



Inspiring Neurodiverse Learners to Love Writing

Practical, Trauma-Informed, Evidence-Aligned Approaches from 20 Years in the Field

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Writing One True Thing

Welcome

Writing is often taught within rigid structures.

Students are asked to organize before they have discovered what they think, edit before they have found their voice, and produce polished work before they have experienced the joy of creating.

This workshop begins somewhere else.

It begins by creating the conditions that allow people to be fully present in the moment.

From that place, curiosity emerges. Attention deepens. Writing becomes less about performing and more about discovering.

Over the next ninety minutes, you won't simply hear about these practices.

You'll experience them.

We'll write together. Reflect together. Listen to one another. Together, we'll create the kind of writing community many of our students have never experienced.

My hope is that you'll leave not only with practical tools, but with the lived experience of what becomes possible when writing begins with presence, safety, and connection.

Beginning Reflection

Think of a learner who struggles with writing.

- What happens when this learner is asked to write?
- What might this learner be protecting?
- What do you wish were possible for them?

Writing Is More Than Output

Writing draws on executive functioning, working memory, language retrieval, emotional regulation, motor planning, organization, self-confidence, sensory processing, creativity, and the ability to tolerate uncertainty.

Case Study One: The Shelter

Notes:

- Literacy history does not define creative capacity.
 - Shared attention can deepen creativity.
 - Low-stakes writing reveals abilities formal tasks often conceal.
 - People often need permission before instruction.
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Case Study Two: Kara

Notes:

- Progress may unfold over years.
 - Confidence often precedes skill.
 - Community reshapes identity.
 - Joy fuels learning.
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Case Study Three: 'Suzie'

Notes:

- Regulation does not always look like stillness.
- Accommodation allows expression.
- A writer can make meaning from lived experience.

What Makes Writing Feel Safe?

- ☐ Choice
- ☐ Belonging
- ☐ Predictable structure
- ☐ Short writing periods
- ☐ Body awareness
- ☐ Option to pass
- ☐ Option to read aloud
- ☐ Listening without critique
- ☐ Freedom from correction
- ☐ Community

Writing Jam

Prompt:

Write about a learner you will never forget.

You may follow the prompt—or write what needs to be written.

Six Principles That Shape Every Writing Jam

Regulate before inviting.

Help the nervous system arrive before inviting it to create.

Separate creating from correcting.

Creation and revision ask different things of the brain.

Reduce the size of the beginning.

Short writing stints, clear invitations, and defined boundaries make beginning possible.

Protect choice.

Participants choose how they write, what they write, whether they share, and whether they follow the prompt.

Participate.

Write alongside participants. Follow the prompt. Read your own imperfect work. Model the process by showing up for it yourself.

Affirm before anything else.

Responses are grounded in appreciation—not critique, advice, interpretation, or suggestions. Protect the writer first.

Final Reflection

What surprised me today?

What challenged something I believed?

What condition do I want to create more intentionally?

What will I remember about the learner I pictured today?



Every learner has an interior life larger than the work they produce.

Long before they become confident writers, they deserve to know that their thoughts matter.

Sometimes the most important shift does not begin with better instruction.

It begins when a learner discovers:

There is something inside me worth saying.

Continue the Conversation

The books below have shaped my thinking about writing, learning, trauma, creativity, and neurodiversity. You certainly don't need to read them all. If one title sparks your curiosity, begin there.

On Writing

Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*

A classic exploration of writing as a practice of presence rather than perfection.

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

A compassionate reminder that strong writing begins with permission, curiosity, and imperfect first drafts.

Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*

A foundational text on separating drafting from editing and allowing authentic voice to emerge.

On Creativity

Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*

A meditation on attention, creativity, and noticing.

Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*

Especially valuable for helping reluctant writers reconnect with creative confidence.

On Trauma & the Nervous System

Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*

An accessible introduction to how trauma shapes learning, regulation, and attention.

Stephen Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory*

Understanding how safety influences learning, connection, and creativity.

On Learning

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain*

A compelling argument that emotion is central to learning.

Carol Dweck, *Mindset*

A helpful framework for understanding how beliefs about ability influence persistence and growth.

On Neurodiversity

Ross Greene, *The Explosive Child*

A philosophy grounded in the belief that kids do well if they can.

Barry Prizant, *Uniquely Human*

A compassionate rethinking of autism that emphasizes understanding before intervention.

On Belonging

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

An invitation to imagine classrooms as communities rather than places of performance.

The Research Behind This Work

This workshop is grounded in research across educational psychology, neuroscience, trauma-informed practice, self-determination theory, and neurodiversity-affirming education. The practices of regulation, autonomy, community, reflection, and positive affirmation are supported by a growing body of evidence showing that people learn most effectively when they feel safe, connected, and intrinsically motivated.

- Stephen Porges — Polyvagal Theory (safety and social engagement)
- Bessel van der Kolk — trauma, memory, and regulation
- Edward Deci & Richard Ryan — Self-Determination Theory
- Mary Helen Immordino-Yang — emotion and learning
- Ross Greene — collaborative, curiosity-based support
- Barry Prizant — neurodiversity-affirming practice
- Peter Elbow — separating drafting from editing
- Carol Dweck — growth mindset
- James Pennebaker — expressive writing research
- National Writing Project — writing as social practice

A Final Invitation

You don't need to redesign your writing instruction tomorrow.

Simply notice.

Notice what happens when a learner is given more choice.

Notice what changes when the first response is appreciation rather than evaluation.

Notice what becomes possible when you write alongside your students.

Small shifts create remarkable change.