

# Introduction to Creative Writing for ESL Students

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**Abstract:** This poster presentation represents the results of the pilot course in Creative Writing offered by the Center for General Education, The University of Tokushima. The presentation gives a definition of creative writing, and explains how it was taught, as well as the pedagogical goals of creative writing. Students and instructor have been meeting weekly since November 10, 2011, to participate in this non-credit course. The small group size facilitates intense instruction and discussion. Students are learning about the components of good writing, and how to generate ideas. In writing creatively, they are furthering their ability to express their opinions and ideas. Also, this course enables them to focus on topics in which they are interested, which makes writing more enjoyable. In learning and practicing fiction writing techniques, they are developing a greater appreciation for literature, and enhancing their critical skills. Ultimately, students aim to produce writing that is publishable.

## 1. Introduction to Creative Writing for ESL

### Students

Although creative writing courses are standard offerings in American and other Western universities, little attention has been given to this form of writing at universities in Japan. Traditionally, regarding English education in Japan, emphasis has been placed upon grammar and translation – an analytical left-brain approach. It appears that students' creative faculties have not been sufficiently developed in Japan, although studies in the West have shown that creative pursuits, such as the study of music, art, and creative writing, enhance skills in mathematics and

other areas.

By encouraging creativity and self-expression as opposed to rules of grammar and spelling, students gain confidence and learn to enjoy writing. Creative writing courses are often implemented in the United States to build self-esteem among underprivileged populations, and among other groups such as immigrants, prisoners, and the elderly.

## 2. Creative Writing in Practice

The Creative Writing Course is being held on the Josanjima Campus of the University of Tokushima. The initial session was held on November 10, 2011 and the course continued until mid-February for a total of 13 sessions.

Students of varying abilities discussed writings by established writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Sherman Alexie and engaged in short writing exercises. For example, in one of the first sessions, students read and discussed a famous 6-word story by Hemingway and then wrote their own 6-word stories. Initially, we concentrated on craft-based exercises. Students learned what makes a compelling beginning and an effective ending, the difference between showing and telling, how to create distinctive dialogue, the elements of a good character, and how to chart a plot. We also examined the differences between academic writing and creative writing, including experimental novels and poetry. Students produced the raw material for a piece of writing – an essay or a short story – which they refined through revisions after receiving peer critiques, and self-analysis using techniques taught in class. Their progress could be clearly seen through comparisons

of successive drafts. Students emerged with an enriched appreciation of literature, and a renewed enthusiasm for writing. This year, the course is being repeated. We hope to expand upon the project by producing a publication of participating students' creative writing at the end of the current session. Hopefully, we will be able to share students' writing with readers outside of the Tokushima University community. Perhaps this program will even inspire other universities to hold creative writing classes, as in other countries in the world.

### **3. Conclusions:**

We hope to show that the study of creative writing in English has many benefits for second-language learners. For example, we expect to reveal that practice in creative writing has helped improved the students' writing overall, has enhanced their enjoyment and understanding of written English, and has improved their critical skills.