

General Format for a Living Words Creative Writing Workshop Session

1. The moderator introduces the writer. We recommend that the moderator and the writer (person leading the workshop) should be different.

2. The writer introduces him or herself. Generally, the writer gives an introductory anecdote involving humor. He or she may begin by saying something to the effect of, Here is what I write, and here is how I got into writing.

**It is important that the writer not linger on his or her personal connection with Alzheimer s disease. From our experience, writers that spent too much time on Alzheimer s and dementia tended to get very sad, which created a somber mood for the workshop that was hard to shake.*

3. The writer introduces the exercise (and, possibly, how he or she came up with that exercise.) The writer may have to explain the exercise a number of times. He or she should also warn the group that they will have the opportunity to share their work with the group when they are done. No one likes surprises when it comes to speaking in front of a group. Warn them in advance and keep it optional!

4. The rest of the workshop is a balance between private writing time and more expressive work time. Generally, this occurs in about 5 minute intervals. Therefore the pattern resembles something like this: individuals are given a prompt (or part of a prompt), they write privately, and then they share what they have written.

** The moderator should be aware that when the first three participants have finished, he or she needs to start wrapping up that segment of the exercise. If too many people have finished and their attention is drifting, it is can become disruptive. It is okay to stop the others when they are not yet finished. We think of this as leaving them a little bit hungry for more!*

5. Invite participants to read what they have written or offer to read what a participant has written for them. Different people are comfortable with different things, so asking, Do you want to read or do you want me to read for you? works well. If people read, comment on it! Point out what is compelling. Encourage others to comment on what other people have written.

6. Continue with the balance of private writing time and expressive work time. Offer another part of the exercise or give them a small new exercise. Some workshop sessions may be based on one prompt with many parts, while other workshop sessions may consist of smaller independent exercises or increasingly difficult versions of the same prompt. This follows with the balance of talk, write, talk, write. Humor and group interaction are extremely effective as well as variation of activity.

** Try to encourage a break from the normal pattern of the caregiver doing everything for the individual with dementia. Also, try to gently encourage people beyond their initial embarrassment or hesitation to write. (Nudge people out of their comfort zones; never shove them.) Be prepared for it to take some individuals a few workshop sessions before they feel comfortable writing or sharing!*