

Close to Life: Writing Short Personal Essays – Syllabus

Instructor: Christine Schoefer (cschoefer@berkeley.edu)

6 Monday sessions: March 31; April 7,14,21,28; May 5; from 10 a.m.–noon

Room 365 Golden Bear Center, 1995 University Ave.

What do short essay writers do? We pay attention to what happens around us (exterior world) and what we feel (interior world). In writing, we reflect on our impressions and weave what we know. Memories surface, fresh insights arise. Writing, it turns out, is a verdant field of discovery. And yet, for many writers – not only beginners - it is challenging to step away from everyday life and immerse into the magical process of writing that is solitary, generative and creative.

This course offers techniques for getting into the creative flow and working there. We will discuss concepts like narrative, dialogue, “less is more.” Mostly, you will practice writing. As you give and receive meaningful feedback in class, you hone the essential skill of revising your own work. You will write short personal essays in class and at home to craft your style and your voice.

Week One – Plunging In

- Check in
- Introduction and agreements.
- Getting to know each other
- Discussion: What do we need to write?
- In class writing: Haiku
- What makes a personal essay?
- Practicing at home – yes, there is homework!

Week Two –Creative Flow

- Check in
- Discussion: Naming our demons and our guides - what interferes with our writing? What supports our writing?
- Recognizing the generative flow of writing
- Skill building: Narrative writing
- In class guided writing practice
- Practicing at home with prompt

Week Three- Vitality

- Check in
- Skill building: Voice (exterior and interior world)
- In class writing practice
- Skill building: how to give meaningful feedback
- Discussion: finding the energetic heart of a piece of writing.
- Sharing writing and giving feedback
- Practicing at home with prompt

Week Four –Revising

- Check in
- Skillbuilding: Revision
- In class writing practice
- Working in small groups with this writing
- Practicing at home

- **Session Five – Art and Craft: workshopping participants’ writing**
- Check in
- Sharing our writing in class. The writing process is solitary and sharing allows the opportunity to offer and receive support in a structured context.
- Discussion
- Practicing at home
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- **Session Six – Art and Craft: workshopping participants’ writing**
- Check in
- Continuing to share our writing in class
- Discussion: What did I learn that inspires and deepens my writing practice?
- Free writing: How will I stay in the flow of writing after this class?
- Resource sharing: finding writing partners, sharing venues that publish short pieces, and other tips.