

FREELANCE WRITING COURSE

LIFELONG LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

WINTER 2017

Session 1, INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

Distribute handouts

Instructor's professional bio (students may ask me questions)

What course will and will not cover

In-class writing assignment to assess skills, commitment, and knowledge of subject:

What is your conception of what a freelance writer does? Why do you want to learn about freelance writing and how do you think this course will help, i.e., what are your expectations for the course? Has student published? Where? How much?

Recommended reference works:

William Zinsser's ON WRITING WELL, the unofficial text and model for the course.

The Elements of Style, Strunk and White

The Elements of Grammar, Margaret Shertzer

Additional recommended reference works:

On Writing, Stephen King

Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing Classic Prose, Francis-Noel Thomas and Mark Turner

Any style books, such as AP, Chicago, New York Times, etc.

Dictionaries and thesauruses can be found online but it doesn't hurt to have good, up-to-date print copies.

Other resources: foreign language dictionaries, writer's market guides, internet sites for freelancing and blogging, almanacs, encyclopedias, public records, phone directories (online), etc.

Participants are not required to purchase these books for the course, but they are highly recommended for a writer's reference shelf.

For next session, bring in five ideas for stories (Story ideas can be found everywhere: personal interests, observing the world around you, interesting people you know or don't know about whom you think you could write an interesting profile, everyday activities, etc.)

Pick three ideas and write stories from them, one each for the next three sessions. **Stories should run no more than 600 words.** We will discuss work in class. Assignment for the final session will include writing a query letter about the story. We will do a mini-workshop at the last session if the class size is small enough by then and time is right.

If there is time, start on writing fundamentals

Session 2, WRITING FUNDAMENTALS

The differences and similarities between journalistic and literary writing.

Basic tools: vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Simplicity, clarity, unity and style (voice)

Rhythm in prose, as in poetry: Thomas Paine quote: “These are the times that try men’s souls.”

“Clutter is the disease of American writing. The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. If the reader is lost, it’s usually because the writer hasn’t been careful enough.” (Zinsser)

The Zinsser FDR example:

A government blackout memo given in 1942 to Pres. Roosevelt, read like this:

“Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all federal buildings and non-federal buildings occupied by the federal government during an air raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination.”

Roosevelt’s response: “Tell them that in buildings where they have to keep the work going to put something across the windows.”

Adapting fiction techniques to non-fiction

Keeping a journal

Style, Usage and Unity

Language is dynamic, but we have to know what the fundamentals of clear language are before departing from them, even if changes come that go against long-established rules, i.e., nouns now being used as verbs. It’s OK, as long as it’s recognized in the dictionary.

Avoid trendy words that will date your writing, unless you’re writing for a trendy publication, like Entertainment Weekly or a “trend” blog.

Session 3, WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

Determine your audience

Article categories: General feature, news feature, profiles, columns, op-ed, criticism, special interest publications (science, business, nature, cooking, cars, skiing, parenting, tattooing, etc.)

Article structure

Research

Interview techniques

Query Letters

(Can continue to next session if necessary)

Session 4, MARKETING YOUR WORK I

Query letters continued, if necessary

The difference between a query letter and a cover letter

Getting started and getting serious as a freelancer

Researching markets

The writer/editor relationship

Manuscript format

Summing up for success:

Savvy, professional writing and queries

Honed reporting and interviewing skills

Professional looking submissions

Session 5, MARKETING YOUR WORK II

Tracking stories

Networking

Getting assignments

Fees

Taxes and deductible expenses

Short session on e-markets, blogging