

General Format for the First Living Words Workshop

Below you will find our suggested outline for your first Living Words Creative Writing Workshop. During the first meeting it is necessary to set some ground-rules and provide basic information about the program.

Introduction (1min): Provide plan for the workshop (how long, order of activities, etc.). Hand out journals (or whatever they will write on) and pens. If the group does not know each other, it is recommended that everyone wear a name tag. You can also use name tents (fold a piece of paper length-wise, write name on one side, and place open side down on the table so that everyone can see it).

Explain purpose of workshop (1-2min): It is important to stress why you want to offer and why you think others should participate in the Living Words program. Explain your interest and why you care to put in the time and effort to organize it. Discuss benefits (see "Why do this program" tag at top of page), such as cognitive stimulation and releasing stress by having fun with others.

Rules (1-2min): It is important to make the environment as comfortable as possible for everyone. Therefore, we recommend telling participants to do whatever they feel comfortable doing. This may only be observing the first week, but eventually sharing the story they wrote with the group during later workshops. Attendees should not feel any undo stress or pressure to do anything they do not want to do during the program - but you have to tell them that!

Give other information (1-2min): You always need to tell attendees where they can find the closest bathroom and that they can get up and leave at any time! Any other information about the setting should be given at that time. We also suggest that you tell attendees that you will hold onto their journals (or whatever they will write in) during the course of the workshops and why (so they do not have to remember to bring it with them each time). If individuals want to ensure that no one else is reading their writing then you can ask them to write "private" on the front of the journal with their name on it.

Ice Breaker (15-20min): The purpose of an ice breaker is to get attendees comfortable and talking with each other. The type and extent of the ice breaker may change depending on how well the group knows one another. The ice breaker we have used on our first workshop is based on Rhea Zackich's "Ungame" in which the participant chooses a question from a stack of cards (e.g. "Would you ever go skydiving and why?") and answers it outloud for the group. It is a great way to get everyone thinking and putting those thoughts into words. The next step is to write it down! The ice breaker may take a little longer during that first workshop, but that is ok, allow everyone to get comfortable.

Writing Activity (30min): See the tab above "Writing Activities" for lots of ideas or learn how to invite a writer to lead a workshop in "Getting Started" tab.

Wrap-up (5min): Summarize what you did during the first workshop and discuss the plan for the next workshop. Allow attendees to discuss what they liked and disliked about the workshop. Make sure to write down that feedback!

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