



Llenyddiaeth  
Cymru  
Literature  
Wales



An Essential Guide  
from Literature Wales

# Writing for Well-being

## Introduction

Creative writing offers us a way of expressing and giving language to our emotions; through writing and journaling we can process and explore our life experiences; we can share stories and enable our voices to be heard. Writing is a route towards (re)discovering meaningful relationships with ourselves, others, and the world around us, and to reigniting a sense of purpose and compassion in our daily lives.

This document offers some tips, thoughts, and suggestions on how to prepare and deliver creative writing workshops around well-being.

## How Writing for Well-being Works

It is important to note that the goal of writing for well-being is *not* publication, nor about getting the writing 'right.' Rather, writing for well-being is about giving yourself permission to write yourself well; to mindfully connect with your inner landscape and emotions, and to reflect on how you are relating to the external world.

*'Trust yourself, you can't write the wrong thing, give yourself the gift of this writing.'* - **Gillie Bolton, *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing*. (1)**

## Some key elements of practice for facilitators

- Facilitating a safe, creative workshop space.
- Participant safeguarding.
- Revealing the page as a safe space for processing emotions and life experiences.
- Encouraging creativity, curiosity, and word-playfulness.

- Offering ways into exploring with words and stories; unlocking the word-creativity and allowing it to emerge.

*'The act of writing is a gift. A simple prompt can open up a space that lets words flow and reconnects us to our sense of self. In that space we may find the things that are most important to us.'* - **Frances Ainslie & Barbara Bloomfield (2)**

## **Recommendations & suggestions**

### ***Group ground rules / alliance***

It is good practice to begin a group session by setting some ground rules which will help to create a safe space or alliance for the workshop. Here are two simple acronym examples, based on the words *crisp* and *cares*:

#### ***CRISP***

Creative, confidential  
Respect, raucous, revelrous  
I will speak for myself  
Self-care  
Privacy

#### ***CARES***

Confidentiality  
Attention  
Respect  
Empathy  
Self-care

There are many other alliances for writing groups. For a one-off session we might present the alliances above, but for a series of sessions it is worthwhile to build them

from the group and review them regularly.

*Writing about 'life' can bring up challenging emotions:* it is important to remind participants that should this happen, then they may wish to leave the page, they can always return at a future time if it feels right for them to do so.

### **Mindfulness / grounding activities**

It can be helpful to begin a session with an activity that will bring participants into the present and encourage them to give mindful focus to the session content.

Below is a suggested grounding activity based on an object - alternatively bring participants attention to their senses, or colours, or shapes:

*Mindfulness activity:* Take a moment to bring yourself quietly into the present moment - it may help to sense your feet on the floor, to feel yourself being held by the chair and to rest your attention on the natural rhythm of your breathing. When you are ready, allow your gaze to journey slowly around the room, and when your eyes find something that they'd like to rest their gaze upon, allow them to do so. Then, when you're ready, follow your gaze around the room again, until your eyes find another object that they'd like to look at. Repeat this as many times as you wish. Try not to judge or to think too much about what you're looking at and why, simply allow your eyes to roam and to look freely.

### **Writing warm up**

Taking a little time to be on the page and to write freely, even if it's just for five or ten minutes, can be a useful way to check in with how you are feeling, and to find out what's going on for you beneath the 'doing'. Bringing yourself to the page can be insightful, revealing, and helpful: we can welcome all of ourselves to our writing knowing that the page is a safe and private space to be. A writing prompt such as, 'In the here and now I am ...' can be a useful way to encourage free writing & warm up activity.

## **Writing activities**

### ***Prompts / Sentence stems***

These are great for prompting writing explorations. A single stem can enable us to discover a whole new piece of writing; encourage us to delve into our experiences and to give them life on the page. Try making up your own sentence stems, see how your writing may grow and where it can take you!

### ***Some examples:***

*In the here and now I am ...*

It may help to consider your surroundings, your senses, and to acknowledge how you're feeling - if it feels safe to do so. Notice how you're bringing your attention to the page. Try not to judge your writing, allow the words to flow freely - you don't need to stop and think about it too much!

### ***Sentence stems for exploring the senses:***

*Here, in this place of ...*

*I am seeing ...*

*I can hear ...*

*I am smelling the ...*

You can explore all the senses, or you may prefer to focus on one sense, moving more deeply into description. Our sense of smell is the sense most strongly associated with memory and is a safe way into writing about our childhood and past memories.

