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Today

- A Very Quick Look at the Subject of Creative Writing

- Placing Creative Writing in the EFL Environment

- The Three Courses I Ran

- The Workshop

- Key Takeaways (and my favourite one)
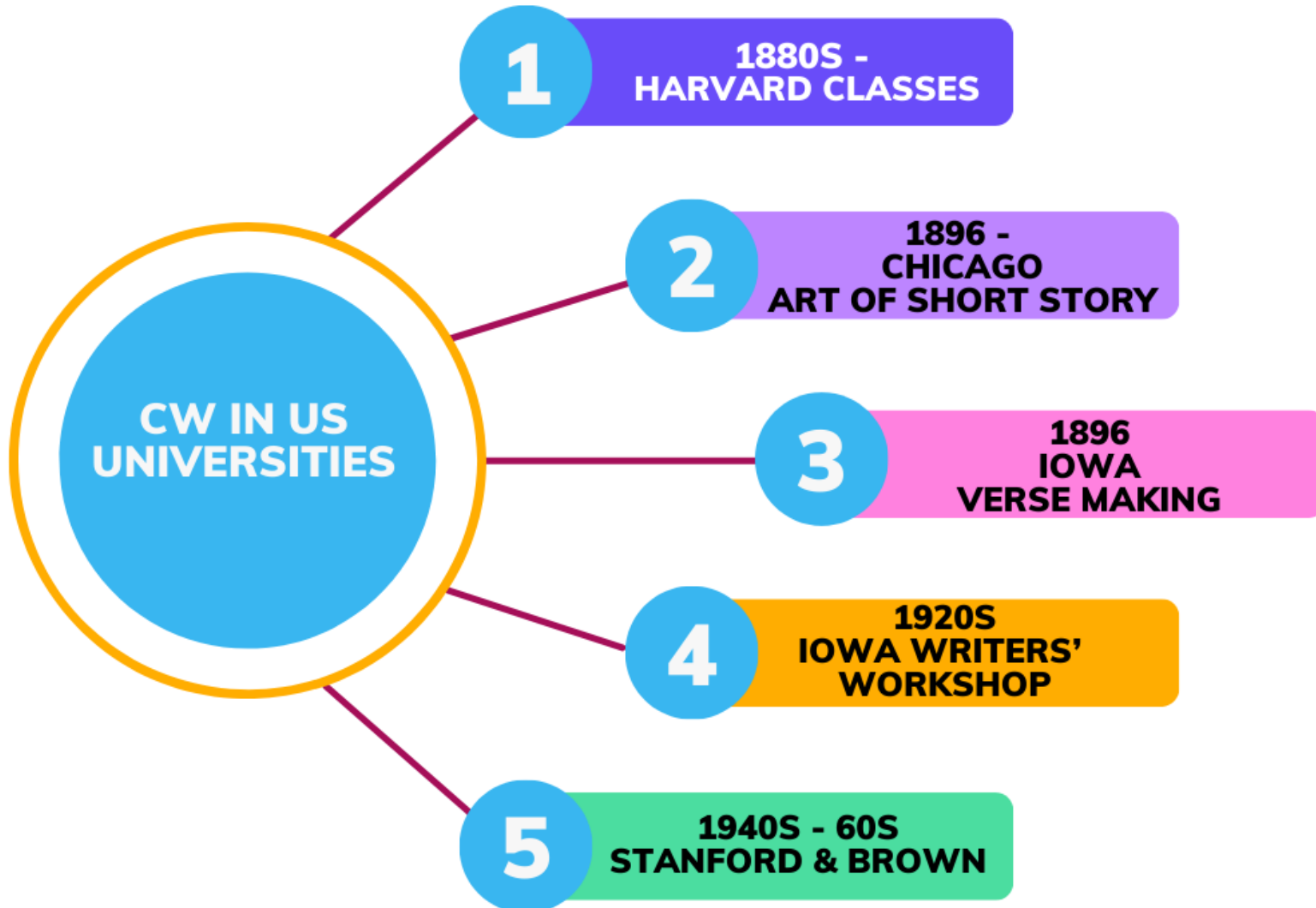
- Looking Ahead

- Writing Exercises

The way of words, of knowing and loving words, is a way to the essence of things, and to the essence of knowing.

