



Byline 360°: A Writing Workshop

“I Can't Write.”

Yes, you can. If you can talk, you can write. If you can express yourself in any other medium, you can write. If you can type, operate a pen or a pencil, or string together words and phrases, you can write. But there are two things you might not know to do:

1. Trust yourself. If you don't trust yourself, you won't write. But that doesn't mean you can't write. It only means you haven't given yourself permission to do it.
2. Re-write. There's no such thing as a perfect first draft — of anything. But that doesn't mean you can't write. It only means you don't trust yourself to commit what you're thinking to writing. Once you've done that, reviewing and editing is no different from changing brush strokes, from chiseling a sculpture, from sanding a piece of wood, burnishing a piece of metal, or otherwise refining an expression of your vision.

“I'm Afraid to Write.”

No, you're not. You're afraid of being judged. If you haven't written before — especially if you think you can't write — who could blame you? But if you've worked artistically or expressively in any other medium, you've faced this fear before. And you've overcome it. It's easier the second time. Here's why:

- Your work in that first medium taught you no one will like everything you do. That's why boxers say, “Styles make fights.” And it's why Grandpa O'Brien loved to say, “That's what makes horse racing.”
- Your work in that first medium taught you to create for yourself. Regardless of the medium in which you work, you'll never know if what you're creating is art. Create it anyway. It's the only way you'll ever find out.

What We'll Do

In this workshop, we'll take the first steps toward finding our writing voices. We'll learn to trust ourselves to write what we think, to write it the way we think it, to listen to it, to feel it, to refine it as we see fit, and to leave the judging to someone else. There won't be time for judgment anyway. We'll be too busy creating.

How We'll Do It

Starting Monday, May 13th, 2024, we'll meet twice a month, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern time, for three months. Over the course of those six sessions, we'll talk, draft, share and discuss our drafts, then revise and refine them. Along the way we'll figure out why we do the things we do when we write, which of those things we might do better, and which of those things define tone, style, and voice.

The Ground Rules

To keep things orderly and fair for everyone, we'll follow these three rules:

1. Registrations must be received by Monday, May 6th.
2. Participation will be limited to the first 10 people who register. (The workshop may be repeated if there's sufficient interest.)
3. Since we'd like people to be invested in the workshop, attendance is mandatory for the first two sessions.

Schedule

We'll proceed according to this schedule:

May 13th: We'll get to know each other. We'll talk about why we want to write, what we want to write, and why we struggle to write. We'll discover (and be surprised at) how much we share when it comes to writing and our trepidations about it. We'll select a topic for our first draft. And we'll get to work.

May 27th: We'll share our first drafts with the group by reading them aloud. Listening to ourselves read our work will enable us to hear the rhythm, the cadence, the music in our writing. Because writing is as much about our readers as it is about our writing, we'll learn from the comments of our peers in the group about the extent to which we're fulfilling our communicative intentions. We'll revise our first drafts accordingly.

June 10th: We'll discuss what we learned in the process of editing and revising our first drafts. We'll talk about whatever problems or challenges we might have encountered. We'll share our second drafts with the group as we did in Week 2. We'll welcome the comments of our peers in the group. And we'll talk about our aspirations and objectives for finalizing what we've written as we look toward Week 4.

June 24th: We'll share our third drafts with the group as we did in Week 3. We'll look at the ways in which our writing voices have become more like our speaking voices. We'll notice the ways in which the narrative presentational logic of our written expressions mirror the narrative presentational logic of our spoken expressions. And we'll talk about what we might write next.

July 8th: Depending on what we decided to write in our last session, we'll share what we've written with the group by reading aloud, as always. We'll discuss how we applied what we learned in writing our first pieces to writing our second. We'll come to consensus on what we'll do for week six. (We might consider writing poetry and, if so, what kind.) And we'll consider whether we should continue the workshop beyond that.

July 22nd: The nature of this meeting will be determined by what we decided in week five. Regardless of what decided to do then — and what we decide to do now — we'll look at the ways in which our writing voices have become more like our speaking voices. We'll notice the ways in which the narrative presentational logic of our written expressions mirror the narrative presentational logic of our spoken expressions. And, if we've done it right, we'll conclude (or proceed) with confidence in ourselves as writers who are committed to improving as writers.

If the plan needs to be adjusted as we go because of what we do and discover, we'll adjust. Inflexibility doesn't play nice with creativity.

Who's Doing This?

The host of Byline 360° is Mark O'Brien. Mark is the founder and principal of O'Brien Communications Group. He's a former Executive Director of Literacy Volunteers Valley Shore. He's a lifelong learner and an incorrigible writer. He's a self-professed language snob. He's [a columnist for BIZCATALYST 360°](#). He's [a published author](#), who uses his middle name when he writes for reasons not even he understands. He's the host of [The Anxious Voyage](#). He believes passionately in the power of language and writing. He's the only person who'll ever tell you the dirty little secret to writing is that there is no dirty little secret to writing. And he's profoundly convinced that — no matter what we're doing — if we're not having fun, we're doing it wrong.