

---

## Weekend Courses 2024-25

### Yes, you can write: an introduction to creative writing

**Start date:** 25 April 2025                      **End date:** 27 April 2025

**Venue:** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge  
CB23 8AQ

**Tutor:** Derek Niemann & Lizzie Speller      **Course Code:** 2425NRX038

---

#### Tutor biography

**Derek Niemann** is a freelance writer specialising in natural history and life writing, and course director in creative non-fiction for ICE. In 2012, he interrupted a career writing about bees and butterflies to begin researching and writing a family history story that was published in 2015 as *A Nazi in the Family* (Short Books), based on the SS grandfather he never knew. His other non-fiction books were *A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland* (2016) and *Birds in a Cage* (2011), telling the story of four Prisoner of War birdwatchers in World War II. Derek is a country diary columnist for the Guardian. Formerly he was children's magazines editor for the RSPB (1998-2014) and has written a number of wildlife books for children.

**Elizabeth Speller** has a Cambridge MA and MPhil. and was a visiting scholar at Lucy Cavendish College. She is course director in fiction and writing for performance at ICE. Her three novels include *The Return of Captain John Emmett* (Orange Book of the Month, Richard & Judy pick) and *At Break of Day* (CNY State One Read 2015 in the US). They are published in eight countries. Her non-fiction includes *Following Hadrian* (Hodder/OUP US) and a memoir, *The Sunlight on the Garden* (Granta). She was short-listed for the Forward Prize for Poetry and provided the libretto for Michael Berkeley's work *Farewell*, written in memory of Sir Paul McCartney's wife Linda. Her journalism includes *The Independent*, the *Financial Times*, the *TLS*, and *Vogue*. She has taught at Cambridge, Bristol and Birmingham Universities. She was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Warwick and is currently completing a further novel for Virago.

## **Summary of Content**

The course sets out to cover some of the basic ingredients that make up creative writing in both fiction and non-fiction. These include description, character, plot structure and narrative voice. You will be encouraged to share your work on the understanding that these are rough drafts and not polished perfection; and everyone can learn from everyone else. Though the emphasis will be on practical exercises and sheer enjoyment of writing, we'll also scrutinise and critique different types of published writing, gaining insights from an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

## **Aims:**

This course aims to:

- build a positive, joy-filled, fear-free approach to creative writing within a mutually supportive environment
- gain a broad understanding of the various techniques that lift dull prose off the page and make it zing
- develop the confidence, through stimulating practical exercises, to stretch and develop your writing talents, both during the course and beyond

---

## Course sessions

---

### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
<b>20:30 – 22:00</b>	<b>From a potato to an octopus.</b> A worry-free guide to creative writing
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Whose story is it anyway?</b> – finding your writing voice
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Building your world</b> – mastering descriptive skills
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
<b>16:30 – 18:00</b>	<b>Plotting the storyline</b> – how to develop your narrative
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
<b>20:00 – 21:30</b>	<b>Divertimento</b> – an evening exercise playing with words
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Getting into character – how to handle personality</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Nuts and bolts</b> – a round-up session in which we look at techniques for improving style and the all-important editing process
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

**Presentation of the course:**

The course will involve a range of practical exercises, study of both fiction and non-fiction, and a good deal of class discussion.

**Learning outcomes:**

As a result of the course, you will gain a greater understanding of the subject and you should be able to:

- complete the course having gained more confidence in your writing ability
- feel more comfortable in exercising your writing muscles in different ways
- leave the course with a desire to continue writing creatively beyond the confines of the classroom

---

## Reading and resources list

---

There are no compulsory readings for this course.

However, you may find the below recommended reading list of interest to supplement your course.

Elborough, Travis and Gordon, Helen, *Being a Writer*, (Frances Lincoln 2017)

King, Stephen, *On Writing*, (Hodder & Stoughton 2000)

Moore, Lorrie, *How to Become a Writer*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's 2003)  
(from Charters, Ann, Ed. *The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction* included)

Saunders, George, *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, Bloomsbury (2021)

**Note:** Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) students are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current ICE course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*(Information correct as of April 2024)*