Writing Toward Mindfulness

Instructor: Sara Michas-Martin, Winter 2016

Watering the Horse

How strange to think of giving up all ambition!
Suddenly I see with such clear eyes
The white flake of snow
That has just fallen on the horse’s mane!

—Robert Bly

Course Overview

How can writing promote mindfulness—and how can mindfulness improve our writing? In this course, writing—and writing often, and writing a lot—becomes our vehicle for learning how to bring our full attention to the present moment. Through daily writing prompts you will establish a routine that will encourage you to write more freely as you experiment with a variety of perspectives and forms. I hope for this course to serve more as a “writing lab” than your traditional, “fix-it” workshop, as we approach our writing in the spirit of collaboration and innovation. It’s essential every voice be heard. We will aim for our writing to “focus us, center us, slow us down and allow us to simply observe as clearly as possible.” (as writer Brenda Miller says).

Like any endeavor, what you take away from this course heavily depends on what you are willing to put into it. For those with ambitious goals, there will be opportunities to read or write more, and for those pressed for time, to streamline their work. Regardless of where you are coming from, you must commit to the goal of establishing a writing routine for five weeks, and you must commit to participating thoughtfully in our group discussions. Each week you can expect the following:

1. A short lecture outlining the week ahead.
2. A writing prompt every morning. The only expectation is to write for at least 15 minutes.
While there are other course requirements, the majority of your time will be spent generating new work everyday. You will be encouraged to share at least one passage from your writing excursions each week (500-1000 words). Students will be sharing very rough drafts and feedback from the instructor and the group will be offered with a light touch.

3. A reading assignment to compliment the week’s topic.

I will assign creative texts that demonstrate an awakened mind, as well as readings that address writing as dynamic practice. You can expect each week to read one to two short essays on writing practice, and either one piece of short fiction (or nonfiction), or a handful of poems.

4. **A Live Group Meeting: Saturday’s, 9:00am (pacific time)**

As stated in the course description, a meaningful aspect of this course is the weekly, hour-long video chat. These meetings will be more intentional than the usual “office hours” you may be used to from other OWS courses. Suggested discussion topics based on the interests of the class will be posted ahead of time. I may also offer a writing exercise (or two!) on the fly! In addition to having a live discussion where we can see and hear one another, these meetings provide a chance for “informal readings” of student work. In other words, students will have opportunities to read from their writing inspired by creative prompts.

If you are not able to attend any or all of our meetings, you are still welcome to join the class. For those not able to join us our meetings will be recorded and there will be alternative places to share your work in the classroom.

**Please note there are TWO sections of this course being offered. SECTION “B” will hold live weekly meetings on Thursdays at 7pm (Pacific Time) should this time work better for your schedule.**

5. Online discussion. While I hope for us to utilize our live meetings for animated conversation in “real time,” there will also be designated areas in our online classroom to respond to the readings, as well as areas to post writing you’d like to share with the group.

**Grading Criteria**

Again, what you get out of this class is based on what you are able to put into it. IF you are taking this course for credit you are required to complete all of the weekly readings and respond to all discussion questions and daily writing prompts. Because participation will count for 40% of your grade, it is strongly advised you attend the live meetings and check in on our online forum 2-4 times per week.
Required Books

The Mindful Writer: Noble Truths of the Writing Life, by Dinty W. Moore
ISBN-10: 1614290075

Writing Begins with the Breath, by Loraine Herring
ISBN-10: 159030473X

Preliminary Schedule

- **Week 1. Creating the Space, Tapping the Well**
  {topics: *introductions, setting intention*}

- **Week 2. Let’s Get Quiet for a Minute**
  {topics: “catch yourself thinking,” risk & kicking the critic}

- **Week 3. Writing and Attention**
  {topics: *the art of noticing, starting small*}

- **Week 4. Write What You DON’T Know**
  {topics: *cultivating compassion, curiosity... your friend*}

- **Week 5. Carrying the Wondering/Wandering with You**
  {topics: *art of inquiry, now what...*}