Writers of memoir, narrative nonfiction, short stories and novels will have the opportunity to hear samples of exemplary published work and participate in discussion on topics including Story, Character, Dialogue and Voice. There will be flash writing assignments in class and some overnight homework, both in fiction and nonfiction. Finally, participants will have 500-750 word excerpts of their current projects critiqued on the final day. By strengthening your writing in one field and examining another, you experience an adaptability that enables you to write in multiple genres, improve career chances as a working writer and develop a specific writer’s “voice” that will attract the reader.

MONDAY: Understand Your Story at Its Core and See New Directions in Its Telling

Whether you are writing about your own past or the lives of characters you create, understanding the major dramatic conflict of your work, boiled down to its essence, is important to timely completion of the work, including fewer rewrites. In spending a day on Story for fiction and nonfiction, we will also look at recognizing themes in the stories we tell and how going back to theme helps the writer overcome roadblocks in writing.

We’ll communally create a logline for a very recognizable work of literature, exploring many different ways of describing the same story, deciding on those elements which serve the story most effectively. Taking actual incidents your instructor has witnessed, there will be an in-class writing assignment called “the Story Generator.” We’ll expand upon obvious story choices in fiction and nonfiction, to create a wider palette of possibilities.

Finally, the overnight assignment will be to write a one or two sentence logline of a fiction/nonfiction project of your own. This will be the project for which you will have a 500-750 word segment submitted and critiqued for the final session. In reworking the logline, you will gain further insight into story, character and theme possibilities.

TUESDAY: 3 C’s of Character Development: Complexity, Complication and Confession

After readings and critiques of project loglines, we will spend the session on the above topic of Character. This will include a lively discussion on balancing story and character in fiction and nonfiction, to help engage the reader consistently. We’ll also discuss the theory of the
Unity of Opposites by Lajos Egri, exploring the need to have your protagonist meet with one or more antagonists of approximately equal resolve, to bring out depth of character.

In order to develop the ability to write real or fictional characters who have a combination of interesting, even contradictory qualities, we'll utilize an in-class exercise called the “Character Quality Chart.”

The overnight assignment, fairly complex, will be started in class. “Police Interrogation” is an exercise that has three different characters summarize a given event in entirely different ways, showing how character is shaped by not only what is seen but by the preconceptions of a character.

**WEDNESDAY: Developing Your Own “Voice” as a Writer to Stand Out in Your Career**

After readings and critiques of “Police Interrogation,” the day will be spent discussing Voice, emphasizing the difference between the author’s voice and the voice of a character. Samples of strong authorial voice in fiction and nonfiction will be read and discussed, with an eye toward encouraging the personality of the author to come out, to be memorable to readers.

An in-class writing assignment called “One Narrative, Different Voices” will give the writer a chance to describe a given action in a couple different ways, to make the writer see his or her own voice as one that is clear and distinct.

As a final in-class assignment to concretize the concept of the author’s voice, we will do an exercise entitled “The Author’s Voice Travelogue,” in which a fictional or nonfictional description of a location visited will be described with a strong, clear voice. The overnight assignment, in preparation for the next day’s emphasis, will be writing a line of dialogue that sums up a particular psychological aspect of a character.


Dialogue is not just about relaying information or emotions from a character to others. Our discussion of Dialogue for fiction and nonfiction will also address ways to avoid on-the-nose dialogue, excessive exposition and cliché. Further, an emphasis will be placed on recognizing subtext and its use in creating dramatic tension and psychological depth in writing.

There will be readings and discussion of the prior overnight assignment, lines of dialogue summarizing psychological aspect of a character. This will be followed by a discussion on ways to vary dialogue among characters in fiction and nonfiction, to avoid a blandness that undercuts reader enthusiasm.

We will investigate “psycholinguistics,” the study of what is said and what is inferred, with a specific example of dialogue that holds hidden meanings. This will also be related back to subtext, so that the writer broadens the quality of dialogue in characters and, as a result, creates more dimensional characters and new possibilities for useful dramatic conflict.
The overnight assignment will be the excerpt of 500-750 words of your personal fiction or nonfiction project, to be read and critiqued on our final day together.

FRIDAY: The Power of Image and Critique and Guidance on Personal Projects

It is not just the responsibility of screenwriters to convey information and emotion with potent images. A discussion of The Power of Image, including how Scale, Danger and Expectation can convey moments that live in the minds of readers of fiction and nonfiction.

In an effort to further engage the senses of readers of fiction and nonfiction, we will do an in-class exercise, “The Frozen Moment,” that takes an image from one's life and imbues it with great sensory detail.

Finally, the excerpts of fiction and nonfiction from participants will be read and critiqued, leaving room at the end for questions and answers related to the craft and business of writing.

BRAD SCHREIBER has worked as a writer in all media. He was Vice President of Storytech Literary Consulting, founded by Christopher Vogler, for 11 years. Brad created the series North Mission Road, which ran for six seasons on truTV, based on his book about the L.A. Coroner, Death in Paradise. His other books include the humor-writing how-to What Are You Laughing At?, which garnered blurbs from humor greats like Larry Gelbart, Tom Robbins and Mort Sahl. His compendium of live theatrical disasters, Stop the Show! was praised by Pulitzer Prize winning author Robert Olen Butler. Brad’s journalism for the Huffington Post has been honored by the National Press Foundation in Washington, D.C. and the L.A. Press Club. His national credits include Variety and The Writer and his fiction and nonfiction have been in literary journals Tin House and Black Clock. His newest book is the early-years biography Becoming Jimi Hendrix, called “fascinating” by the New York Times. The book was a Finalist, Biography, at the International Book Awards and was chosen for inclusion in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library. He administers the Mona Schreiber Prize for Humorous Fiction and Nonfiction at www.bradschreiber.com

Credit Option: Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.