

**A DIY MA IN  
CREATIVE WRITING  
Fiction and Creative Nonfiction  
A Syllabus by Andrew Wille  
2019-2020**

A series of self-directed modules designed to equip writers with knowledge and skills of the craft of writing and the business of publishing. This can be used for fiction in any genre as well as narrative forms of creative nonfiction such as memoir.

I suggest the modules are spread across two years:

- Craft Seminar (Year 1)
- Writing Workshop (Years 1 and 2)
- Manuscript Project (Year 2)
- Professional Development Masterclass (Years 1 and 2)

Some principles to learn by:

‘All of these declarations of what writing ought to be, which I had myself — though, thank god I had never committed them to paper — I think are nonsense. You write what you write, and then either it holds up or it doesn’t hold up. There are no rules or particular sensibilities. I don’t believe in that at all anymore’ — *Jamaica Kincaid*

Embrace the idea of ‘Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason’ — *John Keats*

‘There are no rules in writing, except: don’t be boring’ — *AW*

## **READING LIST**

### *Required texts*

- Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction* (tenth edition)
- Constance Hale, *Sin and Syntax* (optional: *Constance Hale's Lesson Plans for Teachers*)
- Stephen King, *On Writing*
- Ursula Le Guin, *Steering the Craft*

### *Optional reading*

- Francine Prose, *Reading Like A Writer*
- Anne Lamott, *Bird By Bird*
- Susan Bell, *The Artful Edit*
- Pat Schneider, *Writing Alone and With Others*
- Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power* and *Writing Without Teachers*

### *Additional reading*

- I often use *Fingersmith* and *Notes on a Scandal* to discuss plotting and narrative style, and 'Brokeback Mountain' and 'Hills Like White Elephants' for analysing many other aspects of craft.
- See Further Reading (below) and other recommendations throughout.
- And do integrate texts of your own choosing into your studies as well.

## **CRAFT SEMINAR**

*Aims and objectives:* a practical understanding of key concepts in writing (see Craft Checklist).

*Timeframe:* I suggest each class is staggered across two weeks, with each unit of five classes adding up to a ten-week term (give yourself the holidays of a conventional MA too). In the first week of each class, aim to complete the reading assignments. In the second week, give yourself writing assignments (see Writing Workshop). Allow four to eight hours per class.

*Readings:* See the schedule below, and you may also supplement with relevant chapters from Francine Prose's *Reading Like A Writer* and Anne Lamott's *Bird By Bird*.

*Writing assignments:* Try exercises in the readings, and I've added other ideas too.

### **Unit One: Creating a World**

*How do character, setting, and other ingredients combine to create a dramatic situation?*

*What is the role of conflict and tension in your story? What change will it embody?*

'Conflict is one kind of behavior. There are others, equally important in any human life, such as relating, finding, losing, bearing, discovering, parting, changing. Change is the universal aspect of all these sources of story. Story is something moving, something happening, something or somebody changing.' – Ursula Le Guin, *Steering the Craft*

#### **1. Getting Started: Memory, Observations, Voice**

Burroway, Ch. 1: Whatever Works: The Writing Process (1-21)

Le Guin, Ch. 1: The Sound of Your Writing (1-10)

\* I Remember exercises: <https://wille.org/blog/2012/09/28/friday-writing-experiment-no-3-variations-on-the-form-of-i-remember/>

\* Make an ongoing practice of collecting Overheard Dialogue:

<https://wille.org/blog/2013/03/09/friday-writing-experiment-no-22-voice-1-listening/>

#### **2. Character 1: Outer Worlds**

Burroway, Ch. 3: Building Character (44-45, 63-74)

*Further reading (also class 3):* David Corbett, *The Art of Character*

\* Character Questionnaire <https://wille.org/blog/2019/01/28/character-questionnaire-writing-experiment-no-70/>

\* Distinguishing Features <https://wille.org/blog/2013/04/12/friday-writing-experiment-no-26-distinguishing-features/>

\* Wardrobe Masters and Mistresses <https://wille.org/blog/2013/05/17/friday-writing-experiment-no-30-wardrobe-masters-and-mistresses/>

