

Creative Writing virtual course (a practical approach)

October 2011 – March 2012

Summary

This course in Creative Writing will familiarize students with the very basics of writing fiction, poetry, drama and creative non-fiction in English. In a much larger sense, the course should enable students to strengthen their ability to use written language for expression and communication purposes. The course will be conducted in ten workshops, where students will produce their own writing exercises as the main object and basis for class discussion. However, we will also discuss well known published authors in our way to understanding how literature, in a very broad sense, works.

Main Objective

This course will help students become more aware of their writing “voice” by helping them strengthen basic writing skills and learn the basics of writing fiction, poetry, drama and creative non-fiction.

Specific objectives

- Understand the difference between literary/non-literary language.
- Improve overall writing and communication skills: word choice, simplicity, the importance of rewriting, coherence, eliminating clutter, and the use of literary devices.
- Understand the basic working of fiction, poetry, drama, and creative non-fiction by examining point of view, dialogue, time, style, etc.



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Addressed to

Writers at all levels and people who want to start writing in English. It requires an advanced level in English.

Syllabus

- I. Introduction
- II. Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Creative Non-Fiction
- III. Poetry
- IV. Novel and Novella
- V. Short stories and micro-stories
- VI. Time and plot, the knot
- VII. Character, point of view, place
- VIII. Tone, Rhythm, Voice
- IX. Dialogue
- X. Other creative writing genres – the sky is the limit

Program

	Topics
CLASS I Introduction	• Why write? What makes a good writer? What is literary language? • Topic: What makes a good writer. Simplicity. Literary language vs. non-literary language. Introduction to literary devices. • Readings: (Excerpts) <i>On Writing Well</i> Ch.2 – Simplicity by William Zinsser, <i>Travels with Charley</i> by John Steinbeck, <i>Oliver Twist</i> by Charles Dickens.
CLASS II Fiction vs. Non-Fiction	• Where do we draw the line between fiction and non-fiction? • Topic: Define subcategories: Novel, Novella, Short story, micro-story; memoir, travel writing, newspaper piece, autobiography, letters, textbooks etc. What is creative non-fiction? • Readings: Fiction and non-fiction piece on the same topic. Creative non-fiction example. Bill Bryson's <i>A Short History of Nearly Everything</i>, John McPhee's <i>The Control of Nature</i>, Carl Sagan's <i>Cosmos</i>, Truman Capote "In Cold Blood", Zinsser Ch.
CLASS III Poetry	• What exactly is poetry? • Topic: Short introduction to poetry. The importance of observational skills. Show, don't tell. Look at famous poems and focus on their use of line breaks, imagery, diction (word elisions). "you should notice and fondle details" (Nabokov) Dimension, senses, light and place. Readings: <i>In a station of the metro</i> Ezra Pound, <i>Ars Poetica</i> Archibald Macleish, <i>Introduction to Poetry</i> Billy Collins, <i>The Great Figure</i> William Carlos Williams. <i>The rusty spigot</i> Eve Merriam.



CLASS IV Novel and Novella	• When was the first novel written and how has it changed over time? Novel vs. Novella. • Topic: History of the novel. American and British famous novels over time. Differences in how they are set up – nuts and bolts of each. Structure. Readings: Zinsser Ch.7 Usage, excerpts from famous novels over time – the first novel, Jane Austen, etc. Compare and contrast.
CLASS V Short stories and micro-stories	• Are short stories easier to write than novels? Differences? How are they similar to poetry? R. Carver “One good short story is worth any number of bad novels.” • Topic: What are short stories and micro stories. Structuring the conflict – physical conflict and unwritten problem (the theme). The time in the story – structuring a line of events from photos. Focus on a <i>moment</i>, not on a casually connected chain of events. Compression of elements in a novel (like a poem). • Readings: Zinsser, photos (give ahead of time?). Raymond Carver <i>Beginners</i> excerpts. Washington Irving “Rip Van Winkle” Edgar Allen Poe, Chekov “slice-of-life” short story. Micro-story?? R. Chandler, Alice Munroe
CLASS VI Time and Plot, the knot	• What is the role of time in a story? • Topic: Time with conflict. Flash-forwards, flashbacks, present tense, memory, “stream of consciousness” Readings: William Faulkner
CLASS VII Character, Point of View, Place	• Where can you get ideas for creating your characters? • Topic: How to build character. Look at characters profiles from a selection of novels. Write profile of people you see in a picture. Narration – 1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person Readings: (pictures by Cartier-Bresson, etc.) Zinsser on ...



