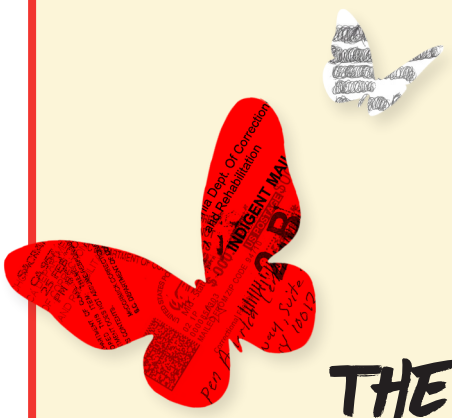

THE Freewrite PROJECT

A Writer's Workshop Curriculum Guide

PEN AMERICA

FACILITATOR GUIDE


PEN
AMERICA

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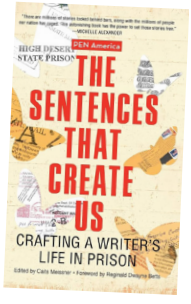
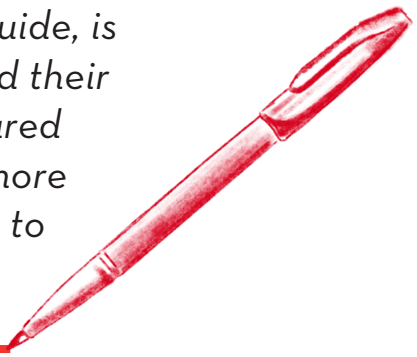
This curriculum was born out of The Freewrite Project, a program generously funded by the Mellon Foundation that leverages PEN America's book, *The Sentences That Create Us: Crafting A Writer's Life in Prison* (Haymarket Books, 2022) to support the self-determination of writers in prison to form incarcerated-led community writing groups.



The Sentences That Create Us, referenced across this guide, is a nearly 350-page road map for incarcerated people and their allies to have a thriving writing life behind bars—and shared beyond the walls—that draws on the unique insights of more than fifty contributors, most themselves justice-involved, to offer advice, inspiration and resources. If you don't have a copy, you'll want one—it is full of useful and inspiring information. You can order one for free from PEN America (if you're incarcerated, that is), by writing to Prison and Justice Writing c/o PEN America 120 Broadway 26th Floor North New York, NY 10271.

Dear Facilitator,

The Sentences That Create Us, *referenced across this guide, is a nearly 350-page road map for incarcerated people and their allies to have a thriving writing life behind bars—and shared beyond the walls—that draws on the unique insights of more than fifty contributors, most themselves justice-involved, to offer advice, inspiration and resources.*



If you don't have a copy, you'll want one—it is full of useful and inspiring information. You can order copies for yourself and your students/workshop participants for free by writing to Prison and Justice Writing c/o PEN America 120 Broadway 26th Floor North New York, NY 10271 or through our online form: https://forms.gle/LLLaKJLvXc1d6LUd7

This is a resource made for writers by writers, designed to offer support and guidance for building a supportive writing community for incarcerated writers. This guide offers suggestions on how to foster spaces inside carceral institutions that can cultivate community, creativity and self-expression.

Learning environments like these are different from those many of us were raised in, where rule-following and rote memorization is valued. Tossing the red pen out the window, instead we emphasize the development of a horizontal writing community that can foster individual and communal learning through creative risk taking, personal growth and collaboration. Creativity is much messier than you may have been led to believe in your previous experiences in formal schooling. We believe in the power of unleashing creative spirit to tell stories that truly matter.

Of course, we are aware that while the imagination runs free as it pleases, the setting you are in is full of rules and regulations. We encourage you to be creative in the application of the materials within these pages. This guide is designed to support you and should be used as it best fits your needs and the limitations or opportunities of the facility you're in. Nothing in this guide is an irrefutable truth. Instead, we invite you to experience the guide as a collection of best practices from writers who have come from the same conditions where you sit, and have made fulfilling livelihoods of their passion for the written word.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE CONTENTS

This guide is divided into:

Section One: Structure
The first offers suggestions for how to structure a workshop. There are two main options which can be modified based on your group's needs and desires. Experiment with one, then try the other! These structures offer a foundation and container for your group's meetings. These are followed by sample pacing guides with timelines and content suggestions week by week for running a workshop for 8-10 weeks, using either of the two structures. We recognize timelines differ and many prison classes are longer than an hour or two. However, many of the components can be combined with things that already work well for you. It's designed to be generative rather than prescriptive.

Section Two: Methods
The second section offers and explains methods that you can use within these structures. Allow us to repeat, there is no one "right" or "better" approach. Consider your journey through the guide as a choose your own adventure, full of ala carte options. Some will gravitate towards methods that other people won't find as productive. For example, some find starting workshops with freewriting time based on prompts generative and useful, while others people prefer privacy for

scratching out first drafts. Whatever methods you choose, we suggest switching them up periodically so that everyone will get a chance to try different techniques that they can add to their personal toolbox for use on their own outside of workshop time. Much of this section is written speaking directly to workshop participants and can be reproduced as references for writers. Alternatively, they can be adapted by you to meet the specific needs of your workshop group.

Each of these sections contains companion pages in *The Sentences that Create Us: Crafting a Writer's Life in Prison* that can serve to clarify and expound on the structures, methods and readings included here. We highly recommend reading the book together with this resource. These connections are marked with the butterfly.

This guide was written by people who know their stuff—but that doesn't mean we know everything. We look forward to hearing from you with suggestions, resources and feedback. And of course, we'll welcome success stories. Writing changed our lives. We never get tired of meeting others who feel just the same.

Write on,
Jen, Annie, Zeke, Sterling,
Suotonye, Moira, Caits and Michele

The Freewrite Curriculum Committee is:

Jennifer Bowen (curriculum writer) spent her formative years in rural West Texas, and her adult years in the Midwest. A writer, arts instructor, editor, and single mother of sons, Jennifer is the Founding Director of the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop (MPWW), which is the largest literary-arts-in corrections organization in the country. She teaches in prisons throughout the state. A Pushcart Prize-winning writer, Jennifer's work appears in *The Sun, Orion, Kenyon Review, The Rumpus, The Iowa Review,* among others. She's the former Nonfiction Editor for *Hunger Mountain* and she also edits creative prose. Jennifer is working on an essay collection about isolation and connection. She now lives in St. Paul.

Annie Buckley (curriculum writer) is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and curator with an emphasis on art and social justice and the founder and director of the Prison Arts Collective, a statewide program dedicated to expanding access to the transformative power of the arts to incarcerated people. Professor Buckley joined San Diego State University as Director of the School of Art + Design in summer 2019 and is thrilled to collaborate with faculty, students, and staff in the School. She began the Prison Arts Collective (PAC) in 2013 and has been awarded over $2 million in prestigious grants and contracts from the California Arts Council, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the National Endowment the Arts for the project. She is the author of over 250 reviews and essays on contemporary art published in Artforum, Art in America, The Huffington Post, and others and she is a contributing editor to Los Angeles Review of Books, where she writes the column "Art Inside" about facilitating art in prisons. She has presented her art and community activism work at national and international conferences including in Ireland and Belgium and her creative practice embraces image, text, and participatory practice.

Zeke Caligiuri (curriculum writer) is a writer and activist from South Minneapolis. His book, *This Is Where I Am: A Memoir* was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award. His prose has been anthologized in "Prison Noir" edited by Joyce Carol Oates and "From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline." He has very strong opinions about criminal and prison justice and the carceral state. Ask him about them.

Sterling Cunio (curriculum writer) is a spoken word poet who transforms adversity into the substance of stanza. Sterling is a 2019-2020 PEN America Writing For Justice Fellow, a 2019 Oregon Literary Arts Fellow and a two-time PEN America Prison Writing Award winner for his essay Going Forward with Gus (2018) and co-authored play The Bucket (2018). Published in The Marshall Project, Sterling's currently a University of Oregon undergrad majoring in crime, law and society. At age 16, Sterling was sentenced to life without parole and has spent twenty-six years in prison where he's devoted himself to hospice volunteering, mentoring younger prisoners, transforming the culture of street crime and building peace. Sterling is a frequent contributor to community-based efforts to raise awareness around issues of mass incarceration, food scarcity, and Restorative Justice.

Suotonye DeWeaver (curriculum writer) is a Black community organizer, literary writer, and journalist who co-founded prisonrenaissance.org while serving a 67 years to life sentence in prison. He participated in the passage of Senate Bills 260, 261, and Proposition 57. His personal essays have been published in Rumpus and Seventh Wave, and his op-eds have been published in the Mercury News and San Francisco Chronicle. His sentence was commuted by Gov. Jerry Brown in December 2017 for his community service, his productivity, and his story of transformation. Suotonye is currently working full-time as a product specialist for Pilot.com while working part-time as a guest lecturer and freelance writer.

Moira Marquis (project lead) is the Senior Manager of The Freewrite Project in PEN America's Prison and Justice Writing department. Marquis has many years of experience teaching writing in both secondary and higher education, as well as leading Asheville Prison Books, and founding Saxapahaw Prison Books. She has a PhD in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Caits Meissner's (editor) poems, comics, essays and curation have appeared in *The Creative Independent, The Rumpus, [PANK], Harper's Bazaar, Adroit, Literary Hub, Split This Rock, Bust Magazine, The Normal School, Hobart,* and *The Guardian,* among others. She spends her days as Director of Prison and Justice Writing at PEN America where she edited *The Sentences That Create Us: Crafting A Writer's Life in Prison* (Haymarket Books, January 2022), of which the Mellon Foundation funded 75,000 copies to reach readers in United States prisons free of charge.

Michele Scott (curriculum writer) is formerly incarcerated having served 30 years on a double Life Without the Possibility of Parole sentence. In December 2018, Michele's sentence was commuted by the California Governor in recognition of her commitment to self-improvement, giving back to the community, and serving as a positive role model. She has published in *Elle Magazine, The Fire Inside, Blue Sky Funders Forum,* and *The Marshall Project*. While in prison, she was involved in peer education, restorative justice, work around victim impact, and spiritual groups. In 2014, she co-founded the first life without parole support group in the women's prison. She is also a passionate gardener and was a key advocate for the establishment of the Insight Garden Project at the California women's prison at Chowchilla. Michele invested in her prison community and learned to seek purpose in helping others.

01

Getting Started

Your group may want to bring already started pieces to your workshop. This is not a requirement, as using freewriting in each session can also serve as a way for group members to generate new writing within the workshop's timeframe.

However, if your group decides to bring pre-written work to the group, remember to keep it short! Your workshop can and should set some limits on the number of pages you can all responsibly respond to each meeting. It can be tempting to allow writers to bring in anything they want help with, especially if this is your first time working together. Do note, there is a law of diminishing returns. The feedback you can offer for 20 pages may be far more considered and helpful than if you read 100. And often, we writers tend to make some of the same mistakes over and over again, and can learn from one workshop how to help other pieces.

It's up to you as a group, of course. If it's helpful to know, a common length for a workshop piece often caps at around 25 pages of prose, comprising no more than 2-3 pieces. A common workshop range might be 10-30 pages. Similarly, it's reasonable to workshop 3-5 poems by a poet at one time. This usually allows for 2-3 participants to be "workshopped" each session, in depth. As always, do what works best for your group.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

There are always people in collectives who are more prolific than others. It is natural in these places to want to be noticed and recognized for your work. Sometimes, though, we would get people who had been working on manuscripts that couldn' help but try to overload everyone else in the collective with their productivity. We had a writer who would go to segregation for a few months at a time. While he was back there he would write entire novels on the backs of state kites, and when he would get out he would start passing around his manuscript, seeking after feedback and validation for what he had given himself to for the time he was in the hole. It would be impossible to workshop this much work, so he had to count on personal readers who were willing to spend the adequate time with it. As a community, we wanted to support those of us that were driven and productive, but we couldn't support such substantial projects as a group. There just wasn't the capacity as a group to workshop such long pieces. It meant other people in the group couldn't get some of the necessary attention for their work and decisions have to be made for how the collective is able to support each other. Our cohort member would get out of prison, and finally publish those manuscripts he had originally written in the hole. It was a communal success for all of us, even though we weren't able to personally support those projects as significantly as the writer would have liked.

– Zeke Caligiuri

02

Workshop Structure

Writer's workshops benefit from predictable structures, practices and methods that set expectations and serve as a container for the task at hand. The container helps people to come prepared, understand when to talk and when to listen, and learn how to give feedback so that others can hear it. The goal is to create a space that is safe enough to share writing, which, as you probably know, can be a very vulnerable act. In this section, we provide two models that have been effective for many writers, whether established or just beginning. We invite you to try a method with your group, reflect on how it worked and didn't work, and from there innovate or change your approach as needed before trying another option.

Round Table Writers' Workshop

OVERVIEW

Whether you sit in a circle or scattered around the classroom, workshop is created simply when we come together as a group to discuss each other's writing. Round Table Workshop is a helpful way of letting the writer know how their work affects others. It's where we learn to give and receive feedback. Workshop offers the group a shared vocabulary, practical tools, and often inspiration. It's where we learn to talk about writing and to know ourselves as writers, critics, and a member of a writing community. No one person is "in charge" of a workshop. Likewise, whatever guidelines your group sets apply equally to all participants.

SHAPE

New writers who join a writing community often tell us they were most nervous about sharing their work with others. These same writers, at the end of the session, often report that sharing turned out to be one of the most rewarding parts of the experience. The aim of workshop is to let the author know how their work is received by readers. In doing that, the hope is that we help the author clarify their own thoughts and intentions about the work. In giving and receiving feedback in workshop, it's wise to remember the words of writer Neil Gaiman, "when people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly how to fix it, they're almost always wrong."

KEY COMPONENTS

Though each group will run workshops differently, here are a few basic guidelines that are helpful to follow. You can use them as they are listed here or you can use these as a starting point to discuss what norms will be helpful for your group:

- When we're in the room together, we're all writers and we support each other.
- The best way we can support each other is to be generous in our praise, generous enough to offer constructive criticism and generous in receiving others' response to our work.
- We try to talk about the way we experienced the work, not the way we'd "fix" it. (Ex: I felt confused by the alligator on the porch in the second paragraph, page 3).
- Refer to the work not the writer. (Narrator instead of John, the mother character instead of John's mom.) People can feel defensive if comments are directed to them as a person, rather than their writing.
- Ask questions of the piece, not the writer. (I'm wondering why the story jumps forward 10 years, instead of, Why did Tom skip a decade?)
- Begin a workshop with positive feedback, then transition to constructive feedback after the writer has heard what's working well. Hearing positive feedback first helps people receive critical feedback receptively. By hearing the aspects

of a piece that work and people relate to or appreciate, a writer can better orient themselves towards addressing those elements of their writing that aren't being understood or are distracting for readers.