#### **3. Character 2: Inner Lives**

Burroway, Ch. 4: The Flesh Made Word (75-100)

\* Write an I Don't Remember in the voice of a character <https://wille.org/blog/2018/06/01/i-dont-remember-writing-experiment-no-67/>

\* Write a breakup letter in the voice of a character <https://wille.org/blog/2014/09/19/friday-writing-experiment-no-53-breaking-up-is-never-easy-you-know/>

#### **4. Setting**

Burroway, first part of Ch. 5: Atmosphere: Place, Time and Mood (101-110)

\* Read a story with a distinct sense of place (e.g., 'Brokeback Mountain') and then (1) identify its individual settings (large/small, mountainside/hotel room) and (2) list details that bring those settings to life.

\* Write a scene through the eyes of a character decluttering a room of personal possessions:

<https://wille.org/blog/2019/02/01/characters-sparking-joy-writing-experiment-no-71/>

\* Tales of Your City <https://wille.org/blog/2014/02/21/friday-writing-experiment-no-48-tales-of-your-city/>

\* Draw a map or plan of a fictional setting of your creation.

#### **5. Plotting and Narrative Focus: Genre and Story Type**

Le Guin, Ch. 10: Crowding and Leaping (117-126)

\* For a genre of your choice: look up bestseller lists and prize shortlists, and read/sample current titles. Identify half a dozen conventions each book might observe or deviate from.

\* Explore links about story types:

<http://changingminds.org/disciplines/storytelling/plots/plots.htm>

OR use Ronald Tobias's model (downloadable PDF):

<https://www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/write-first-chapter-get-started/20-master-plots-exclusive>

\* Also explore genre, e.g., via Book Riot or the Story Grid:

<https://bookriot.com/2019/05/28/guide-to-book-genres/> OR

<https://storygrid.com/genrefiveleafclover/> OR <https://storygrid.com/genre-in-writing/>

\* Then choose one story type and one genre and use them to identify the conventions of a story or novel of your choice, e.g., 'Brokeback Mountain' as forbidden love story and western.

\* Assemble your narrative content (characters, setting, story ideas, plot points, theme), and draw up a list of conventions of both story type and genre that might make them cohere.

### **Unit Two: Telling A Story**

*What choices do you have in the techniques of telling of your story?*

#### **6. Plotting and Narrative Structure: Pacing, Reveals, and Time**

Burroway, second part of Ch. 5: Some Aspects of Narrative Time (110-122); Ch. 6: The Tower and the Net: Plot and Structure (124-152)

\* Identify key stages and turning points in a book of your choosing using one of the models for writing screenplays, e.g., the Pixar Story Spine or Michael Hauge:

<https://www.aerogrammestudio.com/2013/06/05/back-to-the-story-spine/>

<https://www.storymastery.com/story/screenplay-structure-five-key-turning-points-successful-scripts/>

#### **7. The Narrator: Point of View and Narrative Distance**

Burroway, Ch. 7: Call Me Ishmael: Point of View (153-179)

Le Guin, Ch. 6: Verbs: Person and Tense (47-60); Ch. 7: Point of View and Voice (61-86); Ch. 8: Changing Point of View (87-93)

Emma Darwin's blog on Psychic Distance:

<https://emmadarwin.typepad.com/thisitchofwriting/psychic-distance-what-it-is-and-how-to-use-it.html>

\* Using the same scene (e.g., a wedding, a baptism, or a funeral), write five flash fictions in five different ways: different grammatical person, different perspective, different style, different tense, degree of narrative distance.

### **8. Showing and Telling**

Burroway, Ch. 2: Seeing Is Believing: Showing and Telling (22-43); the section on Dialogue in Ch. 3 (45-63)

Le Guin, Ch. 9: Indirect Narration, or What Tells (94-116)

Tell Me A Story <https://wille.org/blog/2014/01/17/tell-me-a-story/>

A Book Is Not A Film <https://wille.org/blog/2015/11/21/a-book-is-not-a-film/>

\* Read Ernest Hemingway's story 'Hills Like White Elephants'

<https://www.gvsd.org/cms/lib/PA01001045/Centricity/Domain/765/HillsPDFText.pdf>

Then write a scene in which one character is trying to persuade another character to do something against their will; however, do not be explicit about that intention. Make sure you create tension in the scene, and make sure something changes (even if it is yet to be resolved).

