



FIND YOUR STORY. FIND YOUR VOICE. FIND YOUR Y.

Writers Voice PRO
YMCA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Updated November 2024



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WRITERS VOICE PRO HANDBOOK

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM WRITERS VOICE PRO

Writers Voice PRO offers writers the time and attention they need to develop their writing practice. PRO is a two-year program for anyone serious about their writing and aspiring to write and publish a book. During these two years, you will share work with several writing mentors, who will give generous feedback on your work and help refine your strengths as a writer, based on their understanding of your writing and goals. PRO connects you to the Writers Voice of CNY, a literary community that has been growing together for over twenty-five years, and PRO gives you the flexibility to choose craft classes and workshops that align with your writing goals.

BENEFITS OF WRITERS VOICE PRO

The Writers Voice of CNY is based in Syracuse, NY and is CNY's largest community literary arts center. We've offered small, accessible writing workshops since 2001. We also have a Visiting Author Reading Series and an acclaimed annual journal of literature and art, Stone Canoe. Welcome!

When you join PRO, you also get the following benefits through the Writers Voice of CNY:

- Discounts on craft classes. We offer 75+ writing workshops each year and PRO writers can take any workshop for 25% off the non-member rate.
- Priority registration for classes. PRO writers can sign up early for classes and are guaranteed a spot in any of our workshops.
- Conversations with visiting writers. PRO writers can meet and talk with professional writers from our Visiting Author Reading series.
- Reading with Stone Canoe. PRO writers can be readers for our literary journal that is published twice a year in the Fall and Spring.
- Social Gatherings and Networking. Each season, PRO writers and others from our community meet to talk and get practical guidance on how to promote and publish their work.
- Graduation Celebration. PRO writers will celebrate their work and read as part of our Visiting Author Reading Series.

FINDING THE RIGHT KIND OF MENTOR

We're looking for published writers who enjoy helping others become better writers. This means, among other things, fluency in talking about writing (what works and what doesn't work), but also a keen sense of what it means to guide and teach. We're looking for writers who are friendly, reliable, and proficient with virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom. Finally, we're looking for writers who are doing interesting things in their own writing and can translate their own curiosity into potential classes that can be shared with students at the Writers Voice.

FINDING THE RIGHT KIND OF STUDENT

We're looking for writers who are ready to commit to their writing practice and who want to create (or finish) a project worthy of publication. We're also looking for writers who are curious to learn more about how and why writing works (i.e. the craft of writing) and are willing to stand up for their writing. This also means being willing to put in the work and reliably meet deadlines and writing goals. Finally, we're looking for writers who can describe where they are as a writer and where they want to be, while understanding that their goals will change as they complete the program.



FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

EXPECTATIONS FOR PRO WRITERS

Writers Voice PRO is a two-year program. Each year of the program consists of three seasons, and each season consists of three months:

- Fall (October, November, December)
- Winter (January, February, March)
- Spring (April, May, June)

Writers can expect to share a new writing packet with their mentor in the first week of each month. This means that in the first season of PRO, writers will share a writing packet with their mentor three times. Writers should ensure they are prompt and punctual in sharing packets with their mentor and they should communicate with their mentor if any obstacles arise.

Packets should be 5 to 10 pages of poems and 10 to 15 pages of prose. They should be shared as an accessible document file (such as a .pdf), unless another format works for both parties. Writers may send older or significantly revised work, but they're expected to also send work they're creating during the program.

Writers and mentors will arrange at least one virtual meeting each month for one hour, in which the writer and mentor can reflect on the feedback together and discuss their writing goals. This is a flexible time which can be used in any way that is helpful to the writer, and it should be scheduled for the end of the month, after the mentor has shared their feedback. This can be a time to discuss feedback, set or revise goals for next month, or share insights or reflections from the past month.

Writers will also be asked to share feedback in a brief evaluation at the end of each season. We want to ensure that writers get what they need and invite writers to shape and improve the program.

Each season, writers will co-create a reading list with their mentor, based on their writing goals and the authors that the mentor identifies as potentially helpful guides. This reading list will inform the critical writing that writers will also complete as part of the Writers Voice PRO. More on this below.

