



THIS IS **NOT** A
WRITING
MANUAL

Teacher's Edition

KERRI MAJORS

Hello Teachers, Librarians, and Literacy Specialists!

Thank you for inviting my book into your collection; I hope that together we can mentor as many young writers as possible. To show my gratitude, **I'd like to offer you some of my best material for teaching creative writing.** Because I was a writing professor for many years, I know how busy you are and how hard it is to figure out how to use a new book in your class. While *This Is Not a Writing Manual* could certainly sit on your shelf waiting for an eager (or even reluctant!) young writer to find it, I'd rather you have some tools to help reach out to those writers.

I wish I could do this myself! But I can't teleport into each of your classrooms to do the lessons with your students.*

In this package is a series of lesson plans that I have put in a logical progression, starting with the **Think Like an Editor** workshop, which coaxes students into critique mode with writing that is *not* their own. Young writers especially feel more comfortable discussing writing that they didn't do themselves, but once they see how productive and fun such a discussion can be and learn that "critique" doesn't always mean "criticize," they get hooked on the whole workshop idea.

However! You do not have to do the lessons in the order in which I put them, nor do you have to do all, or even several, of the lessons in order to give your students a valuable taste of the creative writing process. Feel free to pick your favorite lesson and just do that one. These lessons will **improve the writing of any students in middle and high school (not just the self-professed creative writers)**, and I have also noted **Advanced Options** for more mature and experienced students (**even at the college level!**), including a **bonus advanced workshop about revision**, called "Cut Half."

I've also included some other writing class essentials: "**Workshop Ground Rules**," a "**Guide to Forming a Teen Writing Group**," and a "**Reader's Guide for *This Is Not a Writing Manual***."

And because I know you are all conscientious teachers, I want to reassure you that **everything in this package will help you bring your students up to (and surpass!) Common Core Standards.** This package and the book are ideal to help you with the third core standard for writing, "Text Types and Purposes" in grades 6–12: "Write narratives to develop real or *imagined experiences or events* using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences" (emphasis mine). All of my lesson plans ask students to do just this with increasing levels of difficulty. I also encourage students to think about the "Production and Distribution of Writing," another Core Standard, including gathering feedback, revising their work, and even moving it toward publication.

IF I MAY, HERE IS ONE REQUEST: In the interest of fair use, when you are copying and pasting the prompts from this document into your photocopies or online bulletin boards for students, please also paste something like “This prompt is courtesy of Kerri Majors, author of *This Is Not a Writing Manual: Notes for the Young Writer in the Real World.*” Many thanks for your consideration of this matter.

If you are searching for more creative-writing teaching resources, you might want to check out my literary journal, YARN, which provides quite a few lesson plans based on the fiction, poetry, and essays we publish: www.yareview.net. Not only is YARN a resource for your classroom, but it is also a publishing opportunity for your students.

Thanks very much for your time. I hope to hear from you as well! I love to interact on Facebook, Twitter, and my website. Or feel free to e-mail me at [kerri\[at\]kerrimajors.com](mailto:kerri[at]kerrimajors.com).

Happy reading and writing,

Kerri

* I might be able to Skype into your class, though. Or if you are in the Boston metro area, I just might be able to make a live appearance.

1. “THINK LIKE AN EDITOR” WORKSHOP

This is almost always my first workshop for a new group of students, because it's a great ice-breaker and a low-risk way of discussing a piece of writing. Since students are not discussing their own writing, they are more open and honest about what they think. It's also an eye-opener for them to realize that even if a writer has submitted a piece of writing for publication, it still might not be “finished.”

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “Feedback”
- “Revision”
- “Getting Published”

In this one-hour lesson, students will:

- engage in an authentic editorial process
- learn to productively critique a piece of writing, including appreciating the writing's strengths, while also offering suggestions for improvement
- learn that “editing” means more than fixing spelling errors
- apply this process to their own writing for any subject or area of interest

Some background information to share with students:

- Explain how YARN's submission-reading process works. Start by showing them YARN's Submission Guidelines, which are our instructions to writers on how to submit (<http://yareview.net/how-to-submit>).
- Explain that YARN's process for reading, accepting, and rejecting submissions is similar to that of many other literary journals and isn't even that different from the process a novel might undergo at many literary agencies and major publishing houses.
- Basically, at YARN, every submission is read by two readers who give the piece a numerical score and some comments. Based on the total score and comments, the piece then gets a rejection letter or is sent to one or more of YARN's editors for another read.

The editors then decide whether to reject the submission, publish it as it is, or make some suggestions for revision and possible publication.

- The comments and discussions YARN editors and readers have online, through e-mail, and on the phone are very similar to the live discussion your students will have during this lesson.

You will need:

- TINAWM
- YARN online, during class. You'll need a computer with an Internet connection and a projection screen.
- photocopies of the submission to YARN, "The Not Romantic Platonic Angst Filled Love Poem" (permission to use this piece was granted by the author)

To prepare:

- Ask students to take a look at YARN and its "How to Submit" section online. Let them know they will get to be YARN editors for a day!
- You might ask your students to read the suggested chapters of TINAWM before this lesson.

In class:*

5 minutes:

Present introductory information as described above, and explain that they get to be YARN editors for this hour and will ultimately get to vote on whether or not the submission should be published. Ideally, you would briefly show them YARN on a computer screen in class.