### **9. Tone, Description, and Detail**

Burroway, Ch. 8: Comparison (180-200)

\* Write your own How To piece (perhaps your own version of How To Become A Writer) with a specific tone and revealing details, following the examples of Jamaica Kincaid, Binyavanga Wainaina, or Lorrie Moore linked here:

<https://wille.org/blog/2013/03/16/friday-writing-experiment-no-23-voice-2-tone/>

### **10. Form: Shaping Your Text**

[http://fractiousfiction.com/rise\\_of\\_the\\_fragmented\\_novel.html](http://fractiousfiction.com/rise_of_the_fragmented_novel.html)

<https://wille.org/blog/2019/06/18/plotting-conflict-curiosity-and-connection/>

<https://wille.org/blog/2019/06/24/only-connect-writing-experiment-no-74/>

\* Write a nonlinear narrative, e.g., a piece in fragments or sections that seem unconnected.

## **Unit Three: Styling Your Prose**

*How can knowledge of grammar and syntax help you refine your literary style and develop a clear and distinctive voice?*

### **11. Words: Nouns and Verbs**

Hale, Introduction and Words (ix-10), Ch. 1: Nouns (11-34); Ch. 3 Verbs (60-80)

Le Guin, Ch. 2: Punctuation and Grammar (11-19)

Chuck Paluhniak on Thought Verbs <https://litreactor.com/essays/chuck-palahniuk/nuts-and-bolts-“thought”-verbs>

- \* Try exercises from Hale or Le Guin (also check out Hale's *Lesson Plans*).
- \* Word Power <https://wille.org/blog/2016/09/16/friday-writing-experiment-no-60-word-power/>
- \* Zoe Gilbert's Heart Words vs Head Words <https://wille.org/blog/2019/03/29/heart-words-vs-head-words-guest-writing-experiment-no-73-from-zoe-gilbert/>

### **12. Words: Other Parts of Speech**

Hale, Ch. 2, 4-8 (Words): Pronouns (35-59), Adjectives (81-95), Adverbs (96-105), Prepositions (106-122), Conjunctions (123-136), Interjections (137-148)

Le Guin, Ch. 5: Adjectives and Adverbs (43-46)

- \* Try exercises from Hale.
- \* Remove all of the adjectives and adverbs from a piece of your writing, then read it aloud. How many might you need to restore? Justify each one you put back.

### **13. Sentences and Paragraphs**

Hale, Ch. 9-12 (Sentences): The Subject, the Predicate; Simple Sentences; Phrases and Clauses; Length and Tone (149-222)

Le Guin, Ch. 3: Sentence Length and Complex Syntax (20-35); Ch. 4: Repetition (36-42)

- \* Try exercises from Hale or Le Guin.
- \* Writing Good Sentences <https://wille.org/blog/2012/10/20/friday-writing-experiment-no-6-writing-good-sentences/>

### **14. Developing a Style**

Hale: Music, Ch. 13-15: Melody; Rhythm; Lyricism (223-270)

- \* Try exercises from Hale.
- \* Take a page of writing from Ernest Hemingway, then rewrite it in the style of Angela Carter. Then take a page of writing from Angela Carter, and rewrite it in the style of Ernest Hemingway. (Alternatively, choose other writers with distinctively different styles.) Then: rewrite each in your *own* style.

### **15. Your Voice**

Hale, Ch. 16 (Music): Voice (271-284)

Further reading: Anne Lamott, *Bird By Bird*, 'Finding Your Voice'

- \* Try exercises from Hale.
- \* Do an I Remember exercise for what you have learned about writing during these classes.
- \* Investigate and set goals for future writing, e.g., writing a novel, plus any support systems you might want for this, such as books/courses on writing novels (see Professional Development).

