyes that we perceive phenomena, but with our living, sensate bodies.

For centuries, however, we have been taught to think otherwise. We have been living within and accepting the false separation between body and mind and between thoughts and feelings. Gendlin explains that our erroneous thinking is deeply rooted in our historical past as a result of false binary thinking:

[An] ancient error was to divide between body and feeling, then again between feeling and thinking. Conceptual forms were held to be the forms of reality, while feeling was merely an emotional reaction from the even lower body. In that way

the body ended up at the bottom, as if it were the least human “part” of us, as if it could be safely given over to the mechanists without our thereby losing feeling and thought. It isn’t so. (1991, 104)

Gendlin argues that our bodies are not merely machines. He wants rather to return the body to its rightful position in the realm of knowing. He wants to show us how the body functions all the time in situations and how it is out of or from our bodily sense of situations that we speak and create. And he wants to argue that it takes all three operating together—body, language, and situation—for human beings to create meaning.

“Body, situation, and language,” he writes, “imply each other, but that means that we cannot do with less than all three. The functions of the human body are not reducible to those of a separated language and a separated situation” (1991, 104).

One way to concretize this idea is to ask how we know what to do in any given situation. Take formal learning in a classroom, for example. Given the complexity of what is happening all the time, how do we know what to say next, what to comment on, what to ignore? If we were asked to explain why we took a particular action, we could very likely provide a reason or two, but it is not likely that we could explain everything. Nonetheless, in living in any situation, we basically know how to proceed, how to make sense, and how to move forward without stopping to think about it.

We know because we have what Gendlin calls “a bodily orienting sense” that “knows” the whole of each situation and, in fact, far more aspects of it than we can ever think or say (2003, vii). It is this bodily orienting sense that we draw on to guide us as we live our lives, usually without realizing it. But once we recognize the way the body functions within situations and with language, we can turn to it often as a source of new knowledge.

Said simply, we are embodied beings; the body is central to knowing and speaking; while our common language creates separations among body, language, and situation, in actuality they function together and always imply next steps, new possibilities in speaking and knowing. In a philosophy of embodied knowing, body, language, and situation are inextricably linked; they are all of a piece. Experientially we only come to know and articulate our understanding of any one through our being fully in each of them together (Gendlin 1992, 201–3).

*What Happens at the Edge? Gendlin's
“Carrying Forward”*

When we contact or enter a , we enter what Gendlin calls “the murky zone.” We often experience being in this zone as uncomfortable. We are in a place of not knowing, a place of confusion or emptiness which can feel overwhelming. At such times, it can seem as if we’ve pushed ourselves to the limit, and, apprehensive or anxious, perplexed or puzzled, we think we have nowhere else to go. We think we’ve already said it all or that we’re only repeating what others have said. We don’t believe there is some fresh new way here.

But wait . . . there it is. . . . It’s just there on the edge of what we know . . . if we pause right there, call up that wordless space, if we stay there and ask, “What’s *this*?” Or, “What does *this* want or need?” If we pay attention to the implicit realm . . . to what is *not yet in words* . . . a palpable presence can be felt and from this presence, language, more often than not, will come.

Gendlin calls this process a “carrying forward.” What was at first a blank or a space, a pure , hanging there, akin to the poet’s hand rotating in the air, has now been spoken or written. What was implicit or implied in the has now been articulated. This articulation now becomes a



part of the knower. And it allows the knower or speaker or writer to live further into the situation in which he or she is enmeshed, to think further into and with whatever idea has come (1997, 22).

Let's take learning, again, as an illustration of how carrying forward can happen in action. Let's assume you are leading a class or a workshop. After a few comments on an issue everyone has been studying, the class falls silent. You aren't sure why. But something has gone wrong. How do you know this? In part, you see it, but if you look, you may also have a felt sense or a of this situation. In most instances, you might ignore the discomfort and just ask a new question or switch topics or move on to another activity. But once you are aware of bodily knowing as a guide, you can also carry the situation forward in a different and often more productive way. You can let your of the situation inform you by turning toward it. You can pause, wait patiently, let your felt sense deepen and ask yourself, "What is going on here? What needs to be said?" If you do, what comes next will come to you from this wider realm of knowing, knowing that is in your body and informed by the situation you are experiencing; what you next say may very likely speak to the dilemma in a way that moves it along.

