



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

Writers Voice PRO  
YMCA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Updated December 2024



# INDEX

What to Expect from Writers Voice PRO	3
Benefits of Writers Voice PRO	3
Joining the Writers Voice Pro	3
Getting to Know Our Mentors	3
<b>FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS</b>	
Expectations for PRO Writers	4
<b>SAMPLE PROGRAM</b>	
Sample First and Second Year Program	5
<b>GUIDELINES</b>	
Critical Essay	6
Thesis	6
Testimonials from Past Students	7

**YMCA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK**  
Arts & Education Branch  
340 Montgomery Street  
Syracuse, NY 13202

(315) 474-6851 x380

District Executive Director:  
Phil Memmer

Director of Writing Workshops:  
Tim Carter

[ymcacny.org](http://ymcacny.org)



# 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.

## JOINING THE WRITERS VOICE PRO

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.

## GETTING TO KNOW OUR MENTORS

Our writing mentors are all published writers who enjoy helping others become better writers. They have a keen sense of what it means to guide and teach, which means, among other things, fluency in talking about writing (what works and what doesn't work), and translating their own curiosity into practical lessons for writers. Many of our mentors also teach workshops in the Writers Voice of CNY.



# 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).

We accept new PRO writers on a rolling basis, meaning that you can apply to join PRO during each of our seasons. Your year will then consist of three seasons, excluding summer. For example, if you start PRO in the Winter season, your first year will consist of a Winter, Spring, and Fall season. It will follow a similar trajectory to the “sample program” on the following page, which shows a Fall season start date.

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 10 to 15 pages of poems and 20 to 30 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.

Each season, writers will also co-create a list of 5 to 7 books 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, in addition to giving the mentors another way give helpful feedback to the writing packets each month. Along with their writing packet, writers should include a short annotation of 1 to 2 pages of what they read each month. Mentors will not be expected to provide feedback on these annotations, rather, they will supplement the discussions that the mentors have with writers about their work.

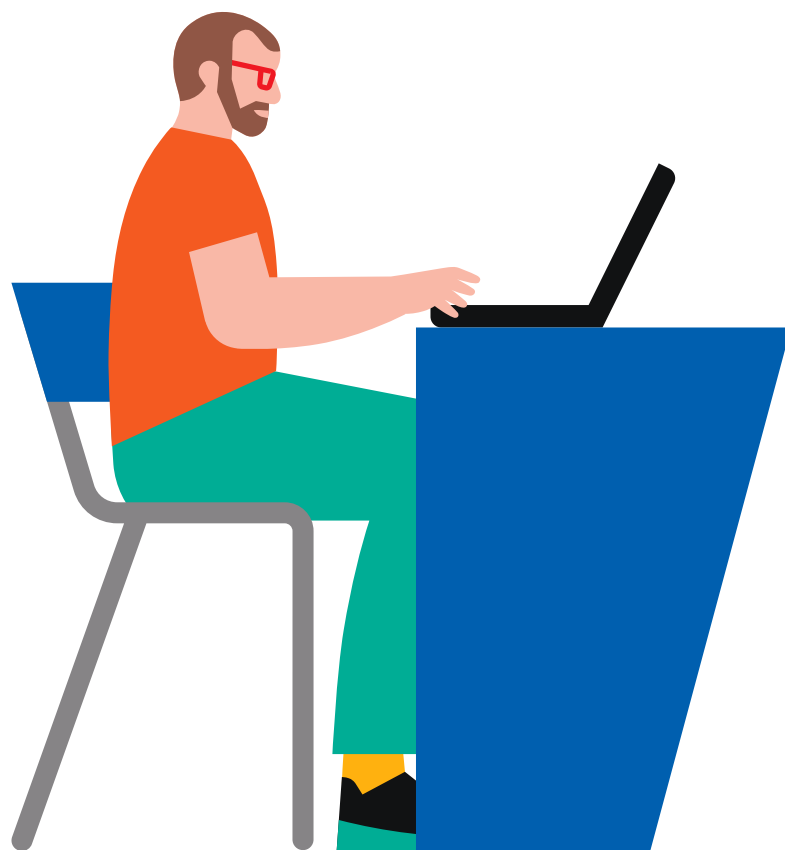
Writers and mentors will arrange at least one virtual meeting each month for one hour, in which the writer and mentor can reflect on the feedback together and discuss their writing goals. This is a flexible time which can be used in any way that is helpful to the writer, and it should be scheduled for 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.

