

Teaching the Page One Moment (the essentials in summary)

1. Set up the idea of writing for the “Stranger/Reader” walking in on any moment of one’s life.¹
2. Explain that we will be working with two basic questions:
 - ▶ Where would you like the Stranger/Reader to meet you on your Imaginary Page One?
 - ▶ How will you be able to get that Stranger/Reader to care about what is happening particularly to you?
3. Model a small “build-your-own” menu of fertile Page One meetings, where you pick from a variety of different categories, like a takeout counter where you get to choose your base, your meat, your veggies, your dressing, etc.
 - ▶ In a variety of periods in a lifetime:
 - ▷ One or two out of early childhood
 - ▷ One or two out of adolescence or coming-of-age
 - ▷ One or two turning points in later adulthood
 - ▶ In a variety of tonal compositions:
 - ▷ Joy/triumph
 - ▷ Pain/loss
 - ▷ Stillness/reverie
 - ▷ High drama/packed with action
 - ▶ In a variety of narrative treatments:
 - ▷ Chronological—moving forward
 - From the voice of that moment
 - From the voice of the one doing the remembering
 - Jumping back and forth in time
4. Help each newcomer to play-act one or two openings, testing each one for
 - ▶ Strength in engaging a Stranger/Reader in that chosen moment
 - ▶ Dramatic offshoots that will allow it to move forward
 - ▶ Possibilities in terms of each writer’s comfort zone
 - ▶ Relationship to the larger story that each writer wishes to tell
5. Explain the nature of slowing down into the opening of one’s choice.
6. Make sure each newcomer leaves with a Page One plan of action.
 - ▶ If time allows, go quickly around the room a second time to review how each newcomer will structure their opening
7. Finally, extend the “courage to write badly.”
 - ▶ Encourage everyone to bring all of the drafts they generate so that the notion of a workshop will be real.

Concepts to Be Introduced on Day One

- ▶ The Stranger/Reader
- ▶ Book Time
- ▶ The Imaginary Page One
- ▶ “There-ness” as opposed to “About-ness”

Please refer to the glossary if you need extra help in explaining these concepts.

¹ This Page One Exercise must be repeated in full, even if there is only one newcomer in the group; however, it can be drastically abbreviated by having each member of the ongoing group introduce themselves with their Page One while you cover the various points we have outlined in our “build-your-own” menu. Once the introductions have been completed, you can take your new student/students quickly through play-acting their Page Ones, then conduct the workshop as usual with readings out of ongoing projects, returning at the end to the new students’ plans of action and permission to write badly.

Review for Facilitators

Ideally your goal will be to have each newcomer tell their scene so vividly that the others in the room will not be able to wait for the next working session to see where that scene might go. By the end of the first working session, you will have been able to image not one, but a multitude of possible next steps, based on what was offered: steps to take the reader backward into a memory contained within a memory; steps to take the reader into the next stage of whatever drama has begun to unfold.

Remember to let your mind wander, as you go around the room listening to each person's story, as one person will give so much detail you will be unable to follow, while the next one will offer so little, you won't know where to begin.

Do let your mind wander. Its wandering will be your source of clues as to when the narrative went off. You will snap to attention the minute that the story calls you. What called you back, you will find, often resonated for the others as well, even if it was spoken in a rush, mired in a lot of peripheral material.

Before you lose the story fragment's shape, draw an outline around it, first in your mind, while you are actually listening, and then later out loud, when your speaker has come to a stopping place, so that other group members can go back to it and work with it.

Invite the group to play around with those strong moments, finding as many ways to use them as springboards for the story of the person who is speaking, all the while reminding the group that the decision as to how or whether to use it is really the speaker's alone.

If you make it clear that your play with the materials offered is only to inspire and not to impose shapes, you can relax into rearranging the narrative pieces into one rapid tableau after another, offering each one as a possibility to the speaker, but assuming that later, when they get home, at a moment in the shower, they will come up with a new tableau, inspired by the examples, but entirely their own.

Working with the Group

To keep our blank slate effect:

1. Discourage students from answering and asking those reality questions that will destroy the use of the group to play-act the Stranger/Reader who does not yet know what will happen.
2. Explain how the mystery of the work unfolding on the page will be broken by answers to well-meaning questions such as:
 - ▶ How did your brother die?
 - ▶ Was he a baby or already a grown-up?
 - ▶ Did you end up keeping the child?
 - ▶ What did you do that landed you in prison?
3. Explain how admitting only information that came from the writer's own framing of their opening page and direction will protect
 - ▶ The privacy of the writer until they are ready to tell more
 - ▶ The integrity of the story being written so that the creation of suspense/concern can be real