## **A CHECKLIST OF CRAFT TERMS**

Aim to have a working understanding of the following terms. Burroway's *Writing Fiction* covers many of them, and you can also consult glossaries of literary terms in literature textbooks.

### ***Narrative content***

*What is the story about? What is it made of?*

Character, protagonist, character arc, motivation, yearning

Antagonist, antagonisms

Inner

Interpersonal

Societal

Environmental/cosmic

Archetypes

Setting, world-building

Place

Time, timeframe

Dramatic situation, dramatic question

Storyline, plot, subplot

Change

Genre, conventions

Theme (idea, vision)

Payoff

### ***Narrative style***

*How is the story told? How is the storytelling crafted?*

Narrator, narration, narrative tone

Narrating stance

Narrative focus, dramatic focus, unity n

Narrative/psychic distance

Showing and telling, scene and summary

Subtext, indirection, connotation, denotation

Backstory, exposition

Info dump, expository lump

Interior monologue

Persona

Commentary

Description, detail

Dialogue: direct, indirect, summary

Point of view and narrating stance:

Perspective: whose viewpoint?

Person: first (I/we), third (he/she/they), second (you)

Tense

Technique: omniscient, close third, stream of consciousness, objective, etc.

Misdirection

Transitions

Form, frame  
Word count, length  
Linear narrative, multiple/dual narrative, nonlinear narrative, collage, polyphonic  
Structure (three-act, Hero's Journey)  
Sequence, scene, beat  
Pace  
Conflict, tension, suspense  
Kishōtenketsu  
Plotting  
Plot points, turning points: inciting incident, rising action, climax, resolution  
Catharsis  
Risk  
Reversals  
Reveals, realisations/epiphanies  
Cultural appropriation

***Prose style and voice***

*How is the story brought to life line by line, word by word?*

Voice  
Tone  
Mood  
Register  
Detail (concrete, specific vs abstract, vague)  
Description  
Explanation  
Symbolism, figures of speech  
Irony  
Parts of speech: verb, noun, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, interjection  
Filtering; thought verbs, auxiliary/helping verbs, linking verbs; dynamic/static verbs  
Anglo-Saxon vs Latinate words  
Hedging, qualifiers, intensifiers  
Parallelism  
Breaks, paragraphs  
Sentences: simple, compound; complex, sentence fragments  
Right-branching sentences, left-branching sentences  
Additive style, subordinating style  
Punctuation  
Gender  
Idiolect  
Vernacular English, nonstandard English  
Classic prose  
Minimalist  
Maximalist, baroque, mannerist  
Realist, representative  
Modernist, postmodernist, metafiction



## **FURTHER READING**

Based on writing I use for examples in classes and in recommendations to writers.

### ***Fiction and creative nonfiction***

Ernest Hemingway, 'Hills Like White Elephants' and other short stories (minimalism, subtext)

Angela Carter short stories (maximalism/baroque)

Lydia Davis short stories (style)

Alice Munro short stories (style, character, narration, setting)

Raymond Carver short stories (style, minimalism, subtext)

Lucia Berlin short stories (style, voice)

Lorrie Moore, 'How To Become A Writer' and other short stories (voice, detail)

Joan Didion, *The White Album* (style, voice, tone)

Annie Proulx, 'Brokeback Mountain' (setting, character, narration, style, plotting)

James Joyce, *Dubliners* (form, epiphany)

Zoe Gilbert, *Folk* (form, literary style, setting)

Elizabeth Strout, *Olive Kitteridge* (character, tone, subtext)

Kent Haruf, *Our Souls at Night* (literary style, minimalism)

Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (realism) and *Searching for the Secret River* (memoir)

Edward Carey, *Little* (character, voice, tone, setting)

Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith* (plotting, narration, setting)

Jonathan Franzen, *Purity* (form, character, voice)

Anne Enright, *The Green Road* (form, voice, point of view, character)

Zoë Heller, *Notes on a Scandal* (voice, narration, point of view)

Armistead Maupin, *Tales of the City* (setting, character, story)

Nina Stibbe, *Man at the Helm* (character, voice)

Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (character, voice, form)

Kit de Waal, *My Name Is Leon* (voice, character, point of view)

