

Memoir in a Year Part I: Writing the First Draft of Your Book-Length Manuscript

WriterHouse

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Thursdays, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

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Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to Memoir in a Year Part I: Writing the First Draft of Your Book-Length. My name is Lisa Ellison and I'll be your instructor. Memoir in a Year Part I is a generative course designed to help you complete the first draft of your manuscript. **We will meet for 23 class sessions on the following dates: 1/18, 1/25, 2/1, 2/15, 3/1, 3/15, 4/5, 4/19, 5/3, 5/17, 6/7, 6/21, 7/12, 8/2, 9/20, 9/27, 10/4, 10/18, 11/1, 11/15, 11/29, 12/6, and 12/13.** You may purchase an optional half-manuscript review that includes a one-hour meeting during the summer to provide you with additional direction as you work on your draft. One-on-One coaching sessions and a final manuscript review are also available. The course is divided into five parts, which are described below. The first hour of every class will be devoted to creating new material for your book. Centering meditations and prompts will be provided; however, what you write will be up to you. The second and third hours will focus on craft discussions, experiential activities, workshops, and analysis of published manuscripts.

Course Goals

- Provide structure, accountability, and deadlines that support the completion of a first draft
- Develop an understanding of the memoir genre and subgenres as they pertain to student projects
- Learn the three-act structure and the elements of storytelling as they pertain to memoir
- Learn how to mine your experiences for relevant information and sensory details that hook readers and maintain their attention
- Develop a deeper understanding of your life experiences and how they impact your narrative and character arcs
- Learn how to use self-care to pace yourself during the drafting process

Required Texts: *Your Life as a Story* by Tristine Rainier, *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls, and *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed.

Recommended Texts: *Screenplay: The Fundamentals of Screenwriting* by Syd Fields, *The Mindful Writer* by Dinty Moore, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler and Michele Montez, *The Art of Memoir* by Mary Karr, and *To Show and to Tell* by Philip Lopate

Course Organization

Part I: Preparation (1/18, 1/25, and 2/1): To jumpstart your projects, we will meet for three classes in a row. Class time will focus on establishing a regular writing routine, writing goals, accountability, idea generation and writing key scenes for your book. We will read chapters from Tristine Ranier's book *Your Life as a Story* and discuss important elements of memoir, such as scenes, characters, point of view, tense, and dialogue.

Part II: Drafting (2/15, 3/1, 3/15, 4/5, 4/19, 5/3, 5/17, 6/7, and 6/21): The first hour of class will be dedicated to generating new material for your project. During each class, three students will submit 7 – 10 pages for workshop. As a class, we will analyze *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls. Students will also choose books to analyze for class presentations that will take place during Part III of our class. A list of recommended memoirs will be distributed; however, any memoir can be chosen. Students will be assigned "writing buddies" who will help them stay on track. On weeks when class is not in session, students will be encouraged to schedule at-home writing sessions or to attend open writing hours at WriterHouse.

Part III: Generating (7/12, 8/2): Because so many people go on vacations during the summer, we will have a modified schedule, meeting only once a month. A minimum of ten pages should be written every two weeks. Students will keep tabs on each other's work and support each other through their writing buddies. Students will read *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed and be ready to identify its narrative structure and discuss how the author uses time, objects, and suspense to keep us turning the page. During our summer meetings, students will deliver presentations on the books chosen during Part II of our class. Students may schedule a one-hour meeting with the instructor to discuss their projects, even if they have not purchased a manuscript evaluation or coaching sessions.

Part IV Regrouping (9/20, 9/27, 10/4): We'll kick off the final leg of our work together by applying what students have learned to their works in progress. Maps will be created for the current narrative and character arcs, and final scenes will be planned. Students will continue to write ten pages every two weeks. Submissions will be workshopped and *Wild* will be analyzed.

Part V Refining (10/18, 11/1, 11/15, 11/29, 12/6, and 12/13): At the end of this session students will have a complete first draft of a book-length memoir and be ready to start revisions. We will have an end-of-year celebration/reading in December and students will be encouraged to bring guests.

Methods of Instruction

This course will include in-class writing exercises, analysis of published texts, experiential activities, and instruction regarding aspects of craft that relate to your projects. Specific written feedback will be provided for student submissions that addresses both the strengths and areas of growth in your work. Brief readings and out-of-class writing assignments will be assigned to enhance classroom instruction.

Developing a Safe and Welcoming Culture

One of the goals of this class is to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for all writers so they can take risks that lead to their most valuable work. To support this goal, I have three main policies for this class:

1. **Confidentiality:** Everything shared within the class should remain within the class, unless a student gives you express permission to share his or her ideas with others.
2. **Voluntary Sharing:** It is more important to write what is true than to write what is acceptable. In that regard, sharing during feedback periods is always voluntary. While it's important to take risks and participate fully, please share work that feels ready for a general audience. More information regarding voluntary sharing will be provided during the first class.
3. **Respectful Feedback:** The focus of this class is to help writers write openly and freely. Feedback should always focus on specific elements of the text as they pertain to craft. It should be free of judgements regarding the author, behavior of characters, or motivations for writing a specific piece. Instead, focus your feedback on what touches you, what you like, and what makes you curious about the writer's work. More information regarding feedback will be provided during the first and second classes.

Workshop Expectations

Author

You will have six opportunities to workshop a maximum of 7-10 pages during this class. To ensure the best possible feedback, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- Submit your piece via email **by FRIDAY evening** prior to your workshop date to ensure ample reading time.
- Format: Word or PDF document, 12-point font, double spaced document, 1-inch margin. Add page numbers to the upper right hand corner. Add your name, left aligned, to the header. If you have any questions about how to do this, please let me know.

Reader Expectations

- Print student pieces and bring marked copies to class for our discussion

- Read all student work. Provide written comments in the margins or on the back of the piece, using the following format:
 - What the piece is about
 - Three strengths of the piece
 - Three questions you had about the piece
- Because we will be reading works in progress, feedback should be brief. You may point out additional craft-related issues within the piece; however, please **do not** comment on structure, or attempt to copyedit or line edit student work. Our focus remains on the development of the piece, not polishing it for publication.

Attendance

Please contact the instructor ahead of time via email (lisa.cooper.ellison@gmail.com) or text (502-640-7686) if you will be late or need to miss a class.

Accessibility

This class is designed to be accessible to students of all levels and abilities. If you require specific accommodations or modifications that would be covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please let me know by the end of our first class.