10 minutes:

Distribute photocopies of the poem, and ask students to read it silently or out loud, with one student reading one line, and going around the room.

Note to the students that this was a real, live submission by a teen writer just like them!

20 minutes:

Discuss. Lead with the positive: What were the poem's strengths?

- Ask them to point to specific lines in the poem to illustrate their points.
- Ask them to look not just at the content of the poem, but also at the structure and the language choices. Where are the clever wordplays? The cultural references? (In case you want to share a funny aside with the students: I didn't realize that "Degrassi" was the name of a television show when I first read this, so I thought the poet was addressing the girl directly, by her last name. Different audiences will take away different things!)

- Encourage debate and discussion. Students are likely to disagree, and that's great! Just have them use the poem to support their opinions.
- The discussion is likely to segue naturally into suggestions for improvement. When students mention things they “don't like,” ask them why they don't like that specific thing, and ask them to think of a specific suggestion to improve the poem. Again, it's perfectly fine if students disagree—tell them that editors disagree all the time! But it is important for writers and editors to notice patterns in criticism—especially if one thing is noted over and over.

5 minutes:

Vote! There are three options: (1) Reject the poem. It's just not ready for publication. (2) Accept the poem, pending some revisions based on a few suggestions. (3) Accept the poem pretty much as it is, after some minor copyedits.

And ... YARN did accept the poem! Pending a few pretty big revisions.

10 minutes:

Look at the final version published in YARN: <http://yareview.net/2013/01/the-platonic-angst-filled-love-poem-i-was-told-to/>. Ask students: What changed between the draft and the published version? How did your students' suggestions compare to YARN's editorial suggestions? Remind the students that there is no “right and wrong” here. This is a subjective process. It's okay if they disagree with our decision.

10 minutes:

Synthesis: Ask students what they learned about writing from this process. About revising? About editing? Publishing? How can they apply this lesson to their own writing in any subject?

Further practice:

- Students might not be aware that they can replicate this very process for any writing they need to do both in and out of class. You might give interested students a copy of the “Guide to Forming a Teen Writing Group.”
- If you opted not to assign any of TINAWM before the lesson, you might suggest the chapters above to interested and advanced writing students who want more information on the processes of editing and publishing.
- Encourage students to revise their own creative writing and submit to literary magazines like YARN!

Advanced option:

Start your own class literary magazine! For older students who are familiar with workshoping, you can actually use students' writing for this editorial workshop: Form a class literary magazine that perhaps you will actually publish online or in photocopies, and ask each

student to submit a piece of creative writing for consideration. You can replicate this workshop as a full-class discussion of each piece over several days or break students into groups to discuss and accept/reject. You could also do this at the end of the five-lesson sequence and ask them to submit one of the pieces they have written.

While it might seem harsh that some writing will get rejected, it's still possible to do this without hurt feelings. When I ran a college literary magazine, students on the editorial board also submitted their own work and listened to discussions about those pieces at meetings; they could take it. It is important for teachers to stress the subjective nature of editorial work and ensure that students discuss the writing in respectful terms. Be sure to offer them the "Workshop Ground Rules" handout. Or you could do away with the "reject" option and make the only two options "accept as-is" or "accept with suggested revisions."

* All times are approximate suggestions. You'll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.

The Not Romantic Platonic Angst Filled Love Poem

We are Not a couple,
and I regret to inform you,
we *Never* will be.

Let me break this down for you,
in the words of the late, great, Merriam Webster:

Platonic.

Adjective.

Definition 2 comma B:

“Of, relating to, or being a relationship marked by the absence of romance, or sex.”

And through the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Thesaurus:

Antonym:

1. Mr. Salt and Mrs. pepper.
- B. James Ford and Juliet Burke.
3. Prince charming and Snow White.

Synonyms:

- A. Harry and Hermione.
2. Ted and Lilly.
- C. Her and I.

You see what I did there?
metaphorically slapped peer pressure
across the face,
with words from wanna be text books
bound in the land of common knowledge.

On some days it almost feels like the
universe wants us to be in love.
No, It needs us to fall deeply in love.
So far down the rabbit hole, that we end up
drowning
in a sea of reds purples pinks Indigos
hearts Sun shines daisies and
Butterfly pooping elephants
with buttercups

and her-
eyes.

Yes, her eyes.

Green.

But not just any green.

A Green mixed with a hint of blue,
giving the illusion of a warm summer brook,
or moss masked by a clear blue spring of
beauty.

Eyes that make it nearly impossible to look
away.

Because you know that behind the eyes is a person that makes your hear skip
a beat every time she looks your way.

A person that you actually want to spend
time with, because deep down inside
you know that you legitimately care about what she has to say,
and you know she cares about you.

But I'm not in love.

What is this,

Degrassi?

Look,

Don't say a thing,

I've heard it all before.

You're gonna look back and have regret!

(Yeah, I probably will.)

You two all ready act like a couple!

(So, what's it to you?)

Don't you like her!

(I enjoy spending time with her.)

Ask her out!

(No.)

Why not?!

(I am afraid of loss.)

Haven't you heard it's better to love and experience loss rather than never love at All?