John Dunne

ABOUT ME
Olivia (Liv) Hambrett

- Honorary North German from New South Wales

- B.A. Psychology, M.A. Creative Writing (Macquarie University, Sydney)

- Münster → Weiden in der Oberpfalz → Kiel → Flintbek

- CELTA and TESOL Cert IV (Sydney)

- 2011: started working in the TEFL sphere

- 2017 – 2019: *Fachhochschule Kiel*. Languages Centre + Docent in the Media Department

- 2019 → *Europa Universität Flensburg* – Lecturer for Sprachpraxis

# A Very Quick Look at the Subject of Creative Writing

CW IN US UNIVERSITIES

1. **1880S – HARVARD CLASSES**
2. **1896 – CHICAGO ART OF SHORT STORY**
3. **1896 IOWA VERSE MAKING**
4. **1920S IOWA WRITERS' WORKSHOP**
5. **1940S - 60S STANFORD & BROWN**

'Verse Making' → 'Poetics' One of the earliest instances of students' own writing being critiqued in class.

Sound familiar? The Iowa Writers' Workshop.

UK & AUS

- **But ... elements** of literary craft, the **discussion** of them, the **application** of them, the **investigation** of them in pieces of literature → not novel!

1 1970
1ST MA IN UK

2 1972
1ST PROGRAM IN AUS

3 MID 90S
FLOURISHING!

UK & AUS
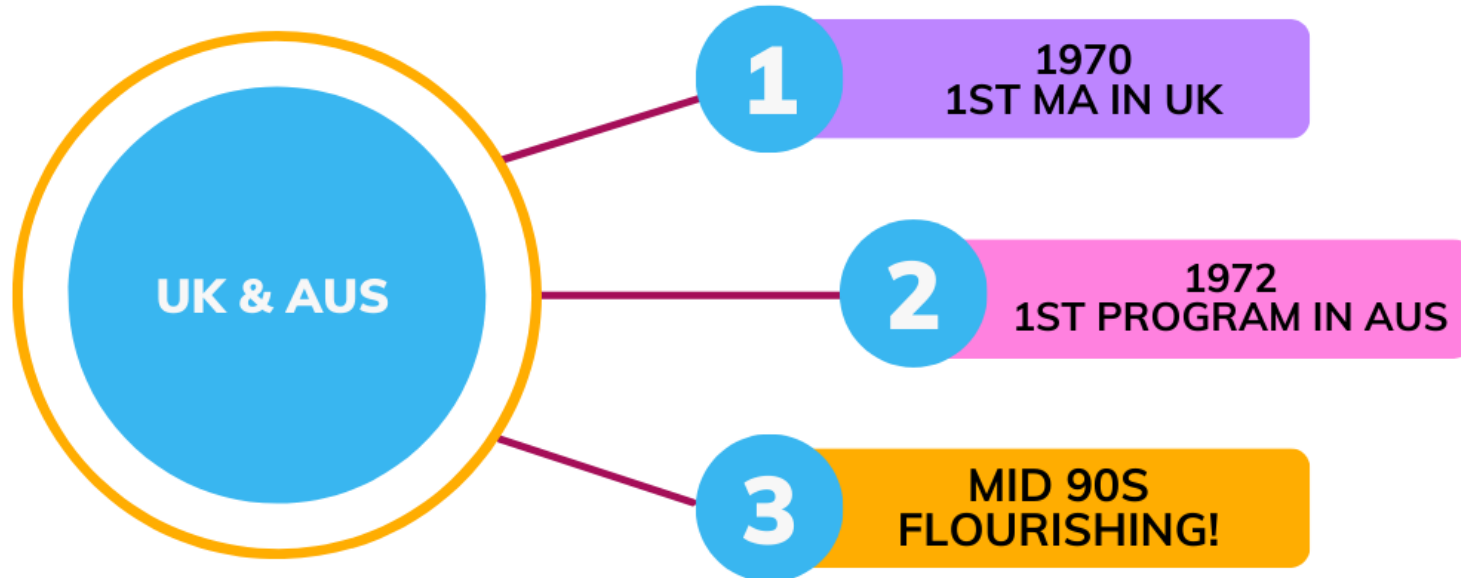
Germany?

- **Writing for the Stage program in Berlin**
- **Program in Munich (since the mid 90s)**
- **German-language program in Hildesheim – CW & Editing**

- John Crutchfield → workshop → goal was performance
- By and large not as broadly accepted nor implemented as in the Anglosphere
- Educators aren't aware of its potential, nor qualified to implement it.

