

Welcome Writer!

I'm delighted you've made the decision to nurture your creative self by coming to Writers' Sanctuary.

General Notes to make the day as supportive to the creative process as possible:

What to bring: You will be doing writing on the spot, so please bring whatever writers' tools you like best to work with: journal and pen, or laptop.

Cell phones: please turn off your cell phone if you can. If you need to leave it on because of child care issues or whatever other complicated situation is happening, please have it on vibrate and if you need to answer it, either go outside or into my office with the door closed to have your conversation. As much as possible, resist the urge to check texts and email. This is your day away from all that!

Clothing: This house has big picture windows looking over the pond and a fireplace as well. Temperatures can fluctuate quite a bit in the main writing space. I recommend you bring layers, from a tank top underneath to something quite warm on top, so that you can shed or cover up and always be comfortable. Also, the house is not airconditioned, so if you're coming from May to September, it's good to have options for comfort.

Food: Please let me know if you have dietary issues early in the week before Sanctuary begins so I can be sure to take your needs into account when planning the menu.

Who you will be writing with:

There is a community of writers who call themselves Sanctuary Lifers – they've been coming for a long time and they say they intend to keep coming. Hooray! Most Sanctuaries have a mix of novice or emerging writers and established Sanctuarians. The long-timers do a wonderful job of anchoring the practice, and we always welcome new and emerging voices. It's an honour and a privilege to witness new or shy writers beginning to discover and believe in their voices on the page.

What you will be writing:

As the facilitator, I offer various prompts intended to prime the writing pump. However, this is YOUR writing time. You are always free to ignore my prompt and write whatever you want to be working on. All writers are welcome here – Sanctuarians write everything from life essay and journal entries to long and short fiction, poetry, or scripts and plays. This creates a rich mix of genres that often ends up encouraging writers to experiment with unfamiliar forms and voices. There is no way to do this wrong – you'll probably hear me say this several times over the course of a day.

On the following pages you will find some notes to orient you so that you know what to expect.

Rhythm of the Day (times are approximate)

Arrival and Parking

Maps and other information about how to get here can be found at this link:

<http://inkslingers.ca/inkslingers/contact/location-of-uplands-writing-retreat/>

My cell phone number (in case you get lost) is 905-985-8389 and, should I not answer for some reason, you could also call James at 416-435-7372.

Please try and park, if possible, so that no one is blocked in. Sometimes people have to leave before the day is over.

Getting Started

Participants arrive a little before 10:00 so that we're ready to settle into our seats and begin on time. There is always coffee and tea available and usually some light snacks - fruit, cheese, muffins - in case you were rushing and didn't get breakfast.

We start with a check-in - generally introducing ourselves to each other and saying a sentence or two about where we're at with our writing.

Grounding Meditation (5 minutes or so)

Then we do a brief grounding meditation - a couple of minutes of focussing on the breath, on physical presence - to slow our brains down and enter that light trance state from where (in my experience) the best writing comes.

Brain Dump (15 minutes or so)

Next we spend about 15 minutes doing Proprioceptive Writing* (instructions below). This is the "brain dump" portion of the day. It's a chance to set down things that are taking up a lot of mental real estate, or to write about what you want to explore or accomplish for the day. You may do the formal Proprioceptive practice, or you are welcome to simply journal. You won't be asked to share this writing. (And sharing is ALWAYS optional anyway - read more about this under the AWA Guidelines).

Prompted Writing and Reading (10:30 to 1:00)

Most Sanctuaries there will be two sessions of writing and (optional) reading. From about 10:30 - 1:00 I will guide participants (and myself too!) in writing to prompts and then (optional) sharing.

I lead workshops in the AWA Method developed by Pat Schneider 30 years ago, a method with a long history of supporting writers in discovering and exercising their voices and expanding their abilities with craft in writing.

A larger explanation of the AWA method can be read below, but two of the key principles are:

1. A high level of confidentiality is maintained to protect writers and their writing.

2. For first draft writing only what is strong and working in the piece with receive feedback. Questions, suggestions and constructive critique are reserved for later, edited work.

All this boils down to a simple statement: the safety of your psyche and your work is paramount in an AWA workshop. I will be writing along with you, but my primary work is to keep the space safe and productive so you can relax, trust the process and the group, and work on your writing.

Lunch – (approximately 1:00 to 2:00)

Lots of writers say they come to Sanctuary more for the food than for the writing. They're joking, but I do try hard to make sure that you're nurtured in body and soul during the day, so I try to ensure that the food is healthy and delicious. If you have special needs regarding your food PLEASE let me know a few days ahead of time – I'll do my best to incorporate your needs into the menu.

Silent Focused Time (2:00 to 4:00 pm)

At 2:00 pm we enter our 2 hours of silent focus. You may want to expand on something you started in the morning, or you may have brought something to edit. Or you may want to use that time to create new material for a project you're already engaged with - a novel, new poems for your collection, etc.

If you and another writer want to talk, you're welcome to outside and chat - either going for a walk, or at least far enough away from the house that you won't disturb the concentration of the others.

This day is meant to be nurturing time for you. Sometimes what we need for creativity is just a break – or a nap – so feel free to support yourself in whatever way is best for you. There are various soft horizontal surfaces with pillows and blankets for a nap, and Uplands is located on almost 500 acres of land on a dirt road, so there's the opportunity to get out and enjoy nature as well. When the weather is warm, you are welcome to sit outside and write too.