(Yeah, well gee, I guess I'm lost in lost in love.)

2. “VOICE AND POINT OF VIEW (POV)” WORKSHOP

This is one of my most popular and successful prompts. It’s designed to get students thinking about the differences between and the overlap of voice and POV. It just might result in some of the most fun, spunky writing your students do all year.

(Special thanks to David Lodge and his novel *Thinks...* for inspiring this lesson!)

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “Eavesdropping”
- “Watch Your Soap Operas”
- “Play With Your Words”
- “Come At It From the Side” (This one is best assigned after students have completed the assignment.)

In this one-hour lesson, students will:

- learn what voice and POV are in a piece of writing
- experiment with different styles and mindsets
- engage in active listening and critique
- discover that excellent writing need not always be serious
- improve their critique skills
- closely read the writing of a favorite writer

You will need:

- TINAWM
- the prompt, photocopied or e-mailed to students
- “Workshop Ground Rules,” photocopied for students

To prepare:

- Give students the prompt, and ask them to complete the writing as homework and bring it to class.
- *For less advanced students*, you might set aside time the day you hand out the prompt for students to browse the school library for books/characters they want to use. And/or you could preselect ten novels and let them choose from those.
- Review “Workshop Ground Rules.” Although this isn’t really a workshop geared towards revision, it’s never too early to make these suggestions to students.
- You might ask your students to read the suggested chapters of TINAWM before this lesson; however, I would recommend saving “Come At It From the Side” for *after* you’ve completed the assignment, because in that chapter, I discuss giving this same prompt to my own students—it might be fun for your students to compare their experiences.

The prompt:

Choose a famous character with a clear voice (like Philip Roth’s Nathan Zuckerman, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, or Stephanie Meyer’s Bella), and adopt that voice to write 300–700 words from the POV of a dog. Yes, a dog—any breed you like!

If it makes the task easier, choose a short passage from the novel that stars your chosen character and pattern your dog’s story on that passage.

Bring the book/character on which your writing is based to class.

Most important: Have fun with it!

In class:*

10 minutes:

Review the “Workshop Ground Rules” with your students, and ask if they have any questions.

Explain that there is likely only time for the class to workshop two of the pieces brought in that day, but that you will be commenting on all of them. (See the **Advanced Option** below, which allows for all the pieces to be workshopped.)

10 minutes:

Ask for an intrepid volunteer to read his/her piece aloud to the class.

- Have the student read a few paragraphs from the book he chose so the students can hear the original voice first. (**Advanced Option:** For more well-read students, try skipping this step and asking students to guess the voice imitated by the student.)
- Then have the student read his own piece aloud, slowly and with feeling. Ask the rest of the class to listen actively and jot down favorite words and lines as they listen.

20 minutes:

Discuss, following the suggestions of the “Ground Rules.” Lead with the positive: What were the strengths of the student’s piece?

- Ask students to point to specific words and lines to support their points about the piece.
- Ask them to start untangling voice and POV. What was the “voice” they heard? What was the POV? What was the difference? How did they overlap?
- How did the student writer handle voice and POV in this piece? What were the strengths and characteristics of the voice and POV? Were there any ways the writer could have sharpened the voice and/or POV?
- Ask students to reflect, too, on their own writing for this assignment—how did they feel about juggling voice and POV as they wrote?

20 minutes:

Repeat the reading and discussion above for a second work. Second discussions usually take less time, since the pattern has already been established.

Follow-up and further thinking:

- Ask students to turn in their books and written assignments for your commentary.
- You might also ask students to journal about or write a short reflection on this assignment. Ask them to consider *how this assignment changed their ideas about voice and POV. What did they learn about how to craft a voice or POV?*

Advanced options:

- Note the embedded option in the lesson plan above.
- Continue the workshop. Perhaps on a different day, break students into groups so that everyone’s piece gets discussed. Ask writers to take notes on their classmates’ thoughts and write a short “critique report” on what was said.
- Encourage revision of a different sort: Ask students to try a different character/voice but remain a dog. What changes?

* All times are approximate suggestions. You’ll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.

3. EMOTION WORKSHOP

One of the hardest things to get right in any piece of writing is emotion—it's too easy just to state the emotion (“he felt sad”) when what we really should do is show it in action. Then when we do try to show it, our portrayals are often overwrought, melodramatic, too subtle, or just plain laughable. This workshop gives writers an opportunity to explore a single emotion in detail, to try to portray the emotion without ever stating it and avoid the pitfalls of writing emotional scenes.

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “Play With Your Words”
- “Come At It From the Side”

In this two-part lesson, students will:

- write about a single emotion in detail
- practice “showing, not telling”
- discuss the nuances of word meanings and the benefits of using a dictionary
- engage in full-class *and* group workshops
- improve their critique skills

You will need:

- TINAWM
- the prompt, photocopied for or e-mailed to students
- “Workshop Ground Rules,” photocopied for students

To prepare:

- Make copies of the list of emotions provided below, adding or duplicating as necessary for your number of students. Cut them into strips, fold them, and put them into a hat/jar.
- Ask students to draw an emotion out of the hat, and not to reveal what they drew.

- Give students the prompt, and ask them to complete the writing as homework and bring it to class.
- Review the “Workshop Ground Rules.”
- You might ask your students to read the suggested chapters of TINAWM before this lesson; after the lesson or between the two parts would also work.

