

Project Story: Interactive Writing Workshops

Carol Cram

Sixteen people (the maximum number, as agreed prior to the course) enrolled in the free writing course—eight people in each session. The sessions were full approximately one week before the start dates, with a short waiting list. Ultimately eleven people attended and participated; everyone who attended the first session completed the three sessions of the course.

The program was advertised on various Bowen Island Facebook groups, the Arts Council weekly update, two advertisements in the Bowen Island Undercurrent, and on my website: www.carolcram.com.

I delivered twelve hours of instruction in total: two sets of three two-hour sessions via Zoom to five to six participants in each session. The sessions combined hands-on writing activities with PowerPoint presentations. Prior to the start of the course, I sent a survey to the participants to get feedback about what writing topics interested them.

The three writing topics that garnered the most interest were:

- Creating Memorable Characters
- Developing Plot and Structure
- Learning Editing Tips

The participants were very engaged throughout the sessions, participating enthusiastically in the writing exercises, reading their work, and asking questions. Teaching them was a joy. I loved sharing my enthusiasm for writing along with practical skills that participants can apply immediately to their writing.

A particular highlight was listening to the participants read the results of the writing exercises. Even in the short time frames allocated, most participants wrote remarkably engaging pieces and were inspired to continue writing following the course.

I was heartened to discover that online teaching is a viable way to bring together a small group of participants and to encourage interaction. I enjoyed being able to see each participant on screen and to focus solely on them while they shared their writing. The intimacy of the online experience is different from the classroom environment but still highly effective. I would definitely consider teaching small-group courses in this format again.

Following are testimonials from some of the participants.

Roger McGillivray: I want to thank you for the three-session writing class you taught over the past few weeks. I thoroughly enjoyed the course and appreciate all of the information you provided. As well, I look forward to spending a lot more time writing and practising and using this information, especially the points from the second week.

Judith Heezen: This mini-course of Carol Cram on writing was very inspiring. Carol managed it to get me writing short fiction stories with so much fun while normally I am only writing non-fiction blogs. By teaching us to look at it from different angles, it gave me tools to use to empower my writing. These two hours a week with Carol with no other distractions energized me in this chaotic COVID time.

Dina Amouyal: Thank you so much to Carol Cram and the Bowen Island Foundation for the outstanding experience of the writing workshop. Carol presented a wonderful course load of material, exercises for personal experience and opened up a new world of thought and inspiration. It was too short ! In the limited time Carol imparted a “tool kit” for writers to utilize and expand their own creative writing abilities. Thoroughly enjoyed every minute of the Zoom workshop with Carol, still swirling with the lingering sparks of the lessons! Would love to do that again ! Thank you, Carol!

Angela Saunders: Thank you, Carol, for providing this writing course and helping me rediscover my love of writing. I have been looking for a reason to get back into writing, not only for myself but for others, and this crash course was the perfect start! Your lessons were packed with takeaways and you encouraged us to write, share and receive critique in a comfortable setting. Not easy to do when we're all in an online classroom! I will be applying your lessons on character development and the hero's journey to finally start on a novel (or many!) that I know deep down I've been wanting to write.

Thank you to the Bowen Island Foundation for the opportunity to create and deliver this online course to Bowen Island residents. It was a wonderful experience.