



Course Title: The Creative Habit

Course Code: CW 19 WA

Instructor Name and Bio: Malena Watrous

Malena Watrous is a novelist, short story writer, essayist, book critic and cookbook author. Her novel, *If You Follow Me*, won a Michener Award and was named a New York Times critic pick. She collaborated on a cookbook, *My Mexico City Kitchen*, with the renowned chef Gabriela Camara, that recently made Vogue's list of 10 best cookbooks of all time. She is the co-author of a forthcoming cookbook, *Scandinavian from Scratch*, which will be out in Fall 2023. She enjoys writing in a diverse array of genres and styles and helping others to channel the joy of writing in all sorts of styles and on all sorts of subjects, often surprising themselves by what comes out. This is a course that allows people to do just that, writing freely in an effort to shrug off self-criticism that may have resulted from internalized critical voices of others.

Class Sessions and Recording:

Meeting days and times: Thursdays, noon - 1pm PT

Meeting location: Zoom

While most of the work in this class happens asynchronously via prompts emailed to students each morning, to be completed on their own time, we do have a one hour weekly live session for a brief craft lecture and group writing time and breakout rooms for student sharing. These sessions are optional, and I will record them for the benefit of those who can't make them but want to view the lecture and do the prompts at home. I also email out those prompts following each zoom session. These collaborative and spontaneous writing sessions are fun and low pressure. Students often report making surprise breakthroughs as a result of having to try new things on the spot.

*Please note that the Zoom schedule is subject to change. The live sessions are recorded; student attendance is optional.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - o Brief lecture, in-class writing prompt, writing time
 - o Break-out rooms to share writing in small groups
- Assignments & Coursework

- o Daily prompt will be emailed each morning and posted in Canvas.
- o Students will submit writing in response to these prompts; there are options to give and receive feedback with classmates.
- o Instructor will not moderate the daily peer feedback thread, but you will have the option to choose 1 piece of writing each week, up to 500 words, to submit for light and positive instructor feedback.

Grading:

- o No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - o This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- o Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - o Respond to 15 daily prompts (weekend writing counts)

**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.*

Course Summary:

Creativity comes naturally to us from childhood, but “real life” often gets in the way, with its critical voices and practical concerns squashing the impulse to put our ideas on paper and make art. Even if you can barely remember the last time you wrote anything beyond an email or grocery list, the seeds of creativity are still deep inside you, and need only a little coaxing to flourish again. Writing just a little every day will take away the anxiety of the blank page and make you more observant, more in touch with your creativity, and as a result, happier and more fulfilled.

Every weekday, for five weeks, you will receive a prompt in the morning via email, from which you should free write for twenty to sixty minutes (or whatever you can spare). Once you finish, you will post your writing in the Canvas class site, to receive credit and feedback from a peer, and to give feedback to one peer. Weekends will be off, though I will still send out optional prompts for folks who don't want to lose steam. The daily prompts will encourage you to try the three major genres of writing: creative nonfiction (writing from what you know), fiction (turning what you know into stories, or making things up), and simple poetic forms (exploring the boundaries of language). You will always be welcome to approach a prompt from a different genre or angle. (There are no hard and fast rules in creative writing!)

This course is for those who want to write without inhibition and have fun without an evaluative component. Each student will be expected to read and respond to just 1 peer posting per day, offering just a line of observant and constructive feedback. You

will be allowed to choose one piece each week, up to 500 words, for light and constructive instructor feedback, if you wish.

Through this 5-week course, we will seek to forge a sense of community and to find the quality of heightened awareness that comes from using creative writing as a way of being more present in the world.

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

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1: Mining the Moment (Creative Nonfiction)

Week 2: Digging up the Past (Creative Nonfiction)

Week 3: The Lie That Tells the Truth (Fiction)

Week 4: More Adventures in Storytelling (Fiction)

Week 5: Explorations in Poetry

Again, each morning you will wake to a prompt in your email inbox. Sometimes they include a brief model of a text to read—a short essay, piece of flash fiction or poem—for inspiration. Often you will get a few different choices on how to approach the prompt. I encourage you to write freely, with as little care as possible for the quality of the writing, just seeing what comes out, and to post what you wrote without obsessively editing. Everything you turn in for this class will be presumed to be a draft. You will not be able to see your classmates' submissions until you post your own work, at which point the chain of posts will become visible to you. You are to read the creative writing of the person who posted right above you and offer a line or two of constructive feedback before logging off for the day, thus creating a robust feedback chain.

Our task as a group is to NOTICE rather than evaluate, because paying attention (reading closely) is a form of care, and as we relax judgment and sharpen our powers of attention, this will serve us in a multitude of ways, including making us better writers.

Finally, my ardent hope is that we have a lot of fun together, honoring and feeding our creative impulses, trying new things, finding out what's inside of us that wants to come out on the page.