The Creative Writing Center

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FIRST A BRIEF TANGENT.

English depends on **binary oppositions**, or paired categorie
of ideas that organize ways of knowing.

These categories are socially constructed,
culturally learned, historically contexted, reflexive, and
naturalized.

Such structures reflect, inform, and justify understandings
about the world.

**Often, hierarchical bias favors
one opposition over the other, according to
institutionalized patterns of privilege and dominance.**

good | bad
west | east
light | dark
strong | weak
male | female
civilized | savage
teacher | student
rational | emotional
pure | impure
white | not-white

We often use binary oppositions to categorize texts and writing:

academic | creative
non-fiction | fiction
biography | memoir
prose | poetry
literary | genre
serious | frivolous
useful | useless

Categories, however, can **overlap**, **blur,** or **fall short**. Between margins, language fails.

Language hates a vacuum.

So it generates new categories to describe what was previously undefined.

This is much less confusing.

Prose poem
Flash fiction
Creative non-fiction
Slam poetry
Micro novel
Hypertext

Consider the distinction between "creative" and "non-creative" writing.

How are these categories defined? Who defines them?

What **values** or **perceptions** do they reflect/reproduce about certain kinds of writing (or certain kinds of writers?)

In other words: when we teach a particular "category" of writing, are we teaching implicit limitations?

However, underdogs have a certain freedom, too.

- Lowered stakes
- Less at risk
- Language = playground
- Focus on craft
- Experimentation
- Democratic
- Accessible

All of that just to say:

With this workshop, I aim to blur the distinction between "academic" and "creative" writing in the Writing Center, and share some exercises I've used to help students enrich their
language and their enjoyment of it.

ATTACKING ABSTRACTIONS

Exercise 1
Abstraction inventory
Cluster map embedded meanings
To raise the heat: make it competitive

Discuss & identify themes.
Title the map.
Then use all of the words in a
poem/story/essay/article

ATTACKING ABSTRACTIONS

Exercise 2
Treasure hunt for abstractions in your/a peer's essay.
Cluster map.
How would replacing these abstractions with more specific words change meaning?

Example: "Praise Song for the Day"

BREAKING CLICHE

Exercise
Cliché' inventory **OR**
Treasure hunt your/a peer's work
Break them open to defamiliarize
Rewrite

Example: "Wipe That Simile Off Your Aphasia"

BREAKING LINES

Exercise 1

Redraw line breaks in a poem. Compare to original.
How do line breaks change tone & emphasis?

Example: e e cummings

Exercise 2

Reverse outline your/a peer's essay
Rearrange idea / sentence order
How does this change flow?
Especially in the introductory/concluding paragraphs?

ELEVATING LINES

Exercise
Identify "transparent" vs "ornamented" lines in a passage
Where does the language begin to rise? How do you know?
What makes a line catch your attention?
What is the emotional effect?
Now elevate the transparent, and simplify the ornamented sentences.

Example: "The Flying Cat"~

REFINING NUANCE

Exercise
Describe an object in the room through the following lenses:
Grief
Anger
Infatuation
Hysteria
How does vocabulary change tone & meaning?
Interpretation?

Example: Freeway 280

CONTROLLING TONE

Exercise
Invent an audience and/or author
Compose an argument for the following claim:

Eating fast food is good for you.

Tailor your argument to your audience
Or from your author (or both)
Consider key words, vocabulary, and logic specific to your audience/author.

DEVELOPING VOICE

Exercise 1: Person
Write an author's bio about yourself using singular 3rd person. Now change it to 2nd. Then to 1st. Then to both collective 3rds (We, They)

How does the change in voice impact the feeling of the piece? Or your process in writing it?   Which feels the most distant? The most intimate? Discuss appropriate situations for each.

DEVELOPING VOICE

Exercise 2: Imitation
Select two authors with distinctive writing styles.
Analyze a passage. How does the author craft his or
her sentences to create that style?
Write an essay in the "voice" of both authors.
What techniques did you consciously employ?

Examples: David Foster Wallace
*   Jamaica Kincaid*
*   Annie Proulx*
*   Vladimir Nabokov*

DEVELOPING RHYTHM

Exercise 1
Define meter & scantion
Scan a poem
Then scan song lyrics
Then scan your essay

Exercise 2
Rewrite a passage of your essay in iambic pentameter

I could keep going...

TION

Questions? Suggestions?
Demonstrations?