



**Course Title:** The Bleeding, Pounding Heart of Prose: The Art and Craft of the Sentence

**Course Code:** CW 25

**Instructor:** Robert Hoekman Jr

### Course Summary:

A four-week dive into what makes sentences work, full of examples, generative exercises, and discussion of the principles and theory behind great writing.

If possible, please complete this course's exercises by hand, as it can help you more fully see the material, and can help you build the muscle memory of strong writing. (If you need to work by computer, that's fine as well.) To post your assignments, you may either reproduce the work as a digital document (.docx, PDF, etc.), or post photos of the handwritten work. Anything handwritten must, however, be legible.

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

### Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

All class sessions will be recorded. Live attendance is not required, but since each class involves direct participation and discussion, please plan to attend as long as you are able, as this will provide the best benefit.

### Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Students must attend and/or watch at least 3 class sessions.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - For the highest grade, students must attend and/or watch all 4 class sessions and complete all assignments described below. Each missed/incomplete assignment will reduce your grade by one letter.

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## First assignment (due at start of first class session):

Bring to our first class at least three of your favorite sentences, whether from the catalog of someone else's writing or your own. Don't worry about their purpose, genre, vernacular, or anything else. Just jot down three or more you love so you can start from a positive place and move only forward.

### Week 1:

To kick off our four-session seminar, we'll discuss the role of cultural dominance in how we view craft, and then roundly reject its influence in favor of our own cultures, worldviews, and audiences. We'll then read and react to a few of your favorite lines, discuss the significance of skill in matters of the written word and how that skill ties to the different purposes for our writing (literary, poetic, professional, technical, etc.), then explore the theories of Don Killgallon and Stanley Fish, who propose that rather than diagram sentences to identify their parts, we model them to draw from their strengths. Please be prepared with a notebook, a pen, and a sense of adventure.

**In-class exercises:** 5-min free-write, sentence unscrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding

**Assignments:** Find three more sentences that grab your attention and write three sentences modeled after each one.

### Week 2:

If you've heard this one before, too bad: it's time for the story of Gordon Lish. Why? For all he did to help turn Gary Lutz (now Garielle Lutz) into the genius she became. In this second week, we look at Lutz's seminal thinking on sentence craft and some examples of her principles in practice, and commence a cracking examination of the world of sonic techniques, studying sentences for their sense of concision, rhythm, disruption, shape, feel, idiolect, and more.

**In-class exercises:** 5-min free-write, plus a series of generative exercises centered on sonic sentence features

**Assignments:** To explore idiolect, audio-record a conversation with someone who speaks differently than you, replay the recordings to make notes on the other person's speaking style, then write three original sentences meant to sound like that person. Next, write a revision of each to emphasize sonic techniques.

### Week 3:

On the very first page of the book "The Writing Experiment," Hazel Smith conjures two modes of word generation: language-based and referent-based. In our penultimate session, we define the two modes, discuss why and when someone might employ each, and their role in the creation of work of different purposes.

**In-class exercises:** 5-min free-write, plus generative exercises using language- and referent-based writing and revision approaches

**Assignments:** Build a robust sentence using a language-based approach, doing your best to apply what you've learned so far about sonic techniques. Then study the sentence to spot the idea(s) it is communicating. Next, write a revised version of the sentence using a referent-based approach, bringing that idea to its fully realized form.

## Week 4:

No matter their writer, language, cultural influence, tradition, form, purpose, or anything else, many of the sentences we remember most are those that catch our throats as we read them aloud. Those that land well, land hard. Convince us, affect us, transform us, whether through persuasive power, emotional weight, or tough truth. And what every one of them illustrates is what can be achieved through the studied, deliberate use of a few tools, not the least of which are your choice of content words and the order you put them in. During our final meeting, we'll consider Nathan Alling Long's tips on dynamic verbs and using syntax for surprise, moving from there into one glorious sentence by Brian Doyle and a discussion of what makes it work. Next, we'll use the sentence from your previous week's assignment as the basis for a series of revision exercises to show just how far you can stretch a single idea to turn any sentence into a work of a skilled hand.

**In-class exercises:** 5-min free-write, deconstruction of a sentence by Brian Doyle, and a series of revision exercises

**Ongoing practice:** Read like a writer, steal like an artist, and write like a technician.