Versions of Creative Writing teaching

Versions of Creative Writing teaching 1. Beginners 2. Spiritual / therapeutic 3. Writing workshop 4. Craft and technique 5. Contextual 6. Literature 7. Thematic 8. Masterclass

Thematic

Characterised by the use of Creative Writing - in tandem with other art forms - as a strategy to teach particular themes or ideas, particularly in relation to social and cultural idioms. It often works better if combined with a craft-focused approach, although participants may not receive any feedback on the quality of the writing.

- purpose
  - often an issue viewed as difficult or socio-cultural in nature
  - focus on learning outcome
  - learning and teaching strategy
- typically multi-modal
  - very short exercises
  - poetry
  - life writing
  - fiction
- **Mode not important. Learning point is important.**

Key players
- schools
- community groups

Writing workshop

Characterised by participants and a tutor commenting on a piece of writing in a group setting, verbally or vocally. Workshops tend to specialise in one mode of writing. Regular workshops have the effect of turning **writing practice** into a habit.

- mode of writing
  - any
  - specialist groups
    - whole group
    - small group
    - pairs
- purpose
  - improvement
  - feedback
  - self-awareness
    - preparation for working alone
  - editing
    - self-editing
  - career preparation
    - writing
    - publishing
    - higher education
    - teaching

Craft based teaching is sometimes viewed with suspicion by proponents of the workshop model.

Participants may be preparing for submission to a publisher OR engaging in art for art's sake.

Key players
- University Creative Writing courses
  - **ESPECIALLY MA COURSES**
- Community centres
- Arvon Foundation
- Literature development organisations
- Adult education centres

Craft and technique

Characterised by exercises set by a tutor to teach particular aspects of writing, such as imagery, form, rhythm, characterisation, plotting, editing, layout etc that are designed to improve participants' writing. **Often combined with the workshop model.** Tends to focus on one mode of writing.

- mode of writing
  - any
  - specialist focus
    - includes reflection on published works
- purpose
  - improvement
    - in workshop
    - from tutor
  - feedback
  - **PRACTICE**
    - preparation for practicing alone
    - e.g. One Art by Elizabeth Bishop
  - constraint
    - form
      - villanelle
      - narrative structure
    - framework
      - Allows for exploration of a theme or idea or mode within known parameter

Key players
- University Creative Writing courses
- Literature development organisations
- Many mass-marketed 'how to' creative writing texts

Masterclass

Characterised by the involvement of a well-known or revered figure giving advice to a select group of participants, often through an analysis of the work of three or four of them, often based on a theatre model.

- mode of writing
  - any
  - focus on one specialist mode

Key players
- Literary festivals
- University MA programmes
- Arts organisations

Beginners

Characterised by the inclusion of most of the other versions or techniques.

- typically multi-modal
  - very short exercises
  - poetry
  - life writing
  - fiction
- multipurpose
  - toe-dipping
  - self-expression
  - communication
  - spiritual
  - **what next?**
    - Typically (but not always) participants move on to a next stage
    - Ironically participants in the other versions do not necessarily complete this stage first, though they may later teach it.

Key players
- Community centres
- Literature development organisations
- Arvon Foundation
- Libraries
- Adult education centres

Spiritual / therapeutic

Characterised by emphasis on self-expression, creativity and personal development, and creative recovery or journeying.

- mode of writing
  - **journal writing**
  - poetry
  - life writing
  - free writing
- purpose
  - self-worth
  - freedom
  - self-expression
  - creative / spiritual journey
    - for example, shamanic journeying
    - self-discovery
  - healing
    - palliative care
    - grief
    - addiction
  - humanist
    - better communication
    - community engagement
    - ethics promotion

Key players
- Community organisations
- Julia Cameron: juliacameronlive.com
- Lapidus: www.lapidus.org.uk

Contextual

Characterised by emphasis on political, literary or creative motivations for writing. May involve cultural / literary theory, or literary history, particularly focusing on writers' published work on why they write. May focus on personal motivations for writing or on theories of writing process, referred to as poetics.

- purpose
  - political change
    - thinking about the world
    - thinking about writing
  - development of an academic discourse
  - deals with "anxiety of influence" (Bloom 1973)
  - adds depth to work
  - understanding that there are many reasons to write
- mode
  - Any
  - Poetics / theory
  - Tends to focus on a diverse range of writing practice
  - short exercises
    - accessing creativity
    - as illustrations
    - why I write

Key players
- University Creative Writing courses
  - Particularly postgraduate work
    - e.g. Roehampton's Poetics module
  - Undergraduate
    - e.g. Roehampton's contextual modules
    - e.g. Why Write? module at Royal Holloway developed by Dr Douglas Cowie and Dr Tim Jarvis
- Academic texts on Creative Writing
  - Publishers
    - Multilingual Matters
    - Professional and Higher
    - Palgrave
    - Routledge

Literature

Characterised by the specific use of Creative Writing as a strategy for learning and teaching Literature - rather than teaching writing for its own sake - asking participants to write in a particular form in order to better understand it, or to imitate and investigate the work of particular writers. Tends to function as one of a range of strategies used by teachers and lecturers, although writers working alone might also defer to this method.

- mode
  - any
    - but particularly fiction and poetry
  - imitation / response
    - of a literary technique
      - e.g. stream of consciousness
    - of a particular writer
    - popular forms
      - e.g. writers producing fan fiction
  - short exercises
- purpose
  - better understanding of the text in question
  - imitation of 'masters' for improved writing practice
  - enhanced student engagement
  - recognition of link between Literature and writing practice

Key players
- writers with a Literature education
- University Literature courses
- School and college Literature teaching