

中国第一本原创英汉双语创意写作指南

写出 心灵深处的 故事

WRITING STORIES FROM OUR HEARTS

A Creative Guide to the Art
of Nonfiction Writing

非虚构创作指南

(英汉双语版)

李华 著

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献  给

兰达夫人和我的学生们

To

Mrs. Lander and my students



亲爱的朋友：

很高兴本书的英汉双语版终于能和大家见面了。从我2006年回国在人民大学开设第一门英语创意写作课到今年，已经过去了九个年头。期间，我有幸和几百位同学在课堂上一共用英语来实践创意写作，并且和社会各界朋友用汉语来一起尝试创意写作，我发现，英汉双语的碰撞和交流让我们的思维更加丰富、活跃、富有创造力，而英汉双语的创意写作无疑是激发这种创造力的最佳方式之一。

本书的中文版于2014年1月由人民大学出版社出版以来，广大读者给予了我极大的鼓励和支持，其中有我敬重的长辈，有经过“死荫幽谷”的母亲，有身处逆境仍追求不息的年轻人，有在各行各业努力工作并积极思考的人们。在此，我向大家表示深深的敬意和感谢，也特别想和大家分享两位读者的来信。

一位北京的读者这样写道：“您的这本书成为上个月我们家庭的‘中心读物’和‘热点话题’。拿到书后，我和我爱人在地铁上就迫不及待地读了起来。我们一口气读完了您的书，感觉深受启发，也仿佛成为了您课堂上的学生，与您展开了无声的纸上交流。我爱人平时就喜欢写写东西，今年正好赶上他毕业五周年，他刚好想写几笔回忆下研究生岁月。在写的过程中，他受到您的创意写作与真实态度的启发，尽情地回忆了那两年时光，并在一稿后几经修改，还与我分享讨论。我们俩在这里要感谢您和您的这本书，感谢您启迪我们去挖掘、探索、思考。”

一位上海的读者来信说，他因欠下多家银行信用卡无力偿还，只能去狱中服刑，但在此之前，他迫切地需要从书中找到未来生活的出路，所以他就三次去书城选书，最后一次他看到了我的书，觉得受到了真正的鼓舞，书中自由写作的理念对他极大的释放。他说他终于可以去面对狱中的日子，相信那里对一个真心寻求真理的人将会是一个神圣的殿堂。他希望，我的课堂能涉及更广的领域，包括“牢门之内”，因为“教育是一种奉献给所有人的爱”！

我的心被每一封这样的来信感动着，震撼着：但愿创意写作能释放更多的心灵，让每一颗心都能走出困境，探索美好，拥抱生命！

我从2008年开始写本书的英文版，当时的一大心愿是让高校的广大师生能看到一本从心里写出来的、独特的、不同于传统写作教材的英语非虚构创作指南，让更多的同学能在英语写作课堂上自由写作，直到写出感人至深的作品，让更多的英语写作老师能经历和同学们一起耕耘、一起成长的喜悦。对社会上广大的英语爱好者，我更是希望这样一本书能成为你的好朋友，让你突破英语学习中的瓶颈，在英语写作中真实自然地表达你的思想和情感。

感谢清华大学出版社，我的心愿终于在2015年圆满实现了，不仅是英语版，而且是英汉双语版：希望这两种不同的语言能让你对创意写作有更深、更全面的理解，帮助你成为一个更有创造力的、超越国界的地球人和双语作者。

英语完全可以成为你心灵的语言，中文更是有很多等着你去发现的美妙之处，但是最重要的是，你要写出你自己心灵深处的故事，那时语言就不再是束缚，而是帮助你飞翔的翅膀了。相信你会飞得更高、更远！

你的朋友

李华

2015年3月于北京



To the reader and fellow writer

Dear friend,

Did you pick up the book because you were attracted by the picture on the cover? Or the title “Writing Stories from Our Hearts” just warmed your heart? Or the genre of nonfiction impressed you? Or the bilingual version interested you? No matter what, I am glad you picked it up, and I hope you will enjoy reading the book.

This book is meant for you to read first, and if you enjoy the reading, it is my hope that you will also enjoy the writing aspect. For this simple reason, all you need is an open heart to read and enjoy first, and then, you will be inspired to write!

