



Creative writing course with Stan Abbott

Telling Tales *or* **How to Write Better Stories**

Course outline

The objective of this course is to give students the confidence to write more creatively, to forge more interesting narratives, whether these be diaries, blogs, feature articles, short stories or novels.

It is a “creative writing course” but with a very solid practical foundation, aimed at giving the student the confidence to understand how and when to use more expressive prose. For those with less creative ambitions, it will also help in day-to-day writing, facilitating both speedier and less ambiguous communication. By looking closely at how language “works”, it will also whet the appetite for reading and for expanding the horizons of the student’s reading ambitions.

It is not a vocational course and there’s no formal qualification at the end, but that does not mean that a degree of intellectual exercise and effort is not demanded. The online platform will also give participants the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with their fellow students.

The course is open to writers and budding writers of all abilities and the tutor will respond to the needs of all participants individually, both in the “formal” online classes and in reviewing their “homework”.



All students should be familiar with using the online platform, Zoom, and have access to a computer or tablet with an appropriate word-processing programme. Homework will be required to be submitted in Microsoft Word or in a format accessible to Word.

The course tutor is **Stan Abbott**, a career journalist and professional trainer for the provincial media and for Third Sector volunteers requiring better writing skills. After learning his craft with newspapers in Yorkshire and the North East, he wrote for all the major national dailies and weeklies, while establishing an acclaimed publishing business in **Wensleydale**, specialising in books about travel, the outdoors and the politics of transport.

He has written, published or edited a great many books and magazines, earning awards for both his writing and editing. He currently writes regularly for *The New European* newspaper and his books are published under the name Stan L. Abbott. He has three non-fiction titles in progress with his publisher, Saraband, and is also working on his second novel.

A graduate of Leeds University in French and Management Studies, Stan also has some understanding of other languages, including German, as well as written Latin, Spanish, Norwegian, Arabic, and Greek.

Module One

(Six sessions each of 90 minutes, March and April 2021)

Session 1 – Language, meaning and culture

Creating a better understanding of how we use language to translate abstract thoughts into the “tangible” written form. English, like all languages, has evolved from and thus reflects the various different English-speaking cultures, while all other languages are similarly interwoven with their own cultural and societal roots.

- The beauty of being born to speak English
- Different English for different types of story

We strip things down and learn how to:

- Write economically and without ambiguity
- Understand English grammar better

Session 2 – Bringing your subject to life

How to structure longer pieces of non-fiction (1,000 to 3,000 words), including feature articles and blogs. The evolution of more creative ways of doing this, including:

- The New Journalism
- First-person narrative writing
- Interview
- Memoir

Session 3 – Bathos, pathos and all that jazz

Exploring the use of a variety of literary devices and understanding how different writers use these to stimulate the reader’s imagination. What makes a good metaphor and what figures of speech may serve only to stop the reader in his or her tracks.

Session 4 – ‘I could write a book about that...’

We discuss how to identify the essence of a bigger story and how to structure more ambitious non-fiction writing projects. We will look at the work of successful writers of non-fiction genres, such as biography and travelogue, and identify themes for our own individual work. We consider questions such as the use of dialect, how to be funny and how to write realistically about human relationships and in dialect forms that have no recognised written

form. We'll learn about the use of different voices, linear and non-linear timelines and other stylistic choices.

Session 5 – From fact to fiction

Fictionalised telling of factual events; factual events as the basis of fiction. We examine the work of some of the best proponents of the transformative “new realism” of the late 20th century and the evolution of new novel forms since then, as well as exploring other fictional genres, including crime, sci-fi, horror, humour...

Session 6 – What's my genre?

By this stage, students will have begun to have quite well formed ideas about what type of writing most stimulates them and which they are best at. The aim of this closing session will be to help students to identify the best routes to publishing for material of all types – fiction and non-fiction, shorter and longer, online or printed. We shan't sugar-coat things: on the one hand, technology has made it ever easier to publish work in one form or another; on the other, this growth in published material has not made it any easier for people to be financially rewarded for their creative efforts.

Module Two

(Six sessions each of 90 minutes, October and November 2021)

Students who participate in Module One will have the opportunity to help shape the syllabus for Module Two, which will aim to take students to the next level in developing their writing skills. It will potentially include sessions with guest speakers with expertise in areas not covered in Module One, including playwriting, poetry and scriptwriting. Once again, there will be a helpful focus on where the opportunities may lie for students to commercialise their work.