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 PROGRAM

MONTH	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial interview with Y1</li> <li>Determine fall reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine fall reading list</li> </ul>
<b>OCTOBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit first packet</li> <li>Discuss first packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> </ul>
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit second packet</li> <li>Discuss second packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> </ul>
<b>DECEMBER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit third packet</li> <li>Discuss third packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> <li>Determine winter reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Complete fall reading list</li> <li>Determine winter reading list</li> </ul>
<b>JANUARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit fourth packet</li> <li>Read and write responses</li> <li>Discuss fourth packet</li> <li>Complete winter reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Complete winter reading list</li> </ul>
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit fifth packet</li> <li>Discuss fifth packet</li> <li>Complete winter reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Write critical essay</li> </ul>
<b>MARCH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit sixth packet</li> <li>Discuss sixth packet</li> <li>Complete winter reading list</li> <li>Determine spring reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Submit critical essay</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> </ul>
<b>APRIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit seventh packet</li> <li>Discuss seventh packet</li> <li>Complete spring reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Revise critical essay</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> </ul>
<b>MAY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit eighth packet</li> <li>Discuss eighth packet</li> <li>Complete spring reading list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> <li>Revise critical essay</li> </ul>
<b>JUNE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit ninth packet</li> <li>Discuss ninth packet</li> <li>Mid-program evaluation</li> <li>Set goals for next year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit final critical essay</li> <li>Submit writing packet</li> <li>Discuss writing packet</li> </ul>

Chart reflects a sample program schedule. Actual schedule may differ.

# GUIDELINES

## CRITICAL ESSAY

We believe that writing and reading are always in conversation with each other. It's difficult 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 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 1 to 2 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. Mentors are not required to give feedback on the annotations; they will be helpful to inform the conversation between the writer and mentor each month.

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. Or 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. This essay will be written during the second year of the program, starting in February. During this time, PRO students will be also working on completing their final thesis manuscript.

## 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.

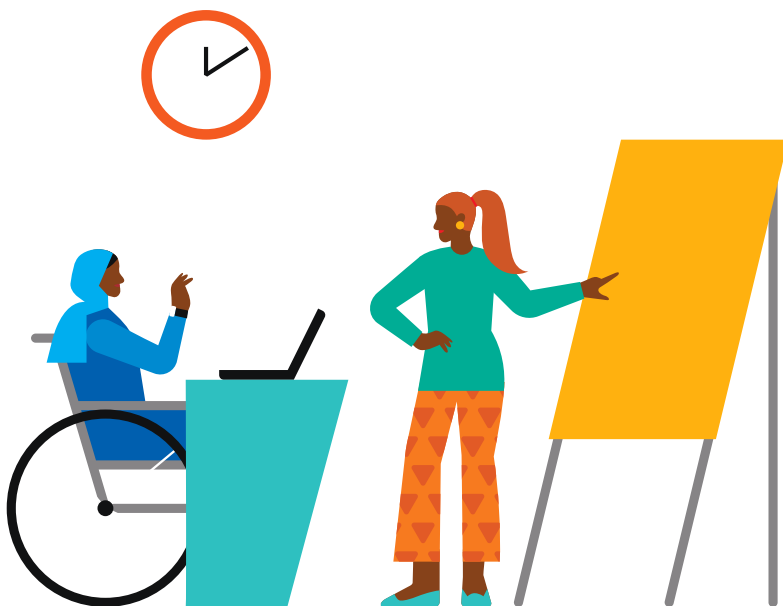
Each thesis will be accompanied by an introduction. The thesis introduction is a way for the writer to talk about the values, questions, and struggles that have shaped their writing. This introduction should give a clear sense of the writer's understanding of craft and process.

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.®**

**YMCA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK**  
**340 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202**

Arts & Education Branch | Camp Evergreen | Downtown Branch | East Area Family Branch  
Manlius Branch | North Area Family Branch | Northwest Family Branch | Southwest Branch

**[ymcacny.org](http://ymcacny.org)**