I wrote this book first in English with the hope that university teachers and students may use it in their English creative writing classes, so you will find in the English version a letter to my fellow teacher and a syllabus for the students. If you are not on the university campus, that does not mean you are less important. Far from it. I firmly believe that education is a life-long journey and only the ones who keep learning after graduation from college truly understand the fun of it. If possible, find some kindred spirits to read this book together, to form a writing group and encourage each other to write. If you cannot find anyone, you always have me and my students in the book as your faithful friends and fellow writers.

Please read the book with an open heart, not a tight mind. I believe creative writing is, first of all, a person’s intimate conversation with his/her heart, and as an

honest writer and teacher, I cannot think of a better way to show you how to write than to share with you part of my personal journey, and, with my students' permission, the paths that some of them had taken and enjoyed. I am not assuming any authority here: all I have is an honest heart trying my best to tell truthful stories and encouraging my students to tell the truth in their lives. I hope you are inspired and encouraged, and may seriously seek the purpose of your life in this creative writing class, whether you are reading this book by yourself or in a class.

Since the Chinese version of this book was published by Renmin University Press in January 2014, I have been warmly encouraged by readers of various ages and backgrounds telling me how the book has set them free and inspired them to write. In May 2014, I received a long letter from Shanghai, written by a friend who was in deep debt and had no choice but go to prison. Before serving his time in prison, this friend felt an urgent need to search for the meaning of life, so he went to a big bookstore three times to look for a good book--- the last time, he saw my book and just could not stop reading! Thus we started our correspondence and I was always amazed by his honesty, warmth and insight. He was truly empowered by the free writing concept. He said he had never been happier than the year 2014 because he finally found a good teacher and friend. What an encouragement for me. On Teacher's Day in 2014 he sent me the last message wishing me all the best. And I pray that he will find peace and freedom of heart in prison, a holy place for a real seeker.

I sincerely hope that the bilingual version will reach more friends and inspire you to become international writers. Wherever you are, regardless of your age, profession, gender, or nationality, you are free to write, in English or Chinese or both, to explore the meaning of your life, at any given stage. Not for fame or money, not out of obligation or fear, just write to honor your own life, to be honest with yourself as early as possible, and to live out the truth courageously.

Best wishes,

Li Hua



In 1988 as a guest of the Chinese Writers Association in Beijing, I wrote an essay for the *Los Angeles Times* entitled “A Renaissance in Modern Chinese Literature” . In it I stated that: “a new revolutionary rationale has infiltrated an old-culture consciousness. China is in transition—economically, socially, and politically—but nowhere are the changes more dramatic than in its literature.”


In Hua Li’s book *Writing Stories from Our Hearts: a Creative Guide to the Art of Nonfiction Writing*, we are invited to engage yet again in a new revolutionary rationale of eclecticism that will distinguish an entire generation of authors, devoted in their prose to crossing national borders in pursuit of a global conversation in the arts. “Art” is the key word in Hua Li’s title. The motivation to write nonfiction lies in the ability to view both one’s personal and world experience as an endless vista of narrative possibilities and to explore craft as a condition of art. What is not lacking in either is imagination and the articulations of a universal vision. If the great Chinese Tang Dynasty poets Li Bai and Du Fu were asked today: What are you here to do in the world?”, they would respond: “I am an artist. I am here to live out loud.”

What Hua Li has accomplished in this vibrant, incisive guide to writing nonfiction is a journey into the very core of self-expression, a foundation on which to build a lasting testament to personal reflection and the day-to-day practical approaches to writing. From the opening chapter’s emphasis on writing as an “action” , with

its exploration of the freedoms born of an “open” response to experience—to the succeeding chapter’s call to write from the heart, where writing nonfiction is an “art”, crafted by the powers of imagination, Hua Li invites us into a world of sustained creativity where the heart is a prime mover and the story is what it moves. And, as reflected in the closing chapter, the journey has its destination, a “coming home” to what is universal in the shared global experience of all writers.

As readers, we share as well in the creation of art that is both public in its discourse and private in its inspiration. Hua Li has given us an informed view into the creative avenues of the imagination with all its starts and stops, detours, misfires, and accelerations. She asks us to immerse ourselves in the most profound and primitive instincts, the instincts to create, to build a whole out of separate parts. The book aids us as a guide in our pursuit of discriminating between fact and fiction, which is a fundamental premise for nonfiction writing. And so it is, that nonfiction, as a craft, has in its eclectic nature the power to advance a globalization of the arts. Only through the sharing of many voices and many cultures can we begin to break down the borders in communication and share in a community of trust. Hua Li has done just that. This is the journey we gratefully share through her insightful guide to writing nonfiction from the heart.

