

The Standing Exercises

We stand in line at the grocery store and the bank. Some people stand in food lines and unemployment lines. We stand first thing when we get out of bed, and are happy to flop down at night. We stand back from things, stand up for things. We take a stand. We under-stand. Standing is an outstanding accomplishment.

All of the following poses begin with the idea that standing, taking our stand in the world, is not easy or mindless: it can be one of the most challenging things to do. Think about Bob Marley's "Stand up for your Rights." Listen to "Stand by Me."

Begin an unrhymed poem called "I Understand" and fill in the blanks. What do you stand for? Can you find a funny twist on standing up for things? *Stand up for lemons! They're always in a squeeze.*

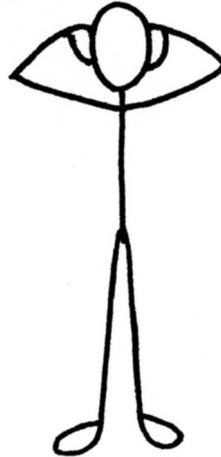
Seriously, when we stand in these stretches, we stand with intention. We are trying to keep head up, neck straight, spine straight, shoulders away from the earlobes and pulled down the back, shoulder blades separated, and other limbs relaxed—including your chin and jaw!

We are trying to find our ground, hold ourselves steady. Anchor. Root. Maintain an erect posture, not a lazy slump forward. Think upwards, onwards. Walk with a book balanced on your head!

Lots going on! Can you relax with all this standing at attention?!

2. The Frame

Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. To write is to observe, to examine. Part of what we need to do is stop and look—to freeze-frame an image in our minds or register an emotional connection in our body. So we begin with looking at ourselves. And out from ourselves.



Breathe

1. Always breathe in and out through your nose.
2. Place your hand close to, but not on, your belly near your navel. Inhale. As you do, gently push your belly toward your hand.
3. Exhale. Pull your belly in. Imagine your navel touching your spine.
4. Do this three times.
5. Return to normal breathing.

Stretch

1. Stand heels together, toes touching, hands at your sides.
2. As you inhale, raise your hands over your head.
3. Bring your hands down so you cup your ears with your hands, elbows out to the sides.
4. Frame your face with your hands.
5. Move your hands to the top of your head. Interlace your fingers
6. Exhale and lower your arms back to your sides.
7. Breathe three times.

Write

OUT OF THE FRAME

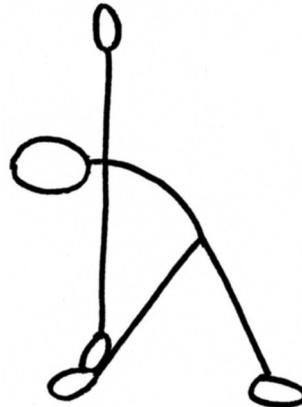
- Everyone gets a painting or picture to look at. Study it, pass it around.
- Write for five minutes.
- These prompts might be useful: What is the story you found in photo or painting? Can it be dramatized? Can you add dialogue to the scene by imagining conversation of the people (if any) in the piece?

Fitness Tip

- Find a poem you like. Frame it!

5. Try Angles

This classic pose symbolizes—and takes—strength. But it is also about feeling balanced and then changing the balance by changing the orientation of the body. Often when we write we have sense of what we are doing, and then inspiration comes and we are thrown off balance, off our original course. It is much easier to go with the flow of the unexpected idea or inspiration if we know that underneath we have ground from which to explore. Go ahead. Tip over. Then give some tips of your own on what works for you when you write.



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Stretch

1. Stand with feet wide apart.
2. Bring arms out straight to the sides, parallel to the floor.
3. Point your right foot to the side at a 90° angle; point your left foot slightly to the right.
4. Shift hips very slightly and, following through the arm first, bend your body to the right, bringing your right hand as close as possible to the outside of the right foot.
5. Bring your left arm up so that it is in a straight line with the right arm.
6. Look up at your left hand.
7. Hold as long as it's comfortable.
8. Come up slowly.
9. Repeat on the other side.

Fitness Tip

- Pass the pen is an old drama game. We use our imaginations: a pen is not a toothbrush, but you guessed it because you imagined and have experienced what it is—you know what brushing teeth looks like because you've done it .

Write

1. PASS THE PEN

Use this exercise as a warm-up.

- Hold up a pen; ask what it is. It's a pen, right?
- Hold it sideways and pretend to brush your teeth with it. Now what is it? Toothbrush.
- Pretend you're sewing with the pen. Now what is it?
- Pass it around the circle: everyone has to use the pen as something else. Everyone can guess.
- Don't worry if everyone can't come up with an idea; just pass on the pen, and if a person thinks of one it can come back.
- Go once around the circle and maybe more, as long as folks have ideas or until you are ready to move on.

Writing is not only seeing something as it is but seeing what it can become. Your body as a triangle. A tree branch as a witch's claw-like hand scratching the sky. Writing is the act of transformation.

2. TRIALOGUE

For five minutes, work on a dialogue piece between three people entitled "The Triangle."

Decide on your tone ahead of time: funny, intense, antagonistic, relaxed. Consider these questions:

- Who are your characters? Name them, give them ages and occupations.
- Where does the trialogue take place?