### ***Sentence stems for exploring the elements:***

*If I were the earth, I would be ...*

*If I were water, I would be ...*

These stems are useful for considering how you are feeling at any given moment. Consider, how are you today, what's your inner rhythm? Have you been busy and rushing about? Are you calm or relaxed? Are you feeling tired, or do you have lots of energy? Maybe you're anxious, or feeling stagnant or stuck? We can explore our 'inner rhythm' and how we're feeling using the elements as metaphor. For example:

If I were fire, I would be ... the strong heat of the sun / the flicker of flames / the slow, faint glow of an ember?

If I were air, I would be as a quiet breeze / a whispering among the leaves.

***Further activities:*** there are a variety of activities which offer potential routes into writing for our well-being, e.g. writing from metaphor; writing about place; reflective writing from poetry or prose pieces which explore particular experiential themes or emotions.

*Please see suggested further reading / resources below.*

### ***Journaling***

The page offers us a safe space for writing the self. If you are able, carve out a little space for yourself each day and bring yourself to the page. As with a free writing exercise, if you're uncertain how to begin then perhaps try considering: how you're feeling in the given moment, what you're sensing around you; explore something you've noticed in the day. If you don't have time to journal then maybe you'd like to simply note down one or two things which have captured your curiosity in the day, which have made you smile.

## Reflection / check out

It is good practice to end the session by touching in again with how people are feeling, inviting them to share some writing and / or their thoughts and reflections on the session, perhaps something positive or pertinent that they have discovered in their writing.

## Safeguarding

Sharing our thoughts, experiences and journeys can trigger uncomfortable or upsetting memories and emotions. However, expressing these in a creatively safe way can help us feel stronger, healthier, and heard as well as helping us to (re)discover meaningful relationships with ourselves, others, and the world around us.

In order to keep yourself and participants safe, it's also important that you look after your own well-being. It might be helpful to consider the following points:

- Ensure and look after your own safety and well-being
- Be clear at the start of the workshop that you are not a qualified Arts Therapist
- Be aware of the physical or emotional risks that could arise
- Prepare a contract with the participants – as suggested above using ground rules or an alliance
- Develop your skills through training in listening or counselling. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has developed an i-act course (<https://www.i-act.co.uk/>) which could help provide more information in this area.
- Work with another facilitator, if possible, of a different gender. Then, if someone does get upset, one of you can focus on them if appropriate.
- Work in partnership with professional therapists wherever possible
- Ask your commissioners / funders / umbrella organisation for supervision / mentoring if on a multi session project – at very least agree a Mental Health

First Aid number to ring for yourself or for others

- Ask your commissioner to supply another member of staff to attend the sessions who will participate but also support participants whilst you deliver
- Understand the referral process and / or project aims at the outset in order to understand potential participant backgrounds
- Ask for observation opportunities or ways to meet a new group of participants (if pre-formed) if unsure about capabilities etc
- Ask your commissioners for their support information (printed) to distribute

Working in partnership with a health organisation or charity such as NHS, Mind or the Mental Health Foundation would help provide support for safety protocols and ethics considerations.

### **Other resources:**

Further public information about Mental Health can also be found on the Royal College of Psychiatrists website: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health>.

Artworks Cymru has an Artists in hospitals toolkit with recommendations for artists: [https://artworks.cymru/uploads/images/posts/Artists\\_toolkit\\_new.pdf](https://artworks.cymru/uploads/images/posts/Artists_toolkit_new.pdf)

\*Literature Wales is not responsible for information / resources provided by third parties.

### **Simple tips**

Should a participant become upset or disclose an issue during a workshop the following tips may be helpful:

- Acknowledge the person's contribution and ask whether they need some time away from the session or are happy to continue
- Offer to provide some signposting to organisations which can help them
- Gently move the session on



- Provide follow-up information at the end of the session, if required

## Quote Citations

- (1) Bolton, G (1999) *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London
- (2) Ainslie, F, Bloomfield, B, *The Little Book of Creative Writing Prompts*, Lapidus International

## Useful contacts

- Lapidus International – the writing for well-being community. Access to online seminars, resources, writing groups, action learning sets and research discussion: <https://www.lapidus.org.uk>
- Metanoia Institute MSc Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP): <https://www.metanoia.ac.uk/programmes/career-development-pathways/msc-in-creative-writing-for-therapeutic-purposes>

## Recommended reading

- Bolton, G Field, V and Thompson, K (2006) *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London
- Bolton, G Field, V and Thompson, K (2011) *Writing Routes: A Resource Handbook of Therapeutic Writing*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London
- Bolton, G (1999) *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London
- Bolton, G (2005) *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*, SAGE publications
- Chavis, G (2011) *Poetry and Story Therapy, The Healing Power of Creative Expression*, Jessica Kingsley
- Hedges, D. (2005) *Poetry, Therapy and Emotional Life*. Oxford: Radcliffe

Medical Press

**Resource content by Kerry Steed, Louise Richards and Sarah Goodey**