

高校英语选修课系列教材

Writing Stories from Our Hearts

A Guide to the Art of Creative Nonfiction

英语非虚构创意写作教程

——写出心灵深处的故事

李 华 著

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内 容 简 介

这不仅是一本教会我们从事英语非虚构创作的写作指南，更是一本教会我们如何热爱生命，如何用爱去拥抱这个并不完美的现实世界的人生指南，是一本充满生命气息的写作教材。本书从理念上突破了传统写作教学方法的束缚，倡导自由写作，使同学们能用“心”去体会，从根本上规避了套版作文弊端，使学习者能够用“心”去体会。

本书可供高校英语和非英语专业的本科生使用，也可以作为英语非虚构创意写作的学习者的参考书。

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**To
Mrs. Lander
and
My Students**

Foreword

In 1988 as a guest of the Chinese Writers Association in Beijing, I wrote an essay for the *Los Angeles Times* titled *A Renaissance in Modern Chinese Literature*. 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 Li Hua’s book *Writing Stories from Our Hearts: A Guide to the Art of Creative Nonfiction*, 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 Li Hua’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 or 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 Li Hua 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 write. 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 chapters’ call to write “from the heart”, where writing nonfiction is an “art”, crafted by the powers of imagination, Li Hua 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. Li Hua 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 of instincts, the instinct 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 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. Li Hua 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 of
Professional Writing Program
University of Southern California

Preface

I write with great pleasure and pride to applaud for the publication of Li Hua's *Writing Stories from Our Hearts: A Guide to the Art of Creative Nonfiction*. It marks the first of such guidebooks in English as a foreign language in mainland China.

I came to know Li Hua's play *The Mighty Hand* while I was doing research on creative writing as a Fulbright scholar at University of Iowa in 2013. I was both surprised and thrilled to find someone who had been teaching creative writing since 2006, three years before I did at Sun Yat-sen University.

I wrote to her immediately. It was not until after a while that she responded. Although I put "creative writing" in the subject of my email message, Li Hua did a bit of a research on me before confirming that she actually had a colleague in southern China. After all, creative writing in English as a foreign language was few and far between in the country. She was the first person with an MFA in the field to offer a creative writing course in a mainland university, and I was very likely the second one, followed by Shan Xiaoming at China University of Petroleum in 2014¹.

Li Hua's passion for creative writing was contagious when we met in early 2014. We talked about how we were touched by the stories our students wrote, and how frustrated we were because few people understood the point and power of creative writing in the department of English in China. It felt like meeting an old friend, not only because of her

1 It was not until last year that I found a few more like-minded teachers in a number of other universities. They came to teach creative writing either because they had been exposed to creative writing courses outside China or because of their love for the writing of literature. A couple of them, Xiao Xingzhen at Xiamen University and Sui Gang at Beijing International Studies University, actually taught creative writing on and off since the late 1990s.

warm personality, but also because we spoke the same language when it came to creative writing.

Li Hua is ahead of me again in writing a textbook. While mine has been going slow, hers came out first in 2014. I felt the same passion for creative writing in the book like I saw in Li Hua in our first meeting. As the title of the book suggests, she wrote from her heart, and she helped her students to do the same.

This guidebook works very well for beginners in that Li Hua writes as a teacher who knows exactly how to encourage students who are either unwilling to write, or too scared to write, or have no clue how to get started. She writes as a friend who opens her heart to the reader through her own writing, and demonstrates how her students open up through writing at different stages. She showcases her students' works and how they have been improved through workshops and revisions.

Li Hua writes in a friendly and encouraging tone not usually found in a guidebook that is, more often than not, matter of fact. The sincerity in her tone deserves and demands attention, and inspires and commands the reader to get started with writing.

I congratulate Li Hua and her students on the publication of this textbook. Written from the heart, the book will touch the hearts of many students.

I thank Li Hua for pioneering both in teaching and textbook writing, and for letting me see what I can contribute respectively.

Fan Dai
Sun Yat-sen University

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.