CLASS VIII Tone, Rhythm, Voice	• What is authorship? What would happen if you changed the voice? • Topic: What authors have distinctive voices? What make them distinctive? Writing for adults and writing for children. How do you create a fictional voice? Creating mood with characterization, description, images • Readings: Bukowski, Charles. "you and I", Jhumpa Lahiri, Highsmith, Patricia (Compare two of her novels), Zinsser Ch. 4 Style. Ch.20 The Sound of your Voice. William Faulkner (distinctive voice)
CLASS IX Dialogue	• How important is dialogue? • Topic: The keys to writing dialogue. – study the great writers. • Readings: Zinsser Ch. 10 Bits and Pieces.
CLASS X The sky is the limit	• Writing is not limited to novels, short stories and poems! • Topic: Fiction: Adventure novels, children's storybooks, comic novels, gothic horror novels, historical novels, mysteries, science fiction, westerns, etc. Non-Fiction: articles, essays, magazine articles, humorous pieces, memoirs, letters, research papers, textbooks. • Readings: of humorous piece, magazine article, mystery, children's storybook (dr. seuss)



Methodology

This online course will be run in our virtual classroom www.laboratoriodeescritura.com/aulavirtual, where the course programme is designed with a dynamic and creative learning methodology. The course is organized into **10 topics of online theory and practice** using collaborative learning tools and individual and group participation. Students can access the platform at any time of day, where they will find readings, exercises and an ongoing discussion forum. The teacher will moderate the classes and monitor the progress of students entirely through the online platform.

General Aspects

- Students will primarily doing individual work, but at times they will work with their professor or fellow students.
- Most of the readings will be either downloadable (from this platform) or links will be provided to articles that can be found on the internet.

Teaching Activities

- Open-ended questions that invite reflection.
- Reading and writing for each class.
- Debate on the readings and active participation in the Forum.
- Debate and resolving of any doubts in Videoconference and Chat sessions that will be scheduled by the professor.
- Written texts will be submitted in the section “Tasks”.
- Course evaluation.

The Professor will also make use of the notice board to keep students up to date on any changes, and the calendar to let them know about the due dates for writing pieces and scheduled Chat sessions.



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Reviewing Student writing

The professor will make comments on the texts and will offer a general evaluation along with advice on how to improve the writing.

Evaluation

All the exercises and the participation in teaching activities (forum, chat, video conference, course readings, etc) will be evaluated on a scale of **100 points**. The minimum number of points needed to obtain the **final certificate** is **60 points**.

The professor will submit a **general evaluation** of the learning process of each student, as well as further recommendations and advice for continuing with their writing.

At the end of the course there will be a **self-evaluation** that the student will need to fill out and evaluate his or her learning and participation in the course.

Certification

The Laboratorio de Escritura will present the student with a **certificate of completion** of the course if the student has successfully carried out a minimum level of participation (forums, chats, email, message board), and has submitted all writing tasks.

Calendar

Starting dates October 17, 2011 – March 16, 2012	Duration 5 months
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Technical Requirements

To access the virtual classroom and the courses for which you are registered, you will need:

- A PC, laptop or other electronic device: Windows or Macintosh, mobile phone, iPad with internet access. It doesn't matter what type of connection you have - both ADSL and dial-up work fine.
- Internet browser: Firefox (recommended), Safari, Opera, Chrome or Internet Explorer. You can use whichever you prefer.
- Speakers
- Web camera / microphone
- Email account

Teacher

Margaret Luppino

Margaret obtained her BA in Romance Languages and Literatures (with a major in French and Italian Literatures) from Mount Holyoke College, (Massachusetts, USA). As a student she worked part-time as a writing and speaking mentor for Mount Holyoke College's Speaking Arguing and Writing Program, helping fellow students improve the communication of their ideas (in both English and French) in various disciplines. Following her studies, she has worked as a freelance translator (primarily Catalan to English, but also French, Italian and Spanish to English when necessary), an English teacher and a freelance writing consultant.