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On Writing: Writing for the Writer and Non-Writer

Sample Pages



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Course Overview

Whether you love writing or hate writing, this course is for YOU, the teacher as writer and the teacher of writing. Discover, recover and support the writer in you through living the life of a writer. Develop and strengthen your writing skills in this content-based course. Improve your writing skills through practicing elements of good writing. Choose writing masters, such as E.B.White, Don Murray, William Zinsser, Ralph Fletcher and others to support, inspire and co-teach writing with you and your students. Experiment with a variety of genres and styles and writing approaches. Create a writing portfolio to include a writer's notebook, writer's journal, planning processes for writing, drafts and revisions. Produce and publish one piece of writing to share with others. You will find the writer in you is alive and well and responds to nurturing. This content-based course will help you be a better writer and teacher/coach of writing.

This course will give you the opportunity to live the life of a writer. Apply what you learn as a writer in your curriculum and instruction on writing. You will be guided in your work for this course through a text, *On Writing: Writing for the Writer and Non-Write*. Part 1 discusses setting the stage for writing, Part 2 explores the writing process, Part 3 is devoted to creating a writing curriculum using mentor texts, and Part 4 addresses writing to text and test prompts. Journal, collecting ideas in a writer's notebook, explore writing strategies and crafts of writing, revise, and edit. Create a writing portfolio. Authenticate the writing process by using your writing experiences with students as mentor texts. Create a final polished piece of writing to share or publish. Read like a writer. Collect mentor texts to study the craft of writing. Play with writing strategies and practice elements of good writing. Create a curriculum application for your classroom. Discover the magic and power of writing!

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Describe the writing process.
2. Evaluate the necessary conditions for improving writing skills.
3. Apply the writing process in writing and in teaching others.
4. Produce a writing portfolio with one piece published to share with others.
5. Construct a lesson plan or curriculum unit on writing for classroom use.
6. Appraise the value of living the life of a writer, in order to effectively teach writing in the classroom to meet 21st century skills.

*This course meets **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** for K-12 Anchor Standards for Writing Production and Distribution of Writing, Standard 4,5,6 and Range of Writing, Standard 10.*

Teachers taking this course will focus on their grade level or content area expectations of the CCSS and their State Standards, as it is appropriate

Table of Contents

Introduction	12
Part 1 Setting the Stage for Writing	15
Why Write	16
Books on Writing	17
The Tools of the Craft	21
My History as a Writer	22
Creating a Culture for Writing	23
Building a Philosophy of Writing	24
Teaching Composition: A Position Statement	25
The Role of the Teacher	27
Grading Papers	28
Creating a Writing Portfolio	30
The First Step in Writing is Talking	31
Writer's Conference	32
Part 2 The Writing Process	33
The Writing Process	34
Process Writing	36
Writer's Notebook	33
Journal Writing	38
Brainstorm- Getting Ideas	41
Purpose	47
Audience	48
Memories	49
Creating Drafts	50
Choosing a Writing Form	51
Revision	55
Editing	60
Decisions a Writer Makes for Publishing Writing	61
Presentation and Publication	62
Part 3 Creating Writing Curriculum	64
Creating Writing Curriculum: An Exercise	65
Using Authors as Co-Teachers of Writing	68
Imitating Good Writing	69
Mentor Text: Author Study	70
Using 6+1 Trait to Improve Writing	76
Writing Lesson Idea	80
Part 4 Text and Test Prompts	86
Typical Classroom Writing Assignments	87
Strategies for Connecting to Text	94
Reflection Paper	97
Bibliography	99

Introduction

This is a course in writing for the writer and non-writer that live in you. This course will give you an opportunity to experience the writing process and to write like a writer. To be fluent teachers of writing, we must be writers ourselves. We must know the struggle of generating ideas to write about or write to a prompt that doesn't connect with us. We must know the frustration of trying to write what we mean and mean what we write. We must experience what it is like to search for just the right word, to convey the specific meaning we intend. We must know that voice in writing grows from lots of writing, lots of deletes, and tossed papers, till we discover and trust our self-expression. If we don't experience the feat of writing, then we have less than authentic instruction to offer our students. The skills and tools of writing can be taught, but the art of writing is experienced. Be a part of that experience. You, the teacher of writing will be more persuasive as a role model of writing than any curriculum guide. Students, who write, learn from teachers who practice the writing process themselves. Writing can be taught from a curriculum guide, but without active participation in the writing process this kind of teaching produces writing that tends to be minimal and rote. It does not inspire ownership or voice. To become a writer means to practice writing. This course will offer you the time to write and explore your writing process.