- Initiate thoughts from classmates who seem engaged but shy about speaking up.
- Remember the most helpful thing we can do is offer one reader's response to the work. In the end, the piece belongs to the writer.

BEST PRACTICES

Round table writer's workshop builds community through shared experience. Further, writing workshops require vulnerability from respondents and writers, who work together with care and respect. The longer workshop participants work together, the safer it becomes to challenge each other. An added benefit of a longer term commitment: the more people come to know and understand each other across differences of perspective and experience. Finally, the workshop offers the common shared goal of art-making.

The essay "On Building Prison Writing Communities" by Zeke Caligiuri in *The Sentences that Create Us*, beginning on pg. 234, supports further thinking about how to structure groups and cultivate writing communities and can be read as a companion to this overview.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Conflicts can easily arise when in the act of giving and receiving feedback. Sometimes people can get defensive if other people don't understand their writing. Other people can be unintentionally aggressive when talking about another person's work. In order to avoid conflicts, you can use open-ended questions that help reader and writer understand the strengths and limits of a written piece of communication. The list of questions below are models that you can use wholesale or as a basis to create your own questions that aren't confrontational but inquisitive.

- What is the piece about?
- What is the situation and what is the story?
- What stood out to you?
- What sensory details did you experience?
- What did you vividly see, smell, hear, etc.?
- How did the piece make you feel?
- How does the language reflect the mood or message of the piece?
- How might the language interfere with the mood or message of the piece?
- What confused you?
- Where in the piece did you feel engaged?
- Were there places where your mind wandered?
- What's something the writer isn't saying that needs to be said?
- What's hidden in the piece?
- Is there a turn or a "volta?" This is a dramatic shift in the meaning or emotion of the piece? Said differently, it's the place where you often feel your stomach shift. Where we hear the audience murmur surprise or appreciation. Is that here? Where?
- Were there characters that came alive for you? In what scenes? Why?
- What do the characters want? Is the character's "want" driving the story?
- What does the narrator want? What's in the way? Are the obstacles formidable enough? How might they be made more formidable in the next draft?
- Do you relate to the narrator/main character/protagonist?
- Do the characters stay in character?
- Are there any risks: linguistically, emotionally, plotwise?
- Is there a surprise? In plot, in language, in emotional or stylistic risk?
- How does the opening create an "exchange of expectations" between author and reader?

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

When the Stillwater Writer's Collectective began, most of the original participants had all known each other for many years, and thus, we carried such a finely woven fabric of shared experience and prison pathology with us as a group. When we first began workshopping each other's work, most of the people in the group were reluctant to comment, or offer suggestions for revision because we were a community that had been configured out of politics and social compromise. Nobody wanted to upset the terms of that configuration. We were a group that wasn't sure if we would stick together as artists, but knew we would have to still live with each other even if our collective didn't succeed. Those politics didn't help any of us become better writers. It took time, and lots of roundtable workshops for the individuals in the collective to trust others' feedback, and to trust themselves to make suggestions about someone else's work that didn't sabotage or hinder any of the ways people had built identities and purpose for themselves. The result was the culmination of a community of writers who came into an already established community with enough trust in the processes and outcomes of the program to share real organic feedback. The writing got better and the collective got stronger. Sometimes we come to groups like this forgetting that they are meant to breathe life into our art and expression, things that are traditionally stifled by the mechanisms of the institutions.

– *Zeke Caligiuri*

Structure

- Does the piece, as it evolves, meet these expectations?
- Does the beginning need to change?
- How is the memoir an exploration of change for the narrator?
- How might this change be made more clear, more developed?
- Are the scenes rendered in this draft the most important scenes?
- What needs to be dramatized still?
- What is the author trying to do?
- What basic orienting facts might be clarified or developed?
- What questions/urges do you have that the piece does not yet answer?

The chapter "Workshop Solitaire: Using Questions to Strengthen a Story" by J.D. Mathes in *The Sentences that Create Us,* beginning on pg. 283, can help you come up with other questions that are relevant to your writing.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

There are many benefits to shared facilitation workshops, such as collective learning opportunities, facilitation practice and project management skills. Building shared leadership into the workshop offers the chance for each person to participate fully. An added benefit is that it can also help provide workshop stability in the constant flux of prison environments.

In The Restorative Justice writing group, a writing community inside Oregon State Penitentiary, we were subject to the volatility of prison life. Early in our formation we had been authorized to have a workshop with outside community members joining us as audience members in the chapel. The institution had also recently decided to send out all the minimum custody prisoners, and the day of our event, the workshop's sole facilitator was transferred out. Without a copy of his notes, event outlines or prepared handout materials, we freestyled our way through the day with our guests, and then, while reflecting on the experience, we each decided a new way to move forward: we would share responsibility in a way that would teach each person how to facilitate every aspect of the workshop.

The decision to break up each element of the workshop into rotating responsibilities would prove to benefit us many times over the years, as we were all prepared to step into any role that was needed in the event of illness, transfers or another unforeseen event that required adaptation.

– Sterling Cunio

Each One, Teach One

OVERVIEW

Another method to structure writing groups is "each one, teach one." While also a shared leadership model, "each one, teach one" offers more clearly defined group roles that rotate in each session of the workshop. For example, one person from the group will guide the group through a main exercise on one method, genre or other activity for a period of time during at least one workshop session, passing the title to another group member in the next session. This and other leadership roles such as preparing the opening or closing, leading freewriting or feedback sessions trades hands throughout the workshop series, ensuring that every participant has a chance to facilitate the role at least once, and perhaps more depending on how often the group meets, and how many people are in the group.

SHAPE

What this looks like in action and process can vary, according to the group's needs. A common opening to the workshop experience might begin with an intentional effort to honor the space and help people relax. Some open with a question everyone answers in brief, a meditation or a short reading one member of the group brings to share as inspiration. After the opening, the person teaching for the day could offer a focus on anything: poetry, freewriting, revision techniques or publishing advice, to name a few options. After the mini-lesson, the group might choose to read aloud their work to share, or engage in freewriting with the assistance of a prompt. Remember, the ingredients are yours to build your workshop recipe with, starting with the base commitment to rotation of facilitation.

KEY COMPONENTS

Below is a sample of activities that could potentially take place in a one and a half hour workshop using "each one, teach one:"

1. **Opening (10-minutes) -** Participant A
2. **Prompt and Freewrite (15-minutes) -** Participant B creates/finds prompt and keeps time. Encourages people to finish at the time
3. **Freewriting Share Out (10 minutes) -** Participant B leads sharing of freewriting
4. **Mini-Lesson (30 minutes) -** Participant C delivers the weekly content drawn from The Sentences That Create Us, methods outlined in this curriculum or other sources. Offers members skills and takeaway methods to employ in their writing.
5. **Train the Trainers (15 minutes) -** Participant D - Since roles rotate in this model, this role is to assign and select who will lead each component in the next meeting, and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge–what each role does–within the group. For example, the person who led the freewriting week 1 will tell the person leading the freewriting in week 2 how to prepare for the role and explain their responsibilities for the next workshop.
6. **Review and Close (10 minutes)** - Participant E leads a review of the material. Lessons discussed are summarized and assignments for next group are issued.

BEST PRACTICES

This method demands fully collaborative and open planning before sitting down to workshop. Groups should dedicate time specifically to meet and decide what each group member wants to lead a mini-lesson on. At the minimum, each group should decide on an agenda to try for the first meeting, with one person responsible for leading each portion of the workshop. After the first workshop, the group can assess what the group would like to change and modify for future workshops. While specific topics will change each week, having a regular pattern can help participants feel comfortable, so it is recommended that workshops adopt a predictable format.

TROUBLESHOOTING

While it can be tempting to simply let people choose a week to present, without committing to a specific topic this can make this method less useful. Without a clear goal for mini-lessons, the group runs the risk of going all over the place and not actually offering participants a deliverable. Before people choose a week to lead a mini-lesson, it is advised that the group peruse the Methods section of this guide and pick one method that resonates with them. This is only if there is not a topic a person is clearly well-versed in and comes to the group already prepared to teach to others.

The group will also need to establish a clear method for determining who facilitates what and when. This process should be developed early and kept throughout the project so as to not waste time in the sessions on trying to figure out who's doing what. Keep in mind that the rules are always flexible. It is helpful to alternate and give everyone a chance to facilitate, but it is also helpful to honor each person's process to determine when they feel ready. An option for someone who is quite nervous to facilitate might be to support someone else in facilitating first, like an assistant or a shadow role, to get a sense for how it feels in action.

Lastly, it's mighty helpful to have an official timekeeper. This person helps the group stay on track and prevents lessons from taking over the entire workshop. Mini-lessons should always comprise just a portion of the workshop time, but without a mindful eye on the watch, exercises can easily risk time-creep. The timekeeper should, like all the roles, rotate for equity.

While your workshop is yours and can be structured any way the workshop participants choose, the sample topics and content, divided by weeks below may be helpful for some. We offer these suggestions for topics and content in order to assist groups who may feel uncertain about how to proceed or, to provoke thought or consideration of alternatives. Feel free to innovate, mix and match and experiment!

Sample Pacing Guide

For A Weekly 8-Week Long

WORKSHOP:
Group Determines Structure (8 sessions)

OVERVIEW

Connect with folks who want to write. That is the first thing. It is helpful, too, if they want to talk about writing. But most of all, the simple shared goal of writing can guide the formation of the group. Start with those you know and ask them to spread the word. Allow some space around the formation of the group. Those who are meant to be there will find their way. As your workshop opens the door and thinking to writing and community, the group will become the hub and connector. The titles and different parts of this particular eight-week session are inspired by water and are meant as a gentle reminder that this is a creative space. As difficult as writing can be, and as much as it requires commitment and discipline, it is also a practice where a sense of flow and ease can support you.

Session One: Flow - Why Are We Here?

1. Introductions. Allow space for each person to introduce themselves. On this first day, it should be more than a check-in or a quick hello. Allow time to share and listen, to get to know one another and who you will be collaborating with in this space. Questions to frame an introduction:

- What is your name and why do you like to write?
- What type of writing do you enjoy? What do you read?
- What brought you to this space? What do you hope to accomplish?

For this first day, this will take about half of the session (30 mins). Moving forward, this can be a brief introduction and members can take turns posing a question each day (5 mins).

2. Community Agreements. Take time to consider how you want to hold space together. This can begin as a dialogue and culminate in shared agreements. If possible, take notes on the discussion.

Some questions to consider for the group dialogue are:

- What does it look like when people are listening to and respecting one another? What does it feel like to be in a space where that is happening?
- How can we create that space together? What are some of the specific things people do to demonstrate authentic listening? How does it feel?
- We will be sharing thoughts and writing with one another. If there is a day that someone doesn't want to share, can we offer a pass option?

From here, use the information from the dialogue to frame agreements for your group. If there are lots of ideas, try to organize them so that similar ones can come together to make one agreement. It helps to limit these to 4-6 important agreements that cover the general approach rather than many specifics ones.

Once you have the agreements, read them again together. Give everyone time to review. Aim for consensus. If someone feels strongly that something is missing, listen and see how that might fit into the list. If there are lots and lots of agreements, talk about how you can shift these.

If possible, write your agreements on a large paper to share when you meet. Alternatively, you can write them in your own book or journal. If nothing else, you can keep them in mind and review each session. Give yourselves freedom to adjust and revise as needed throughout the process.

3. Next Steps. Talk about what you do next session. If following this guide, ask everyone to review the two structures presented: Roundtable and Each One, Teach One. Also, everyone should aim to bring a short piece of writing of less than a page.

Session Two: By The Shore

1. Introduction. Use any of the icebreakers in this curriculum, or one of your own design, for each member to check in and say hello.

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines for a group refresher on the co-created shared agreements and revise these as needed based on discussion and feedback.

3. Ask one person to be the timekeeper. That way, everyone can ensure that the group stays focused, and each reader gets the same amount of time.

4. Focus of the Day: Choosing a Format. Review the two structures, Roundtable or Each One, Teach One, presented in this curriculum. Hopefully everyone has had a chance to review. One person can sum up each one for all to hear. Discuss the benefits and challenges of each. Determine which the group would like to follow. If a decision can't be reached, try one today and one the next time. This can lead to a decision or you can continue to alternate. In this sample pacing guide, we suggest you try the roundtable first, and then each one, teach one the following week, after which the group can determine how to proceed. Having one approach as the focus will help structure the day and allow you to use your time for writing and reflection rather than discussing how to proceed.

5. Main Session: Roundtable Workshop. Check in to see who would like to share the short piece of writing they brought. Since it was meant to be short (less than a page), 2-3 people can read. As each person shares, everyone listens. As they finish, the reader can ask for input. Try sharing in this order:

- What is working, or what did you enjoy?
- Questions — what are things that made you unsure when reading?
- Offer ideas or suggestions (see feedback section of this curriculum).

6. Closing. Do a quick wrap up, inviting each group member to share one word to express how they are feeling or their reflection of the day.

7. Next Steps. Bring a short piece of writing. If people aren't working on short writing, or don't want to share current work, they can use the many prompts in this guide for ideas for new pieces of short writing. In order to try out the Each One, Teach One method, two members can each volunteer to teach one of the methods in this curriculum. They can review them, practice sharing them, and bring ideas for the group to try.

Session Three: Feeling the Water

1. Introduction. Ask each member to share one word about how they are feeling today, or their hope for the workshop today. (Or choose another brief opener.)

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper. These processes should become more swift as the expectation is set in habit.

3. Focus of the Day: Each One, Teach One.

- One of the two members that prepped a method to teach can go first.
- As the person shares the method, aim for everyone to be involved. So rather than just reading it or explaining what it is, ask questions. Invite members to share examples. Make it a space where questions are welcome.
- Practice the method together.
- From here, repeat that process with the second person leading a new method.

4. Closing. Invite members to share how they want to proceed with the following sessions. Which model, or combination of the two, works for the group?

5. Next Steps. Bring a short piece of writing. If people aren't working on short writing, or don't want to share current work, they can use the many prompts in this guide for ideas for new pieces of short writing. Choose 1-2 people to teach a method if taking that route.

Session Four: Diving In

1. Introduction. In one sentence, how are you feeling about your writing? (Or it can be another question or opener, as relevant to your group.)

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper.

3. Focus of the Day. Choose a focus collaboratively. Do you want to show active listening? Ensure there is enough time for feedback? Learn something new? Have fun?

4. Main Session. Depending on the group's choice, the main part of the session will either be: 1. Roundtable, which will include 2-4 readers each sharing a piece and getting feedback, using this guide for input on giving/receiving feedback or 2. Each One, Teach One, which will include one person sharing a method from this curriculum (or another source), along with some time for everyone to practice and write, followed by 1-2 people reading and getting feedback.