The prompt and list:

Write a 300–600-word fictional scene in which a character experiences your chosen emotion without ever stating what it is. Be sure to look up the definition of the emotion in a dictionary to make sure you’re completely sure of its meaning (for instance, there is a subtle difference between envy and jealousy that you might not know about!).

Bring your written work to class.

List of emotions (feel free to add!):

envy
jealousy
schadenfreude
hate
lust
romantic love
familial love
bliss
amusement
bemusement
happiness
joy
fury
grief
loss
annoyance
frustration
overwhelmed
scared
freaked out
indifference
determination

In class:*

10 minutes:

Review the “Workshop Ground Rules” with your students, and ask if they have any questions.

Explain that you will first do a full-class workshop with one emotion, and then the students will break into groups for the other workshops.

15 minutes:

Ask for an intrepid volunteer to read his/her piece aloud to the class. Be sure (s)he doesn't reveal the emotion (s)he chose!

- Ask the listening students to write down favorite words and phrases that help them decipher the emotion.
- When the student is finished reading, ask the class to guess the emotion. *For less advanced students*, you might want to provide the list of possible emotions for them to choose from.
- Usually when students guess the emotion, it naturally leads to the compliments the “Workshop Ground Rules” suggest starting a class with, but if it doesn't, ask the class to identify a few strengths of the piece.
- After about five minutes of guessing, ask the student to reveal the emotion.
- Did anyone guess correctly? Why? Was anyone close? What strengths in the writing led listeners to the right answer?
- Even if the right emotion was identified, how could the writing be improved? Be sure to ask students to offer specific suggestions for improvement.
- Discuss the nuances of the chosen word/emotion; in the past, this lesson has yielded interesting discussions about the differences between and overlap of jealousy/envy and annoyance/frustration.

25 minutes:

Group workshops:

- Have students break into groups of three or four, and ask them to replicate the process they just underwent as a class: read, guess, and make suggestions.
- Ask students to take notes on the suggestions given by their peers.
- I like to visit all the groups as they discuss to keep them on task and offer my own thoughts where they might be helpful.

10 minutes:

Synthesis:

- What did students learn about writing emotions from this lesson? About word choices and meaning? About showing versus telling?
- Ask students to turn in the notes they took on their peers' suggestions so you can check them.

Advanced option:

- Ask students to revise and/or expand their piece based on the suggestions they received in the group workshop.
- * All times are approximate suggestions. You'll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.

4. DIALOGUE: REVEALING & GETTING TO KNOW CHARACTERS

Your students have probably heard the adage “show, don’t tell” many times in their schooling. Dialogue is one of the best ways to show, because a conversation between two or more people truly shows readers what the characters are thinking and how they act by allowing them to *interact* with each other.

Dialogue is also one of the best ways to reveal the voices and personalities of multiple characters at once, which is especially useful in a longer work that is told in the first-person or close third-person point of view, where all we hear is one character’s perspective in the narration.

Dialogue is also a wonderful tool for writers to get to know their characters better. The act of writing dialogue can help writers better understand the minds and hearts of the people they are writing about, which will strengthen the whole piece of writing even outside the quotation marks.

NOTE: Speaking of quotation marks, this is not a lesson about how to properly punctuate dialogue; rather, it’s a lesson in listening to and revealing the voices of the people we are writing about. I often allow students to write their dialogues in “screenplay” format, like so, to eliminate the punctuation distraction:

Kerri: Did you like my book?

Student: It was okay.

Kerri: JUST OKAY????

And so on.

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “Eavesdropping”
- “Watch Your Soap Operas”
- “It Should Be Difficult”

In this two-part lesson, students will:

- write a dialogue with two or more people talking
- practice “showing, not telling”
- learn ways in which dialogue reveals character
- reflect on ways that writing dialogue helped them get to know the characters
- engage in active listening and productive critique

You will need:

- TINAWM
- the prompt, photocopied or e-mailed to students
- “Workshop Ground Rules”

To prepare:

- Give students the prompt and ask them to write the dialogue as homework. You could also set aside the first 15 minutes of class for them to write a short dialogue, but that will truncate some of the discussion time. Explain to them about the punctuation, as I mentioned above.
- Assign students to read the “Workshop Ground Rules,” if they haven’t already.
- You might ask your students to read the suggested chapters of TINAWM before this lesson.

The prompt:

Write a 400–700 word dialogue between two fictional characters (or two real-life people, but change their names). Some ideas for topics: the weather, dinner plans, household chores, upcoming or past elections, religion, a piece of art, another person, a shared childhood experience, or planning a vacation. Some possible pairings to explore: friend/friend, parent/child, parent/parent, child/child, grandparent/grandchild, teacher/student, or coach/athlete. This isn’t an exhaustive list! Feel free to use any two people and explore any topic you like.

It’s perfectly fine if your characters start talking about one thing and wind up talking about another. Try to keep the exposition (any words outside the quotation marks) to a minimum, and try to make the spoken words reveal the meaning.

In class:*

5 minutes:

Review the “Workshop Ground Rules” with your students, and ask if they have any questions.

15 minutes:

Ask for an intrepid volunteer to read his/her dialogue aloud to the class. Or, you could allow two other students to read/act out the dialogue.