Amanda Berriman, *Home* (voice, character, point of view)

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (character, setting, voice)

Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (point of view, character, plotting)

Oyinkan Braithwaite, *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (voice, character)

Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* (mood, voice, character, setting)

Anna Burns, *Milkman* (voice, literary style)

Max Porter, *Lanny* (literary style, form)

Guy Gunaratne, *In Our Mad and Furious City* (voice, literary style)

Kerry Hadley-Price, *The Black Country* (voice, narration, setting)

Garth Greenwell, *What Belongs to You* (voice, narration, tone)

Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (voice, form, character)

Damian Barr, *You Will Be Safe Here* (form, setting, character)

Nigel Slater, *Toast* (memoir, form, voice, tone, detail)

Binyavanga Wainaina, 'How to Write About Africa' (essay, voice, tone)

Xiaolu Guo, *Once Upon A Time in the East* (memoir, voice, tone, setting)

Alexander Chee, *How To Write An Autobiographical Novel* (essays, memoir, voice, tone)

David Sedaris, *Calypso* (essays, memoir, voice, tone, character)  
Joe Brainard, *I Remember* (memoir, tone, detail)  
Alan Bennett, *Talking Heads*, diaries, memoirs, short stories (voice – the best study)  
Classics: Chekhov, Dickens, Woolf, Flaubert, Marquez, *Pride and Prejudice*  
Popular classics: *Valley of the Dolls*, *Jaws*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Hobbit*  
Reread favourite books of your childhood and inspirational novels of your youth  
Current bestsellers and recent prizewinners in the category of your choice  
Audiobooks, particularly for books you've read before: what fresh things do you hear?  
Poetry: get hold of good anthologies, or browse at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems>

### **Books on craft**

Nicholas Royle, ed., *The Art of the Novel*  
Vanessa Gebbie, ed., *Short Circuit: A Guide to the Art of the Short Story*  
Donald Maass, *The Emotional Craft of Fiction, Writing 21st-Century Fiction*  
Albert Zuckerman, *Writing the Blockbuster Novel*  
Scarlett Thomas, *Monkeys With Typewriters*  
David Corbett, *The Art of Character*  
Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*  
Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling*  
Sandra Newman and Howard Mittelmark, *How Not to Write a Novel*  
Benjamin Dreyer, *Dreyer's English*  
Lisa Goldman, *The No Rules Handbook*  
Dohra Ahmad, ed., *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology* (on non-standard Englishes)  
Craft books on genre, e.g., Teach Yourself series  
Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*  
TLC, Craft and Creativity Mini Guides <https://literaryconsultancy.co.uk/tlc-press/>

### **Inspiration and exercises**

Natalie Goldberg, especially *Writing Down the Bones* and *The True Secret of Writing*  
Robert Olen Butler, *From Where You Dream*  
Elizabeth Gilbert, *Big Magic*  
Pat Schneider, *Writing Alone and With Others*  
Brian Kiteley, *The 3 A.M. Epiphany: Uncommon Writing Exercises*  
Austin Kleon <https://austinkleon.com> – sign up for his weekly newsletter  
Lynda Barry, *Syllabus* and <https://www.lynda.com/Business-Illustration-tutorials/conversation-Lynda-Barry/136654/142183-4.html>

### **Useful links**

Emma Darwin's Toolkit <https://emmadarwin.typepad.com/thisitchofwriting/resources.html>  
Words Away blog: many resources on craft and process <https://www.wordsaway.info/new-blog>  
Open Culture - Free Literature Classes [http://www.openculture.com/literature\\_free\\_courses](http://www.openculture.com/literature_free_courses)  
Glossary of Literary Terms from BC Open Textbooks:  
<https://opentextbc.ca/englishliterature/back-matter/appendix-glossary-of-literary-terms/>

## **WRITING WORKSHOP AND MANUSCRIPT PROJECT**

*Aims and objectives:* exploring your own writing process; creating your own time-managed system of writing to deadlines; developing the practice of drafting and revising; acquiring editorial skills for editing your own writing and giving feedback to other writers.

