
THE PRACTICAL WRITER

Fall 2016 | University of Montana | Catherine Lacey
Office: LA 126 | Hours: Thursday 3:30 – 5:30 & Friday 11:45 – 12:45

I have built, for you, an obstacle course.

This course will cover several practical concerns, practicalities, impracticalities, and practices that may influence, galvanize or exasperate an artist who chooses to produce written work. You will formulate new approaches for your writing practice as you enact methods and confront ideas other writers have wrestled with in their careers. Our semester will be divided into two parts, explained below.

The first section—METHODS & CONCERNS—will explore practices, approaches, activities, habits and helpful challenges one could include in a life that produces written work. Each week we will read a few stories, essays or short books and complete one or more WRITING RESTRAINT. Our meetings will be a time that we, a pack of spies, will share that week's mysteries and findings. In these meetings we will present the results of that week's writing restraint and participate in a structured discussion of the works we've read and the development of our ideas. (More on this structure below.) Please note that the WRITING RESTRAINTS need to be completed with competence and clarity. You should expect to read your work aloud every week. Some weeks this expectation will be met. Other weeks it will not. Regardless, you should be arrive prepared!

In the second section—ATTEMPTS—we will read four book-length works of fiction. All four of these books will be the first published work of fiction of these authors. Our focus in this section will be to consider how a writer may approach the challenge of writing their first book.

In both sections a portion of class time will be reserved for investigating that week's readings using a version of THE ASKING METHOD. In this method three students will be assigned three roles: The Asked, The Advocate and The Recorder. The Asked will sit at the front of the class, facing us. The Advocate will sit beside The Asked. The Recorder may remain wherever they are. The Asking will begin when the Asked tells the Advocate they are ready. The Advocate will then call upon someone in the room who will posit one of their questions. (Now is a good time to mention that each student will bring AT LEAST THREE questions to class each week regarding that week's readings and the ideas they contain. These questions must be typed up and printed. You will hand them into me at the end of the class.) The Advocate's role is to protect The Asked from incoherent, judgmental or unfair questions. The Asked will take as long as they like answering this question, meandering as they like. Self-contradiction is expected. When The Asked is done, they will let the Advocate know, who will call on another student. The Asking will go on for the course of several questions, then The Asked will become The Advocate and a new student will be assigned the role of The Asked. The Recorder will simply record the questions as they are asked.

O U R A G E N D A

M E T H O D S

- September 2 Practices // Habits
- September 9 Anonymity // Openings
- September 16 Walking // Intents vs. Intentions
- September 23 Captioning // Immediacy
- September 30 Literature Without Writing
- October 7 The Performed Voice
- October 14 Relationships
- October 21 Rants, Obsessiveness, Depression, Grief

October 28 No class // Assignment TBA

A T T E M P T S

- November 4 *The Little Disturbances of Man* by Grace Paley
- November 11 No class (Veteran's Day)
- November 18 *Speedboat* by Renata Adler
- November 25 No class (Thanksgiving Day)
- December 2 *Samedi the Deafness* by Jesse Ball // Visit from the Author
- December 9 *Bonsai* by Alejandro Zambra // Endings // Remaining Concerns

BOOKS TO PROCURE

I've tried to minimize the amount of books you will need to purchase for this class. Much of our our reading will be photocopied stories and excerpts given a week in advance, however, please obtain the following works.

Selected Stories. Walser, Robert

Thom Pain. Eno, Will

Break It Down. Davis, Lydia.

Weird Fucks. Tillman, Lynne

The Bathroom. Toussaint, Jean-Phillipe

The Little Disturbances of Man. Paley, Grace

Speedboat. Adler, Renata

Samedi the Deafness. Ball, Jesse

Bonsai. Zambra, Alejandro

You will undertake these readings with rigor and attention. You will dispute the ideas and approaches you believe should be disputed. You will take note of ideas that excite you. You will come to class prepared to share your findings and be changed by the findings of your peers.

We will read additional excerpts and stories from Jean Rhys, Henri Cartier-Bresson, James Baldwin, David Markson, Rebecca Solnit, Jacques Lecoq, Rachel B. Glaser, John Berger, Chinelo Okparanta, Virginia Woolf, Ken Sparling, Maugrith Youcenar, and Sara Manguso, however, this list is incomplete and subject to change.

EMAIL POLICY

My email is catherine.lacey@umontana.edu. Should you need to write to me, please do so with a formal style, as if you're writing a letter. I will check my university email on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. You can expect replies from me then.

PLEASE NOTE

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification of this course.