- Ask the other students to listen carefully and write down favorite words and phrases.
- After the dialogue has been read, ask students to talk about what the dialogue revealed about the two people having the conversation. What personality traits were revealed through their spoken words and the way they spoke? What other strengths did they hear?
- How could the dialogue have been improved? And/or if the dialogue was part of a longer work like a short story or novel, what storylines and/or character development would listeners like to see as a result of this dialogue? What clues does the dialogue provide for where the story might be going?

15–30 minutes:

Repeat the above for as much time as you have, leaving time for the Reflection below. You may be able to hear another three or four dialogues (the first is always slowest).

15 minutes:

Reflection:

- Ask students what they learned from writing their dialogues and then discussing them in class. Did they feel closer to their characters after writing the dialogue? Did they understand the people better? How can they apply this skill to other school writing they have to do? Dialogue can come in very handy for argumentative writing in English and history classes; ask them how and why. (All arguments benefit from careful consideration of opposing and dialogic points of view!) For what other class assignments might dialogue be useful? Might they add snippets of dialogue to college application essays?
- Ask students to turn in their dialogues for your commentary.

Advanced option for further thinking and writing:

More advanced students may be ready to use the dialogue as a springboard and dive into a longer work. You could ask those students to revise or continue the dialogue, reveal more information, and develop the characters further. They could even try to situate the dialogue in a longer work, like a short story or essay.

- * All times are approximate suggestions. You'll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.



Kerri's Five Favorite Creative Writing Lessons

5. TGIF!

For this lesson, students will be writing about everyone's favorite day of the week: Friday.

This is a deceptively simple exercise that is so much fun, students will hardly realize they are actually doing the most advanced lesson that I've provided! Instead of isolating one skill, like dialogue or POV, this lesson asks students to write a fully realized piece of creative writing.

SYNTHESIZING OPTIONS: Since this prompt is pretty open-ended—students are asked to write any sort of creative piece about Friday—it's also a great opportunity to ask them to use some of the skills they have been practicing in lessons 1–4, if you have been doing these assignments as part of a progressive unit. For instance, you could ask students to include at least one scene of dialogue, use certain emotions without naming them, and develop a unique voice and POV in their pieces. And if you also ask them to “think like editors” to workshop their pieces, you might then implement the bonus “Cut Half” revision exercise.

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “How Good Am I?”
- “But! ‘You Are Rare and Wonderful!’”
- “Find Yourself an Audience”

In this lesson, students will:

- write a full-length piece of creative writing
- engage in active listening and productive critique
- workshop writing in small groups
- consider *theme* as an aspect of creative-writing craft
- practice skills from previous lessons such as voice, POV, dialogue, and showing, not telling

You will need:

- TINAWM
- the prompt, photocopied or e-mailed to students

- “Workshop Ground Rules”

To prepare:

- Give students the prompt, and ask them to write the TGIF piece as homework—maybe assign it on a Friday and have them write it over the weekend!
- Assign students to read the “Workshop Ground Rules” if they haven’t already.
- You might ask your students to read the suggested chapters of TINAWM before this lesson.

The prompt:

Rebecca Black, Katy Perry, The Cure—they’ve all sung songs about Friday. And we love to sing along.

Now it’s your turn to pay homage to this special day of the week.

Write an essay about something that really happened to you on a Friday, or make up a story about an outrageous Friday, or pen your own poem or song about the day. Whatever you do, make sure that Friday as a day of the week, a theme, or even an epic permeates your piece from start to finish.

If you write in prose (an essay or story), it should be 750–2,000 words. If you write a poem, it should have at least twenty lines.

NOTE: As I mentioned above, feel free to require students to use any other skills. You may also opt to eliminate the poetry option in the prompt if you want students to focus on the prose skills I covered in lessons 2–4. Also feel free to alter the word-/line-count requirements.

In class:*

5 minutes:

Review the “Workshop Ground Rules” with your students, and ask if they have any questions.

15 minutes:

Full-Class Workshop

- Ask one brave student to be the full-class-workshop volunteer before you break into small groups and workshop the other pieces.
- Have the student read his piece, or have another student read it out loud. (Note: You could also make photocopies of this piece and hand them out for silent reading in class.)
- Listening students should jot down notes and ideas about favorite lines.
- When the piece has been read, begin the discussion. Remembering the “Workshop Ground Rules,” lead with the positive: What’s working well here? What were your fa-

favorite parts? How does Friday function as a *theme*? If you have worked on any of the previous skills in this packet, which you asked students to use in this piece, ask about those, too: Is the dialogue working? Whose POV is it, and does it feel authentic? What are the characteristics of the voice?

- Once a few compliments have been thrown out, students will naturally start making suggestions. As you lead them, emphasize that the goal is to help the writer improve his writing: What specific ideas can they share that would *improve* the characters? Dialogue? The TGIF theme?

30 minutes:

Group Workshops

- Divide students into groups of three.
- Swap TGIF pieces and read silently so all three pieces are read.
- Then, ask them to replicate the full-class workshop, spending 5–10 minutes discussing each piece. Remember the “Workshop Ground Rules,” and lead with the positive!
- Ask writers to take notes on what the other two readers say; you might ask that writers turn in these notes.
- I like to rotate through the groups as they do their workshops to keep them on task and answer any questions that might pop up.