5. Closing: Invite members to share feedback on the day and what they hope to practice next time.

6. Next Steps. Bring a short piece of writing to workshop. Choose 1-2 people to teach a method if taking that route.

Session Five: Swimming

1. Introduction. This activity is called Think/Pair/Share. Instead of each person sharing to the whole group, everyone turns to the person next to them and shares with their neighbor. One speaks and the other listens. And then you trade. Share something that happened recently that you think might make a good story.

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper.

3. Focus of the Day: Choose a focus collaboratively.

4. Main Session. Depending on the group's choice, the main part of the session will either be: 1. Roundtable, which will include 2-4 readers each sharing a piece and getting feedback, using this guide for input on giving/receiving feedback or 2. Each One, Teach One, which will include one person sharing a method from this curriculum (or another source), along with some time for everyone to practice and write, followed by 1-2 people reading and getting feedback.

5. Closing. Open space for input... how is the group going? What do you enjoy? Is there anything you would like to change? What and how?

6. Next Steps: Bring a short piece of writing OR bring a longer piece and choose a section to share. Choose 1-2 people to teach a method if taking that route.

Session Six: Rafting

1. Introduction. Share who or what supports you to continue writing.

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper.

3. Focus on the Day. Choose a focus collaboratively.

4. Main Session. Depending on the group's choice, the main part of the session will either be: 1. Roundtable, which will include 2-4 readers each sharing a piece and getting feedback, using this guide for input on giving/receiving feedback or 2. Each One, Teach One, which will include one person sharing a method from this curriculum (or another source), along with some time for everyone to practice and write, followed by 1-2 people reading and getting feedback.

5. Closing. Do a round robin, inviting everyone to share one piece of inspiration for their fellow writers.

6. Next steps. Bring a short piece of writing OR bring a longer piece and choose a section to share.

Session Seven: Floating

1. Introduction. In a sentence, share: Who inspires you and why? (Or choose another opener).

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper.

3. Focus of the Day: Collaboration

4. Main Session. Change it up today. What if, instead of choosing one of those approaches, the group has a discussion about writing... what is working in each person's writing and where they are struggling? How is it to try to find time to write? What ideas might everyone share to support and learn from one another that offers a break from the routine, and inserts some new energy into the space?

5. Closing. Create a collaborative poem. One person starts it, out loud or on a paper, and the next one continues it until everyone has contributed. If using paper, have one person read the result aloud!

6. Next Steps. Bring a very short piece of writing to share with the group.

Session Eight: Water Dance

1. Introduction. In one sentence, or a list, what have you gained from being a part of this writing community?

2. Revisit the Community Guidelines as needed and select a timekeeper.

3. Focus of the Day: Celebration of the work completed and the community formed to recognize the commitment, effort, and growth put forward.

4. Main Session: "Giving Props" by engaging the following exercise:

- Everyone writes their name on a piece of paper and puts them in a jar or box.
- Choose one paper at a time. Whomever's name is picked, that person reads. For this last day, each member has the chance to read their short piece of writing. Instead of feedback, everyone claps or snaps, as if you are reading in a cafe or on a stage. As others read, jot down thoughts about what you enjoy in their writing.
- After everyone has read, select the names again, or go in the same order, and give a minute for each person to hear positive input on what they wrote. Writers can refer to their notes to recall specifics to share with each writer.

5. Closing. How would you like to see this group evolve? Consider "keep / stop / start as a framework. What do you want to keep the same about the workshop? What do you want to stop doing? What do you want to start doing, or try out?

6. Next steps. For those who want to continue, talk about how and what that might look like. Take a moment to appreciate everyone and the work done together.

Sample Pacing Guide

For An 8-week, Bi-Weekly

WORKSHOP:
Each One, Teach One Workshop Structure (4 sessions)

PRELIMINARY PREP WORK

Assign roles for group members before the first meeting. These roles will rotate each week:

Community Facilitator: Facilitates conversations about community agreements (try for 10 or fewer and add as the group grows in experiencing what they need to feel respected in the room). Records agreements. Manages requests to change or add to structure.

Lesson Facilitator: Selects and reads a reading from *The Sentences That Create Us* or this curriculum. After reading, write three bullet point sentences. Each sentence should describe something the reading is trying to teach. For each sentence, write five to ten minutes about why you think the lesson is important. For each lesson, prepare to provide class examples of each lesson in action. There are at least three solid ways to do this: 1. Find a published example of the lesson in action and use it as a discussion piece. 2. Get permission from someone in the group who has shared a piece that exemplifies the lesson and use it as the discussion piece. 3. Facilitate an open-ended conversation where you ask your peers to think up examples of the lesson you're teaching. Manages requests for future topics.

Creative Facilitator: Manages in-class creative exercises and assignments.

Accountability Facilitator: Co-facilitates the group session. Helps keeps group conversations on track and within agreements by naming when they depart or when one individual's talking time has become excessive.Manages selecting and notifying facilitators of next meeting.

Session One

1. Group Introductions (10 mins)

2. Establish Community Agreements (25 mins)

3. First Lesson (30 mins)

Introduce your topic: "I read x reading, and it taught these three lessons. I chose these lessons because [tell them some of what you wrote down about why they are important]."

Pause for questions. Encourage questions. Ask who already knew what you're trying to teach? Ask them to share how they learned it and what the lesson has done for their writing.

Present your examples of the lessons.

Leave at least 10 minutes for group participation, questions, and feedback

4. Creative Exercise (7 minutes)

Creative Facilitator can choose from among the following free writing topics:

1. Freewrite on a topic of writer's choice, perhaps the group makes a shared bank of possibilities and options.
2. Prompt provided to group that all follow.
3. Each writer uses their free write time to brainstorm an article, op-ed, or short story idea.

5. Share Out (8 mins)

6. Next Session Roles Prep (5 mins)

Accountability Facilitator helps select next week's facilitators. Facilitator can ask for volunteers or nominate someone willing to accept the responsibility (5 minutes)

7. Assign Readings and Homework (10 mins)

The Creative Facilitator should assign Method: Coaching for positive comment sharing and affirmations from curriculum, and the following assignment: Begin a story, op-ed, or article. It can be a continuance of the creative exercise or writers can choose something else entirely. They should not only write what they can of the piece in two weeks, but they should also write a 5 sentence summary of what the piece is about and what drove the author to write the piece. Writers should expect that 3 of them a week will share their summary, and then the group will anonymously vote on the piece to workshop for the week.

Session Two

1. Three-Word Check-Ins (5 mins)

This form of check-in is designed to acknowledge how everyone is coming to the room while respecting the limited time available for the first full length class.

2. Homework and Workshop (45 mins)

Creative Facilitator leads the selection of three writers to share their summary. Facilitator collaboratively selects one writer to read their full piece for group feedback. One way to do this is to have people write the name of the piece they want to hear from on a piece of paper, and deposit it in a beanie. The facilitator can then count up the votes and announce the nomination.

Nominee reads his piece and the group gives feedback on the piece. Encourage nominees to take notes on group feedback for their own benefit, but also to show respect for the time people are taking to give feedback.

3. Second Lesson (30 mins)

Introduce your topic: "I read x reading, and it taught these three lessons. I chose these lessons because [tell them some of what you wrote down about why they are important]."

Pause for questions. Encourage questions. Ask who already knew what you're trying to teach? Ask them to share how they learned it and what the lesson has done for their writing.

Present your examples of the lessons.

Leave at least 10 minutes for group participation, questions, and feedback

4. Nominate Next Week's Facilitators (5 mins)

5. Readings and Homework (5 mins)

Creative Facilitator should assign Written Feedback from this curriculum.

Ask each writer to select a buddy. Everyone who hasn't received group feedback will exchange their homework assignment with buddy. Each buddy will provide written feedback.

Session Three

1. Check-In and General Feedback (15 mins)

Class Three has fewer time pressures. This makes it a perfect time for a fuller check-in and also an ideal time to ask the group to share their general feedback on how the group is going. Are they getting what they came for? Do they have ideas to improve their experience?

2. You're Powerful Game (25 mins)

Everyone in the group by now should have read or heard someone else's work. The Community Facilitator should go around the circle and ask each person to acknowledge what was great or powerful about work they've read or heard. Encourage them to aim their praise directly to the writer, rather than talking strictly about words on the page.

3. Third Lesson (30 mins)

Introduce your topic: "I read x reading, and it taught these three lessons. I chose these lessons because [tell them some of what you wrote down about why they are important].

Pause for questions. Encourage questions. Ask who already knew what you're trying to teach? Ask them to share how they learned it and what the lesson has done for their writing.

Present your examples of the lessons.

Leave at least 10 minutes for group participation, questions, and feedback

4. Nominate Next Week's Facilitators (5 mins)

5. Readings and Homework

Creative Facilitator can assign a reading from The Sentences That Create Us.

Writer's should rewrite their pieces incorporating their buddy's or the group's feedback. In addition, they should write five sentences about how their piece has changed from their original draft and idea and what feedback they incorporated. They should not comment on the feedback they decided not to incorporate.

Session Four

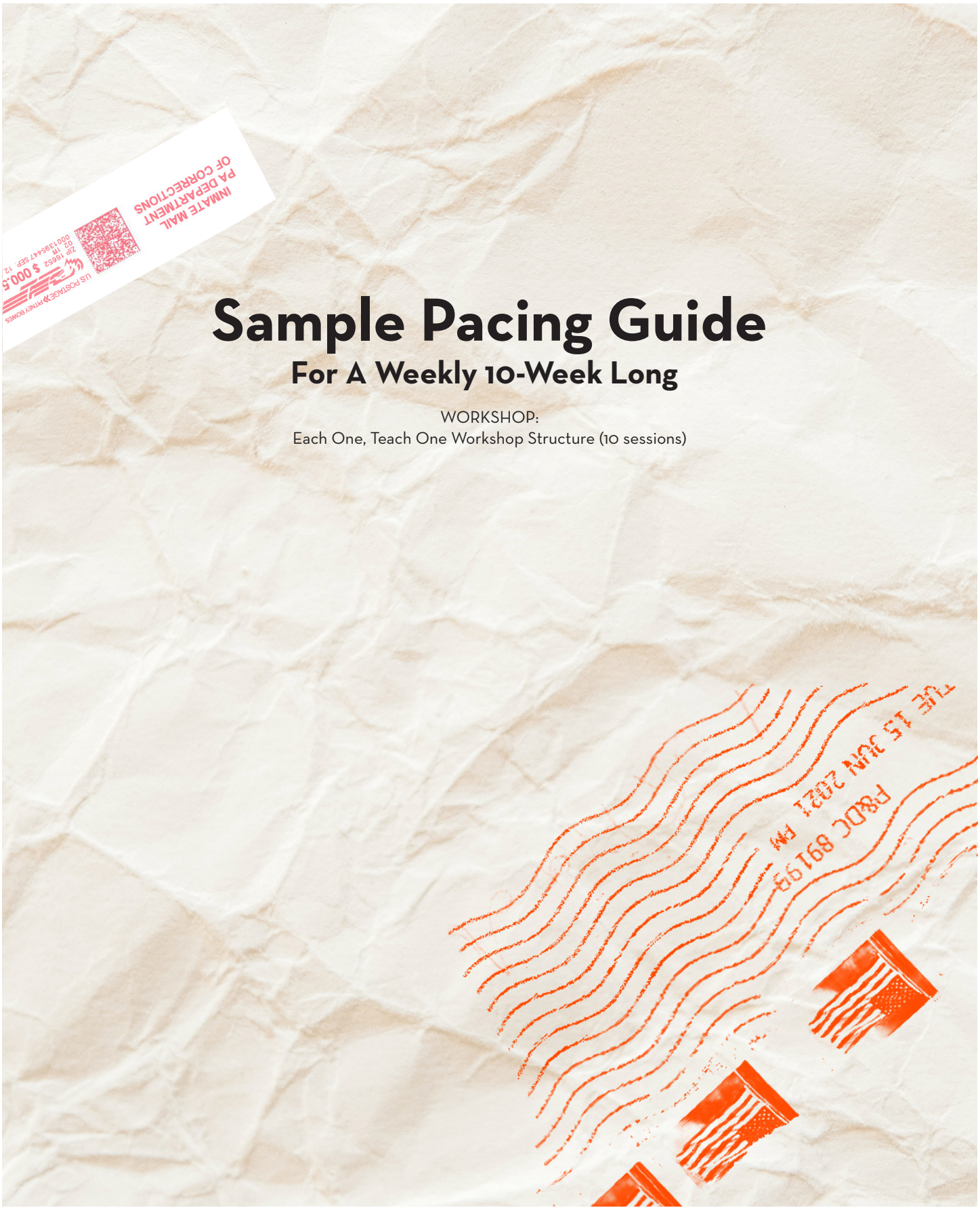
1. Three-Word Check-In (5 mins)

2. You're Appreciated Game (25 mins)

The Community Facilitator should open the floor and ask the group to say one thing they appreciate about another writer in the group.

3. Private Reading (60 mins)

All willing writers read their revised pieces and give the group summaries of what they addressed/ changed. No feedback on readings except applause and congratulations for becoming a stronger writer!



Sample Pacing Guide

For A Weekly 10-Week Long

WORKSHOP:
Each One, Teach One Workshop Structure (10 sessions)

Session One: Welcoming

This Each One, Teach One structure emphasizes use of the following small roles:

- The Opener will conduct opening circle.
- The Guide creates prompts, leads the freewriting, and freewrite share out.
- The Facilitator will guide feedback techniques, instruct on lesson/methods/workshop.
- The Presenter will review writing techniques and give assignments.
- The Closer will recap materials/lessons, confirm small roles/ workshop order/rotation for next session, and conduct the closing circle.

Guidelines for small role participation:

- Each participant will sign up for a role each week until all slots are filled.
- A different group member will participate in each small role at least once.
- No position will be filled by the same participant in sequential weeks.
- For simplicity the Opener/Guide and Presenter/Closer roles may be combined into one.

Suggested Agenda:

1. Introductions. Group members introduce themselves. Members can share any of the following: their name, why they want to write, why writing is important to them

2. Review. Setting group guidelines about how the group wants to structure ideas such as will there be sharing of each other's work, commit to submitting pages for feedback etc.

3. Set the tone and focus of the group. (Poetry, journalism, essay, playwriting, etc.)

4. Jump In! Freewriting exercise, followed by a reading of work and then feedback from member.s

5. Review. Making a living worksheet: As you begin your writing journey utilize a living worksheet that notes when you read something that you like or that resonated with you. This can be a sentence, a chapter, an article, or a book that you like. Refer to the Exemplary Writing List section for an example of a living worksheet format.

6. Closing. Establishing who will lead the small roles for next session(s). Closing circle topic of setting an intention of what they hope to get out of the group or refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop

Session Two: Intro to Feedback and Sharing

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. The Opener (10 mins)

Opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. The Guide (25 mins)

15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. The Facilitator (30 mins)

Introduction to feedback. Refer to the Coaching for positive comment sharing and affirmations and Initial Constructive Feedback Sharing section.

