

Syllabus
Write to Fictionalize Your Life
A Workshop led by Nan Phifer, www.memoirworkshops.com

Your writings will pulse with such vivid, sensory description that listeners will wonder if the accounts they hear actually occurred, or were experienced only in the writer's mind, or are a combination thereof.

Participants will gain the ability to:

- identify an array of writing subjects
- create an overview of sensations that suffused the subject you chose (Trauma is stored in a sensory, pre-verbal part of the brain.)
- indicate action, dialogue, and reflection on your overview
- write a quick first draft
- share your writing, if you wish, in small group
- comment constructively and positively on the writings of others by following guidelines I'll provide

Tentative Session Topics

- I ABCs of Fact to Fiction
Master a quick, tricky way to identify, as writing subjects, the high and low points in your life. A chart will guide you through an impulsive association maze.

- II Fantasies Brought to Life
Learn how sensory details make fiction feel vividly real.
Include drops of sweat, rustling, a twitch, panting, even a hiccup, all the smells.

- III Alternatives: If Only I Had . . . Yikes! Wowie!
Change the course of your life. We'll identify times when you could have chosen differently. Now's your chance to take the road not taken.

- IV "I Knew I Would Be Seen As Peculiar Or Altruistic Or Criminal Or . . ."
Daringly do what you never did. Say what you swallowed back.
Forget your mother's admonitions.

- V Reconstruction of What Might/Should/Could Have Been
As a super power, change circumstances, reform individuals, alter yourself.
Rule the kingdom. Issue laws. Rescue deserving beings.

- VI A Dramatic Moment Spoken Aloud: A Sensational Script
Rewrite a heart-pounding scene you observed, experienced, or imagined.
Make the event yet more intense. Narrate what happens. Add dialogue.

- VII The Dramatic Moment Recorded and Applauded
Select classmates to read roles of characters. Choose a narrator.
You're the director. Record and play back the reading.

VIII Sing Heartily Together *Rich Fantasy Lives, A Song* By Rob Balder With Music By Tom Smith. I'll bring the words. We may even write some song lyrics, using phrases lifted from your previous writings or write our own grandiose new lyrics.

My Methodology

I've adapted a writing process developed by the National Writing Project. First I guide participants in identifying numerous, individual subjects for their writing. Selecting one, they briefly tell a partner about the subject they're considering, and the partner summarizes the subject she/he is considering. In doing so, both individuals find the words they'll use and openings into their stories. In addition they become acquainted and comfortable sharing ideas. When I ask the group write a quick, messy first draft, everyone has a subject and an opening into the subject.

I allow about twenty minutes for writing the rough draft. Although some drafts are not yet complete, we form groups of four, and I suggest that the bravest person in each group be the first to read aloud the draft. No one is required to read aloud, but by the time two or three have read, even the shy ones usually want to participate. At only one time during the workshops do I insist upon a rigid rule and that has to do with responding to readings. To assure that all responses are nurturing and encouraging, I provide a written guide that begins with "Tell what you liked about the writing."

For each classroom session I prepare a handout, often four to six pages long, so participants can clearly follow where I'm leading them. They sometimes fill personal data into a chart or sketch. My handouts often conclude with questions for later reflection on the content of their drafts, questions that can open insights, stimulate further development, and lead to revised, polished final drafts. However, our primary goal is not to achieve masterful writing but to enjoy a convivial classroom experience.

Guidelines for small-group members who listen and respond to writings by classmates.

1. Tell what you like about the account.
2. Ask a question.
3. Tell how the account made you feel.
4. Do NOT critique the literary attributes of the writing, for it is still only a quick rough draft. To critique a rough draft would be inappropriate.