For those of you that do not like to write, this course is an opportunity to challenge your beliefs about yourself as a writer. Bring your skepticism along, but be prepared to be surprised and delighted about the therapeutic and creative power of writing. For those who are taking this course as practitioners of writing, this is an opportunity to expand your skills and repertoire, to take it to the next level. Challenge yourself.

You will read a little, this text and a book or articles about writing. But most of your time will be spent writing. You will keep a writer's notebook, journal, use your memories and experiences to write about and read like a writer. You will choose interest areas to write about and create a portfolio of writing drafts. Explore narrative writing, informational writing, persuasive or opinion writing and argument writing. Delve into a variety of writing formats: narrative, expository, persuasive, research modes, or technical writing. Create a collection of drafts in your writing portfolio. You will choose 1 draft to revise and "publish", meaning that at the very least you will send it to me, your audience, but you may consider sending it to a publisher to reach a larger audience. The intent of this course is to live like a writer, discover the writer's voice that lives and breathes inside you. Practice the writing process. Notice how writing creates heightened awareness, stimulates thinking and offers new insights. Enjoy the ride! Be prepared for some surprises.

A middle school teacher reports from her writing experience that this type of writing means:

“...Surrender one type of control for another. I want the writing lessons to be meaningful and relevant for students. This helps students to be able to directly apply the lesson to what they are doing.

I also share my writing. It was the one thing I saw as a real risk. I was afraid of students seeing me as a bad writer and as not having all the answers. All of these structures were new for me but they didn't feel as out of control as they did in the beginning of this class. I see how these structures replace old structures and maybe even offer more control. If students feel they are trusted, they want to prove that they can handle that trust.

I hope to convey to my students that:

- Writing is worthwhile and that the struggles of motivation and management are worth the end result.
- I am a writer and have important things to say.
- Writing is discovery.
- Writing is transformative.
- I will teach how to write, not what to write.
- Empowering my students will lead to better everything including TEST SCORES!”

-H. Patton

The workbook is set up in four parts. Part 1 discusses setting the stage for writing. Part 2 discusses the writing process. Part 3 discusses how to create a writing curriculum using mentor texts, and Part 4 addresses writing to text and test prompts.

Suggested Process

I encourage you to preview the text, Course Requirements before you begin. Make a plan that works for you. .

Collect your materials for keeping a journal, writer's notebook and writing portfolio.

Read the text and do the exercises

Collect and read mentor texts; any print or digital material that you can use as co-teachers of writing for you and your students. Read these texts like a writer. Stop when a passage resonates with you, and you are thinking, “Wow! That’s beautiful. I want to write like that. How did he or she do that?” Study these passages for writer’s craft. Mentor texts are everywhere there is print - fiction, nonfiction, picture books, magazine articles, comic books, newspaper articles, advertisements, sometimes even the fortunes in cookies!

Spend most of your time writing- journal entries, writer’s notebook, drafts, and revision. Choose 1 piece to revise and polish for “publication.”

Choose and read a book or articles on writing to expand your practice. Let your reading inspire your writing. Read a little then use one of the ideas to write a journal entry, an idea in your writer’s notebook, a draft or use one of the ideas you are reading about to revise. Repeat. You may find that your reading resembles reading a recipe book or a craft book rather than a story. Focus on practicing what you are reading in your writing. Give a brief summary of what you’ve read, but mostly share the writing ideas you got from your reading and any writing based on your outside reading.

Based on your experience and reading and writing, create a writing lesson for you or your classroom.

Evaluate your process. Your last task will be to write a Reflection Paper.

This course is for YOU. Tailor designing the course work to meet your needs is invited. Please contact the instructor if you have questions, modifications or ideas that will make this course more meaningful to you.

(Please see Course Requirements)

Part 1

Setting the Stage for Writing

Why Write?