4. Presenter (15 mins)

Provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments.

5. Closer (10 mins)

Recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Troubleshooting: Think about quick openings and closings for the session to save time.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 5, 6 of *Sentences* in Luis Rodriguez's chapter "On Poetry."

Suggestions for technique/material- how to get started on your first draft can be found for fiction on page 21, in Ryan Gattis' essay "On Fiction" and on pages 59-61 for theater, in Sarah Shourd's chapter "On Dramatic Theater."

Session Three: How Others Experience Our Writing

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. The Opener (10 mins)

Opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes Refer to the Responding to Feedback section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Think of asking the group what they are considering to do with their writing. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 281, 282 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for technique/material- grammar and punctuation can be found on pages 130-146, and The Most Important Thing (and a Few Other Rules) can be found on pages 171-174 of *Sentences*

Session Four: Group and Written Feedback

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes Methods of feedback. Refer to the Written Feedback and Marginal Comments in Rubric section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 269-271 of *Sentences*.

Suggestion for facilitator- Some facilities may not provide a way for typing or printing of members' work for the purpose of written feedback. Consider making time for the writer to read their work to the group. This is called a "cold read." Though making it harder to give written feedback it lets the group hear the work as the writer intended it.

Suggestions for technique/material- After Grammar Learning How to Transition can be found on pages 147-151 of *Sentences*.

Session Five: Self-Feedback and Transitions

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Think of doing a check in how the group is feeling about their writing progression, how the group is running and modify or redirect focus. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes No group feedback this week, focus on how to do our own feedback. Refer to the Sideshadowing section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle suggestion "The strength I see in your writing..."

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 273-274 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for technique/material- On Fiction pages 16-18, 20-31 of *Sentences*.

Session Six: Your Voice

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes How to write like yourself. Refer to the Self-reflection prompts for Whole Groups and Read Aloud section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Troubleshooting: Think about check-ins instead of openers by asking the group how they feel about their work, progress, struggles and how the group is doing.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 258-260, 266-267 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for facilitator- developing your writer's voice can be found on pages 19, 199-200 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for technique/material- On Poetry can be found on pages 2-15 of *Sentences*.

Session Seven: Revisions and Editing

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes Revising and editing strategies. Refer to the Visions & Re-Visions: Seeing Your Work With New Eyes 6 techniques and Reading Backwards section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 276, 278-279 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for facilitator- editing strategies can be found on pages 22-23, 147-151, 152-162 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for technique/material- How to Read Like a Writer and Writing and Editing Guidelines pages 33-40 of *Sentences*.

Session Eight: Readings, Journalism

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes It's time to read. Refer to Readings- collected readings of incarcerated authors section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Suggested prompts for this session can be found on pages 256 of *Sentences*.

Suggestions for technique/material- On Journalism pages 96-99; Why Journalism from Behind Bars?, Lessons from Justice-Involved Journalists and Approaches to Writing the Journalistic Story on pages 100-103 of *Sentences*.

Session Nine: Products, Publishing and Copyright Protection

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

3. Facilitator- 30 minutes What is the end result? Refer to the Creating Products and Performative Readings section.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes provide weekly techniques, material, give assignments, helping members with their writing

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Closing the Workshop.

Troubleshooting: Think about a check-in and asking if the group would like to do something different and use this time towards performative readings by group members.

Session Ten: Ins and Outs of Publication

Suggested Agenda, by role:

1. Opener- 10 minutes opening circle. Refer to Methods section Ideas for Openers.

2. Guide- 15 minutes for prompt/free write, 10 minutes to guide sharing. Refer to the Freewriting section for overview, prompts and uses.

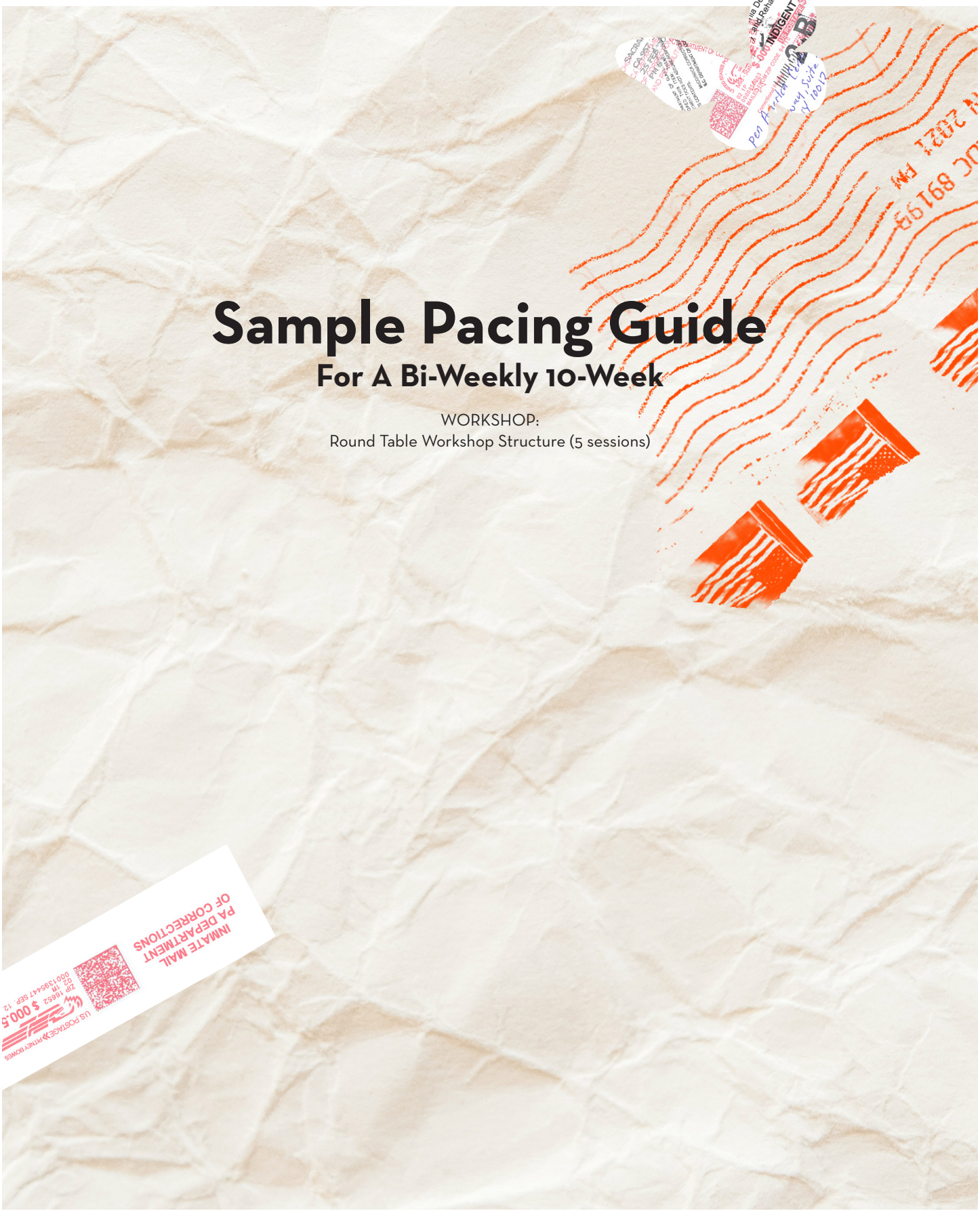
3. Facilitator- 30 minutes Publication of your work and submission guidelines. You can write to PEN America's Prison and Justice Writing Program for literary and journalism specific publishing guides and outlets.

4. Presentor- 15 minutes review resources, cover letter, submitting your work to the right audience/media.

5. Closer- 10 minutes recap and closing circle.

Troubleshooting: Think about how you want to end your last closing circle. Members can share what they have learned or what goals they have set for their writing.

Suggestions for technique/material- On Publishing from Prison pages 175-179; Copyright Protection in Brief pages 180-184 of *Sentences*.



Sample Pacing Guide

For A Bi-Weekly 10-Week

WORKSHOP:
Round Table Workshop Structure (5 sessions)

Session One

Introductions: Even if members know each other it's a good idea to have time to introduce yourselves to each other. You can use a prompt like, "Why do you write?" or, you can keep it open and let people share what they want. The important part is that each person has space to speak and share, building trust and community.

Next, establish guidelines: How many pages will each person bring to workshop (if any)? Will there be reading of each other's work before the next workshop? How do those people get selected? How will the rotation occur?

Then, try freewriting with or without a prompt. Prompts can be found in the Freewriting section of this curriculum and throughout The Sentences that Create Us including: pgs 5-6, 256, 258-260, 266-267, 269-271, 273-274, 276, 278-279, and 281-282.

After freewriting, have people share their favorite part of what they wrote. Using the "Coaching for Positive Comments" section of this curriculum, offer feedback to others in the group that uses those methods.

Session Two

Try openings and closings: For this meeting try to use the deliberate openings and closings found at the beginnings of the Methods section.

Using the method your group selected, conduct a workshop. Suggested order is: Opening, freewriting, reading of work, feedback from group, closing. Readings and feedback can take place as many times and there is time for. For example, if there are three people in your group, all three can read their work aloud and get feedback as long as you don't go over the allotted time. Make sure to save five minutes at the end for closing.

Feedback should be informed by the "Initial Constructive Feedback Sharing" and "Group Constructive Feedback" sections of this curriculum.

Assignments: Read "As for the Rest of Us" beginning on pg. 221 or "Prison Writer" beginning on pg. 227 of *Sentences*. Write a response to either of these for the next workshop or, using your freewrite as the basis, start a new piece. If it is a genre (poem, play, memoir) addressed by a chapter in *Sentences*, read that chapter as you write.

Assignments: Select two chapters from Part II in *Sentences*. Then, write your own essay, poem or story about how you are cultivating a writer's life in prison. What challenges are you facing? What success have you had? What are your goals for your writer's journey?

Session Three

Midway check-in: If your group appreciated the openings, you can start with one. If it wasn't something people enjoyed then you can jump into a check-in. Check-ins are important because they create space for people to consider how they feel about their own progress and the group's functioning. Everyone should have an opportunity to contribute. Sometimes it helps to have an item that is passed around to help demarcate whose turn it is to speak. If issues arise, they don't need to be solved on the spot. Sometimes, solutions present themselves and/or people come up with ideas given time and space. Please read the "Troubleshooting" sections throughout the Methods section as well as the Postscript of this curriculum and the chapter "On Building Prison Writing Communities" in Sentences for ideas on how to address common issues.

Freewrite time: try using a prompt you haven't used before.

For this session, try giving written feedback. Drafts should be pre-circulated so people have time to read and make comments. Select a style from the "Written Feedback" section of this curriculum that appeals to you. Remember: Do not write on someone else's draft unless they ask you to. During workshop, you can share your written feedback with the author and answer any questions they have. Two to three writers can get feedback this way in one session.

If your group is using closings, do a closing.

Session Four

This week, the group can focus on revision vs editing.

Select one technique from the "Visions and Revisions" section. There are six options. Each member can select to use the strategy from mild to extra spicy. Making sure to preserve your original draft, revise.

Share your original and your revisions aloud to the group. These can also be performative readings—see the sections on Reading Aloud and Performative Readings for more ideas about how to enact these.

Don't share feedback for this week. Simply let everyone share their work and their revisions. You can feel how it lands with your listeners and yourself.

If your group is doing closings, do one.

Assignments: Using the main piece you're working on, choose either Sideshadowing or one of the Self-Reflection exercises. After you complete one, assess what you need to do in order to revise your piece to fit more with your voice, your purpose or your stylistic goals. The read pages 21-23, 147-151, 152-162 in *The Sentences that Create Us* in anticipation for next week.

Assignments: Take a break from the draft you've been working on by starting something new. Select a chapter from Part IV: Writing Exercises in *Sentences*. Using that chapter as inspiration, begin a new piece. Don't edit, read or engage with the piece you've been working on until the day before the fifth, and final, workshop.

Session Five and Final Session

For this final week, we suggest going over publication options. Even if you don't feel ready to send something off to be considered yet, it's good to know what options exist and how or why to pursue them.

If your group is doing openings, then do one. Otherwise, freewrite using a prompt from the curriculum or *Sentences*, pgs 5-6, 256, 258-260, 266-267, 269-271, 273-274, 276, 278-279, and 281-282.

As a group, read aloud and go through the "Publication" section of this curriculum. Be sure to stop to enable people to ask questions or respond to the information. Time permitting, this can also be done with the chapter "As for the rest of us" (p. 221) in *Sentences*.

If the group has further questions write them down and mail them to PEN America Prison and Justice Writing 120 Broadway 26th Floor North New York NY 10271.

As a group share closing thoughts for the workshop. These can be:

- Next steps you plan to take with your writing or a draft
- What you've learned through the workshop
- What goals you have for your writing in the future
- What you have appreciated about the workshop
- Or, any other prompts regarding closure.

03

Methods

This section details some ways your workshop can get the creative juices flowing, edit writing, give feedback effectively, and more nuts and bolts best practices of writers workshops. Grammar, punctuation, spelling and other mechanical concerns are not usually the focus for writing workshops, which aim to focus on generating and refining creative content, and not the nitty gritty work of mechanics. If you're interested in these mechanics—they certainly are worth learning to help your work communicate most effectively to its readership— please see pages 130-146 in The Sentences that Create Us *for a short lesson on grammar by Chris Daley.*

Rituals

Rituals are deliberate openings and closings to a workshop experience that serve to foster trust and safe space. Opens and closing can include: check-ins (where participants share how they're feeling about their work or other things), meditation (where the group collectively focuses on mindfulness, conscious breathing, and/or sensory awareness) or creative prompts where people share stories or thoughts (see below).

The following section offers suggestions for how to conduct openings and closings.

INTRODUCTION

Creating a habit or ritual to open and close the workshop can help everyone make the shift from the space outside the workshop to the creative community of the workshop. Openings give space for each member to share briefly and/or to take some quiet moments to reflect on the goals of being in the writing space together. Closings can give people time to reflect on what was learned, shared and/or accomplished that day.

Openings and closings can be different for each workshop, but keep in mind, both are meant to be brief: no more than 4-8 minutes. If all engage, it best serves the group to limit that sharing to a word or movement, one minute or another expressed limitation so as to ensure enough time for other aspects of the workshop.

Whatever method your group uses, openings and closings should invite and recognize every member equally in the workshop. To this end, writers are encouraged to participate but also have the ability to "pass," if they wish. Some people take longer to feel ready to share. Other people may not feel ready to share if they have had a rough day. Enabling a pass gives people the option of returning each week without fear of forced participation.