Being in community with other writers is a big part of what makes the Writers Voice of CNY so special. PRO writers are encouraged to take craft classes and workshops as part of their mentorship and qualify for a Writers Voice membership of a 25% discount on each class. Additionally, PRO writers will always be guaranteed a spot in a class each season. They're also expected to attend our Visiting Author Reading Series, which is offered locally at the Downtown Writers Center in Syracuse, NY and streamed online.

We take your writing seriously and hope that you will as well! We'll do our best to work with everyone, but by joining Writers Voice PRO, you agree to dedicate your time to deepen your writing practice, and this means showing up and following the schedule for the program each season. If accountability to the program and your writing becomes a challenge, we will work on a solution together.

SAMPLE FIRST YEAR PROGRAM

September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial interview with Y1 • Determine fall reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 1st packet • Discuss 1st packet • Complete reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 2nd packet • Discuss 2nd packet • Complete reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 3rd packet • Discuss 3rd packet • Complete reading list • Co-create winter reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 4th packet • Read and write responses • Discuss 4th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 5th packet • Write critical essay • Discuss 5th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 6th packet • Submit critical essay • Discuss 6th packet • Determine Spring reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 7th packet • Revise critical essay • Discuss 7th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 8th packet • Revise critical essay • Discuss 8th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 9th packet • Submit final critical essay • Discuss 9th packet • Mid-program evaluation • Set goals for next year

FOR PROSPECTIVE MENTORS

EXPECTATIONS FOR MENTORS

The writer-mentor relationship is the main part of the writer’s experience in PRO. Therefore, mentors play an important role in guiding writers through the program.

Writers will share a new writing packet with mentors in the first week of each month. This means that in the first season of PRO, writers will share a writing packet with their mentor three times. Packets should be shared as an accessible file type (.docx, .pdf) unless another format works better for both parties.

Mentors can annotate the writing however they wish, but they must also write a feedback letter of at least 500 words. This letter can talk about specific choices the writer makes, any trends or patterns you notice, or any other responses to the work. Mentors should share this letter with the writers in the third week of each month.

Mentors will arrange at least one virtual meeting with their writer for one hour in the final week of each month. This can be a time to discuss feedback, set or revise goals for next month, or share insights or reflections from the past month. Mentors should always act professionally, respond promptly to emails, and attend all scheduled meetings with both administrators and writers.

Each season, mentors will co-create a reading list based on the writer’s goals and any artists the mentor identifies as being potentially helpful guides. The goal should be to recommend one or two new texts each season. This reading list will inform the critical responses that the writer will complete in their second year. The first reading list may contain books the writer identifies as shaping their own work and can be a way to share their own style with the mentor. Later, the reading list may extend and expand the writer’s sense of what’s possible in their writing, based on what’s discussed in their meetings.



SAMPLE FIRST YEAR PROGRAM

September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial interview with Y1 Determine fall reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read 1st packet Write feedback letter Discuss 1st packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read 2nd packet Write feedback letter Discuss 2nd packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read 3rd packet Write feedback letter Discuss 3rd packet Co-create winter reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read 4th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 4th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read 5th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 5th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit 6th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 6th packet Determine Spring reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit 7th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 7th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit 8th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 8th packet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit 9th packet Write feedback letter Discuss 9th packet Mid-program evaluation Set goals for next year

