

Writing Workshop

Fall 2024 –
South Country
Library
7 evening
sessions,
biweekly

Wednesdays

9/4, 9/18, 10/2, 10/16,
10/30, 11/13, 12/4

6:45-8:30 p.m.

- Writing piece due each session.
- Anonymous- no names.
- Limit to one page length
- Type size 12 points or larger.
- Bring enough copies for each participant (16).
- Participants will read aloud their own writing; others will offer comments and constructive criticism.

We begin at 6:45 p.m. sharp! Wednesday, 9/4.

If you must drop out, please call the library Reference Dept. and let us know so someone on the waiting list may have your place 631-286-0818, ext. 1.

Can Writing Be Taught?

There are no general rules for effective writing, only individual examples to help point us in a direction in which we might want to go.

(Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*)

That is what we will do in this workshop: we will read and comment on each other's writing to point out both what the writer has done that makes the piece work, or what he has not done which has left the work lacking. We will read both as readers and as writers, observing **techniques we might adopt-- or be sure to avoid-** as we attempt our own writing.

A piece of writing will be due at the beginning of each session. It should be titled but anonymous- no names. Limit your effort to one page in length - type size no smaller than font 12 points. The piece should be complete in itself - not to be continued. Bring a copy for each member of the group (16) to be collated and distributed for consideration. At our next session, we will read our efforts aloud for discussion and constructive feedback. Remember: the primary purpose in writing is to entertain- that is, to divert, amuse, intrigue, engross, inform - to pry the reader loose from other distractions. So spend some time on your effort. Very seldom does a piece off-the-top-of your head work. Be fair to yourself and your audiences. Rewrite, until you can say: that's the best I can do- for now!

What could you write about for our first meeting?

- Experiment with various forms.
- Write about a personal experience: one that you'll never forget.
- Write that letter that's been seething inside you, the one you've got to get out of your system, one you should never send.
- Write a short essay detailing your success or frustration at writing.
- Write a poem.
- Consider from the back of this page "thoughts worthy of your consideration- if we intend to write." Choose one thought; jot down your reactions - any questions it might provoke, and why your personal experience causes you to agree with it or not. Write about that for your first paper.

Get started on that first piece now. It's due on Wednesday, September 4, 2024. You'll want to have time to rewrite it at least once before then. Rewriting is, after all, what the process is all about.

People who speak perfectly good English start treating it like a foreign language the moment they get within sight of a pen.

Better to write for yourself and have no public than to write for the public and have no self.

The blank page- Still the most challenging environment there is!



Thoughts Worthy of Our Consideration— If We Intend to Write

Language is like a sheet of transparent glass through which every conceivable object in the world seems clearly visible to us. We find it hard to believe that if the sheet were removed, those objects and world would no longer exist in the way that we have come to know them.

Instead of writing about a subject as though in search for a map of its real nature, write about it as a potter handles with tentative fingers a shapeless glob of clay. Something will emerge, but who knows what! The success of the finished pot is not measured in terms of accuracy. What is an accurate pot?

You expect far too much of a first sentence. Think of it as a good country breakfast: simple, but nourishing. Hold the adjectives; just give us a plain subject and verb, and perhaps a wholesome, nonfattening adverb or two.

What matters in the end, perhaps, is how passionately you respond to the life you are writing about, how deeply it taps into your own preoccupations. Good writing is prompted not by the inherent qualities of its subject, but by your unconsciously realized opportunity for self-expression.

The limits of my language determine the limits of my world.

Show only what you have to, tell what you can't avoid, and leave out the rest.

Only the first-person-singular faithfully express what a person can express.

No matter what we see, it is ourselves we report.

An idea doesn't exist apart from the words that express it. Style is not an envelope enclosing a message; the envelope is the

And you say to yourself, finally: there has to be more than just story to make something really good. That something "more" we might say is "style" or "voice" - that which identifies a piece as yours, a piece that no one else could have written.

In his "Ode to a Grecian Urn," Keats tells us, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty- that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Elsewhere we hear "Fiction is truth, truth fiction." - That is something we might ponder - if we intend to write.

For the depths, of what use is language? If I could describe it all, I would be an artist. But if I were an artist, there would be deeper wounds, which (for the moment) I could not describe.

If a painting is good, it will be mostly memory. (Andrew Wyeth)
Memory holds all the baggage that we bring to the task of writing.

Evaluating the work of others

Check the title, the first clue as to what the piece is about. Suggest new title if the original is lacking.

The Mantle Clock

The mantle clock downstairs has resounded its twelfth somber chime. In the distance, the deep muffled howl of a train horn mourned through the haunting stillness of the night. The oppressive gloom was deepened further by the heat and humidity. Leaves on the trees hung suspended as many panting tongues, craving for the solace of a breeze. The moon was a mere squint of a light in the murky sky. Hugging the coolness of the wooden floor, my dog restlessly stretched herself. I, too, waited for sleep to come in this night that seemed to be holding its breath.

The Mantle Clock (A possible rewrite)

It was a hot and humid night. The mantle clock downstairs struck twelve. My dog stretched restlessly at the foot of my bed. A train whistle in the distance. On this night that seemed to be holding its breath, the moon, a mere squint of light in the murky sky, outlined the tree outside my window, and I waited for sleep to come.

Is there anything in the original (left out of the rewrite) that should be included?

Evaluation Choices:

- 6- needs a lot of work
- 7- read aloud; a rewrite might fix it
- 8- a closer look might make it better still
- 9- almost there
- 10- nobody else could have written it

Evaluation # _____

Explain with specific comment: (comment on rhythm, language, other)

As a reader _____

As a writer _____