### *Suggested reading*

Le Guin: Appendix: The Peer Group Workshop (127-135)

Burroway, Ch. 9: Play It Again, Sam: Revision and Theme (201-224)

Anne Lamott, 'Shitty First Drafts' and 'The Writing Group' in *Bird By Bird*

Susan Bell, *The Artful Edit*

### **Year 1**

#### ***Writing Practice***

Create for yourself a weekly/fortnightly writing schedule using exercises and prompts, such as those in the Schedule, Burroway's *Writing Fiction* or Constance Hale's *Sin and Syntax* and *Lesson Plans for Teachers*. My own site also has lots of exercises and suggested resources:

<https://wille.org/blog/resources/friday-writing-experiments/>

Also check out Tim Clare: <http://www.timclarepoet.co.uk/couchto8okwritingbootcamp/>

Lynda Barry (includes drawing): <https://thenearsightedmonkey.tumblr.com/search/exercises>

and in reading lists Brian Kiteley, Pat Schneider, and Natalie Goldberg.

Choose exercises relevant to the current class in the Craft Seminar, or something at random, but aim to be structured and consistent in your routine. Little and often can be good – ten minutes every day can help you establish a good writing practice. But longer sessions once or twice a week work better for other writers. You might want to try out different times of day or locations for writing too, and experiment with writing on the computer and writing by hand. Explore different approaches (perhaps giving each one a week or so?), and develop your own practice. Also, keep a Writing Journal – daily reflection of just a few minutes can keep you in the zone.

#### ***Creating a Critique Group and Writing Community***

Find a writing partner or a writing group, not only for giving you feedback but also for holding you and your writing to account. Aim to produce writing of a certain length for specific deadlines, and agree on common aims; perhaps take advice from Ursula Le Guin or Anne Lamott (above), or try Pat Schneider or Peter Elbow (Reading List). Meet regularly – at least once a month makes sense, circulating writing for feedback a week in advance.

Working With Feedback on Your Writing <https://wille.org/blog/2014/10/03/working-with-feedback-on-your-writing/> and Artist Dates: <https://wille.org/blog/2012/10/06/friday-writing-experiment-no-4-a-date-with-an-artist/>

#### ***Revising***

After you get feedback, revise the piece (sometimes this is done immediately, but sometimes the work needs to percolate). Even if you feel the writing has no future, do another draft to see what you can learn from improving it.

### **Portfolio No. 1**

At the end of the year, look over your assignments and create a portfolio (5,000 to 8,000 words?) of revised work. Exchange with a writing partner, and give each other feedback: what sense of the other writer's work does this portfolio give you? What direction might their writing take? What do you want to read more of?

### **Year 2**

#### **Writing Practice: Manuscript Project**

Create a longer project for yourself that spans a year. Many MA's task students on producing projects of about 15,000 words of creative work (e.g., opening of a novel, or short stories), but you might prefer to produce the first draft of a whole manuscript. You could investigate some of the practices of [NaNoWriMo](#), though feel free to adapt; rather than writing 50,000 words of a first draft in a month, maybe try 50,000 over three months (a more realistic pace?) or even 75,000 words over six months. And then spend the rest of the year redrafting, revising, and expanding. It will be helpful to have daily/weekly writing targets (word counts, or writing time).

Alternatively, you could produce short stories, e.g., six or eight, one per month, and then spend the rest of the year revising them and sending them out on submission to literary magazines.

Continue to share selections with a writing partner or a critique group on a monthly basis.

#### **Genre Research**

Investigate the conventions and practices of the genre or category in which you are working. Also investigate trends in your genre or category: read/sample prizewinners, bestsellers, and especially first novels of the last few years, and see if you can also find out what is being published in the near future (check the *Bookseller* or Publishers Lunch). Some resources here: <https://wille.org/blog/resources/genre-resources/>

#### **Revising and Self-Editing**

Aim to produce at least three drafts of a piece of your manuscript during the course of the workshop. Some exercises and resources for revising and self-editing:

<https://wille.org/blog/2016/12/23/friday-writing-experiment-no-63-a-gift-on-every-page/>