CW as a Program of Study

*In every sense, and from every point of view, the structural position of CW is entirely bound up with **literary studies, cultural theory** and **stylistics/linguistics**. (Wandor, 2012, p. 57)*

- Taking CW as a program of study, generally speaking:

- Literary Theory
- Literature classes
- Craft classes
- Production // Workshop
- Evaluative criteria depending on the class

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*What defines Creative Writing as innovative is its emphasis on **praxis**. Students learn how a literature is made, how it is put together, and what its cultural context is and then they recombine this knowledge to produce their own creative works.*

John Dale

Placing Creative Writing in the EFL Environment

EFL → *continued acquisition*, *broadening*, *confidence building*, *motivation*, *usage*.

CW *naturally* encompasses some of the absolute essentials of language learning.

Ongoing, demanding employment of *receptive, productive* and *interactive* skills.

My early ideas as to what would be of interest:

- Vocabulary
- Sentence variation
- Voice development
- Cohesion
- Organisation
- Innovation
- Literary devices

Creative Writing in a non-native language is a dynamic process consisting of a dialogic relationship between literature, language acquisition, and identity.

- Sreedhevi Iyer

Forming the Class

1. Ensure a small class. The smaller, the better. I capped it at ten.

2. Then I had to consider how the 90 minutes were best divided.

   - They needed **craft** in order to apply these basic elements to their reading and writing.
   - They needed **writing time** - a **prompt** and a window of time in which they could put pen-to-paper and see where they went.
   - And they needed to **workshop**.

3. So it went, roughly
   30 minutes on craft
   20 minutes on writing
   40 minutes for the workshop.

The Course(s)

Pilot

- Not graded

- No credit

- Each week: element of craft + workshop + prompt

**V2: A Graded Writing Skills Course**

- Streamlined the pilot – tweaked prompts and expanded readings

- Same setup: element of craft + 2 students workshopped + prompt

- Reflection essay as exam // entrance essay requirement

- *Extremely* high motivation

- Only emergency absences and they ran their own workshop when I was ill.

Criticism from students:
- An extra hour to write
- *More* writing exercises for *homework*, in addition to their ongoing writing project
- It should be offered to **every student**, not just a small group

Books

1. Bells, J., & Magrs, P. (Eds.). (2001). *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. Macmillan.
2. Salesses, M. (2021). *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping*. Catapult.
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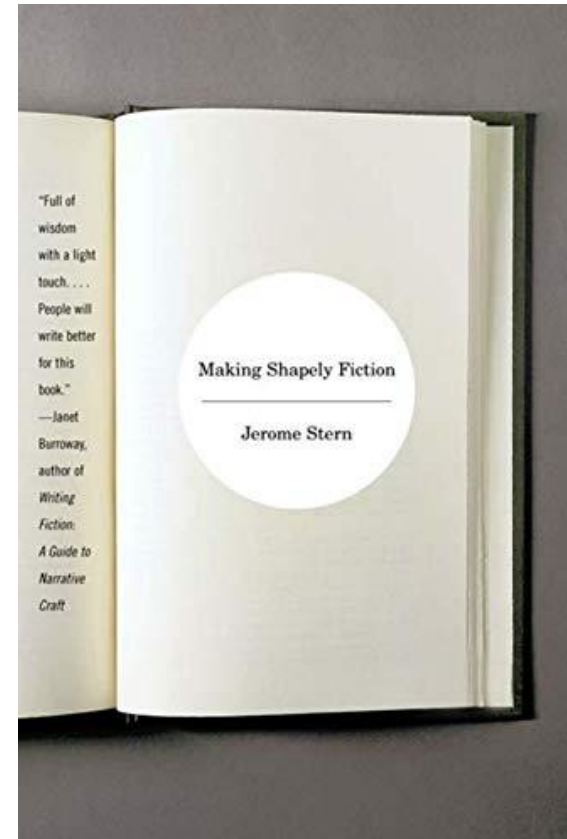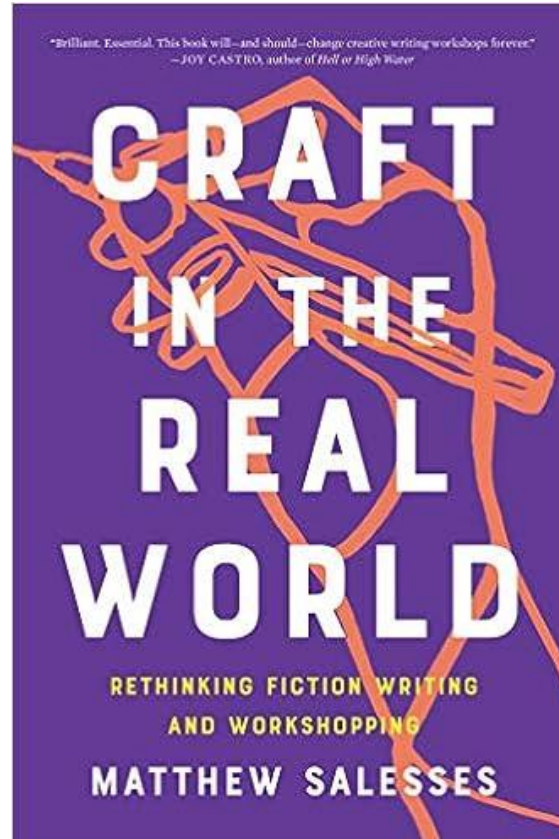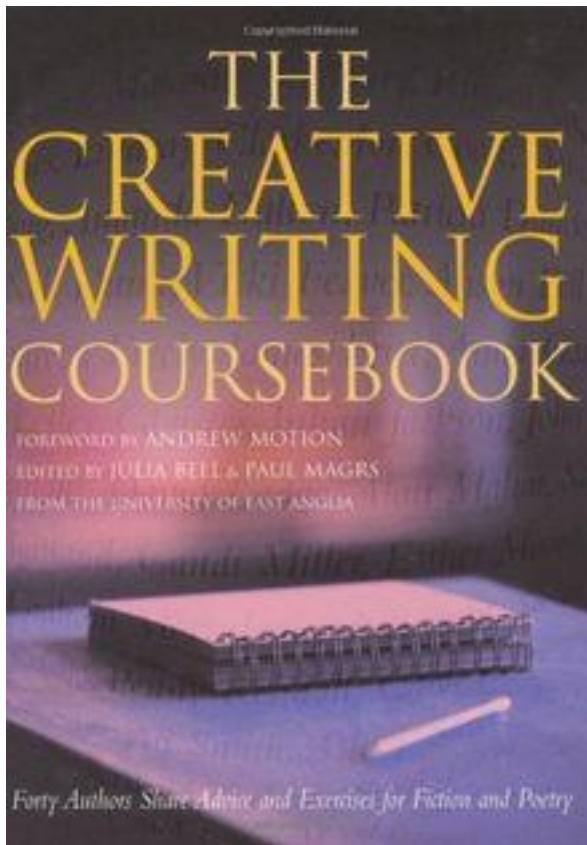
Elements of Craft