GUIDELINES

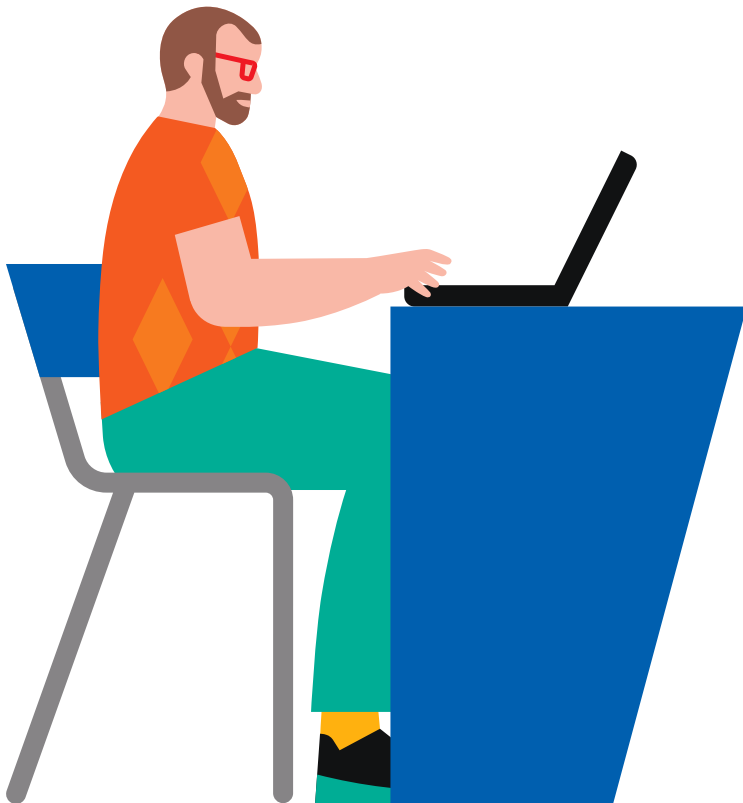
CRITICAL ESSAY

We believe that writing and reading are always in conversation with each other. It's almost impossible to grow as a writer without reading, and writing about what we read can be a vital way of metabolizing what we learn. The goal of both the reading list and the critical writing part of Writers Voice PRO is to give writers the space to expand and deepen their understanding of what's possible in their writing.

There are three parts of the critical writing component: annotations, essays, and thesis introduction.

Annotations should be short, energetic and casual. The goal is to encourage proactive reading, and allow the writer to record their observations, questions, and responses to what they read. There's no precise length for annotations, but you can expect your annotations to be one to two pages for each book. Writers should share their annotations with their mentor each month so their conversations can include their own writing as well as their annotations.

The critical essay is meant to be a more sustained articulation of problems, patterns, and ideas that emerge from the annotations. An essay may compare how two or three writers use similar techniques for different effects. It may examine how a single writer's approach changes over time. The essay should be between 10 and 15 pages, double-spaced, no more than 12-point font.



THESIS

The thesis is the final project PRO students will complete as part of their program. Poets should expect to create a thesis between 40 and 50 pages. Fiction and Nonfiction writers should expect to create a thesis between 110 and 125 pages.

Each thesis will be accompanied by an introduction. The thesis introduction is a way for the writer to talk about the values, questions, and struggles that have shaped their writing. This introduction should give a clear sense of the writer's understanding of craft and process.

Each writer will select a reader for their thesis, ideally a mentor they have worked with during the program. These readers will be responsible for guiding the final manuscript and providing feedback and will check that all the details of the thesis have been met.

Thesis components are as follows:

- **Title Page.** Manuscript title, author name, Writer's Voice PRO, graduating year.
- **Signature Page.** Manuscript title, author name, mentor name, and the signatures of the author, mentor, and directors.
- **Abstract.** A summary of the aesthetic project of the thesis (e.g. plot, imagery, literary devices), between 100 and 200 words.
- **Acknowledgements.** A page dedicated to anyone the writer would like to thank. (Optional)
- **Table of Contents.** Accurately titled and numbered entries, including abstract, introduction, acknowledgements, individual poems, chapters, or sections.
- **Thesis Introduction.** A brief introduction that provides a literary context for the writer's work.
- **Prose or Poetry.** The body of the manuscript. Typically, standard formatting, e.g. 1-inch margins, no more than 12-point font, and double-spaced (prose).

Final bound copies of the thesis will be archived at the Downtown Writers Center library. PRO Program graduates will also be required to present their work at a reading at the Downtown Writers Center or online.

"The [Writers Voice] PRO program is where I began to look at my poetry with a critical eye; without it, I would not have developed a necessary faith in my work."

— Jessica Cuello, 2010 graduate of the Writers Voice PRO and author of *By Fire* (2016), *Pricking* (2016), *Hunt* (2017), *Liar* (2017), and *Yours, Creature* (2023).

HERE'S
WHAT PAST
STUDENTS
HAVE TO SAY
ABOUT
THE PRO
PROGRAM

"I didn't know that I could realize this type of growth outside of an MFA program. The academic rigor, depth of knowledge, craft exercises, readings, and writing prompts have equipped me with the skills to make me a better writer. I encourage anyone who fancies themselves a writer to give the Writers Voice a shot."

—Chris Travis, 2024 graduate of the Writers Voice PRO



For a better us.®

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