Advanced options for further thinking and writing:

- Ask students to turn in their notes for how to improve the piece, with a plan for how they want to revise.
- Ask students to implement some of those suggestions and turn in a revised piece in a week’s time.
- Use the Bonus “Cut Half” workshop.
- Ask students to journal or discuss in your next class about what they learned from this writing exercise. How can they apply what they learned to other kinds of writing—English papers, history tests, or even lab reports?

* All times are approximate suggestions. You’ll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.

ADVANCED WRITER BONUS: THE “CUT HALF” WORKSHOP

This workshop is something of a cold-water shock therapy for young writers who are often accustomed to thinking of their drafts as sacred. If you want to have your students revise their work, the lesson can be used as an **Advanced Option** in addition to any of the other workshops suggested in this package. I do recommend that the first time you use it, you dedicate a full class period to the workshop so you have ample time to explain the methodology and give students an opportunity to discuss the process.

The workshop also works very well in an advanced writing workshop or even an MFA course, in which students are bringing in their own short stories, novel chapters, poetry, essays, and so on. You can ask them to “cut half” and rewrite anything they bring in.

Suggested reading from TINAWM:

- “Play with Your Words”
- “Feedback” & “Revision” (best assigned *after* the workshop)

In this 30-minute lesson, students will:

- learn that there isn’t one correct way to write a piece
- engage in a meaningful revision
- experiment with new styles and techniques

You will need:

- TINAWM
- the prompt, photocopied or e-mailed to students

To prepare:

- Give students the prompt, and ask them to complete the writing as homework and bring it to class.
- Review “Workshop Ground Rules.”

The prompt:

NOTE: You might need to tailor the prompt according to the needs of your class.

Select a piece of writing that you have already workshopped in class. This piece should already have comments from me and/or your peers.

Determine the word count of the draft, and write it at the top of the draft.

Cut half of the draft, then rewrite the piece back to its original word count, or up to 200 words longer, with all new material.

You can cut several paragraphs at once or a sentence here and there, as long as you are eliminating half of your word count.

Please do this cutting *visibly*—using Track Changes or a pen on the draft.

We’ll discuss *why* I’ve subjected you to this torture in class!

In class:*

30 minutes:

Discuss the process.

- Ask students how it felt to cut half. You’ll get a variety of responses, many negative, so brace yourself and don’t argue. I find it best to neutrally listen and put their answers on the chalkboard.
- Ask if anyone felt their writing improved as a result. How? Why? If they didn’t feel the writing improved, why not? Encourage debate.
- Was anyone surprised by the result?
- Ask why it was a valuable experience even if they didn’t feel this particular piece of writing benefited. (The point is that there is value in experimentation and in trying new and different ways of conveying information. Through experimentation and revision, we often stumble on better forms of communication. We may not always say it better, but the experience of saying it differently can help us see that there is not one “correct” way to write anything.)
- Can they see ways that revision could help them in other classes, and even, more generally, in life? Are there times when it could be useful to change your mind, to *revise* your thinking, to compromise?

- If this is revision, what, then, do we call correcting the spelling and grammar? Answer: proofreading. It's an important step, but it's a *final* step. This is a great opportunity to help students see the difference; you might also discuss the term *editing*, which can actually mean both revising and proofreading.

If you want to play hardball:

- In classes where I sense there will be strong resistance to revision, I ask students to take their names off the draft and revision. Then I collect the writings and redistribute them to their peers, so now John has Jane's piece. Then I ask students to quietly read the drafts and revisions, decide which one is stronger, and write a short note to the writer explaining why.
 - After the students have reviewed the pieces, I collect them again and give them back to the writers.
 - I then ask the writers how many readers thought the draft was stronger? How many thought the revision was stronger? Almost always, it's the revision, which surprises the students.
- * All times are approximate suggestions. You'll make game-time decisions on what to cover as you go.

WORKSHOP GROUND RULES

These are Kerri Majors's ground rules for workshopping student writing, culled from her many experiences as a writing student and teacher.* She would like us to add to this list as ideas occur to us.

1. Respect is the #1 most important thing in a workshop. Remember that everyone in the group is a writer, peer, and colleague. Treat everyone with respect.
2. The writer should not speak while his work is being discussed. It's too easy to "explain" the piece to one's peers, but that is not the point of workshopping; this is an opportunity for writers to hear and understand what is and isn't working. Sometimes what we mean to say isn't actually what we are saying! The writer might be able to ask questions at the end of a workshop if time permits.
3. Lead with the positive. Make sure the writer hears at least three compliments on the piece under consideration before moving on to the stuff that needs work. It's so important that writers hear what they do well so they can do more of it!
4. When discussing the things that need work, remember that you are offering suggestions to the writer, not "negative feedback." There *is* a difference. Also, suggestions are just that: *suggestions*, not "criticism." Instead of saying "Your character was boring," think about what the character might need in order to become more exciting, and say, "Have you ever thought about giving the character a cool hobby, like paragliding? I would be more engaged with him if he was as unique as possible."
5. Along those lines, never preface a suggestion with "no offense," or "maybe this is just me, but..." because both of those should go without saying, and to say them makes the suggestion sound and feel more like a personal attack than a thoughtful suggestion, which the writer is at liberty to take or leave.
6. Always point to specific lines in the draft to support and explain what you're trying to say.
7. Don't bother with nitpicky sentence-level edits, since you're probably all turning in first drafts that will be revised then proofread and spell-checked later.