KEY COMPONENTS

Pick and choose which works best for your group, and feel free to vary it depending on moods and circumstances. Different people can select or create an opening and closing activity each day for variety, and to give everyone a chance (see the "each one, teach one" model in Section One).

IDEAS FOR OPENERS

- Share your name and a word that expresses how you are feeling today.
- Share your name and everyone responds, ie, 'Juan' and everyone says, 'Hi Juan.'
- Share something that inspired you this week.
- Share your favorite author, or one that you are currently interested in.

- Share the name of a text (book, poem, article, etc.) that has had an impact on you.
- Everyone joins in taking five conscious breaths together. A nice way to do this is to use your hand or hands. Start by closing one hand into a fist. Take a deep breath in, hold it for a pause, then let it out and open one finger. Repeat this for each finger until your palm is open. Notice how you feel. Participants can close their eyes or gaze at one spot to support this practice.
- If it is available, listen to a part of a song. Invite everyone to move to the music if they want to. This is a way to shift out of the experience of outside the space and into the moment.
- Share a movement or gesture. Everyone repeats the movement or gesture.
- Share three rhyming words. Everyone repeats each person's rhyme.
- Do a few stretches together, as if waking up in the morning. These can be individualized or one person can share some stretches for others to follow. This also helps shift the focus from outside the space to focusing on the work at hand.

More warm-up exercises are detailed on pages 85-86, the first two pages of Andy Warner's essay "On Graphic Narrative" in *The Sentences that Create Us*.

IDEAS FOR CLOSING THE WORKSHOP

Each person can say thank you or congratulations or another word of support and recognition.

A quick way to wrap up class when there is limited time is to simply gather in a circle and each person shares a word to express how they are feeling. This can also be done at the start and repeated at the finish so that folks can see how the workshop may have shifted feelings.

Ask someone in the group to reiterate what everyone is hoping will be accomplished before the next workshop. For example, if you have all decided to read a particular essay, reiterate that. Or if you have selected a few people to present next time, reiterate who will be sharing. This closes out the day and also reminds everyone of what is coming next.

Offer a sentence that each writer completes, such as "One thing I'm taking with me from today is..."

TROUBLESHOOTING

The biggest issue to be aware of when thinking about how to open and close the workshop is time. Even though engaging in opening and closing activities can really support a powerful experience in the workshop, there is rarely enough time to accomplish all of the group's goals. Also, people are understandably protective of their workshop time, so they may be resistant to doing anything else. Here are some ways to address the issue of time:

- Keep it short! These can take 2 minutes and should always be under 10 minutes, more like 5.
- Mix it up! Try something different each time. Let all members take a turn selecting them. Have fun with it.
- Be inclusive! One of the main goals of this is to give everyone a moment to simply be present, whether to say their name, to share a quick rhyme, or to take a shared breath—to goal is to be recognized, welcomed and engaged.
- It's helpful for everyone to come with an open attitude and to be sure to share the purpose of these opening and closing times: shifting from "out" to "in," and building community.
- Try reflecting on how these are working once in a while. Maybe use the opening and closing times one day to ask folks how they are working, and what they might want to try differently.
- If openings or closings begin to feel too rote, it's okay to take a break from them to see what happens organically.

COMMUNITY

Opening and closing activities build community by giving everyone a moment in the sun, so to speak, not just to talk about their work, but outside of their writing, as a person, and as a valued member of the group. Secondly, the opening and closing activities help the group gain a sense of how the work is landing with everyone. Sharing a feeling at the start and at the end, for example, offers a sense of the impact of the work on each person. These moments of connecting beyond the page offer an opportunity for the group to build community and camaraderie, to prepare mind and body for the workshop, and, at times, to share a laugh or movement or quiet space.

Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write—freely, as the name implies, the goal is to keep the hand moving—about what you're thinking about that day, or any topic used as a prompt, for a set amount of time. During freewrite, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Freewriting is about getting ideas out, not producing a polished piece of writing. Write as much as you can without stopping during the freewrite period. If you get stuck, you can copy the same word or phrase over and over or start practicing descriptive writing by explaining what is going on around you in detail. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. A single gem of a thought might arrive in the text that you can pull out and expand on in a more intentional piece of writing. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover many new, and sometimes even surprising, ideas you want to write about. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic entirely that excites you.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Helps end writer's block: Freewriting can dissolve writer's block. Feeling creatively stuck can often be a reflection of stress that our writing isn't good enough or we don't have something worthy to say. Being unable to write, even though you want to, can also be due to fear that our writing will not be as perfect as we want. Expectations for ourselves and our writing can cause us stress, which limits our ability to think creatively and "just start." All of these constraints can be alleviated by freewriting because the stakes are intentionally lowered. Here, the goal is not producing perfection or even something good. The goal is just to get words on the page.
- Build writer's muscles: Writing demands complex mental processes, which we can think of as mental muscles. Just like other muscles, writing muscles need exercise to be strong and confident. Just like other kinds of exercise, the more you write, the easier it will become, and the better you will become at it. The more you face writer's block and write anyway, the better you will become at writing through blocks.
- Critical and creative thinking: Freewriting teaches a vital skill: the ability to turn your judgment on and off. It is true that critical thinking, or making informed judgements about information, can make great writing. In turn, it can feel counterintuitive to switch off our critical minds. Creative writing, however, demands a balance between judgment and simple observation, and acceptance of what can be contradictory and irreconcilable realities. Freewriting allows writers to draft with no judgment. This can help draw out realities we don't consciously admit to ourselves. It can also inspire our imagination beyond the limitations our conscious minds perceive to be true. This way of writing can generate content that can then be critically assessed during the revision process.
- Idea generation: Freewriting creates a library of your own voice and stories that you can access later. A notebook of freewriting exercises from writing prompts can offer writers material during fallow times like lockdown, staff shortages, or time in solitary when there is little stimulation to generate content. The smallest glimmer of an idea in your freewriting collection can turn into a novel. Each small paragraph you write during freewriting is a gift to your future self.

For more on this point, see Curtis Dawkins' essay "The Most Important Thing (and a Few Other Rules)" starting on pg. 171 in *Sentences*.

IDEAS FOR FREEWRITING EXERCISES

Set a time limit: Set a timeframe between 5 and 20 minutes.

Choose a writing prompt:

WHAT IS A WRITING PROMPT?

A writing prompt is a pre-generated topic about which to write. Writing in response to prompts is a great daily practice to build your writer's muscles. Below are 20 examples you can use.

- ❍ Write about the last disagreement you had with someone. Who was it with? What was it about and how did it end? What did you want and what did you learn?
- ❍ What do you want your friends to know about you?
- ❍ If you could have any superpower, what would it be? Why this power?
- ❍ What was your favorite game or toy when you were a kid? Write about an experience that involves this game or toy.
- ❍ Finish this sentence, then keep writing: "Fire crawled across the grass toward the house, and ..."Finish this sentence, then keep writing: "People in hell don't want ice water; they want..."
- ❍ Finish this sentence, then keep writing: "It was a long fall, but I was out of options. I jumped. The wind whipped at my clothes, and..."
- ❍ Choose a poem you know by heart or you take from a book. Write down the last line and continue either writing your own poem or begin a story opening inspired by the line.
- ❍ Make a wish and write it down. Now start a story where you regret making this wish.
- ❍ If you were a tree, what would you say?
- ❍ Write about a place you want to visit. Why do you want to go there?

- Write about a piano player who just had the worst performance of his or her life. How does the musician feel? What happened? Who does the piano player call?
- What's something that makes you smile?
- What's your favorite TV show? Why?
- What's your favorite book? Why?
- Think about the last time you felt disappointed. What happened? Who disappointed you? Now, write about the experience from the perspective of the person who disappointed you. Include why they did what they did, how they feel about it.
- Describe an injustice you've witnessed or experienced.
- Write about a society that believes prisons are evil. How does this society respond to a person who hurts someone else?
- Write an apology letter that only you will see to someone that you've wronged.
- Pretend that magic is real. Now explain why nobody believes in it.
- Consider a visual prompt: Find a picture that interests you. A picture is a moment in time. Start your freewrite by describing the moment the picture shows you, and then continue writing about what you imagine happens next.

Prompts can also be found throughout *The Sentences that Create Us*: pgs 5-6, 256, 258-260, 266-267, 269-271, 273-274, 276, 278-279, and 281-282.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

My students call my writing prompts: "Frankenprompts," because I have so much fun with them. Some writers love them, and write their best work with them. Others groan when I write one on the board. As much as I love to create and share them, I dread writing from prompts. One year after a long, emotional, productive class at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee, my students sent me home with a fifteen-step prompt and made me promise to share the results. I followed their prompt. We circled around the classroom at our final gathering, and I read aloud what may be the worst thing I've ever written. Which is all to say: try everything, then do what works best for you.

– Jen Bowen

Getting Around Writer's Block

While writer's block can often be addressed in general through freewriting, sometimes writer's block afflicts a particular piece of writing only. It may be a piece that is emotionally challenging to write, or one that details events distant in time and space, or any one of a million other reasons. If you're experiencing writer's block with a particular piece it can be helpful to engage in some of the following activities. While there is no guaranteed way to clear our mental hurdles, these exercises can assist in tackling the challenge of writing.

Although there are a number of ways to write your way through a block, the following exercise can be particularly useful:

1 **STEP ONE:** Grab a clean sheet of paper and place it next to the story you're working on.

2 **STEP TWO:** Close your eyes, put your hand on your stomach, and breathe into your belly softly so that you feel your hand rise and fall on your stomach. Do this five times to help reset your nervous system. Other ways to reset your nervous system include yawning, or breathing in the kind of stuttering, fast inhale of breath we do after having a good cry.

3 **STEP THREE:** Read the last page you wrote. It might be helpful to smile a little as you read it (your body associates smiles with joy, and joy is very good for creativity). As you read, hold your pen/pencil over your blank paper ready to write. When you finish reading your last page, give yourself your writing prompt by saying out loud, "What's Next?" or "Why is this important?"

4 **STEP FOUR:** Write on your blank sheet of paper. It may be helpful to place the page you read out of your sight so you can focus on what you're writing and not what you already wrote. If what's next doesn't come to mind, ask the question again, "What's Next?" or "Why is this important?" Keep asking the question until you write. It's important to write whatever comes to mind. Even if what comes next has nothing to do with your story, even if you're just writing, "I want something amazing to come next!" or "This is important because..." The important thing is to KEEP YOUR HANDS MOVING, keep writing and write down as many different things that can come next as you can think of.

5 **STEP FIVE:** After 5 to 10 minutes, stop. Read what you've written. Choose one idea about what comes next that you like. If you haven't written one you like, choose one that moves the story forward. Return to your story and write through the idea. If you chose "Why is this important?," circle three reasons that speak the loudest to your heart.

6 **STEP SIX:** If you haven't written an idea that moves the story forward, take a break (for at least an hour). Exercise, meditate, watch TV, or talk to a friend. After your break, choose a writing or visual prompt unrelated to your story and write for as long as you want. When you're finished, take a break from writing for today. Forgive yourself if you feel like you've failed. It can be helpful to say it out loud, "I forgive myself because I know I'm doing my best."

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

When I have something big, or challenging, to work on, I like to give myself a break. I know that sounds counterintuitive but most of us—including me!—are really hard on ourselves. And being hard on myself about getting started or diving in when I am already worried or stuck only makes it worse! So I try to give myself a pep talk or do something kind of sideways to the writing itself. Maybe I'll read a book that inspires me. Or take a walk. Or talk about the project with someone I care about... sometimes, I talk about it with myself! That might sound crazy, but when I can just have a conversation in my head with myself about what I am working on and what I want it to say, it can be super helpful. It's okay to take a day or two to think and develop. Try to take the pressure off. But we don't want to do that day after day because it can drag on quickly. So I usually say, okay, today is a break. Tomorrow I write, even just a sentence.

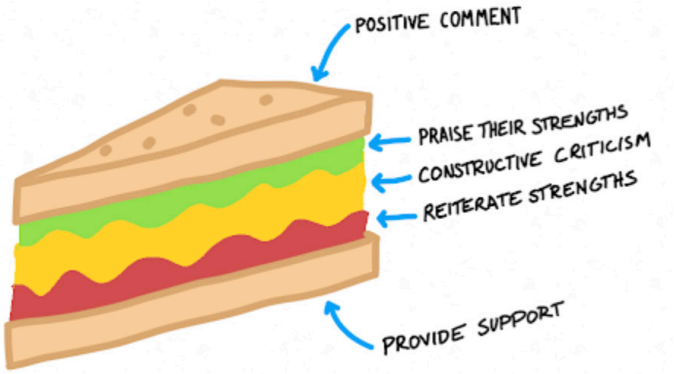
– Annie Buckley

More advice on drafting–that is, getting initial words down on the page–can be found on pages 59-61, in Sarah Shourd's essay "On Dramatic Theater," of *The Sentences That Create Us* and on cultivating your unique voice as a writer on pages 199-200, in Alejo Rodriguez' "And Still I Write" essay.

Feedback Foundations

INTRODUCTION

The word critique gets a bad rap in our society. It is often misunderstood as harsh and negative. There is an old-school idea, commonly associated with "manliness," that somehow the tough criticism is the best. That is: if you don't tell someone all the things you don't like or that don't work about their writing, you're not actually helping them. But even tough words of criticism are just one person's opinion. If negativity breaks the writer's desire to write or warps their writing process, it can't be justified. Critique should not shut down the creative process, but offer specific and constructive ideas that are admitted as subjective and personal. To avoid the misunderstanding of critique as always negative and objective, we suggest using the terms feedback or comments instead. Having guidelines that offer examples of what supportive feedback looks like is also helpful. Once people become comfortable with offering feedback constructively, you will see more confidence in both offering and comfort in receiving feedback. You might even begin to crave it!



This guide proposes that feedback can and should be delivered in a way that builds confidence and invites curiosity. While pointing out areas that confuse listeners or readers, or asking questions regarding purpose or message is important, it is equally important to tell readers what positive attributes their writing contains. Receiving positive feedback is a blessing, and sometimes people, especially women or people who have not had their voice valued by society, also need to build the courage to express what could work better. It's helpful to remind the group that all feedback offered with generosity is a gift. Feedback is how writers come to know how their voices and stories are understood by others. The following section explores ways to offer feedback.

KEY COMPONENTS

Of course, there isn't just one way to offer supportive feedback. But for those who haven't ever had supportive feedback themselves, the following list offers suggestions for how you can share insight while supporting, and being supported by, your fellow writers.

