

Writing lab

How can we best harness word magic to inspire, inform, educate, and entertain?

Or does language 'language' us?

Do different languages (Arabic and English, for example) shape our thoughts differently?

In this writing lab, we will apply aspects of language (sounds, words, rhythm), to discover creative ways of approaching characterisation, description, and action, through a variety of writing genres and styles.

This **six-week** writing lab is designed to build on ideas covered in a previous CILAS class (Story as participative enquiry) but attendance on that course is not a prerequisite for joining this one. Taking inspiration from the *shu-ha-ri* approach to Japanese martial arts training, the exercises in this writing lab are designed to invite you to play by the rules; break away from the rules; and ultimately, transcend the rules to achieve a state of flow.

As both creators and appreciators, participants will engage with what they learn about writing in imaginatively practical personal quests to realise personal, communal, and universally nurturing work.

Participants may work in English and/or Arabic. Films, webcasts, video journals, artwork, social sculptures, or musical compositions are acceptable providing academic rigour and critical and creative thinking are evident as part of the creative process.

2) A tentative course/lab/workshop flow, including the weekly topics and (preliminary) assigned material (reading, viewing, exercises, etc.) for 6-8 weeks, one session per week. (you can find previous course flow samples on the website)

Proposed course outline (flexible - may change according to the individual needs and interests of participants enrolled)

Session 1 will include a thematic overview of the course, and an icebreaker exercise.

We will engage in some writing games and share the results.

We will also discuss how to incorporate the ideas which result into a larger-scale project that participants can choose to work on.

Sessions 2–5 will start with an opportunity to share thoughts about the larger-scale project. They will then introduce the theme for the session. Participants will engage in writing games relating to that theme, share the results with others, and discuss how they might apply the techniques and learning points to their larger-scale projects.

Session 6 will be an open-ended session. The content and flow will emerge from the needs and desires of those present in relation to their writing.

1. Introduction and overview. The art of inspiration; techniques of enchantment.

- a. Theme: We need inspiration. Where does it come from? Can we 'exercise the creative muscles'? Can technique help us? Is there a 'bottom-up' as well as a 'top-down' approach?
 - b. Prompt ideas: Warm-ups and plans. Do they serve a purpose *for you*? What is 'the stuff that dreams are made of'?
 - c. In-class writing games: Drawing inspiration from Chazal (sens-plastique), Blake (fourfold vision), Keats (negative inspiration).
 - d. 'Play away' games: Individual writing exercises (inspiration); application to own work.
2. Descriptions and settings. Shaping space-time. Narrator voice.
 - a. Theme: If our job is to create a mood for the reader that speaks relationally to their emotions, values, and powers of reason, how can we move beyond character-based drama to explore the power of setting, time, and narratorial voice to provide an emotional backdrop or provide emotional colour to our writing?
 - b. Prompt ideas: Action. Description. Feeling. How will you balance them?
 - c. In-class writing games: White room exercise; moving narrator exercise.
 - d. 'Play away' games: Individual writing exercise (5-part emotional framework); application to own work.
 3. The ebb and flow of story: Can story structure inform our understanding of the common ground of narratives?
 - a. Theme: Exploring dynamic story structures ... feeling where you need suspense and surprise. Is the dynamic genre-specific? Are there equivalents in Arab literature to Dan Brown's style of writing?
 - b. Prompt ideas: Drawing inspiration from oral storytelling techniques, how can you explore scenes in stories from new perspectives, and how can that inspire you to work with and go beyond the confines of the possible to innovate within tradition?
 - c. In-class writing games: Revelation structure; Chinese circular structure;
 - d. 'Play away' games: Individual writing exercise (based on dynamic Revelation structure); application to own work.
 4. Relational dialogue: Internal monologue, external conversations; the language of the natural world.
 - a. Theme: Speech is based on language, but language itself goes deeper. What is the language of the heart that drives stories forward, resolves problems, provokes character-based crises, leads to breakthroughs, or results in tragic outcomes?
 - b. Prompt ideas: What emotional story lines flow through a story? When we weave with emotion, how can we create patterns of beauty, however terrible?
 - c. In-class writing games: Mapping emotional story lines; Playing with the emotional flow of plants, fluids, stone
 - d. 'Play away' games: Individual writing exercise (emotional conversations); application to own work.
 5. Sound and silence: Harness the inner power of language.
 - a. Theme: Coming full circle. Channelling inspiration. Seeking transcendent flow.
 - b. Prompt ideas: What can we learn from the ancient Egyptian approach to rhetoric which is based on the wisdom of the heart? What does mystical

poetry have to teach us? What can we learn from the temple teachings of Bharata Muni?

- c. In-class writing games: Evocation and inspiration. Transparency and transmission. Rhetoric and rhythm.
 - d. 'Play away' games: Individual writing exercise (voice and story); application to own work.
 - e. Compare and contrast the effectiveness of the presence of heightened forms of pattern in two or three narrative interpretations of the same story and summarise your findings either in a narrative form which follows a single cycle of the Chinese Circular Structure or in a visual form inspired by and which honours the traditions from which [quincuxial Coptic tapestry designs](#) come (these were often found in burial sites, decorating pillows used to support the head of the deceased).
6. Share your story: creative project presentation. Open-ended session.

There is potential to deliver this via an [Odyssey Grid](#) (a non-linear, inspirational approach to delivering educational content in an emergent game-based process). The approach is outlined in [Odyssey: Dynamic learning journey](#) which I co-authored with David Pinto.

This course is conceived as a two-way opportunity for participative engagement with writing drawing on the classical liberal arts as an integrated and integrative organon (tool for learning and self-realisation). The aim is for the interaction between everyone involved to facilitate a collaborative pedagogy of discovery. I hope this two-way process will help everyone involved (including myself) to advance our understanding ourselves and how best we might serve the societies in which we find ourselves by exploring and learning more about the topics outlined as we progress through the course. My plan outlines potential topics for pre-discussion and post-discussion. I welcome suggestions from others to submit work in a format they feel comfortable presenting in (film, webcast, video journal, artwork, social sculpture, musical composition, etc) as long as academic rigour, critical and creative thinking, emotional engagement and reflective practices are evident as part of the creative process. I am flexible enough to source material in different formats (eg audio, music, film) and from different cultural contexts and periods in addition to the visual, oral, social, digital, and text-based source material already included in the draft outline submitted here.