At this point, it is useful to notice that what comes to us to speak (as in this hypothetical situation) or what we end up writing after we pause, locate, and listen to a may be a new insight or it may be an ordinary idea, expressed freshly; it may be a simple statement of fact or a strong expression of feeling; or it may express an idea that has been lurking around the edges of our consciousness and has finally come to the fore. But whatever it is, if it comes from a felt sense, it is always precise. It is this specific, not another one. The moment of speaking or writing the is a moment when we are speaking uniquely from within ourselves and as such we often experience this moment as enlivening and exciting.

But we also often discover that however accurate our phrasing at the moment, it does not exhaust what is alive and implicit as we move forward. According to Gendlin, this is so because our bodily sense of each situation opens onto a vast implicit knowledge and no one statement or set of statements will ever exhaust what we know.

Gendlin is talking about the multidimensional, fine-grained complexity of situations—or what he calls the *implicit intricacy*: the idea that any situation can be carried further, explicated, understood, thought freshly and newly, by speaking it or thinking it from within the body. And while we can always differentiate or lift out aspects of this knowing, we also always *know more* than we can say at any given moment. This is the inexhaustible richness that comes to us through bodily knowing (Gendlin 1997, 21).

Carrying forward, giving voice to what we sense in the, happens because we are human. It is one primary way that our consciousness works, that the creative process unfolds. Gendlin's focusing questions and my Guidelines for Composing both work because they direct us to this edge where meaning can be made, where ideas unfold naturally, to what is inexhaustibly human in us: our capacity to take whatever is there and to think and develop it further.

Given this understanding, we can now make the following statements:

- We can always think beyond what we currently know by contacting a
- A opens onto all that is implicit in the situation and in the knower.
- Having contacted a, we need to wait patiently, ask an open question, and notice the palpable presence that begins to make itself felt.
- It is from this place or presence that fresh language will come.
- While a specific can *only* be articulated in precise terms, there is always *more* in this realm than we can say.



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- We don't know what comprises this *more* until we pause, ask, and look again.
- Any idea or can, therefore, be taken, articulated, further.
- In the implicit realm, meaning continually evolves and changes.
- There is, then, never a last word in any conversation or in any situation.

These assertions, experientially verifiable, have profound implications for our understanding of the ways we think, know, and create new thinking.

Beyond the Postmodern Impasse

Postmodern theory foregrounds language, making it the center of everything human. This is an invaluable insight and along with advancing notions of play and humor, postmodern theory offers us rich, new ways of thinking and seeing. But postmodernism has also led to several impasses.

First, if we accept that everything exists within the word, then human beings cannot stand outside of language. Instead, we must regard ourselves as signs in a very complex symbol system. Rather than our speaking language, postmodern theorists tell us that language speaks us, or in other words, that we are constructed by language, history, and culture. Language, in this view, becomes a trap in which we are caught. We are led to conclude that everything has already been said. There is nothing new.

Gendlin's philosophy of experiencing refutes the view that nothing new ever emerges by showing the connection between language and the body. According to Gendlin, every time we engage a , every time we go to the edge and pause, we are engaging the *not yet said*. We are, in other words, engaging what surrounds language and ideas but is not yet in words. At this edge, new words,



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new phrasing, new insights can and do come. When they do, we come upon newness: what we may have never thought or said or written before in quite this way. Sometimes it is what no one has ever thought, spoken, or written before.