- Whatever your thoughts are, they can be better received by framing them as questions. For example, if you are confused about the character 'Frank' in a person's story you can say something like: "What was the character, 'Frank,' thinking about at this point?" Instead of, "Frank is confusing." More examples of questions that can be used in feedback sessions can be found in the Section One: Structure section of this guide.
- Start each offering of feedback with a positive comment about the writing. For example, "I really liked your voice in this piece. It is warm and welcoming. It makes me want to hear more." You can also frame points that need clarifying in a positive way. For example, if there isn't enough description about the setting, you could say something like: "I would love to hear more about where we are in this moment. What does this place look like or smell like? What else is happening there?"
- If people are having trouble coming up with feedback, it is understandable. Many of us went to schools where this kind of response was not given space or time. Asking yourself,"What stood out to you?" can help generate ideas. This question can also be a good discussion starter for the whole group. It's open-ended, so it doesn't force an expected answer.
- Instead of sharing feedback verbally, workshop groups can also write feedback using the method above on paper, which is given to writers. This allows the feedback to be taken back to the room/cell, where the writer can privately review it and soak in the praise and constructive criticism on their own time. This can be especially helpful for people if the positive statements are clear and central. Prison lacks positive reinforcement and to see something positive in writing is immensely impactful. Having written documentation of positive comments can be the motivation to stretch and grow in their writing, and reinvigorates the writer in purpose and practice. These are the same kinds of sentences you would say verbally, instead you write them down. Meaning, this feedback moves beyond making marginal notes on someone's draft. They are overall statements and questions that meaningfully engage with the text at hand.

Giving feedback is not just a gift to others, it's a gift to yourself. Reading and thinking carefully about others' work helps us become more sophisticated readers, writers and critical thinkers. Some writers feel that providing careful feedback, more than anything else, helped them grow. Giving careful, attentive feedback to someone else's writing teaches us what good writing is. Learning is a gift that no one can take away, no matter where you write from.

The chapter "Workshop Solitaire" by JD Mathes in *The Sentences That Create Us* also has suggestions for how to strengthen your narrative. It begins on page 283.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Feedback is admittedly a bit of an emotional minefield, and your approach, sensitivity and commitment to truth is worth investigating with time, curiosity and an open mind and heart. The tendency is for people to say, "I'm tough, I can take it!" We've already discussed how this kind of "tough love" feedback isn't effective. It is worth keeping in mind that especially inside, this kind of feedback can easily lead to unwanted power dynamics that are detrimental, and prevent equity and inclusion. This dynamic is sneaky and can inadvertently take hold when the majority of people have been conditioned to receive traditional "red pen" negative criticism. Many will have to unlearn the unconscious habit of deflecting positive feedback, which can cause a writer to feel worried that it isn't genuine, or because it makes them self-conscious. If this is the dynamic in your workshop, it is even more important to build in ways to learn to receive praise and support, so as to understand what IS working in their writing and encourage constructive revisions. Here are some suggestions to support yourself and your group:

- It is worth taking time, even a full session, at the start of a series of workshops to talk about each person's experiences and preferences, to assess personal and group understandings, and gain awareness of how particular types of feedback will land with individuals. What are people seeking in their writing journey? How do they respond to the term "feedback?" What have their experiences with feedback been in the past?
- An option is to integrate the preferred approach into a list of co-created shared agreements for your group. It doesn't have to be involved. It could be as simple as: "balance a suggestion with a compliment."
- Instead of structuring a workshop with one person reading, then silently listening as an observer while everyone else discusses the piece (a commonly accepted workshop method, but not the only one), the writer can instead first identify what they want feedback on for that particular piece. This empowers the writer and allows each group member to tailor feedback to address what they are struggling with in the work. For example, a person could ask for input on dialog or how well the setting is described.

If your group is having trouble with feedback– either giving it or receiving it– consider taking some time to process. The following are suggestions that can help your workshop group recalibrate your relationship to feedback.

- Take a day for just affirmations and support. Spotlight individuals and invite three people to share something they like about that person's writing. Everyone should have a chance to be recognized, and various people should offer input and affirmations, making it a full-group effort.
- Take a day to talk about what feedback means to you, each person's background with it, understanding of its purpose, and preferred way to receive it. This can help everyone understand one another, and where they are coming from specifically, rather than a generalized understanding of what it means to give and receive feedback or criticism.
- Use the suggestions in this guide and write the sample questions and statement starters on cards that are placed on each member's chair. Some examples might be: Go around the circle and have people respond to those starters. These should be sentences that don't relate to any writing shared in the workshop. They are simply to practice constructing sentences in ways that center questioning, affirmations and positivity.

*Note: For those who want to delve deeper into these complex issues, a good resource is: The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the the Creative Classroom by Felicia Rose Chavez.

COMMUNITY

Even the most attention-averse person generally feels good hearing that something in their writing is working. Sharing this kind of support and encouragement is as much for revision as it is for building community, camaraderie, and support for the writer through their creative journey.

Assessing Characterization and Plot through Rubrics

OVERVIEW

Looking at an entire piece can be overwhelming for readers, especially readers new to offering feedback. What aspect do you focus on? How can you give writers feedback that actually helps them? In this section, we offer a method to assess two foundational elements of all fictional–and some non-fictional (like memoir)–texts. You will choose a focus on either characterization or plot. Once you've chosen a focus follow the steps below.

1 **STEP ONE:** Read the rubric below for either characterization or plot. This rubric provides the standard upon which you will provide feedback. It is important to note that this standard isn't the only valid standard for building compelling characters, and we encourage all participants to honor that all assessments are subjective, and represent people just doing their best to convey what a piece of writing makes them feel when they read it. To that end, please feel free to revise these rubrics, or create your own.

2 **STEP TWO:** Read the piece (the manuscript) for which you're providing feedback: After you've read the piece, return to the rubric and read "Subjective Criteria." There are three levels of criteria. Read one, and if everything in the box is true, check the box that best corresponds to the lines you read.

3 **STEP THREE:** If you cannot check any of the boxes, make a note at the top of the rubric. We suggest something along the lines of: "Thank you for doing the very brave thing of sharing your work with me. I encourage you to read this rubric and think about how you can cultivate these elements in your work. I look forward to reading your next draft." After you make this note, skip to Step 6.

4 **STEP FOUR:** Check each criteria you can until the rubric is complete.

5 **STEP FIVE:** Return to manuscript with the boxes you've checked off in mind. Identify for the writer at least three examples where they met each subjective criteria, underline them in pencil, and write a comment acknowledging what the writer did well. For example, if you checked "Good," you might underline a description of the characters' tapered Afro and trimmed beard and write, "Nice description. This helped me have a clear picture of your character." If this is the person's only draft, you can also rewrite the sentences in the boxes on the rubric itself, instead of their draft.

6 **STEP SIX:** Return to manuscript with a mind for potential growth areas. Read the criteria for a line you didn't check off. Think about at least two (and no more than five) moments in the manuscript where the writer might add or change something in order to meet one of the criteria associated with an unchecked box. Share your idea by writing it on the rubric or another sheet of paper.

CHARACTERIZATION RUBRIC

Subjective Assessment	Subjective Criteria
☐ Good	It is clear who the character is. For example, you know two to four features of this person's physical appearance, and you can name two to four things about a character's personality that you wouldn't say about other people in the scene or chapter.
☐ Great	You care about what happens to this character. It is clear to you what the character wants the most, why the character wants it, and what stands in between the character having their desire.
☐ Excellent	In dialogue, the character's voice is distinct. That is, if you read just the dialogue without the tag lines, you can tell the difference between the way the character speaks and the way other characters in the scene or chapter speak. (Tag lines attribute dialogue to a speaker, for example, "John said.")

BASIC PLOT RUBRIC

Subjective Assessment	Subjective Criteria
☐ Good	You can describe what is happening from the viewpoint of a central character in the scene or the chapter in one to three simple sentences. The story moves forward smoothly. In general, the reader doesn't feel bogged down in explanations about what's happening. A loose rule of thumb is most pages in a smoothly flowing narrative will have at least 75% narrative content, and 25% or less exposition. Exposition is an explanation of what has happened or what will happen. Exposition is also character thoughts and descriptions of the setting. Narrative is generally what people do and say.
☐ Great	The central character's actions are the reason the story unfolds the way it does. If the central character seems to mostly react to events happening rather than causing the events, the central character's actions aren't the reason the story is unfolding.
☐ Excellent	The chapter or scene has tension. This can be a subjective feeling in your body, but it also means you can identify what the central character is trying to accomplish in a scene or chapter, the points at which the character's efforts are frustrated, and the ways in which the character must either try harder or change plans to accomplish their goals. In general, the longer the reader must wait for the character to accomplish goal, the more tension builds, but if the reader has to wait too long or if the reader doesn't care about the goal (generally a sign that the reader doesn't care about the character), then tension bleeds out of the story.

Sideshadowing

Sideshadowing is a form of self-reflection through commenting on your own work as you read. You can also write back to yourself in the margins of your writing or, on another sheet of paper if you don't want to clutter your only draft. As you read your writing, the goal is to think about what you were thinking while you were writing, and not the writing itself. In other words, you're not looking at word choice or grammar in this process. You're thinking about your own larger goals for the piece, hidden motivations in creating it, and identifying places of hesitancy and fear that have snuck into your writing. Some questions you can ask yourself as you read:

- What questions or hesitations did you have as you wrote?
- What were you thinking or feeling as you wrote?
- Did you leave out ideas or information? Why did you leave them out?
- Are there lines or phrases that don't seem relevant? Why?

After you have written back to yourself in the margins of each paragraph, read over all you have written. What does this new material tell you about your writing? How can you revise, taking your feedback to yourself into consideration? Synthesize your sideshadowing comments by noticing significant patterns and themes, and reflect on how this new information will enable you to proceed as you revise your work and develop your writerly voice so you can say what you really want to say.

Self-Reflection Writing

Self-reflection is key to building self-awareness and cultivating interest and curiosity in ourselves and others, challenging our habits of judgment. Self-reflection helps people:

- To gain confidence
- To develop your writerly voice
- To focus your thoughts and exercise introspection
- To assess your own writing
- To look at ways to approaching your writing
- To experiment with ideas and learn how to develop ideas
- To learn more about personality and consider your purpose
- To explore complex issues related to your life/crime/imprisonment

For this exercise, you will write an essay about yourself. Writing about yourself can be tough. To focus yourself, try to imagine you are introducing yourself to a stranger. Consider: What does the person need to know in order to really know me? What is important to me that I share? What do I want someone walking away knowing or thinking about me after this introduction? Other questions to get you started writing are:

- Describe a challenge or event that made you into who you are today.
- What is your most interesting or unique quality?
- What are your short and long-term goals and how do you plan to achieve them?
- Write about a time you failed at something, overcame an obstacle and how it affected you, and what you learned about yourself.

Writing about ourselves can feel overwhelming. Where does one start with all of this raw material? But if you focus on a single theme, one specific topic, purpose or event that makes some greater point, it can help give people a sense of who you are without getting bogged down in every detail. Instead, aim to offer unique details that show your personality. For example, a too- general detail might read, "I like sports." A better way to explain this might be through a scene that brings the statement to life through action, something like:"When I was growing up, I would watch baseball games on television with my dad and brothers every Saturday before we would go outside and..."

Write your self-reflection in the first person (I, me, my) and let yourself say things that are honest.

After you've written this essay, put it aside for a week. Then, go back and read it. What are your thoughts about the story you've told about yourself? What did you learn about yourself from this telling? How can you use this skill of self reflection to improve your writing, or guide the further development of your artistic voice? How can you use the skill of self reflection in other areas of life?

Voice, or How To Write Like Yourself

You may think that "good" writing has to sound like a 19th century novel or a history textbook. Many of us were coached in school to bury our voice in favor of a supposedly universal one that was "good." In truth, nothing could be more wrong. When we write in our own voice we convey meaning most clearly to our readers. Your voice encapsulates where you're from, what you've lived through and gives others a sense of yourself. Even if you're a journalist or writing non-fiction essays, your voice matters. Readers want to hear from you—not a computer, not a writer they've already read, not a false version of the author.

However, it can be challenging to unlearn all of the coaching we've received that tells us it's better if we don't sound like ourselves. We can additionally become stymied by grammar concerns and other conventions that ask us to be too concerned with the rules, and less concerned about creative freedom. This section is designed to help you cultivate your personal voice as a writer so you can tell your most truthful story—whether it's about yourself, someone else or an exterior event or place.

It can be challenging to change our writing style, and if you're used to writing in a voice that's not your own (most of us imitate until we embrace and settle into our own style), it can be confusing to try to hear yourself. Here are some tips to start cultivating your voice:

1. Pay attention to yourself when you're talking. What are some common things you say? You can also ask friends for common, everyday words that you normally use in a conversation.
2. Use a friendly and casual tone when freewriting or responding to prompts.
3. Imagine you're writing to a friend.
4. Try saying aloud what you want to write and then write it down.
5. Write about an event you feel defines you.
6. Journal or keep a daily diary. By writing to yourself in a private space you can begin to hear yourself more clearly. It also allows you to see how the same themes and ideas come up for you again and again. Perspective is also a key element of cultivating your writerly voice.
7. Write about a personal achievement that is significant to you.
8. Read your writing aloud to yourself. Don't rush. Stop and add or take away words as needed so that what you've written is what you want to say.
9. When applicable, you can start with a personal anecdote, something short, interesting or even amusing. This short story of something that really happened to you or a person you know can help you begin writing in a way that enables you to embrace your voice.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

If in doubt, write something short! I learned more about writing, and got much better at it, by writing very short pieces. For about seven years, I wrote art reviews for an international magazine and had a very strict 250 word limit. This forced me to figure out exactly what I wanted to say, what was most important for readers to take away, and use the minimal amount of words to say it! This made me think carefully about the words, to ensure each one pulled its weight. It was hard at first, and I had to cut out way more than I had initially intended, but it really improved my writing. Give it a try! Write about something you care about, or want to share, and convey the full scope in just 250 words!

– Annie Buckley

Read Aloud

Reading your writing aloud, whether it's to yourself in your own space or to your writing group, can help you hear whether what you've written is in your own voice and help you pick out places where you need to add more or take away. Reading aloud just involves listening and thinking and what you've written. So, don't read automatically. Instead, listen to yourself as you would listen to others. Reading aloud is especially good for people who are auditory learners so, if you've always remembered information when someone told it to you, but not when you read it, this editing technique could be the one for you!

Reading Backwards

Reading your writing in reverse—as in last-sentence first while still reading a sentence as it's written—is a great editing technique when you're trying to catch minor errors such as misspellings, grammar, punctuation or missing words. Reading your writing backwards prevents you from becoming absorbed in the story or line of argument, where it is easy for the eye to skip over or fill in for mistakes. It helps to focus your attention on the words used. This is a good final step in editing before you send your piece off to a publication or perform it.

Pages 33-40, from Ryan Gattis's essay "On Fiction" in *The Sentences that Create Us* offer concrete ways to read your own writing and edit.