<https://wille.org/blog/2018/06/27/putting-it-through-the-typewriter-again-writing-experiment-no-68/>

<https://wille.org/blog/resources/suggestions-for-self-editing/>

<https://wille.org/blog/resources/revising-a-craft-checklist/>

#### **Final Manuscript**

Produce a final (for now) draft of your manuscript, following industry standards (e.g., double-spaced, 12pt Times). Then share with a writing partner. A simple task is to ask: does it feel ready to be read by strangers? Then consider next steps on the basis of your investigations in the Professional Development Masterclass.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MASTERCLASS**

*Aims and objectives:* to gain a deeper understanding of where your writing is located within the wider worlds of publishing and readers.

Set yourself goals for doing, e.g., half a dozen of the following tasks within a span of time, e.g., every three or six months. It might help to do the above with a writing partner: agree to meet at the end of your three/six months to share half a dozen key findings.

- Keep a Writing Journal
- Write yourself a manifesto: <https://wille.org/blog/2014/10/10/friday-writing-experiment-no-54-write-a-manifesto/>
- Listen to podcasts on writing and books, e.g., this excellent series with Charlotte Wood: <https://www.charlottewood.com.au/for-writers.html>
- Follow writers and writing professionals on social media – a few suggestions via my site: <https://wille.org/blog/resources/networking-for-writers/>
- Read Manjula Martin, *Scratch: Writers, Money, and the Art of Making a Living*.
- Listen to a published author speak - a bookshop event, or a podcast or YouTube.
- Speak to a published author, e.g., asking questions you have about writing and publishing at an event or a signing session.
- Listen to publishing professionals speak - online if not in person, e.g., Jonny Geller's TedTalk on writing a bestseller: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD-uP2BsVy4>
- Research genre bodies and see if they host events you can attend - perhaps you can think about joining one: <https://wille.org/blog/resources/genre-resources/>
- Research the publishing industry in the sector in which you write, and identify half a dozen publishers who publish books in your area. You can make a start at this by looking at the spines you find most frequently on your own shelves, then checking out the websites of those publishers: what books did/do they publish last year, this year, and next year?
- Read publisher catalogues: how do they describe books you have read?
- If you are working on a novel or a longer work of nonfiction: write a synopsis (a simple summary of the work).
- If you are working on a novel or a longer work of nonfiction: write an elevator pitch (a short pitch - maybe 25 words).
- Visualise a cover for your book - imagine writing a brief for a designer. Some resources: <https://blog.reedsy.com/6-tips-book-designer-brief/>  
[www.canva.com/learn/book-cover-design-50-amazing-covers-you-will-want-to-pick-up/](http://www.canva.com/learn/book-cover-design-50-amazing-covers-you-will-want-to-pick-up/)
- Research standard manuscript formatting for the field in which you are writing.
- Research cover letters and submission guidelines: what do different agents/publishers want?
- Investigate publishing more broadly. Start with [The Rocky Road to Paper Heaven](#) by Margaret Atwood, and there are more links here: <https://wille.org/blog/resources/publishing/>
- Investigate self-publishing, e.g., start by looking up Mark Dawson and David Gaughran.
- Investigate paid events and services (writers' conferences, festivals, book fairs, readings, retreats, in-person and online courses, workshops, mentoring, manuscript assessments). Create a workable budget for anything you feel you might gain from.

- Investigate opportunities available through writing organisations and sign up for their regular newsletters. Suggestions on my site <https://wille.org/blog/resources/networking-for-writers/>

*DIY MA in Creative Writing 2019, version 1.3*

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*Andrew Wille, 19 September 2019*

*Updates*

1.1 September 2019: Reading List: Pat Schneider; Lamott's 'Writing Group'.

1.2 September 2019: Reading List: Peter Elbow; Craft Seminar 15: Lamott's 'Finding Your Voice', investigating future projects; Craft Checklist: exposition, sequence, scene, beat (oops!); Useful links: Words Away blog; Writing Workshop/Professional Development: Writing Journal.

1.3. February 2020: Professional Development: self-publishing, Mark Dawson, David Gaughran; covers and briefing a designer.