1. **Unpacking Showing vs Telling**
   Language.
   Adjectives and adverbs, how they can suffocate or dictate - I call them bossy, heavy words.
   HOW to show and WHEN to tell

2. **Write What You Know**
   Culture
   A good definition of 'know'

3. **Using Autobiography and Moving Through the World As a Writer**
   Taking the **personal element** of CW head on
   Observing
   Keeping notes
   Making writing habitual

Character

Characters as engines, plot drivers

Believability, vulnerability, the idea of relatability

Journey and **voice** ⟶

- Language used to develop and sustain. That's really hard!
- Specific words and phrases, specific usage of grammar
- What stands between this word and its apparent synonym?
- What makes one more likely for this character than the other?

Point of View

Grammar!

Which person are you writing in and what is the immediate effect of that choice?

Setting

Types and impact

Setting as awareness of the world → awareness is cultured, gendered

Time

Grammar! Narrative tenses, signal words, transition words

Plot

Types

Plot and character

Shape – changes in tension

V3: Digging Deeper

- **Tiny Bits of Meaning** → Ali Smith's Editcise (we'll be trying!)

- **Begin at the Beginning** → or the middle or the end. Tied in with 'Premise'.

- **Organising Meaning** → structural metaphor, changing the order of events

- **Place and Space** → visceral responses: what they are and how to create them

- **Writing** → using specific verbs sparsely in a short narrative (50 words) from Jane Messer's Summer Workshop

- **The Personal Essay** → Me Talk Pretty One Day by David Sedaris and At Summer's End by Margaret Renkl

- **The Vignette** → in our time by Ernest Hemingway and The Female Body by Margaret Atwood

- **The Unreliable Narrator**

- **YA // Characters in YA** → popular genre given the age of the students and its tendency to overlap with fantasy and sci-fi, two other popular genres

- **Time and Duration** → Duration by Katharine Haake

- **Plotting & Shaping**

The Workshop

- The workshop has always been of the greatest interest to me, pedagogically, on a language learning and teaching level.

  - *Close reading → note making → verbal discussion → note taking.*

- **Iowa Writers' Workshop** - methodology has long been the dominant model.