Dr. James Ragan
Director Emeritus
Professional Writing Program
University of Southern California



To my fellow teacher

My dear fellow teacher,

Thank you for choosing this book to teach your creative writing class—probably this is your first time to teach a creative writing class. How exciting! I sincerely hope this journey will be inspiring for both you and your students.

In this book, I want to offer a personal, creative guide to the art of nonfiction writing, so I use my stories and my students' stories to demonstrate what it is like for us to be creative, not because we are perfect, but because we are real people just like you and your students—I hope our stories will touch your heart and encourage you to write together with your students, and to experience the joy and peace that only creative writing can bring to you all.

This book encourages you to be appreciative and supportive of your students. Creative writing is a sensitive art, and all writers are vulnerable, especially the beginning writers. In this book, you will see how my professor and colleague responded to my stories, and how I commented on my students' stories—we truly saw the strength and beauty in each story. With this positive insight, we could give constructive feedback to our students and improve their writing.

This book takes your students onto a creative writing journey with specific guidance for each stage. Part I invites the students to write freely and responsively, to prepare the students' hearts to write their own stories; Part II guides the students to

write a memoir and a report, and then venture into imaginative writing; Part III brings the students home by re-creating their stories in Chinese and sharing their original stories through public reading. I hope this will be a meaningful journey for your students to discover themselves.

Below is a tentative schedule for your reference:

Week 1: Let's Begin the Journey. The goal is to start the students to think for themselves what creative writing is, let them have a taste of free writing, and ask them to write a real letter.

Week 2-3: Free Writing. The goal is to train the students to write freely, to free up their writing muscles and build up the strength gradually—in three weeks, they will be able to write three times a week, each time 20 minutes non-stop and fill at least 2 A4/standard letter size pages. Then they will keep it up and continue to do free writing in their journal, to prepare for their memoir and report writing. Feel free to give any prompt in class—the whole purpose of this chapter is for the students to write freely and continuously!

Week 4-5: Response Writing. The goal is to inspire the students to respond to art, especially to nonfiction stories, so that they will be more familiar with the genre of nonfiction and be more connected with the real people in the nonfiction stories. The homework I suggest here requires them to respond to at least one nonfiction book, which will take three weeks to complete—again, the purpose is for them to form a habit of responding to other authors compassionately so that they will be better writers themselves.

Week 6-7: Film Review. This chapter is optional. Film review is a special kind of response writing. For students who are really inspired by films, this chapter can open their eyes to see more truth in a film and they will be truly responsive. One thing we have to bear in mind is that films are usually fictional, which is different from nonfiction. So, if you want to focus on the genre of nonfiction, you can have students read this chapter on their own, and spend more time doing free writing and response

writing in these two weeks—for example, you can respond to the two nonfiction books mentioned in Chapter 3 “Response Writing”, *tuesdays with Morrie* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. It is really your call.

Week 8-11: Memoir First Draft and Memoir Final Draft. These two chapters are the core of the book, showing us clearly the whole process of creating and revising a unique memoir. You will give students two weeks to do free writing, to prepare their hearts to write the first draft. After you collect their first drafts, I suggest that you write specific and compassionate comments for them, meet them individually or in a small group or conduct a class workshop to talk about their stories—depending on the number of your students, you do your best. In class, it will be good for the students to see what a first draft is like, and then what a final draft is like. You may use Martin’s story in these two chapters as a sample or a story that your student writes. Be patient and gentle. Only very brave students dare to share their first drafts of memoir in class—respect your students and let them follow their hearts. After you return the first drafts to your students, give another 2-4 weeks for them to write the second and final draft and complete the portfolio.

Week 12-15: Report. This chapter requires the students to work with their group members, to conduct interviews and to incorporate interviews in their reports. You can watch over your students and make sure they are on the right track. You may give your students 4-6 weeks to complete the report portfolio.

Week 16: Imaginative Writing. This chapter is optional. The purpose here is to challenge the students to transcend their current circumstances and to use their imagination to write more truthfully and courageously. This is a good transition from nonfiction to fiction and usually students enjoy it very much.

Week 17: Re-creating Our Stories in Chinese. This chapter is also optional. In class, the students may start to re-create part of their stories in Chinese. The purpose here is for the students to understand that the ultimate goal of writing stories is to break down the borders and help people to understand each other, especially their own

compatriots. It will mean so much if the students can share the Chinese version with their family members and friends.

