No good reason is reason enough to write

Yvonne Gonzalez
Writing Assistant

Why make the time for creative writing? The real question here is: Why make the time to do anything? Why don't we just surgically remove all the bones in our body and lie in a lawn chair all day and look fragile? That was my plan until I fell upon this assignment.

But back to the question at hand: to effectively gauge why individuals choose to make this kinetic activity a priority, we have to take into consideration the drives, benefits, and goals of creative writing for individuals on all levels of the literary spectrum.

For some like Christina Salvin, Creative Writing instructor at Gavilan College, the act of writing creatively is an organic impulse. To her, “It’s not about making time. It’s [about] being inspired to spend the time regardless of whatever else is going on in your life.”

As an instructor she sees many types of writers set foot inside her classroom, each carrying with them a unique mindset from which to write. Sometimes writers find it hard to locate and then channel their inspiration into creative writing and that’s what creative writing classes were designed for. The written word, coupled with inspiration and the goal to write something that will “crack the world in half,” as Salvin puts it, is one reason why we make the time. But how deep do you have to dig into your gut to locate inspiration?

A student of Christina’s, Tiffany Williams, innocently began her trek into creative writing when she started journaling as a teen.

“...a hook”

Tell a story

Let’s say your assignment is to research an aspect of some culture and to write an essay evaluating that aspect: you choose to write about the Japanese tradition of tattooing intricate visual myths over their entire body.

Appeal to your reader’s imagination by beginning with an example. “Steadfast samurai march across the ridges of Matsuo Ichikawa’s body, pursued by fire-breathing dragons,” would interest me more than

—See REEL page two

VOX CALUMUS

Issue No. IV
Newsletter of the Gavilan College Writing Center
Spring 2006

Academic Writing

Reel in your reader
by Tiffany Williams
Writing Assistant

Face it: for every single written assignment you’re given, for every essay you spend hours writing, your instructor has to read about thirty of them. If I were an instructor, one thing I wouldn’t be able to stand is reading the same boring essays over and over again.

As students, we need to make our essays stand out from the stack, and for that we need a little something special. A device used to grab your readers’ attention is called a hook; in a standard college essay, this hook should come at the beginning of your introduction and should probably be about a half-paragraph long.

“We need to make our essays stand out from the stack, and for that we need a little something special .... a hook”

Here are three types of hooks to pull your reader head-first into your essay:

Tell a story

Let’s say your assignment is to research an aspect of some culture and to write an essay evaluating that aspect: you choose to write about the Japanese tradition of tattooing intricate visual myths over their entire body.

Appeal to your reader’s imagination by beginning with an example. “Steadfast samurai march across the ridges of Matsuo Ichikawa’s body, pursued by fire-breathing dragons,” would interest me more than

—See REEL page two
In Japan, there is a tradition of thinking about your topic before you begin your essay. This method gets your reader engaged and interested in what you have to say. This is exactly the trend in Japan, where...You get the idea.

Try out one of these strategies next time you have an essay and see what works for you, your ideas and your reader.

—From REEL page one

—From REASON page one

Erin’s goals for her personal writing also fall into the bigger picture. The way she sees it, writing serves a more humanitarian purpose and that is to “connect to people that are otherwise distanced by space and time.” She makes a good point, in saying reading others’ creative writing can help us build empathy towards people we are normally disconnected from, and publishing our own writing can help us accomplish this altruistic task in reverse by allowing others to become connected to us.

The world of publication comes with many benefits, and for James Jones, member of the Science Fi Fantasy Writing Circle, one benefit is to be “…recognized by other writers.”

James, a Gavilan student, has been working on a series of 10 sci-fi novels, four of which have been completed, and to be published would validate all the ink stains and paper cuts on his being.

Stacey Lopez, his friend and founder of the circle, would also like to be published but says that the prestige of publication is not the most important thing but only a perk. Her goal in being published is less about facial recognition and more about inspiring others to write, just like she was inspired as a child by other published authors.

So why make the time for creative writing? The real question is: Why not?”

Erin, an English instructor, is driven by the invisible life force to release the pressure in one’s mind caused by an accumulation of thoughts and ideas. “I would go insane otherwise,” says Erin in regards to her focus on creative writing. When she is not teaching English courses here at Gavilan, she is concentrating her energy on writing poetry and short stories and she affirms that a lot of the time her writings are not fit for an audience outside of her own consciousness.

“...that’s a long way off.”