- Sitting around a table, readers have read a part of the writer's work *in advance* and they *react to it critically* over the course of the workshop.

- I **didn't** gag the writer.

- **Logistics:** We workshopped 1-2 students a week. They uploaded their piece of writing for workshopping (capped at 2000 words or two poems) on Moodle the week prior, giving their fellow students time enough to read it well.

- Aimed for *20 minutes per writer*.

Workshopping Guide

- Created a guide.

- It is paramount ground rules are laid in the first week

- The workshop is an environment most of them won't ever have been in before.

- Respect each other by ***reading people's writing closely***.

- Respect each other by ***coming to the workshop with notes on that piece of writing*** and the ability to discuss it constructively and analytically.

- Respect each other when in the workshop space - ***give everyone the time and opportunity to verbalise their thoughts.***

- ***Keep the writer in mind*** when you give your feedback.

Workshopping as a Skill

Starting with a summary: the ability to quickly and succinctly distil a piece of writing into its absolute essence.

Giving feedback, be:

• **Thorough & specific**: tell them *why*. And *how*. And *when*. 'I loved it' doesn't cut it.

<div align="center">

PULL IT APART.

</div>

• **Constructive**: what can they work on from here?

• **Non-judgemental:** obviously. We're all in the same boat.

• **Thoughtful and generous.** Make notes, highlight certain parts. Share your reactions to the work, how it affected you, what lines in particular moved you or made you think.

Why I Loved the Workshop

- Quickly became the course's heart.

- As important to **talk** about the writing as it was to **perform the act of writing**.

- Readers vs the writers – different roles and skillsets

- Act of taking notes and enacting those notes

- → Refinement of thought

- → Precision and process

- Students:

- → Took ownership of the language

- → They revealed their own relationships with words.

- Being able to see the building blocks in their writing and the writing of others

Challenges

- **Classroom Management:**
  - Workshops are inherently very dynamic places
  - Personal nature of expressive writing and facing feedback on the spot
  - Dominant students
  - TW and CW

- **Time Management:**
  - They're entirely verbal, productive places → TTT vs STT
  - Writer can talk back/take notes/explain → but you want to avoid Q&A

- **Themes:**
  - chronic illness, mental health, sexual assault
  - The danger of the workshop instructor becoming what Michelene Wandor calls an 'ersatz therapist'
  - *The need for robust support structures to students who may well draw on traumatic experience in the processes of reading and writing. (*Siobhan Holland)

- **Pulling a number of duties as a teacher:**
  - Language
  - Style
  - Literary craft
  - Ensuring discussion stays on track // mediating

Key Takeaways

- Motivation

- Classroom configuration

- The efficacy of the workshop in its bringing together of language learning skills

- The workshop's role in the course

- The role of culture and the different cultural conversations happening in the different countries of setting.

- Language skills of EFL students → they actually know language and can often access the grammar of a piece of writing on a level a lot of native speakers cannot

- Frustration of CW teachers in classrooms of native speakers is students cannot engage with grammar

I didn't read it like that.

But my favourite realisation → the role of *reading* across the entire class.

I was so focussed on the ***productive*** elements of the course, I didn't give a lot of thought to reading.

Readers - good readers, close readers, analytical readers - have every advantage when it comes to writing.

Writers cannot not be readers. That doesn't work. Students in the CW class have to become, if they are not already, good readers.

What readers have:

- A better knowledge of syntactic forms - the relationship between events
- An understanding of story forms = an ability to infer and predict
- A greater sensitivity to cultural traditions and the feelings of others

(Wolf, 2008, p. 102)

We have to read musically, testing the rhythm and precision of a sentence, listening for the almost inaudible rustle of historical association clinging to the hems of modern words, attending to patterns, repetitions, echoes, deciding why one metaphor is successful and another is not, judging how the perfect placement of the right verb or adjective seals a sentence with almost mathematical finality.

James Wood

Looking Ahead

- Ideally: a pure workshop course and a pure craft lecture series

- Next run, paying attention to:
  - how the students verbally respond
  - what drives their responses
  - what degree of literary critique is present/how they draw from or relate to other literature.

- Designing a rubric for the students to work with in the workshop that reflects this course's position in the EFL environment

- The role of rewriting

- The role of student reflection

- How do we educate EFL teachers?

- What might Sprachpraxis-specific materials look like?

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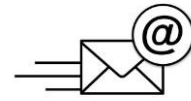
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Exercises // Prompts

1. Ali Smith's Editcise – using opening lines from novels I have chosen

2. One-Hundred-Word Story

3. Micro Fiction