Week 18: Public Reading. This is really the climax of the creative writing class. Your students have been working so hard the whole semester, and a public reading gives them a wonderful opportunity to be heard. If possible, make sure every student will have a chance to read a story. Depending on the number of your students, you may devote week 16, 17 and 18 all to public reading in class.

Usually we don't have midterm and final exam in a creative writing class, and you may use a memoir as a midterm and a report as a final exam.

How do we grade our students' final drafts? The story itself is always more important than the language. In this book, you will read different stories written by my students: some use more sophisticated language than others, which does not necessarily mean they are superior writers—depending on the nature of the story, simple language may suit certain stories better. To me, all the stories selected in this book have found the right language for themselves. Of course, if the student's language is so problematic that it gets into the way of the story, then we have to lower the score.

How do we comment on students' final drafts? In my practice, I usually have some students read their final drafts in class, and usually I would give positive comments, focusing on the content and how the story inspired me to feel and to react, which, I think, is the best way to show my appreciation toward the students for their hard work and to encourage them to continue to write. Most of the comments you read in this book are just like that. I know this is very different from a traditional writing class, in which the teacher would usually point out the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the final draft. Nevertheless, I found the positive approach has worked really well in a creative writing class: starting from free writing, response writing, first draft, second draft, all the way to the final draft, the students have truly done their very best and all they need at the end is to be appreciated just the way they are, not how they should continue to improve. Of course, all students have room for improvement, but

that may take years of efforts, whether it is the art of the story-telling or the English language. For the prepared minds, the teacher's encouragement is the most important thing they need to pursue further in creative writing.

I hope the story goes on for you and your students after your class is over. The last chapter "The Story Goes On" shares with you the journey that some of my students and I have taken after our class was over, and how this book came to be published. You may ask the students to read it on their own, at the end of the semester. Yes, as human beings we will have successes and failures, but love never fails.

Wishing you a wonderful and fruitful semester of teaching creative nonfiction writing!

Sincerely,

Li Hua



In this creative writing course, we will embark on a journey to discover ourselves through writing nonfiction stories in English. We will write in English from our hearts.

We will learn to do “free writing”, which means that you will be given complete freedom to write in English without being concerned about your grammar or spelling. We will write responses to nonfiction stories, songs, poems, films, or anything that triggers you or moves you. We will keep an English journal in which we are honest with ourselves—you don’t have to share it with others if you don’t want to, but you are writing it for your own sake.

Equipped with the above creative writing techniques, we will be more sensitive to the voices in our hearts and learn to capture them in our English writing. For this semester, our goal is to write and revise two nonfiction stories. First, you will write a memoir about a significant experience in your life, whether it is a childhood memory, or a comparatively more recent adventure. Second, you will write a report, which requires you to interview a person and include it in your report.

For each nonfiction story, we will conduct workshops to help each other to revise and improve based on the teacher’s and other students’ feedback. We may have a one-on-one conference, which means that you will meet the teacher individually to discuss your work. Or, we may have a group conference, in which you will have one or two classmates in addition to your teacher to discuss each other’s work. We will learn to do

peer reviews in an open and supportive atmosphere. You will be guided to give specific and constructive advice to your peers, which will help you to be a better writer and reader yourself.

Textbook:

Writing Stories from Our Hearts: A Creative Guide to the Art of Nonfiction Writing

by Li Hua

Books to Read:

- 1) *tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom
- 2) *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

Remember: the focus of this class is writing, not reading. All the readings serve as springboards to help you to write. Also, you will spend a lot of time both in class and out of class writing, but not thinking or worrying about how to get your writing done. Creative writing is meant to be an action—fun, exciting and has its own mystery.

Although English is a foreign language for many of you, this does not mean that you have to copy others and hide your true self. Plagiarism is not acceptable in this class.

This course is designed for you, the students. You need to take ownership of the class. There will be a public reading at the end of the semester when you will read one of your stories to the public. Please don't panic now—by that time, you will know clearly what story you want to share and you will enjoy reading your story.

No midterm or final exam. Your grade will be based upon the quality of your work and the progress you make in each draft.

Please respect everyone in the class. Listen to your teacher and classmates attentively and be open to their perspectives. We all have different strengths and weaknesses. You are not worse than anyone else in the class and you are not superior to others, either.

Let's begin the journey together.