Revising

A SHORT NOTE: EDITING VS. FEEDBACK

We thought it would be helpful to offer a quick distinction on the two related, but notably different, terms. Sometimes new writers expect a workshop to feel something like an editing service, where members will mark up the paper with x's and rewrites. It's really not. A workshop is not meant to correct mistakes, but to build your own understanding of the work you're creating. It's a sounding board, not a quick fix, and certainly not a copyedit. That's not to say you can't ask a trusted member to read through a piece that you feel is done to find any last minute issues before you seek publication. It's great to ask that, but generally it's not the best use of a workshop.

We keep saying it, because we mean it: a lot of people think revision is looking for grammar errors or making sure your punctuation is correct. But, real revision is not polishing. It's taking a close look at what you've said and thinking about: whether other people understand it, if it's true to yourself and your writerly intentions, if it's written in your voice and are other people as drawn into your telling as you want them to be?

In this segment, you'll find techniques for revision that will help you change your writing without throwing everything away. We know revision is particularly challenging when you only have one draft, which may be your situation. In order to use some of the strategies in this section we offer the following suggestions for revision that won't ruin your only draft:

- Numbering of pages and numbering paragraphs so you can note, on another sheet of paper, which area of the text you want to add to, revise, move or take away.
- Get extra paper and write single-sided so you can add pages and notes in between your current draft. Make sure to note that they were added with symbols of your own devising or a revised page number system.
- If available, you can use post-it-notes to write marginal comments to yourself which can then be removed.

All of the editing strategies explained here can be paired with pages 21-23, 147-151, 152-162 in *The Sentences that Create Us* which talk about editing, what it is and how to do it. The top advice for revision and for taking feedback from others is: sleep on it! Nothing is better than getting space from your draft to see it with new eyes. If you've been working nonstop on something, start another project and come back to it in a week.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Years ago, when I first started writing, I loved the process, but felt like what I wrote never came close to the beautiful writing I loved to read. At the time, I admired the work of David Sedaris, so when I heard him being interviewed on the radio, I stayed in my car despite having arrived home. He mentioned casually that one of my favorite of his essays had been revised over 28 times. I started crying when he said that. I hadn't realized that "real writers" didn't write it perfectly the first time. I didn't know "real writers" had to try so hard. That moment was a turning point. I approached revision as part of the writing process and the mark of a professional writer instead of waiting for each new piece to land on the page finished. The first essay I truly revised (between 20-40 times) got me into graduate school, and was later published in a great magazine. I wish I'd learned sooner that revising isn't separate from writing, it is writing.

– Jen Bowen

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

I've never met a writer who enjoys critique. Books have been written about how writers need to develop thick skins. I developed mine easier than most because I was desperate. I was trying to learn to write in the county jail, but I had no resources. I did discover, though, that in the publishing industry, editors who see promise in a writer will sometimes write a personal rejection letter instead of sending a form rejection. On one hand, it was easier for me to accept critique when it meant that an editor thought I was special. On the other hand, it was the only form of instruction that I could access. So I devoured it, believing that THIS was the college education I couldn't afford. It took a while but it worked. After 12 years of submitting to editors and integrating their feedback, I published my first professional piece. The feedback had improved my craft so much that after the world saw my first piece, I published a professional piece every month for over a year.

Here's the thing I would say about feedback. I became a great writer not because I followed the right advice from editors and ignored the bad advice. I became a great writer because of what I learned from incorporating their feedback. It made my mind flexible, and I came to understand why things work or don't work because I had taken the time to implement them.

– Suotonye Deweaver

Responding to Feedback

You pour your heart and soul and history and ideas into a piece of writing. You put in time and effort. You are writing when you could be chatting with friends or reading, or whatever other thing you might enjoy doing. Most likely, this process matters deeply to you.

And yet, you don't want your writing to be just for you. You want others to engage with it and enjoy it. As a writer, you know what you mean. But what happens when someone else picks it up and reads that piece of writing, without the context of your brain and experience and feelings? Afterall, they're not you.

Feedback helps writers know how the writing that we are doing is landing with another person — another mind, another heart, another collection of experiences. That is an invaluable piece of the writing process if we want our writing to move beyond our experience and into a community of readers. Feedback is essential in order to bridge the gap between a writer's mind and a reader's mind. It should be a collaborative process but it is challenging.

It can be exhilarating to hear that someone "gets" you and the story or idea you are expressing. It can help us to feel seen and validated. But it can be really hard to hear people's feedback when they don't understand what you mean. Maybe they ask a question that seems so obvious to us and we want to say, "What do you mean? It's right there on the page!" It's important to remember that feedback is an opportunity to clarify for others what we want to convey as writers. If people are not getting an aspect of what we want to say, more than likely there is something that we might want to add or shift or change so that it's clearer.

But, not all feedback should be taken as a directive. How can we distinguish between feedback that helps and should be addressed to improve the writing, and feedback that is just someone's opinion? This is decidedly tricky. It depends on what the feedback is and who is sharing it. If someone simply shares that they like or don't like something, or whether it speaks to them, it might not be something you need to address. All writing is not for all people. But in general, if someone asks a question or makes a suggestion that shows that our writing is not as clear as we thought, it is a good idea to consider a revision towards clarity. Look for thoughtful readers that ask questions—not tell you what or how to write.

Here are some tips on how to seek and respond to feedback on your writing:

- Be your own first reader. When you complete a piece, or a chunk of a longer piece, step away for at least a day and then reread it. This will offer enough of a distance for things to pop out at you that need to be resolved or revised. If something sounds "off," or you don't feel good about how it is written, chances are it will benefit from another pass at that part before you share it with others.
- Read your work aloud to yourself or to someone else.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

I remember the excitement as I read the letter from the editor telling me that my essay had been accepted and would be published. He offered some feedback, three pages worth. At first I thought three pages? What did he actually like about my piece? As I reread his notes I realized this was an opportunity to raise the level of understanding and connection that a reader would experience as I shared what my incarceration was like. I saved those three pages of feedback and referred to them often as I was writing. Soon I found I was tapping into those bits of feedback in real time as I wrote. Though at first my ego was hurt, I went on to realize that this feedback made me a better writer.

— Michele Scott

- Be sure you take these steps before asking for feedback. This isn't to say you can't get feedback early in the process, but it takes time for people to read and reply to writing so you will get the most benefit if you spend time with your own writing to ensure it is the best you can make it before sharing it.
- Consider asking people to look for specific things in your writing. For example, maybe you want to know if the story flows, or if a character is fleshed out, or if the logic makes sense in your argument... you can ask these of your readers.
- Consider who is reading and offering feedback. Do they read widely and know a lot about writing, or the genre or topic you are addressing? Are they thoughtful and will they provide honest and helpful feedback? Do they know you very well? Have you told them this story or shared this idea with them before? All these can color a person's responses to our writing.
- When you do get feedback from the reader, try reading all the feedback once before you really respond to it. Try to be a bit outside yourself, and not react emotionally, so that you can hear their input. From there, whether it is positive or negative or both, a suggestion or idea or something else, set the feedback and your draft aside for at least a day. This will give you time to process.
- Return to the feedback the next day and consider: is all or part of this feedback relevant to what I am hoping to do with the writing? If so, how might I revise the text to address these issues or questions? If they are minor or grammatical revisions, what can you learn from them to apply in future writing? For bigger or more structural suggestions, take your time to consider what is being said and whether it warrants a major change. Maybe seek another opinion.
- From there, if you opt to revise, consider the best way to address the suggestions. If possible, have a conversation with the reader to get more insight into their ideas.

Overall, for better or for worse, you are in the driver's seat as a writer. You can seek input and learn from it and apply what is helpful to make your writing what it is that you want it to be.

Seeing Your Work With New Eyes: Visions and Revisions

This segment written by Heidi Czerweic, poet, essayist, and Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop instructor, offers a variety of strategies and techniques for reimagining your writing. The hope is that these exercises will provide a tool kit of strategies you can use to experiment with and enrich your writing. While these exercises were originally designed for poetry, including lineated poems, prose poems, and short/flash hybrids, if your piece is prose, these strategies will still prove useful. Each technique is divided into four "strengths." If you feel unsure about revision, begin with the "mild" version. If you are feeling brave, try the "extra spicy." Anything you experiment with will produce more ideas and options for you as a writer so, there's no wrong way to go about doing these.

CUTTING

Mild:

- ❍ Cut phrases like "I think," "I feel," "I believe," "I remember." Readers don't need these introductions. Instead, when you write, go directly to the thought/feeling/belief/memory.
- ❍ Cut phrases like "there is," "there are," "it is." These are static and use weak "to be" verbs, which is the most ambiguous verb. What 'being' is, has been a perennial philosophical conundrum!

Medium:

- ❍ Cut any overly obvious telling or explanation. For example, if you wrote, "I was hungry, so I ate something," consider either showing yourself preparing the food or telling the reader how you physically felt the hunger, and what you physically felt through consuming the food.
- ❍ Check for repetitions. When you repeat yourself, you've created a pattern. Is this on purpose? Is it doing work? Has the repetition come to mean something new? If not, consider cutting repetitions. Repetitions can also be a sign of insecurity or a mental block where we don't see the next step. Think about how you feel about any repeated phrases or words. Why are they coming up for you?

Spicy:

- ❍ Cut the first line or lines of poems. Even the whole first stanza can usually go—does the reader need that information? Which line first excites you—could that be the start? For prose works that are short, try cutting the first paragraph. For longer prose works, especially nonfiction—five pages or more—try cutting the whole first page. Readers don't need your background thinking. Throw readers into the story—hat's what engages a reader.
- ❍ Do the same with the last line/lines/stanza for poetry—is the poem trying too hard to wrap things up neatly? To tell us what it means? Trust the reader to get it, or else let the poem end in good mystery. For prose works, consider eliminating your conclusion paragraph. Conclusions are sometimes too neat. It's okay to leave a reader without a clean resolution, but with ideas that expand their thinking.

Extra Spicy:

- ❍ Read quickly through your poem and cut at least a third of it. For prose pieces, delete each sentence you read that slows you down or makes you lose attention. What happens when you do this? What do you think of each version? What's lost? What's gained?

GRAMMAR

Note: If you can do this exercise with different color pens/pencils/etc., even better!

Mild:

- ❍ Draw boxes around verbs (actions, states of being) and circle nouns (subjects, what's doing the action, or what's being acted upon).
- ❍ Look at these verbs and nouns. Are they clear? Are you identifying who is doing what? Are the actions strong actions—not weak actions like "being"? Nouns and verbs are the bedrock of English meaning. They perform the heavy lifting of language and so, it is important to make sure they are clear and important characters and things, actions and movements.
- ❍ Other weak verbs, including "to be,", are "to have," "to do," and "seems." If you're using verbs that hardly move at all, like these, try replacing them with dynamic, active, specific ones that bring life to your writing.

Medium:

- ❍ Underline your descriptions, especially your modifiers (adjectives and adverbs, words that describe nouns or verbs), like big man or he ran quickly. Sometimes, simple descriptions are the best. But watch out for weak modifiers that are covering for weak nouns and verbs. Consider what's most effective and take out a thesaurus—all writers use them! You can replace 'big man' for example with "giant" or "behemoth," or "ran quickly" with "sprinted" or "raced."

Spicy:

- ❍ English favors a sentence construction of Subject-Verb-Object. This is how "active voice" is achieved in writing, and it's considered the clearest form of communication in English. But if most of your sentences are the same structure (Subject-Verb-Object), it can become repetitive and tiresome for readers. Writing can also feel repetitive if sentences are similar lengths. If you notice similar sentence structure and length, try to change some of the structures. Make compound sentences by

joining two sentences using "and," "but," "or," or "so." Depending on the style, you can include a few sentence fragments, which are short and slow our focus down. You can also ask a question or two.

Extra Spicy:

- Try rewriting a short piece as all one sentence, and see how that affects the pace/sound/experience of your writing. You can even try this with longer pieces. There are several highly acclaimed novels that have whole chapters made up of a single, run-on sentence, including Samuel Beckett's The Unnamable.

STRUCTURE

Mild:

- Swap the first and last stanzas of your poem or the first and last lines of a paragraph. How does this change the terms, argument or narrative? If you like what it does, especially for prose, you could be "burying the lede" in your writing. That means you're saving the best or most significant point for last.

Medium:

- For poetry: try writing it backwards, line by line. Then go back and add any connective language to help it make sense. How does that change the shape of the poem? Of how it unfolds? Its arc?
- For prose: write an entire paragraph backwards. Then, add the necessary logical connections needed for comprehension. How does this shift your telling?

Spicy:

- Try changing the form of the poem. If it's in a poetic paragraph, put it in lines. If it's in long lines, make them all short, or vice versa. If it's in free verse, try a form such as: quatrain haiku, sonnet. If it's in a form, try putting it into free verse. Or find a poem you like of similar length, and model your structure on theirs.
- For prose: if your narrative is descriptive, rewrite it as dialog.

Extra Spicy:

- If you're working on a poem, double-space it (or write it out, leaving a space between each line). Now, go back and add a new line in between each of the old lines, connecting them. Your poem is now two times as long. How has this changed the poem? Has it added anything new that's helpful or exciting? Or is it just padded? Now cut the double-sized poem by at least a third by eliminating the lines that you don't like as much.
- For prose: re-write your narrative so that it starts at the end. Then, work your way back to the beginning by the end of the story. This is called a circular structure and many famous novels are written like this, including Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird.

PACING

This whole strategy is spicy!

- For poetry: Put your poem into couplets of similar-length lines. The idea is just to force yourself to play with meter and length. You probably won't keep it in couplets (in fact you the next step suggests you won't!), but the exercise will help you see it with new eyes.
- Once you've arranged your poem this way, go through it and see how many of these lines you're devoting to various aspects of your poem:to a description, an image, an explanation, a gesture, a moment. Are you dedicating 5-6 lines to an image where you only need 2-3? Are you over explaining something? Are you putting a hat on a hat? This exercise will help reveal what economies of language and space you're using. Pare down what's being overwritten. Add more if you think you've given too little space to a certain idea or image that needs more development. Return the poem to its previous form, and adjust as needed.
- For prose: Take a section of dialog and add descriptions for what each person who speaks looks like, how they move and how they respond to others. Descriptions should be no less than a sentence for each line of dialog—even if the character just says "hello." This will reveal whether you're rushing.f the added descriptions benefit the scene, adding depth to characters or giving readers insight into what's at stake, slow your pace down and add more description throughout your work.

SOUND

Mild:

- Read a short piece aloud several times—even better if you can also have someone read it aloud to you!—and note where it sounds especially good, or clunky, or awkward. Revise the parts that could sound better.

Medium:

- For poems: Read aloud for line breaks (if your piece is in lines), allowing a very brief pause at the end of each line. Does it sound good? Awkward? You might want to shift where the line break falls.
- For prose: pause for each paragraph. Does the meaning benefit from these breaks? Are there places where there should be a pause but there isn't?