“Why do writer’s write? To inform, to persuade, to entertain, to explain, but most of all to discover what they have to say.”

Learning by Teaching, Donald M. Murray. (1982)

Writers write to understand. Writers write as a way of thinking. Writing is an act of self-expression or communication, sometimes with self, but more often to others. Writing requires a purpose. Writing requires an audience, aka, a reader. What a writer gets from writing is different than what a reader gets from reading. A writer writes best the things he/she cares about. The more a writer writes, the keener their awareness develops. The act of writing requires looking, smelling, tasting, touching and feeling. The more you write, the more acutely your senses become attuned to color, sensation, dialogue, words, ideas for writing, events and what people say and do. It is almost as if you can be both a participant and observer at the same time. It is the magic of writing.

The process of writing and the product of writing are two different things. In the process of writing the writer goes through several different stages to arrive at a final product. The final product is like a punctuation mark for a writer. The joy of writing is in the process. For a reader, however, the final product is the “stuff” that we use as models for teaching writing. Often readers are not aware of the writer’s process and only see the final product. Readers do not see the many rough drafts, the parts deleted and thrown away. Readers do not witness the myriad of decisions a writer makes as they write. Helping students to become aware that the writing process is the same for all writers whether they are beginners or proficient will help them accept the “hard” parts of writing. In the classroom, it is important to create the environment that allows the process of writing to flourish. More time spent on process writing and less on writing for product will ensure that students learn to improve their writing abilities.

Exercise: Why do you write? What do you write? Do a timed, fast-write on this topic and tune into your insights and the process. A timed fast write is usually 5 minutes of non-stop writing, allowing thoughts to come more from the subconscious mind than the thinking mind. Just write!

Mentor text: *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!* Dr. Seus, Jack Prelutsky and Lane Smith. (1998) This is Ted Geisel’s last book that was still on his drafting table when he passed away. Prelutsky and Lane finished the illustrations and final draft. The publisher included some of Geisel’s draft pages, showing the revision process.

Books on Writing

“You GOTTA’ have this one! This is THE writing program!” Teachers look for the best curriculum to teach writing. Most like a structured, day-by-day plan that spells out what to do, what students do and how to assess student progress. I am one of those teachers. I search for the Holy Grail of writing programs: 6 +1™-Traits of Writing, Step-Up-To-Writing, Write Source, Teaching the Qualities of Writing, Units of Study, Lessons that Change Writers. My library evolved from a collection of self-help books to an assortment of writing books, each touting their philosophy, each begging to be the ONE main writing guide. Writing books such as the classics, *Elements of Style*, by E.B. White and William Strunk; *The Art of Readable Writing* by Rudolf Flesch, my go-to writing books by Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*, and Barry Lane’s *Reviser’s Toolbox*, and almost all of Ralph Fletcher’s books on writing, plus writing books by Donald Murray, Don Graves, Lucy Calkins, Georgia Heard and Katie Wood-Ray, Kelly Gallagher, Jeff Armstrong! And I keep adding!! I love them. I use them. I dip into them when I feel insecure or out of ideas and I appreciate what I learn about writing. The bottom line about learning to write is not in reading about writing, but in the act of WRITING! That is the real curriculum. Write, read, re-write, share, write some more, revise, and slowly, slowly, meaning, clarity, and voice emerge. Gather your books and curriculum guides as resources, but most of all write! In this course, you will read a little and write a lot.

With that said, here are some of the mentors and their books that have supported my writing process and the development of this course. Their company awes, inspires, challenges and guides me. I owe them each a great thank you, for their words, wisdom, guidance and repetition. I am learning that the only writing that is original is my “voice”; **how** I say it, not **what** I say. Writing and the process of writing are similar whether you read Ralph Fletcher’s version or William Zinsser. What is different is how each author presents his or her idea of writing. Originality comes in how you interpret these ideas and apply them to your writing practice and the teaching of writing in your classroom.

Ralph Fletcher’s books on writing are easy to read, practical and inspire me to feel like a writer – instantly! My favorite is *Live Writing*, though I enjoy every one of Ralph’s writing books.

The Writer’s Notebook

Live Writing

Breathing In, Breathing Out

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