



My goal as a teacher is to help writers develop a personal writing process, to be comfortable accessing spaces of contemplation, and to engage with visual forms of communication. I draw on the pedagogies of embodied and place-based writing as well as the composing opportunities afforded by materiality to aid in these endeavors.

The two questions Lynda Barry describes in her book *What It Is* – Is this good? Does this suck? – can paralyze young writers into either not writing or

into creating static pieces that meet formal conventions but lack spark. To counteract these questions and fears, my classes teach writers how to navigate their writing process. We complete drawing exercises that act as bridges into creativity, and visualization exercises that help writers consider the details and nuance of place. Writers in my class compose in unconventional spaces (like dance studios) and on new surfaces (like roughly-textured and oddly-shaped pieces of paper) to push them out of old habits and cliché phrases. And to help students access states of contemplation and become comfortable within a quiet, generative mindspace, at strategic points in the semester I guide students through stretches and meditation exercises.

In my classroom, I try to build a community where students are comfortable sharing and discussing their writing. At the beginning of the semester they complete small, low-stakes writing exercises that ask them to practice a specific technique. These exercises are shared during class, first in pairs, then in small groups. Then the class as a whole discusses the process of writing – what they learned or struggled with while completing the exercise. In large class

discussions, I sometimes use go-arounds, where every person in the circle shares what they have learned, and at other times I use the more traditional open discussion. By fluctuating between these levels of sharing, I provide safer spaces for students who are less inclined to speak up in large group discussions. And in my class I've discovered that through gradually building the format of class dialogue, by the middle of the semester each of my students has voluntarily spoken up during large class discussion, often responding to and building on comments by other classmates, mentioning them by name.

In my syllabus I offer students multiple ways to participate in class dialogue that do not require speaking in full class discussion, even as I strive to provide classroom space where these students feel comfortable pushing themselves out of their comfort zone. Certain personalities have different styles of learning that do not work well with the fast-paced, discursive nature of large class discussions. Introverts may prefer to engage with a type of learning that privileges slower modes of thought that may provide leaps of insight. However, by the time the student formulates these thoughts and works up the courage to share them, the discussion may have moved on to another topic. Through online discussion forums and in-class partner feedback, these student voices can join the class conversation.

To help students develop their own sense of style and purpose in their writing, each student researches and presents on a literary journal where they might submit their work. In addition to providing a handout of basic information on the journal, they also choose a piece of writing from that publication to present and discuss with the class. In doing so, I decenter the authority of the written texts shared in the classroom, and students begin to connect their writing with larger writing communities. In addition to classroom assignments, I try to help writers develop a sense of self and purpose through smaller gestures. When I email the class with

updates or post on our university's content platform, I use the salutation "Dear Writers" instead of "Dear Students." Whether they intend to continue to higher-level creative writing classes or have only taken my class to satisfy a general education credit, I treat them as serious writers engaged with issues of craft.

My workshops follow the structure I learned from my mentor, Professor Valerie Laken. Before students offer feedback on what they liked or disliked about a piece of writing submitted to workshop, I ask them to summarize what happens in the story. Who are the main characters? Where are they? What are the main events? Is there anything that is unclear? By taking this time to describe the story, students collaboratively create a space where their writing is treated as a serious endeavor. I've found that as a result, my students give specific feedback that considers how changes in the story will impact the piece as a whole. At the end of the workshop, the author has the opportunity to ask questions. At first these questions are tentative, but as workshop progresses my students ask craft questions that demonstrate a clear understanding of how the moves writers make shape the reading experience. By forming a cohesive classroom community, I hope to create a space where less-frequently heard student voices feel safe and welcome. I want to help writers hear their own voice, the one that answers the questions *Is this good? Does this suck?* with a confident *This is what's good. This is how I can make the piece even better.*