* This list is based on advice from Kerri's book, *This Is Not A Writing Manual*, in the chapter "Workshops and Writer's Groups."



GUIDE TO FORMING A TEEN WRITING GROUP

So you want to form your own group of creative writers? That's awesome. Giving and receiving feedback is an essential part of the writing process. In fact, giving feedback is often more helpful for your own writing than receiving it because it's much easier to see that Jane's piece has way too much telling and not enough showing than to recognize it in your own work, but once you have noticed it in *her* stories, maybe you'll start to see it in your own as well. And the suggestions you brainstorm for your friends just might come in handy in your own writing, too.

Also, meeting regularly with a group of writers helps keep your head in the game; you'll be thinking about writing and what makes it work or not work, which will make you a more thoughtful and *better* writer over time.

Plus, it's just more fun and effective to learn together. It's tough to see your own writing clearly—but your friends will! And it's nice to know you're not alone. When you get together to chat about writing while snacking on pretzels and pop, the process of writing seems less lonely, more doable, and yes, actually *fun*.

I've put together several writers' groups in my day, and these are the steps I've followed to make it happen. In every case, I've managed to get at least three writers together, and that's all you need to get started; over time, as word gets out, your group is likely to grow. This is what you need to do to get it off the ground:*

- Get your parents' permission before you get started. Describe what you want to do and get their support, because they may very well be talking to other parents about what you're up to.
- Design a simple but eye-catching poster that you can print in plain old black ink, on colored paper (people are much more likely to notice a yellow or orange paper on a local bulletin board than ho-hum white). The words TEEN WRITERS' GROUP should feature prominently, and you should include your e-mail address (though probably not

your phone number), and offer up your parents' e-mail for concerned parents who want to make sure your endeavor is on the up-and-up. Include one or two short sentences about yourself and your interest in writing, like: "I write for my high school newspaper and yearbook, but my real passion is YA paranormal, and I'm working on a novel in that genre. I'll read anything, though, and will even cop to a penchant for manga."

- Post these posters on all the local bulletin boards in your town. Some places to check out: the library, grocery stores, pizza places, coffee houses, high school bathrooms, community or recreation centers, book stores, gyms, and YMCAs. Be sure to talk to the managers at each of these places, because in addition to giving permission to put up your poster, they might take an interest in you and help spread the word to their customers. Warning: These bulletin boards tend to be high-theft areas, and they also get cleaned off by employees pretty often, so I suggest that you check your posters at least once or twice a week and be prepared to put up a new one if the old one has disappeared. I've found that it's essential to cart around a combination of scotch tape, staples, *and* thumbtacks.
- Secure a space where you can meet regularly, like every Sunday afternoon at three. This might be your own living room (*Mom, snacks please?*), a local coffee shop, or a private room in your local library (some have them, some don't).
- When you have enough people to make a group—even two or three is a good start!—e-mail everyone and tell them where and when you'll meet for the first time. You might want to float around a few possible dates/times, then agree on the one when most people can attend.
- Since you started this group, you are its informal leader. Be prepared! The group is likely made up of new writers at a variety of stages in their writing, so it'll help to have exercises ready to go that you can all do together. These exercises will serve as ice-breakers, but will also put you on equal footing. Plenty of books on the market offer exercises like these, and you can buy one or check it out from your library. Then, as a group, you can decide which ones to do together.
- At your first meeting, decide together how you want the group to work. Maybe you want to be able to submit pieces of your novel each time, but someone else wants to work from the exercises in the book to get warmed up. That's fine! I encourage you to be flexible and make everyone feel comfortable and want to return. Decide together what format will work for all of you, and keep everyone interested and meeting regularly.
- Decide how often you'll meet. Every week or every other week is a good guide. And keep it up, even if it's hard to keep a regular schedule, or if you only have half a page of new material to share. Having a deadline is an excellent reason to write.

Whew! Got your group together? Congrats. That was a lot of work already, and the fun is just about to begin. What should you do next? Consult the "Workshop Ground Rules," and let me know how your first meeting goes! I'm on Twitter, Facebook, and I have a website: kerrimajors.com.