Final Sharing and Wrap-Up (4:00 to 5:00 pm)

At about 5 minutes to 4:00 I call writers back together. For the last hour each writer has a few minutes to share and receive feedback (if desired) on what they've been working on. If you want feedback on a more polished piece or have a specific question about whether or not something is working, this is the chance to get that. Or you may choose to read another piece that you produced in the morning but haven't had a chance to share yet. Or you may be tired and simply want to listen and comment.

Sometimes people's schedules mean that they can't stay till the end of the day – the group is often smaller by 4:00 than it is in the morning. If you need to leave early, that's fine. We all have busy lives – that's why there's a need for Sanctuary!

Here is a quick overview of the **AWA Method**, designed to keep writers and their work safe.

THE FIVE ESSENTIAL AFFIRMATIONS

1. Everyone has a strong, unique voice.
2. Everyone is born with creative genius.
3. Writing as an art form belongs to all people, regardless of economic class or education level.
4. The teaching of craft can be done without damage to a writer's original voice or artistic self-esteem.
5. A writer is someone who writes.

THE FIVE ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

1. In the workshop we maintain a non-hierarchical spirit regarding how we treat the writing (e.g. the facilitator is not the “expert” & no one’s writing is treated differently than anyone else’s); at the same time we keep writers safe through a series of guidelines and practices which we adhere to in a disciplined way. These practices are simple to follow and have been demonstrated to be effective for the safety of the members of the group through thousands of workshops.
2. Confidentiality about what is written in the workshop is maintained at all times, and the privacy of the writer is protected. We maintain confidentiality in four different ways:
 - We treat all writing as story or as fiction - feedback is offered to the writing not to the life of the person writing. We refer to the “I” voice in the piece as the speaker, the narrator, the character, etc.
 - At all times, writers are free to refrain from reading their work aloud.
 - The work is only open for feedback at the moment it is offered. Once the discussion has moved on to another piece of writing, no one refers back to it again. This means that no one will question or address the writer about their piece afterwards in any way, particularly any way that breaches the contract that all work offered here is fiction.
 - And finally, we don’t talk about any work we’ve heard here to anyone outside of the workshop space.
3. Absolutely no criticism, suggestion, or question is directed toward the writer in response to first-draft, just-written work. A thorough critique is offered only when the writer asks for it, and only when he or she has distributed work in manuscript form. When work has been offered in manuscript form, critiques are balanced; there is as much affirmation as suggestion for change.
4. The teaching of craft is taken seriously, and is conducted through exercises that invite experimentation and growth.
5. The leader writes along with the participants, and reads that work aloud as well. This practice is absolutely necessary, for only in this way is there equality of risk-taking and mutuality of trust.

Practice of Feedback for On-the-Spot Writing

- 1) We are free to write what we want --- exercises are offered as a prompt or a jumping off point, not as something to restrict the writing.
- 2) We are invited to read. Anyone at any time is free to pass up their turn to read. (Some sensitivity is needed around this – sometimes writers pass because they are intimidated by the voices they have heard and think they won't "measure up". In that case we may offer a gentle nudge – but never force anyone– to share.)
- 3) We honour the writer and the writing by listening carefully.
- 4) Everything shared in this room stays in this room. Confidentiality is key to creating a safe space for each writer.
- 5) We treat everything as fiction. In responding, we refer to the narrator/speaker/main character, not to "the author", as the voice of the piece.
- 6) At this stage, when the writing is unpolished and the author still vulnerable, we do not make suggestions about what might make the piece stronger.
We respond by giving back to the writer, in words as close as we can to the way the author wrote them, "what stayed with us" or "what was strong in that piece for us". Sometimes what stays with us will be an emotion or a bodily sensation. That can be offered back as well.
- 7) We concentrate on the writing being offered, not on our own similar experiences.
- 8) We remember that, while writing is often therapeutic, this is not a therapy group. If the writer begins to cry, as sometimes happens, we do not rush to comfort them – we trust that they are moving through their process as they need to. We breathe and wait until they are able to finish the reading.
- 9) We remember that, while other writers may express in their writing sentiments with which we disagree, this is not a discussion group for content. We focus on the craft of the writing.

Proprioceptive writing

is done at the beginning of Sanctuary as both “brain dump” (to unload whatever may be weighing on your mind or calling for your attention, whether you’re aware of it or not) and as exploration.

YOU WILL NOT BE ASKED TO READ YOUR PROPRIOCEPTIVE WORK ALOUD!

This is your place to write anything, say anything. (On the other hand if something comes up that you do want to read aloud, you are welcome to do so when it comes time to share your work.)

Proprioceptive Writing

Write what you hear in your mind. If you want, you can start with the sentence stem: “this is where I am right now...”

1. *Listen* to what you write as you write it
2. Pay attention to each word, each phrase as you write and *watch for*
“where the energy is”.
3. Be ready to ask the proprioceptive question:

What do I mean by _____?

The blank is whatever you “hear” during your session. This is about getting out what you hear and not judging the content. This is personal writing. Explore whatever is inside, then you will be able to expand it creatively afterward should you choose to do so.

When the Proprioceptive part of the morning is finished, I will ask 4 quick concluding questions before we move on to the next section of the day.