

Hoboken Free and Public Library

Raise Your Voice! A Free Virtual HerStory Writing Course

Hosted by Diane Rubino

Diane teaches communications ethics and effectiveness at NYU. She's written 60 articles + lectured in the US and abroad. Diane's helped activists, nonprofits, scientists worldwide tell their story. In her spare time, she's a community activist, Toastmaster, + Hoboken Public Library patron. Diane lives near the library with her partner Jesse + cats, Moose + Lucky.

Week 1 | March 8: So You Want To Be A Writer?

Only one person can tell your story, as you'd like. YOU!

How will you tell your story?

There isn't any "right way to do such personal work. There are all kinds of writers all kinds of methods. Any method that helps you to say what you want to say is the right method for you. ~ William Zinnser, p. 5 *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Nonfiction*

Why bother?

If you don't tell your story. Someone else will.

- Human beings are meaning makers. To help us understand the world we "fill in the blanks." If we don't know someone we fabricate a story for them that fits OUR understanding of the world.
- You can only own your story if you're willing to tell it.
- Example: Prince Harry + Meghan Markle told their story to Oprah. Winfrey earned a reported \$7M. The royal couple got no financial reward, but did earn the ability to tell their story.

But there's another dimension to telling your story. Later in the course you'll meet First Responder Jasmine Simpson. She mentions the story of leadership, which often has a man in role by default. Telling your story allows you to help change that default setting. it allows you to be part of social change, updating the idea of who story gets told and how. Do I dare to disturb the universe? ~ T.S. Eliot, poet, essayist, playwright

Start with the end in mind. Where do you want to go?

- The first step is identifying: What is the story you want to tell about you? What is the vision of yourself that you want to show to the world. Even if it's the broadest brush terms possible. I want to be a professional. I want to be a good writer.
- Write your goal here.

1. Find a community:

- A likeminded friend
- Writer's Groups
 - Hoboken Public Library has a writer's group. FYI: hpl@gmail.com.
 - Your library might have a writer's group or be willing to host one that you launch.
 - Search MeetUp or Facebook groups for, say, female writers of Hudson County
 - Shut up & write. Shutupwrite.org. "Our goal is to ensure every writer has access to resources, community, accountability."
- Classes
 - Any place where you could find adult education, you'll find writing classes.

Raise Your Voice Curriculum

= March 8: So You Want To Be A Writer?
 = 3/15. Grammar School: The Logic of Writing
 = 3/12. Storytellers & Dreamers: Young Women
 = 3/29. Make Yourself Famous (No one else will!)
 Goal: short (+/-800) publishable personal story by the end of March – or your own goal

This week's bonus tracks:

Telling your family's story with genealogy
 Laurie Tvedt is a User Experience Designer with a passion for genealogy. She's written about hers and other families. Laurie holds a graduate certificate in genealogy. In this 7-minute audio clip she discusses the basics of telling your family's story using Hoboken Public Library resources.

Laurie: https://soundcloud.com/user-692743978/raiseyourvoice_genealogy

HPL genealogy resources:
<https://hobokenlibrary.org/online-research-homework/genealogy/>

Writers Caren Lissner (American novelist, essayist, and newspaper editor. She's a writing coach who can help tell your story. Check carenlissner.com) and Maisy Card (fiction and nonfiction writer, author of a novel *These Ghosts are Family*. Maisy was born in Jamaica, raised in Queens, New York. Check maisycard.com) offer advice about taking your first writing steps.
<https://soundcloud.com/user-692743978/rtv-interview-new-writers>

- Hubs for writing courses:
 - Catapult <https://catapult.co/>
 - Sackett Street Workshop <https://sackettworkshop.com/writing/>
- Coach
 - In this week's special bonus video you meet Caren Lissner who you can hire to help your story. Next week you'll meet Edith Updike who can also provide writing coaching services.

2. Write. Get started with daily exercises. Do one or do all three!

- Morning Pages, an exercise from Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*: Get up every morning and use pen and paper to "free write" three pages. Free write means writing without judgement, putting whatever is in your mind on paper.
- Write a haiku, or traditional Japanese poem, which has three lines, the first with five syllables, the second with seven, the third with five. Here's Katsushika Hokusai's "A Poppy Blooms"
 - I write, erase, rewrite
 - Erase again, and then
 - A poppy blooms.
- Write a six-word memoir. These are from the NY Times pandemic-themed contest:
 - Not a criminal, but running masked. — Stella Kleinman
 - Every day's a bad hair day. — Leigh Giza
 - Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/opinion/coronavirus-pandemic-poetry-memoirs.html>

III. Addressing common errors

In evaluating new crops of writers over the years, the biggest problem I've noted it that most writing is overcomplicated. Students will tell me that was how they were taught to write or they think it makes them sounds smart.

Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* offers advice in 1935, that applies today:

- Omit needless words
- Do not overwrite
- Do not overstate
- Do not explain too much
- Avoid fancy words

A word about writing during COVID: I believe that most people's threshold for being overwhelmed is very high. Be a compassionate communicator, make your writing easy.

The two biggest mistakes that contribute to complexity are long sentences and excessive use of the passive voice.

I advocate for:

= **Sentences with 15 words per sentence or few.** MS Word can generate that number for you if you turn on your Readability statistics. (instructions: support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2)

= **Zero percent passive voice.** MS Word can identify the passive voice as you write it

(<https://www.techwalla.com/articles/how-do-i-change-microsoft-word-settings-to-check-for-passive-voice>)

The active voice (in which the subject performs the action stated by the verb) is easier to understand than the passive voice (the subject is acted upon by the verb. Active: I ate the tofu Passive: The tofu is eaten by me.

Pearson Writer is a virtual writing tool that can help spot writing mistakes. Full disclosure: as a teacher I access this tool for free. The cost is \$8 a month. Scroll down this page for a free 30-day trial [Pearsonwriter.com](https://www.pearsonwriter.com)