

The Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning
at the University of San Francisco

Discover & Craft Your Writing Voice

A Seminar by Professor Joan Minninger & Paul Quin | Winter 2009

What Thursdays look like (roughly)

10:00 We start on time, writing. If you are late, slip in quietly. We want everyone to feel welcome, but save hellos 'til break. Prompts inspire writing sprints.

Writing happens within time. Stimulus is everywhere. Trance is the freeway.

Habit (or prolonged incarceration) is key.

Your critical mind is not invited.

The morning is the exploratory phase. After each sprint, those who wish, read aloud.

11:40 Break for lunch.

1:00 The afternoon is for crafting. First, the class discusses a crafting tool with examples. If you find short passages that show off a crafting technique or present a challenge, bring them to Paul ahead of class - or email him - so we can share them.

1:20 Tables are the crafting groups. Each gets copies of an exploratory piece - with the authors' permission - typed up from the morning or last week. They discuss strengths and how to bring them out, using tools of craft to create a vibrant piece.

2:00 After break, each group reads their piece aloud and discusses its crafting.

2:35 Wrap-up and plans for next week.

Everyone gets a turn

Each morning someone from each table typically gets a chance to read from their sprint. Time does not allow everyone to read in each class; volunteers from one week have first dibs on reading the next week. Encourage the shy ones.

If you want, leave a copy of an a.m. exploratory sprint with Paul to type for next week's crafting. You may also bring or email for comment writing you do at home.

Two brown-bag salons are scheduled. Readers will be asked by Joan and Paul on the basis of submitted work. If you want to read, talk with us. Also, Joan and Paul are starting the Lone Mountain Project to post finished work on-line.

Choose your materials

For writing in class, remember that work you submit for discussion needs to be taken away for typing. So consider a pad or notebook different from the one in which you keep class notes - or, like Joan, use a carbon so you can keep a copy.

Send work for review to Paul Quin <pdquin@me.com> or bring to class. He'll comment.

If you need to get in touch with Joan Minninger, email joanminninger@sbcglobal.net.

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Readings for Discover & Craft Your Writing Voice

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The bookstore has two books:

Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*. The class sequence follows her chapters.

Stephen King: *On Writing: A memoir of the craft*. This anecdotal account provides additional context for class discussions.

Also of interest: Syd Field, *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting*. Engaging back-story and plot energy discussions apply to all media.

If you enter 'writers on writing' at Alibris.com, you get a list of, today, 159 books. Most are collections, notably a rash of focused studies like *Hebrew Writers* or *Mexican Writers on Writing*. A little impromptu reading on your part could bring new riches to class.

Francine Prose uses examples to great effect; stumble on your own in a short story collection. You may have Hansen & Shepard's *Got To Read This*, which Gabriella Mautner assigns; it delivers a range of interesting writers. Or, trusting in serendipity, pick out a slim volume of stories by an unfamiliar author who for some reason intrigues you. One student relies on the *New York Times*, and it works. Delight us by sharing excerpts. We'll use them as time allows. Feel free to send suggestions ahead of time to Paul so he can get them copied or set up for projection.

Joan Minninger
joanminninger@sbcglobal.net

Paul Quin
pdquin@me.com

Discover & Craft Your Writing Voice Draft schedule

Professor Joan Minninger & Paul Quin, Winter 2009

- 15 Jan The isolated word or object.
One perfect, single word – does it shine out? Underline it.
Use this word as the focus for crafting the final work. Prose 2, Words.
- 22 Jan An action or condition.
Does one description or single action carry the main thought? Underline it.
Trace its echoes through to an inevitable end. Prose 3, Sentences.
- 29 Jan A thought or situation.
Find the thoughts that intrigue you. Bracket them. See how the whole piece
can circle around these thoughts and sprout sequences and consequences.
Prose 4, Paragraphs.
- 5 Feb An image.
Does an image hold power? Circle it. Follow its glance through ordered
progression to the end. Images, see Prose 5, Narration.
- 12 Feb An attitude, proposal or opinion.
Does a thesis appear, shimmering in immanence? Bracket it. If it is active but
unstated, write it. Expose the point of view on which it relies, then spin out
the tale. Thesis & points of view, see Prose 6, Character.
- 19 Feb A conversation – maybe just a sound.
Call out each voice you hear, mark it and relate occurrences. Expose the
skeleton, extend relationships to their dénouement. Voices & progression,
see Prose 7, Dialogue.
- 26 Feb You witness or hear of something. You remember.
Highlight cogent memories and reports. Build these into logical sequences,
completing sets of examples to support concepts. Examples, information &
logic, see Prose 8, Details.
- 5 Mar A character, a context.
Mark items in context or out of context. Which do not belong? Or perhaps
one apparent set is replaced by another. Observe what exists, then use
vocabulary, grammar & referents to create a sea-swell that carries the
reader ineluctably forward. Prose 9, Gesture.

	Inspiration	Process	Content	Expression
Focus	Concept brainstorm dramatic quirky everyday insipid fuzzy	Logic energy expansive complex simplistic confused absent	Introduction point zero venturesome solid self-evident incomplete invented	Presentation format transparent emphatic decorative awkward thoughtless
Structure	Thesis proposition compelling well constructed ambivalent inconsequent self-contradictory	Rhetoric artistry engaging interesting clever sloppy disjointed	Progression organization inevitable probable orderly contrived disconnected	Syntax grammar energetic supportive well grounded imprecise dysfunctional
Scope	Field of enquiry context fertile challenging stable arbitrary skewed	Range of knowledge info convincing instructive superficial spotty insufficient	Examples metaphors illuminating supportive predictable irrelevant falsified	Referents citations substantial useful generalized elusive non-existent
Resources	Point of view approach revealing insightful common inconsistent fractured	Voice persona engaging active neutral confusing random	Relationships dialog challenging stimulating routine ineffectual dissonant	Vocabulary language robust focused considered hackneyed off-target
Detail	Ideas philosophy explosive dynamic formulaic weak dissonant	Images similes evocative intriguing obvious unclear trite	Actions sentences compelling informative simple repetitive inconsequent	Objects words inspired precise clear ambiguous inaccurate