READER'S GUIDE

Part 1: Introduction and Writing Process

1. In the introduction, Kerri lists various reactions people had when they discovered she wanted to be a writer. Have you told people about your literary pursuits? How have they reacted?
2. In “Drafting,” Kerri says that the first draft is a place where we are free to make mistakes, because we can always fix them later. What kinds of obstacles have you encountered when writing a draft? How can these seemingly negative issues be turned into positive aspects of your emerging writing?
3. Kerri thinks that reading can be a form of writing. What was the last book you read that felt more like writing than just reading? What memorable lessons did you take away from it? How did you apply them to your writing?
4. “Priceless raw materials” (see “Eavesdropping”) for your writing can be found all around you; Kerri has benefitted from eavesdropping, Art History, and teaching in particular. What work, activities, and guilty pleasures do you latch on to, and has this raw material changed as you have gotten older?
5. How valuable has feedback been to your own writing process? Do you feel comfortable giving feedback? How do you apply feedback—both given and received—to your own writing?
6. The old writing adage “Show more, tell less” will likely present itself time and time again throughout your literary life, as it did in Kerri’s. What does this expression really mean, and is it really good advice?
7. Writer Susan Sontag believes in “pluralistic, polymorphous culture,” the view that there is equal value in high- and lowbrow forms of entertainment; given Kerri’s view of soap operas, she is likely to agree. Think about the movies, television shows, games, museums, and other forms of art that you enjoy and ask yourself *why* these forms of entertainment succeed in capturing your attention.
8. Kerri learned from watching soap operas that “You have an audience. Make them happy. (You are your own first audience! Does your writing make you

- happy?)” What is the balance between making an audience happy and making yourself happy? How have you balanced these two happinesses in your own writing? Have you ever had to sacrifice one for the other? What compromises have you found?
9. Writing what you believe is difficult, particularly in this Internet-dominated age in which everyone’s truth is on display. How can you separate your truth from what others perceive to be true? Can these different truths coexist?
 10. Take a shot at the prompt from the creative writing class Kerri describes in “Come at It From the Side,” which was inspired by David Lodge’s *Thinks...*

Pick a book or story by an author with a strong, recognizable style (you might also call it “voice,” as we have in class). Make a photocopy of one or two pages from the voice you’re using as your example, and be sure to provide the attribution (i.e., name and title).

Then, pretend you are a dog (I am not kidding). Write a short passage (500–750 words) from the dog’s POV, but in the voice of the author you’ve chosen. This need not be a full-fledged short story; it can be about whatever you like, as long as it’s in that voice, and from the POV of the dog.

11. Do you agree that Keats’ “negative capability” —that sitting “with our doubt,” embracing danger, and overcoming fear—is essential for a writer? If you disagree, what other challenges provide writers opportunities to grow as people and artists?
12. What kind of writer are you: a chiseler or a genre-hopper? How are these approaches to writing different and similar, and why do these distinctions matter?

Part 2: The Writing Life

1. Edna St. Vincent Millay once quipped, “I am glad that I paid so little attention to good advice; had I abided by it I might have been saved from some of my most valuable mistakes.” What is your stance on well-intentioned advice by writers and nonwriters?
2. Who was the first audience for your writing, and what did he or she say that made you continue down the literary path? Have you ever been someone’s first audience? How was this experience?
3. Is it essential to have a writing buddy? If you’ve had one, how did the relationship help and shape your writing? If you haven’t had one, did Kerri motivate you to look for one? Why or why not?
4. Forming a writers’ group is no easy task. What aspects of creating one seem the most intimidating, and how can you overcome those hurdles?
5. In the publishing industry, a “midlist” novel is a book that isn’t a bestseller, but gains enough sales and critical attention to advance the writer’s career. The majority of books fit this definition. How does this fact align with what Kerri says in “How Good Am I?” Why are midlist novels imperative to the future integrity of the book industry—and of your own future career as a writer?
6. At some point in your writing career, you will encounter this unavoidable question: “What is more important to you: time or money?” How would you answer today? How

do you feel about your response? Does the life you currently lead reflect this personal value?

7. Kerri believes that Teddy Roosevelt's quotation, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." encapsulates much of the essence of the writing life. How does this philosophy prepare a person for the difficulties of that life? Do you agree with the sentiment?
8. Kerri discusses the virtues of rejection throughout TINAWM. Which one of her reasons carries the most weight for you, and has it changed your point of view on what constitutes "rejection" and "failure"?
9. Kerri loves SARK's mantra, "You are rare and wonderous." Why does the spelling error make her pronouncement even more valid?

Part 3: Looking Ahead: Supporting Yourself, Getting Published, and Not Getting Published

1. Take a moment to research famous writers who had "real jobs" while pursuing their writing career. Were any of the results surprising to you? How come?
2. Did the chapter, "Those Who Can't Do, Teach" alter your impressions of teaching? Can you add to Kerri's ideas on why it's such a beneficial career for a writer?
3. In "Hating Your Best Friend" and "Hating Yourself," Kerri reveals how the success of others inevitably affects how you see yourself. What tips does she share in order to tame the beasts of envy and jealousy? Can these emotions ever be *helpful* for a writer?
4. Do you write for pleasure? Did you used to? Do you want to in the future? For what other reasons do you write? Why do you think Kerri places such an emphasis on the seemingly impossible task of writing just for "pleasure"? What pleasures do you take in writing?
5. The journey to publication is a long and arduous one, filled with more steps backward than forward. Kerri suggests numerous ways of approaching this process. Can you add more suggestions? Which ideas fit best with your current goals?
6. Kerri concludes her book with a chapter on the importance of reading in the writing life. Can you think of additional ways to champion reading and literature? After considering both her ideas and your own, where would you be most inclined to begin?
7. The Appendix is filled with many creatively stimulating "real jobs" for writers to investigate further. Were you surprised by any of them? Can you think of others? What is Kerri trying to say about the balance between the practical and the creative in a writer's life?

Questions by Lourdes Keochgerien, Editor-at-Large of YARN, Young Adult Review Network.

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