Spicy:

- For poetry: Add rhyme! This does not have to be at the ends of lines, where we're used to seeing/hearing it. If there are two (or more) things you want to parallel or draw a comparison between, using a rhyme will also draw the ear and attention to it. Even in an otherwise unrhymed poem, rhyming the last two lines can create a sense of closure.
- For prose: try adding alliteration to descriptions. Alliteration

is when the same letter or sound occurs at the beginning of, or adjacent to closely connected words. For example, "sweet birds sang."

Extra Spicy:

- ❍ Add other sound effects. What's happening auditorily and can you describe it? Common ways to describe sound are through metaphors like, "the gates shut with a clanging like rolling thunder," or other analogies. In poetry, sounds can also be evoked by the words. For instance, if there are bees, you could add consonance (repeated consonant sounds) by using a lot of z's, v's, m's, and n's to create buzzing/humming sounds. If your poem is a lament, you could add assonance (repeated vowel sounds) like long O sounds to mimic moaning. The pace of a piece can also mimic sound. If you want your piece to evoke slow sounds, you might use lots of one-syllable nouns and verbs. If you want to evoke a faster pace, you could use lots of 3+ syllable words.

TURNS

This one's all spicy!

Still stuck? Write into weirdness, strangeness, mystery. Use one or more unexpected turns in action, plot or character response to shift your piece in a new and unexpected direction. Think of your scene, and write something that comes after that may not be what really happened, or what you think should happen, or what would realistically happen—but it opens possibilities, a new road for the story to travel, and perhaps, it just fits. Maybe it's where the piece wants you to go! If you're revising this way for poetry, you can also add lines or unattached notes from your notes, physically moving them around in the poem to see what they might add.

Peer Editing

Editing benefits a writer by giving not just overall impressions or a focus on one specific aspect of the writing (the revision approach we've stressed throughout the curriculum thus far), but more sentence-level reading for small issues that may impede understanding or not conform to conventions readers expect. While the prior strategy is usually most beneficial for pieces that are earlier in the writing process, this feedback is appropriate for pieces that have already had verbal feedback and the writer has revised for comprehension and clarity. In order for editing on this level to be useful, the author should be looking at what minor changes can clean up a piece now that they feel good about overall structure, meaning and style.

If your group agrees, it might be nice to agree on a few standard proofreading symbols as a way of communicating. An example is below, but feel free to take or leave them, or add your own.

WC	Best word choice?
??	I'm confused by what you're trying to say.
¶	New paragraph/Add paragraph here.
#	Add space, often used between sections.
!!	This surprised me.
Sp.	Spelling error.
✓	This is good!
✓✓✓	This is really good! ;)

Performative Reading

Not all authors write with the intent of a performative reading. Although for those who do, (spoken word poets, musicians, playwrights, speech crafters, etc.) it is important to be mindful that the listening audience is engaged differently than a reading audience. A person sitting in their favorite spot with tea or coffee holding a book, tablet or magazine becomes involved in the reading enough to allow a little more time for the plot to develop and the characters or concepts to emerge as the arc takes shape. Doing performative readings within writers workshops can help performative creators revise. Performative pieces need audience engagement, and performers need to feel their pieces out on real, live people.

Here are some performance tips:

- The listening audience is waiting. When one steps on a stage or performs a reading to a group, it is important to draw them in quickly. Whereas pacing is important to any genre, in pieces written to be proformative, it is wise to imagine yourself having a little less time to capture your audience and thus plots, characters, concepts and ideas must take form a little sooner. This doesn't mean reading or speaking faster, but rather being mindful of this in the writing and revising of the piece to be performed. One way to do this is to: Go Big Soon. Whether it's a spoken word poem, monologue or lecture, putting a big claim, statement, character, image, thought or idea out to your audience quickly can accelerate engagement. It doesn't have to be the main idea or reveal but something significant should be offered as an early entry point. Keeping this in mind will help one write to perform.
- Performative pieces may include more sounds like "cling, cling, cling-clack and echo, echo, echo" written with the intent of including vocally projected sounds to accompany the read text. If you find yourself using these kinds of words and descriptions when you're performing your piece, consider adding those into the written work itself.
- While it isn't necessary to memorize your work for a performative read, you do need to be familiar enough with your content that you can alter the flow, improvise parts, project sounds and be demonstrative at any time within the presented piece. If you're stumbling over your own sentence construction, be aware that your listener will, too. You should be able to look up and out at the audience while finishing the sentence or paragraph, and not struggling to find the next sentence where you left off.
- Performative readings can leverage numerous ways for communicating emotion that writing on the page doesn't always capture: shouting, pounding, singing, clapping or speaking in tongues can all add a dimension of expression in how the text is read. While reading, project out to your listener with numerous devices as opposed to singular delivery methods only emphasized by inflection. Integrating a variety of vocal sounds and volumes, along with body movements, facial expressions and non-verbal clues all add performative essence. If you have not included these elements in your written text but engage them in your performance, try to write those elements in on the page, too? Are they actions a particular character takes? Are they tones of voice someone uses? Are there pauses for meaning that you should add?

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

When we were a young writing collective, we were granted the opportunity for a reading with an audience of peers and staff, which included the warden at the time, and other decision makers. The reading allowed all of us real space to share work without any critical analysis or pressure. These performances provide an energy and collective feeling that helps feed, grow and strengthen the community. The impression that first reading left with the warden created enough room for our collective to materialize into a community that was prepared for other writing opportunities that would come later. It also encouraged people outside of the group to join. Inevitably, that first reading became a model for an ongoing reading series at MCF-Stillwater, and pilot readings throughout the facilities in Minnesota, bringing in dozens of accomplished free world writers into the facilities to lend some credibility to the community we were creating. Reginald Dwayne Betts, Kao Kalia Yang, Charles Baxter, and Jimmy Santiago Baca were all writers that came and spent time with us. These readings did a lot to build up our own community, and intertwined us with the greater writing community beyond the walls. Every year, the MPWW holds a public reading for the work of its students. It does more than connect the free world writing community with our prison writing community. These readings create public gathering spaces that allow family and formerly incarcerated people to stay plugged into our creative universe, thus giving it amplified voice and ability to be seen.

– Zeke Caligiuri

For more on performative writing please see pgs 210-215 from Sterling Cunio's essay "On Writing and Staging a Play in Prison" in *The Sentences That Create Us*.

Creating Products

Each writing group will benefit from the creation of a final product to celebrate the work that has been done and document the writing community's journey. Below are some suggestions:.

Anthologies: Your group can collect one example piece from each writer at the end of the workshop period or sporadically—say, twice a year—and collect those pieces into one pamphlet of writing. You can decorate these with drawings and have someone photocopy them for you, if possible. Or, people can copy them out by hand and each version will be a unique testament to the work you each have done.

Podcasts: Groups can create podcasts that feature conversations about writing and craft, readings from group participants and sharing of favorite passages from published works. If you have the capacity to create a podcast, it can be done in tandem with your workshop and document the stages, struggles and victories of the group's writerly journey—which is a hero's journey of it's own.

Newsletters: Another great way to share information on an ongoing basis is to create weekly or bi-monthyl newsletters that share interviews with writers, excerpts from pieces being worked on, and advice from the group for others interested in building a writing practice. These can be decorated as well, and photocopied or passed around.

Performances: Staged readings or performative readings are also great ways to share work when group participants are ready. The group can plan a time when participants can share their work with the larger community, and read or perform their writings for an outside audience, if such means are available.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

In 2008, a young version of our cohort published an anthology of our work, "Letters to a Young Man and Other Writings." For most of us, it was the first time we had seen our name in print next to our art. As part of the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop, we started editing an annual anthology of the work within Minnesota prisons. It offered a shared platform for writers throughout the state, and editing experience for those of us fortunate enough to be on the editorial board. There have since been numerous anthologies and zines published, along with other shared community opportunities for the work of those in the collective to professionalize their work.

– Zeke Caligiuri

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

When our Life Without Parole (LWOP) Support Group was looking for ways to advocate for ourselves we generated a book, "Resilience," which represented 22 individuals serving LWOP). We included a bio page with our achievements, hopes and goals and what each person valued. The book included a section of six questions, highlighting brief quotes of each person's answer to: How they felt about their crime; What would they say to their victim's family if given the chance: Did they believe they deserved an opportunity to parole; And what they did with their life in amends for their crime. When creating a product, be creative and think of how the content you create ties into your passion or cause. A copy of our book was presented to the Governor. Out of the 22 women featured and serving LWOP at the time, over 50% are now free. What we create holds an energy that can change our experiences. Think outside of the box and dream big with what you choose to create.

– Michele Scott

NOTES

04

Glossary of Literary Terms

Glossary created by Kathryn Savage, author of Groundglass, and Jennifer Bowen, founder of MPWW

Character: Characters are the people in a work of prose. One, or many, characters are the guiding force behind the narrative because through their emotions, actions, and behaviors, plotlines emerge.

Couplets: A couplet is two lines of verse in the same meter and usually joined by rhyme. For example: "Good night! Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow/ That I shall say good night till it be morrow" from Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare. Or from Shakespeare's Sonnet 81: "You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen/Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men." Or from Alexander Pope, who wrote: "Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?/ Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?"

Descriptive Language: Descriptive language is language that evokes the five senses: sight, smell, sound, touch, taste. It is the sensory way the world of the story is described. If a character is walking down a sidewalk on a rainy spring night, what are the smells in the air, how do the parked cars look? What color is the sidewalk? What sounds do the character's shoes make on the ground? Descriptive language evokes place and works over the reader's senses to root the reader in scene.

Dialogue: Dialogue is what characters say and how they say it. When your character's hurting, do they run to the nearest ear and confess all their sorrows? Does your character go to any and every length to avoid honestly answering the question, "So, how's life at home?" Does your character have a word they always say first when they first greet someone? Does your character say thank you every time a store clerk gives her the receipt? Does your character never thank anyone? Think of dialogue as both what characters say and also how what they say reveals how they feel and behave. Dialogue can be used to show the reader that the character speaking is honest or dishonest, comfortable or uncomfortable, happy or sad. The language of your character's successes and failures will be unique to the whole of who they are. Characters can also speak differently to different people. How does the same character address their wife, child, boss, neighbor? Context and dialogue are in relationship as people usually speak differently depending on who they're talking to.

First Person: This style of narration uses the "I" voice. I saw, I felt, I heard, I went. Narratives told in this form have a quality of seeming "close." The reader feels close to the "I" voice because there is not really any psychic distance. What the "I" voice perceives, feels, and notices in a given scene is what the reader sees too.

Memory: Memory is connected with character and point of view. In a work of prose, what characters remember reveals who they are and what they think about. For example, a father and son live in two different states. The father character thinks about his son. What are the father's specific memories of their child? When did they last see each other?

How do these particular memories reveal both who the child is, but, more importantly, who the father is? Memories reveal the father character's thoughts, feelings, shames, obsessions, desires, failures, and moments of joy. They are useful in prose because they can exist in "backstory" or "flashback" a mode outside the story's present timeline.

Plot and Narrative: Plot is the actions and the sequence of the actions in a narrative. Plot has the characteristic of sequence. The reasons attributed to the actions are a significant component of plot. It's the order of information.

Point of View: Point of view is how the story is seen and told. Point of view can be seen as the selection of detail and the ordering of events (credit: Ethan Canin). Point of view is what the characters see and feel and respond to and how this information is ordered in the narrative. Point of view is both connected to character and plot.

Psychic Distance: John Gardner wrote, in The Art of Fiction, that psychic distance is the emotional distance the reader feels between himself and the story. Understood this way, psychic distance is a way to control, as you write, the distance or proximity of the narrator to the point of view character(s). Psychic distance can be close, very close, or far. For example, "Mr. Gardner loved coffee," has a different degree of psychic distance than: "If I wake every morning and don't immediately have coffee I feel like I'll pass out from exhaustion." The first example is more distant than the second. The narrator is describing Mr. Gardner in the third person, and in the second example, the voice of the narrator is the "I" voice, the first-person voice, the voice of the character. More detailed information on styles of narration the writer can choose to use are described below.

Second Person -This style of narration uses "you" and the reader might feel very close to the narrator because we are being told "you went," "you saw," "you felt" and it can be a useful style when writing about certain charged material where the intent is for the reader to feel very close to the material/narrator.

Setting: Setting is where the story takes place. It is the physical world of the story. Setting is where characters live. What they do for work. What the couch in the main character's home looks like. Setting also speaks to class and specialized knowledge: can your character afford the things in his home, or is money tight? Does walking into his living room and seeing his couch cause the character to feel calm, or stressed out? If one setting in your story is a hospital, say, is the character the doctor or the patient? The doctor would possess specialized knowledge useful in this particular setting; the patient might feel afraid at the hospital. Setting can be useful in understanding where characters feel like they do and don't belong. The physical world of the story raises other questions useful to consider as you write: questions about inclusion, safety, class, comfort, and identity.

Style: Style is connected with rhythm and sentence structure and movement: it's the way the story is told. It is the movement of the writer's syntax. Sentences. It's the use of grammar. Is the story told in short declarative sentences? Are paragraphs languid and full of rich evocative language? Style and rhythm are the music of the words on the page.

Third Person Close: This style of narration use the pronouns "he" "she" and "they" to create distance so the reader and the narrator are observing one character move through time. This style of narration doesn't allow the narrator to "get inside the mind" of multiple characters, but keeps the gaze trained on a single character's inner life.

Third Person Omniscient: This style of narration uses "he," "she," "they," and the pronouns create distance so the reader and the narrator are observing the same character move through time. Omniscience gives the narrator the capacity to get inside other character's heads too. One narrator can be in the mind of many characters and depict a range of inner lives, thoughts, and feelings. This is a style of narration with a fairly large reach and scope and can be useful when, say, writing a novel told from multiple points of view.

Time: To quote Joan Silber, "time draws the shapes of stories." Silber defines plot as a pattern of events and through those events, meaning. Seen in this way, the length of time a story chooses to narrate is directly related to what the story is about. Time also impacts scene. Silber again: "The longer something takes, the more emotionally important it is." Time can be applied to the whole piece of writing and to scenes within the narrative. Time in narrative can be urgent, slowed down, or otherworldly depending on how the writer wants the reader to be affected by the work of the scene.

Tone: Tone is what sets the mood and atmosphere in a story. Tone is a way to prepare the reader for what's coming. Is the tone of the piece humorous? Menacing? Sad? This is the element in a work of writing that unites other elements like character and plot with language choices and the movement of sentences and paragraphs.

Voice: Voice is the style of the speaker. Voice can be attributed to the characters or the work at large. In a work of prose, a short story, one character might speak in a distinct voice. In an essay, or a work of first-person memoir, the essay itself might have a consistent voice. The narrator can have a strong voice. Certain characters might have very different voices in a single narrative, and these different voices converging will give the voice of the whole text dynamism. The voice of the work of writing can contain many voices.

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