

## Allegra Lingo's Teaching Philosophy

As with all assignments in this course, I will keep my writing philosophy brief.

But first, I have a secret to share with you.

I am not the best writer in the world.

I am a writer. My writing process and the ways that I choose to interpret the world around me through words is unique, and I owe any success that I've had in working with words to the following:

- Dr. Gail Griffin, English professor at Kalamazoo College
- Dr. Dawn Duncan, English professor at Concordia College
- The books I surround myself with, mainly the works of James Joyce, Jostein Gaarder, and Roald Dahl.
- The Rockstar Storytellers
- My former students

My goal in teaching is not to turn you into me. Frankly, that would be quite scary for all people involved. My goal is to help you find and develop your own voice.

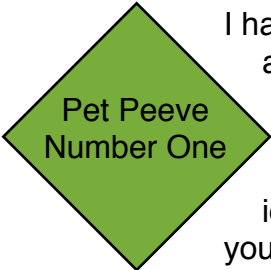
Think of me as a German tour guide in New York. The one holding the pink umbrella over her head while wearing a really proper black suit so that her tour group knows what direction they're headed. I'm going to lead the group from Central Park to the Empire State Building, and point out landmarks along the way. But I don't necessarily know what you'll find interesting. Maybe you'll be taking pictures of all the street vendors along the way, while someone else hunts for celebrities. A third person will be focusing on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. All of those interests and viewpoints are equally valid. Nothing takes precedent over the others. This is why I feel discussion and the sharing of work amongst a group is so important in a creative writing class. I can teach you my viewpoint, and I can guide you on ways to craft language, but you never know who will give you the inspiration or the idea that propels you forward.



*This is how you should think of me. Except, not in China. Like this woman is.*

My courses are not limited to creative non-fiction writers, although that is my primary genre. Many of the exercises we will do easily translate to all genres of prose. I do not have any experience in poetry, and limited experience in writing plays (other than monologues), so as a teacher I would prefer not to be asked to critique or workshop those forms of writing. I am happy to steer you towards mentors in those areas.

I have two pet peeves in writing. They are, in fact, the only two that I will discourage you from using in anything you write during this course.



Pet Peeve  
Number One

I have a serious aversion to the beginning structure “It is [insert year]. I am [insert age].” I realize that this is my personal preference, and is a common beginning sentence structure for many writers. I tend to have a very literal brain, and it immediately takes me out of a piece because I start thinking, “um, no, it is not 1975. In fact, I have no idea what that means, anyways, because I wasn’t even born. And you? Are so not thirteen years old. I saw your picture. You could maybe pass for twenty-five, but not thirteen.” I’d rather know what time period it is by the car parked outside the house. Or what you’re watching on TV. Or how big the flare is in your jeans.



Pet Peeve  
Number Two

I fucking hate swearing in written pieces. Yes, my use of “fucking” in that last sentence was intentional. My own daily speech (really, all forms of personal communication) is peppered with speech patterns that would rival an Irish sailor hitchhiking through Greece looking for new places to base-jump. This would probably be because I learned a lot of words from an Irish sailor hitchhiking through Greece looking for new places to base-jump. Swearing is often used by writers and performers for one of two reasons:

One: as an easy joke.

Two: To shock.

Okay, here’s the thing. Easy jokes won’t take you very far. Yes, some people may laugh, but there are always more interesting ways to say something. Secondly, strong language does not hold the same shock value as it once did in our culture. So, really, readers and audience will fall in to one of two categories. One: possible mild amusement, but nothing more. Two: will be very much offended, and they will only focus on that.

Don’t believe me? In 2005 there was a full-length documentary called “Fuck” that was released to address the use of that word. And what was the first thing you heard about the TV show “Deadwood”, or something that someone mentioned to you when they were recommending the show? Chances are, the phrase “fucking cocksucker” was whispered at some point in that conversation.

I will admit that I used to use strong language in my writing. I stopped this practice about three years ago, and I honestly do think it has forced me to think more creatively about language.

The only, and I mean *only*, exception to this rule is in a line of dialogue where you are quoting someone verbatim.

To sum up:

1. No “it is [insert year], I am [insert age]” sentence construction.
2. No swearing.

Those are the only two things I will force you to change in your writing in this course. Everything else? Suggestions.

This course is designed for beginning, intermediate, and advanced writers. As mentioned above, inspiration can come from anyone at any time so I don't choose to limit participation based on arbitrary self-assessment of writing skills. In the movie *Ratatouille*, Chef Gusteau's mantra is “anyone can cook”. My philosophy on writing is the same.

So, I thank you for joining this class. And now? Let's have some fun.

For those who are interested, the word count on this writing philosophy is 965.



*The rat can cook. And you can write.*