

Course Syllabus: WRITING AS A HEALING MINISTRY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Writing is an art form that belongs to every one of us and a powerful tool for healing. When life hurts, writing can help. "Give sorrow words;" Shakespeare wrote, "the grief that does not speak/whispers o'er fraught heart and bids it break." (Macbeth, Act IV, Scene III). Now, a significant body of research among many different populations confirms what poets and novelists have long acknowledged. The simple act of writing about our thoughts and feelings has a number of physical and emotional benefits.

Writing reduces stress, discharges complex emotions and helps us gain perspective. It gives us a way to navigate the hardships and storms of life. When we suffer pain or loss, writing about our feelings makes them less overwhelming. It helps us gain insight and perspective, and in turn, cope more effectively with hardship. Writing also helps to integrate our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. When we write and our stories with others, it affirms our humanity. We learn that our stories and our lives, matter. Writing is a kind of prayer, one in which you don't ask for anything, except to know your own experience and to make meaning of it.

"Writing as a Healing Ministry" is designed for clergy, lay ministers, healthcare and helping professionals. Whether your intention is to use writing as ministry to others or for yourself, you'll explore why and how writing is healing. Through a blend of the didactic and experiential, individual and small group activities, we'll examine the historical context, recent research, and observe different writers working with unique populations. Daily writing exercises and reflection on course content are critical aspects of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- For CEU credit, participants must attend all class sessions and participate fully in all class and individual activities.
- For academic credit, participants will attend all class sessions, participate fully in individual and class discussions, complete daily reflective journal assignments, and submit, within one week of the course end date, a five page paper on a selected topic in the field of expressive or healing writing (to be discussed with the instructor in a scheduled half hour consultation).

RECOMMENDED READING:

Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms our Lives, by Louise DeSalvo.
Additional resources and reference lists will be provided during the course.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Explore the history and traditions of writing as a way of healing.
- Introduce of key research findings on the healing benefits of writing.
- Examine how writing gives voice to unique populations and offers healing benefits.
- Explore the necessary conditions for a healing writing group experience.
- Experience a variety of approaches to facilitation of a healing writing group
- To write and reflect upon the process of one's own writing
- Write a personal statement defining how writing can be a healing ministry for one's self or others.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

At the conclusion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe ways in which writing and storytelling have helped people heal
- Articulate key research highlights of expressive writing
- Articulate how writing and sharing one's words in community can have healing benefits
- Appreciate the diversity of leader approaches to facilitating writing groups with unique populations
- Articulate how writing plays a part in their own lives
- Define the healing benefits of writing: for one's self/for others

PROPOSED FORMAT:

The class will meet daily (Monday through Friday) from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. Participants are expected to arrive promptly and attend the full class sessions. Class meetings will be highly interactive and feature a blend of didactic and experiential approaches, including selected writing exercises. A mid-morning break will be provided each day.

Daily activities & assignments will include:

- Lectures and readings from the literature on therapeutic writing
- Experiential writing exercises
- Observation and discussion of how writing is used in different groups, such as cancer survivors, veterans, low income women, prison inmates, at risk teens, senior citizens, bereavement support, etc.
- A daily reflective journal assignment
- Small group activities and discussion

This is a course about writing as a way of healing. To use writing as a healing ministry for others demands that first, we experience its healing power ourselves. Participants are expected to participate fully in individual and group discussion and daily writing exercises.

In addition to classroom presentations & discussions, selected readings and film excerpts will be utilized to illustrate the use of writing in different populations. Those DVDs include scenes from *What I Want My*

Words to Do to You, with **Eve Ensler**, an interview between **Maxine Hong Kingston** and **Bill Moyers** on writing with war veterans, and poet **John Fox** working with a young hospital patient. One or two guest speakers may also be invited to discuss their work leading writing groups for those suffering from emotional pain, trauma or illness.

Agenda for the Week:

- Day One: History and traditions of writing and healing. Writing exercises & discussion. John Fox DVD
- Day Two: Key research highlights on writing and healing. Maxine Hong Kingston DVD. Writing exercises.
- Day Three: Uses of Poetry, nonfiction & fiction in therapeutic writing. Writing exercise. Guest speaker (memoir)
- Day Four: The spiritual journey of writing. Eve Ensler DVD & discussion
- Day Five: Reflections on the week. Writing exercises. Statement of Intention. Closing exercise.

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE: SHARON A. BRAY, ED.D.

Sharon Bray is a San Diego-based writer and educator. She has authored two books on expressive writing with cancer patients: *A Healing Journey: Writing Together Through Breast Cancer*, (2004), and *When Words Heal: Writing Through Cancer* (2006), co-edited an anthology, *Learning to Live Again*, (2007), written and published a children's book, poetry, memoir and a number of professional articles.

She is a faculty member of the UCLA extension Writers' Program, where she teaches creative nonfiction and an occasional course in writing for healing. In addition to her regular workshops for cancer patients at Stanford Cancer Center and Scripps Green Cancer Center, she leads a creative writing workshop series for the Literature and Humanities program at the Stanford University School of Medicine. She offers weekly writing prompts for cancer patients and others at www.writingthroughcancer.wordpress.com.

In addition to her course at PSR, Sharon has offered professional development courses in writing & healing for psychologists and MFTs through Alliant International University, and the Santa Clara University Professional Development Center. She was an adjunct professor in Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University from 1997 – 2003 and a faculty member of the CURE Magazine Patient and Survivors' Forums. from 2005 – 2008. She continues to speak at conferences and cancer centers across the U.S.

Sharon completed her doctorate in Applied Psychology at the University of Toronto, and studied creative writing through the University of Washington, The Humber School for Writers (Toronto) as well as Transformative Language Arts at Goddard College, VT. A former Senior Partner of Amherst Writers and Artists, She is a member of the Transformative Language Arts Network, Society for Arts in Healthcare, International Expressive Arts Therapy Association, and National Association of Poetry Therapy.