This is no small feat. Most of us prefer not to go to this edge; many are not even aware that this edge exists. In fact, most people live, speak, and write within the world of the *already said*, within the world of stock phrases and common public knowledge. As a result, our everyday experiences, from listening to the news to making small talk, confirm that we tend to think in set ways. But once we are taught how to engage a *.....*, once we learn how to go to this edge and wait, how to allow words to come from the implicit, we will find freshly emerging possibilities; we will find the newness that postmodern theory denies.

This insight does not deny that human beings are written by culture. It argues that this is not all we are. It argues that we are also creators of culture. The moment of expressing a felt sense from the *.....* is an instance of our speaking uniquely from within ourselves, giving voice to what has been inchoate; and it is this capacity to generate something fresh and new that enables us to take creative leaps, to live further and more expressively into our lives.

Second, deconstructionists have shown that any statement can be refuted by another statement, that any claim can be refuted by a counterclaim, that one idea can cancel another. This insight leads to two different impasses: one is relativism, which asserts that if language statements can always be erased by opposite statements, then there is no truth; the other is nihilism, which asserts that since everything is cancelable, nothing ultimately matters.

A theory of embodied knowing speaks back to both of these claims. In our experiencing, in accessing and speaking from a *.....*, we recognize a kind of bodily rightness; we know when our words originate from felt sense—and when



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they don't. So while there may never be one ultimate truth that all agree on, there is a truth to our experiencing. There is an aptness or a rightness to the language we use to express ourselves. This is, in fact, what genuine expression really means. When we stand in our full experiencing, we know when our formulations carry us forward and when they do not. And far from not mattering, this "getting it said right" matters greatly. It is this saying and carrying forward that allows for new steps; it is this saying and carrying forward that actually builds the world.

Finally, a theory of embodied knowing is also an answer to the fundamentalist view that wants to end the conversation of ideas by claiming irrefutable answers. In a philosophy of experiencing based on felt sense, it becomes clear that any idea can always be taken further; there is never a final answer. If we follow how language operates within us, we discover that any experience can open onto a range of perceptions, ideas, and insights, and that such opening is endless. In other words, language will never exhaust or fully say what it is that is going on. And while this view often leads us to conclude that no one view is ever the full story, it is more accurate to say that the idea of there being a full story—a final telling, a complete version of reality—is itself misguided, even wrong. In a philosophy of embodied knowing, there is no such thing as a full story; instead there is the endless possibility of never-ending stories.

Why Any of This Matters at All

When we start with language, as postmodernists do, we end up in language debates: "There is or there is not only language." "There is a ground on which to stand or there isn't." But in a theory of embodied knowing, we start—and end—with the human being and his or her experience of language and situations.



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What is missing, omitted, overlooked, or forgotten in the postmodern position is the human being, the person—the one who knows and creates, the one in whom language resides. What Gendlin's felt sense offers is an experiential way of understanding and exploring how we, as humans, operate with and in language. It addresses the postmodern dilemma by shifting the relations: in the center is not language alone but the *linguaging* human subject in interaction with others and with culture and history. Central to embodied knowing is the human being who speaks back to and can extend the history and culture in which he or she is embedded, using the given language to make newness.

A theory of embodied knowing claims that to create something new, to say something fresh, to think new thoughts, we cannot overlook the body or pretend it is not there: we have to begin with it. Ultimately, a theory of embodied knowing begins with felt sense and draws from it a theory of experiencing . . . one that says: All knowing is embodied in persons; no knowing happens outside of that; without the body, we know nothing.

This theory has far-reaching implications. It suggests that creativity is inherently human and is, therefore, a human right. It returns the act of saying something new and fresh to all who speak and think. This is perhaps its most enfranchising element. It empowers individuals to speak from within their own experiencing and grants that such speaking has, at its core, a value and a role in shaping what is to come—both in the speaker's life and in the culture in which he or she lives. A human attribute, felt sense anchors a theory of embodied knowing in people, assuring that human beings in interaction with everything around them remain at the center of the meaning-making enterprise.



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