

## Creative Writing in the Writing Center



### Types of Creative Writing:

Fiction

Poetry

Creative Non-Fiction

Playwriting



Creative writing students will most likely come to a session to *revise* a piece of their work. You won't typically get a student wanting to start with a prompt and discuss ideas. The student will most likely already have a draft. The revision process is the most important part of the creative writing process. We will be approaching this subject with that in mind.

### The Writing Process for Creative Writing:

The writing process differs for each creative writer and then for which type of creative writing the writer is working on.

**Fiction** calls for many different parts that make up the whole. These parts are plot, setting, characterization, point of view, dialogue, and structure (Stern). Sometimes writers will focus on one of these things that they think will best help or amplify their story and later fine tune the other parts during the revision process. Others will incorporate all of them and then revise.

**Poetry** calls for a down draft, an up draft, and then a dental draft. The down draft is basically used to get all of the poet's thoughts on paper. The up draft is working with what was produced in the down draft to try and make it a little more polished. The dental draft is what takes the longest amount of time. This is when the poet considers every word and asks himself if it is working, if it isn't, what is making it work or not work.

**Creative Non-Fiction** is a piece of writing about something that has taken place. The art comes into what language you use to convey the story. Creative non-fiction could be an article, memoir, poem, or research paper (Gutkind). First the writer gets the story down and right, and then works with the language to make it creative.

**Playwriting** is very different from the other types of writing and requires everything that fiction calls for in the form of dialogue and a few short stage directions.

### How to structure a session with a creative writer:

- 1) Ask the student what the assignment is and talk about it. Then, dedicate the first 10-15 minutes to reading the piece. You can't talk about the piece unless you have an understanding of what is happening.
- 2) While you are reading, ask the student to take that time to write down questions they may have for you about their piece, things they are worried about or want to discuss with a

fresh set of eyes. Have the student include things that his/her professor has focused on in class or has talked to him/her concerning that piece of writing.

- 3) After you are finished reading, address the questions the student wants to discuss. Creative writers know what they are trying to do in their piece very well.

Another way to structure a session:

- 1) Start off asking the student for questions they may have and what their professor has focused on in class.
- 2) Then read the piece with those questions in mind. This will help with knowing exactly what the student is looking for feedback on as you are reading.
- 3) Discuss the questions the student had and his/her work.

Do's while discussing or reading a piece of creative writing with the writer:

- 1) Have confidence in your ability to discuss the piece of writing even if you are not a creative writer. You have read for pleasure in the past, you have made it to college, you know what makes a good story even if you have not had the experience of knowing how to talk about it.
- 2) When discussing the story or poem etc., talk about what is bringing you deeper into the story. These can be images, emotion, characters that grab your attention, plot, anything that really allows you to see and feel what is going on (Rutherford).
- 3) Look for "gas stations." This is a term used in some creative writing classes specifically when talking about fiction. It means look for moments that are really getting you through the story. There could be many small ones or a couple of big ones, it really depends on the writer and the piece. There is no specific amount of gas stations needed.
- 4) When in doubt pay attention to word choice, because it matters, a lot (Pobo 5).
- 5) Be sensitive to the possibility that the student has a fear of what you will think of their work, but also be honest (Pobo 6).
- 6) Ask questions. By asking questions the creative "juices" will start to flow even more and it will help the creative writer when they are opened up to different possibilities (Pobo 6).
- 7) Let the student know you are both working towards strengthening their writing. This may ease any defensiveness they may have (Pobo 6).
- 8) Encourage creativity without sacrificing good writing (Pobo 6).

Don'ts while discussing or reading a piece of creative writing with the writer:

- 1) Don't be afraid to say something about what confused you or what wasn't bringing you into the story. It is understandable that making suggestions on things that you think could be changed is intimidating when dealing with creative writing because even though we talk about the idea that every type of writing tells us something about the writer, creative writing seems to be more personal and hold more of the writer in it. Don't let that keep you from making suggestions. The writer is there for feedback and knows that in the end they have the power to choose which suggestions they take or don't take.

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- 2) Don't use the words "like" or "dislike." It won't help the writer with his/her revisions (Rutherford).
- 3) Don't lie to the student. It's true that the creative writer is in a vulnerable position, which we would naturally be wary about, and they want to be encouraged, but they also want the truth (Pobo 5).

Possible questions to ask during a session (Pobo):

Who is the audience?

Are you using the best possible word here or could you use a better word? Are you reaching for the easy word?

Why did you choose this phrase, punctuation, or word?

What kind of writing assignments has your professor given you and what were their purposes?

What was your intention here?

What are the suggestions you took from workshoping in class and why did you take them?

Ask yourself and the writer the basic who, what, when, where, why and how questions. This will help with clarity and erase as much confusion as possible in the piece of writing.

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#### Work Cited

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