Like Tiffany, Erin Crook, an English instructor, is driven by the invisible life force to release the pressure in one’s mind caused by an accumulation of thoughts and ideas. “I would go insane otherwise,” says Erin in regards to her focus on creative writing. When she is not teaching English courses here at Gavilan, she is concentrating her energy on writing poetry and short stories and she affirms that a lot of the time her writings are not fit for an audience outside of her own consciousness.

So why make the time for creative writing? The real question is: Why not?”

Erin’s goals for her personal writing also fall into the bigger picture. The way she sees it, writing serves a more humanitarian purpose and that is to “connect to people that are otherwise distanced by space and time.” She makes a good point, in saying reading others’ creative writing can help us build empathy towards people we are normally disconnected from, and publishing our own writing can help us accomplish this altruistic task in reverse by allowing others to become connected to us.

The world of publication comes with many benefits, and for James Jones, member of the Science Fi Fantasy Writing Circle, one benefit is to be “…recognized by other writers.”

James, a Gavilan student, has been working on a series of 10 sci-fi novels, four of which have been completed, and to be published would validate all the ink stains and paper cuts on his being.

Stacey Lopez, his friend and founder of the circle, would also like to be published but says that the prestige of publication is not the most important thing but only a perk. Her goal in being published is less about facial recognition and more about inspiring others to write, just like she was inspired as a child by other published authors.

So why make the time for creative writing? The real question is: Why not?”

Erin, an English instructor, is driven by the invisible life force to release the pressure in one’s mind caused by an accumulation of thoughts and ideas. “I would go insane otherwise,” says Erin in regards to her focus on creative writing. When she is not teaching English courses here at Gavilan, she is concentrating her energy on writing poetry and short stories and she affirms that a lot of the time her writings are not fit for an audience outside of her own consciousness.

“...that’s a long way off.”

Like Tiffany, Erin Crook, an English instructor, is driven by the invisible life force to release the pressure in one’s mind caused by an accumulation of thoughts and ideas. “I would go insane otherwise,” says Erin in regards to her focus on creative writing. When she is not teaching English courses here at Gavilan, she is concentrating her energy on writing poetry and short stories and she affirms that a lot of the time her writings are not fit for an audience outside of her own consciousness.
Writing Prompt

And they lived happily ever after… or maybe until Cinderella discovered that the prince was obsessed with strip clubs, or maybe the prince from “Snow White” finds out that she had a fling with one of the dwarfs, and the prince now notices the boy he calls son is really short and grumpy. Usually fairy tales don’t have the most complicated of plots, and even their endings seem pretty cut and dry. In most of them there is always room for you to put your own twisted, dramatic, bloody, not-so-happy ending.

In this exercise, just take that fairy tale that used to make you so happy as a child. Change it however you like, using any style you like. Turn it into a soup opera, a Greek tragedy or even a Quentin Tarantino kind of thing. And if you think that the villain didn’t get it bad enough, well this is your chance to really make him pay.

During your drafting stage, don’t even worry about grammar or spelling; just write and give that mushy, unrealistic, romantic piece of writing a much needed reality check.

Make sure that you add a lot of detail and even some dialogue. After you are done corrupting an innocent fairy tale, you can post it in the Writing Center’s myspace.com account and enter for a chance to win a $10 dollar gift card from Target.

No space for My Space

Dear Editor,

I personally feel you ought to prohibit students from using the Writing Center computers as an opportunity to play on “My Space” instead of performing class related assignments.

This is a Writing Center, not a place to play.

Sincerely,

David Walters
Gavilan College Student

Writers at work and play

Dear David,

It takes passion to write out your ideas, and bravery to then go on and make sure they’re heard. Thanks for taking time to share yours. My Space is on the minds of many educators these days, and it seems to have almost as many critics as it has friends.

We at the Writing Center have decided to embrace it as a method of attracting and fostering writing community on our campus and beyond it.

In order to fulfill our mission, the center embraces play—even the seemingly pointless play offered by My Space. Many academic studies have shown that writers develop best when...
WRITING ASSISTANTS WANTED

Want to help writers? Want to get paid?

The Gavilan College Writing Center seeks new assistants for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007

Earn money
Help others
Learn new skills
Gain valuable experience

FIND OUT MORE!
Drop by the center at LI120 or call (408) 848-4889

APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

You don’t have to be a great writer!

We need thinkers, communicators, poets, scholars, curious people, future teachers and speakers of Spanish and other languages.

—From LETTER page three

In fact, you can find the center’s blog (and respond to it as well) at www.myspace.com/writingcenter or by clicking on the writer’s forum link at http://www.gavilan.edu/writing.

Again, thanks so much for your thoughtful letter and keep writing!

Sincerely,
Kimberly Smith
Writing Center Coordinator