If you have never studied creative writing before, please don't worry. This book is meant for you to read first, and you may read it through to get an idea of what creative writing is all about. And then, all you need is an open heart to explore each chapter together with 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 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.

At the beginning of each chapter, there are warming-up activities, which are designed to break the ice at the beginning of each class and bring the creative element into the class. You may play the game for 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes or 20 minutes, depending on what you want to achieve in the class. You may design your own games too. When the students feel connected, free and happy, they are already inspired! I always like to start my creative writing class with some activities which make all of us more alive and ready to write.

The core of a creative writing class is always “creative” and “writing”. The warming-up activities, free writing, any surprises—these are all creative. Free writing, response writing, poem writing—these are all writings. Make sure students always spend some time actually writing something in class. Usually we have a tendency to talk too much about writing theories in class, without doing any writing. What if it is a swimming class? Can we just walk around the pool again and again without actually plunging into the water? No way. We would have been fired if we were the swimming coach! Now as a writing coach, we need to honor writing by doing it. Even in a workshop, when we do talk about students' drafts, we want them to write down marginal comments and end comments in class, and if the student happens to be the author who wrote the memoir, I would ask the author to write a letter to that little child in the memoir—you can always find something for your students to write.

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 to you.

Weeks 2-3: Free Writing. The goal is to train the students to write freely, to free up their writing muscles and to build up the strength gradually in three weeks. They will be able to write three times a week, each time 20 minutes nonstop and fill at least two A4

size pages. Then they will keep it up and continue to do free writing in their journal and 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!

Weeks 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.

Weeks 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 find 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. You can respond to the two nonfiction books mentioned in Chapter 3 “Response Writing”, for example. It is really your call.

Weeks 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 students to see what a first draft is like and then what a final draft is like. You may use Martin’s story as a sample or a story that your student write. 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.

Weeks 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 situation 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 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.

If you want to focus more on writing the memoir, report and public reading, you may refer to the following schedule.

Week 1: Let's Begin the Journey

Weeks 2–3: Free Writing

Week 4: Response Writing

Weeks 5–10: Memoir First Draft and Memoir Final Draft

Weeks 11–15: Report

Weeks 16–18: Public Reading

Usually we don't have midterms and final exams in a creative writing class, and you

may use memoir as a midterm and report project as a final exam.

If you have two semesters to teach creative writing, then I suggest that for the first semester, your students may read the two recommended nonfiction books listed in the syllabus and respond to them, write a film review and complete the memoir project, which will lay a solid foundation for the second semester, in which they will write the report, the imaginative pieces and re-create their stories in Chinese. Of course, for each semester, public reading will be a most exciting event. And you may use the major writing assignments as your midterms and final exams.

In a traditional writing class, students are often eager to get the grade and feedback from the teacher while the teacher is usually overloaded with correcting students' papers and grading. Well, in the creative writing class, the first month is really for the students to explore on their own, and there is no need to hand in any assignment, and only when the student has finished the first draft of memoir, then the teacher will need to provide the feedback. It is natural that students will make mistakes in terms of language and grammar. My suggestion is that we should focus on the content, not on the language, and do not correct grammatical mistakes for the students because we are not editors. We must be clear about what we want to teach. In my practice, students become so interested in their stories that their language usually improves significantly.

How do we grade our students' final drafts? The story itself is always more important than the language. In the 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 take certain points off.

What kind of comments do we give to 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 traditional writing class, in which the teacher would usually point out the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the final draft. Nevertheless, I find the positive approach has worked really well in creative writing class: starting from free writing, response writing, first draft, second draft, all the way to the final draft. 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.

All writings are creative in nature. When the students taste the joy of creativity in your creative writing class, they can be creative in expository writing and academic writing as well, and you will enjoy reading their essays and articles!

I hope the story goes on for you and your students after your class is over. The last chapter "The Story Goes On" is for students to read 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 teaching creative nonfiction writing!

Sincerely,
Li Hua

Syllabus

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 have to write 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 Guide to the Art of Creative Nonfiction 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 you, it 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 midterms and final exams. 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.

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