



Faculty Packet Procedures



January 2012

MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults

I ask that all my students come to me with an open mind and heart about the process of writing. The path to a finished story is not always in a straight manner and I would like you stay flexible to the ways we need to work. If I think some writing exercises might be more helpful than writing new pages, or setting aside the main story in order to work on something else that will then allow you to return with fresher eyes, then hopefully you see the benefits of those moments. At the same time, I also want input about what you need to make your semester as useful and fulfilling as possible. I am a willing and able co-pilot, wingwoman, midwife, witch doctor in this uncharted territory called your creative mind.

Packet Procedures

Due dates for the packets will be determined at the residency. Please send them as word attachments and email them to me by 9am. I will return the packets within three to four days. Please notify me at least a week in advance if you are going to be late with a packet.

Packet Contents

Cover Letters:

These self-evaluative letters should address the areas of strength and weakness that you see in your story. Identify any troubling craft and/or story issues that you want me to address. Please include a brief paragraph about your process for the month. For instance, if you spent a lot of time revising or creating new work or reading, tell me why and how that did or did not help. Also, please reflect on my suggestions from the last packet and let me know what points you did or did not address in the current packet.

Critical Essay:

1st and 2nd Semester: Students should include one long or two shorter critical essays that have a clearly stated thesis, well structured supporting paragraphs and examples with properly cited works. Pick topics that relate directly to a craft issue that you are struggling with in your own writing.

3rd Semester: Students should turn in a first draft, or part of a first draft and well organized outline of their critical thesis, by the first packet. Creative work must also be submitted simultaneously.

4th Semester: Students should work on their annotated bibliography and prepare for their graduating lecture.

Annotated Bibliography:

All students should keep a running annotated bibliography that includes a short paragraph stating what was valuable about the reading.

Creative Work

Up to forty pages of creative work. It may include all new pages or all revision or a combination of both depending on the progress of the work. For the first packet, I might ask to see the entire manuscript depending on the project and where you want to start. I would like to work on helping you shape your education around what you would like to accomplish in the manuscript. If I see glaring spots that need your attention, I will definitely let you know, but for the most part, I want you to take control of your creative and critical work. I want students to be focused and ambitious about what they would like to accomplish and if you are unfocused, I would like to help you find your north star and really get the most out of your semester.

Communication

An honest and clear dialogue about the writing is a must for a strong semester. For some packets you might be fine with just the packet letters. Others might need an email exchange or phone call to clear up any confusion or fine tuning a thought. Let's see how it goes and if I think we need to speak verbally, I will suggest a phone call, but I prefer an email exchange first

Margaret Bechard

I bring elements of my own process to my teaching. I try to model for my students the way I look at and evaluate my own manuscripts—how I analyze, explore, experiment, and play; how I try to keep what works while also identifying what falls short. I think of myself less as a teacher and more as a mentor or coach.

I do all the packet work on-line through email and attachments. If you are my student, we will agree on dates when the packets will be due. I will expect your packet to arrive in my email in-box by noon Pacific Time.

I make comments in the manuscript margins using the Word “insert comment” and “track changes” functions. If I come to a place where I feel I have more to say than I can fit in the comment box, or if I find I want to grab a “teachable moment” and discuss some craft issue in more depth, then I move to my letter. I try to respond to every packet in two to three days; if it is going to take longer, I’ll let you know.

I don’t mind being contacted between packets, especially if there is anything confusing or that you don’t understand. I can do phone calls, although I prefer email.

I will encourage you to try new ideas and to experiment with new stories, but I am willing to work on manuscripts that you began before entering the program. I am also willing to work on material that is under contract, but only if the editor is not actively involved. I am willing to read entire novels, preferably in the first packet. Because I like revision and I like working on revisions, you may find you are doing more revision work with me, but I do try to be flexible and to tailor the packets to each student’s individual needs.

I have worked with students in all semesters, and I have worked with manuscripts in every genre. However, if you are interested in focusing on poetry, I freely admit that poetry is not one of my strengths.

If you have any other questions, feel free to ask during the interview time or grab me during free moments. And do try to talk to my former students. They know more about working with me than I do.

About my writing and my approach

I consider myself primarily a novelist, but have a good handle on picture books and non-fiction. I have been called the “structure queen,” and it’s true that I rely on principles of structure to see me through the first drafts of a novel. But once I understand the plot, I start to hear my character’s voice, and she seizes the reins. My approach to working on a novel would thus depend upon where you are in the process. I revise heavily, even when writing picture books, and would expect the same of you.

Packet procedure: We’d meet during the residency, decide on a course of study, and set due dates for each of your packets. I’d expect the packet to arrive, by email, in a word document, by 9:00 am CST on the appointed day.

Your first packet: I’d like to see an autobiography, which may be presented in any number of ways—a scrapbook, a letter. Feel free to be creative.

If we’re to work on a novel you’ve already drafted, please send it in the first packet. After I get a sense of what the novel needs, we’ll work on it in smaller chunks. Please send it by post.

Packets generally. In every packet, I’ll want to see:

- **a letter**, detailing what you’ve accomplished during the month, your struggles and successes, where you feel you need most help, etc. The more time and care you take with this letter, the better I can respond.
- **your creative work**
- **your critical work**, which should be based on your readings or some aspect of writing. It should be tight and clear; it should explore some concrete aspect of writing that’s related to your own creative work.
- **an annotated bibliography**, which, like your critical work, should be tight, clear, concrete, and related to your own creative work.

My response will:

- **consist of comments** in the margins of your work;
- **include a letter**, with detailed and concrete feedback, and suggestions as to how to proceed;
- **include a phone call, perhaps**, either to discuss or elaborate on complicated or abstract points;
- **arrive** within seven days.

The best way to reach me is by email. If you want to talk by phone, please email to schedule a call. Please feel free to email if you’re stuck, or want to clarify something.

Tom Birdseye

As a kid who struggled in school, particularly with literacy, I've relied heavily on a broad and detailed study of the craft of writing to move me along my path. What is intuitive for some, for me is learned. So it's no surprise that I'm a big fan of topics like idea generation, concept and character development, and story structure. I spend most of my time working on middle grade and crossover novels (eight so far, mostly realistic fiction), but have also written eight picture books and three non-fiction pieces. I love humor, physicality, evocative detail, and playing around with dialogue and voice. Revision should be my middle name. (It's not, it's Earl, but only my 90-year-old mother calls me that, and only when she's running short on patience.) I believe in the magic of creative incubation, originality and, more than any other aspect of writing, the power of persistence.

Working with students is a learning partnership. For my part I promise to offer prompt and detailed guidance, editorial honesty (otherwise known as tough love), and lots of encouragement. My goal is simple: to do everything I can to help you grow as a writer and critical thinker. From you I expect openness to feedback, willingness to go deep (even if the going is rough), a professional work ethic, and passion for your writing projects, all topped off with as much patience and resilience as you can muster.

At the residency we'll define and set your writing goals for the semester, come up with a plan to implement those goals, and establish due dates for the packets.

Each packet should be sent as email attachments and contain:

- A letter chronicling your writing life for the month, including struggles, victories, questions you are pondering, and questions for me to ponder. (Caveat: I tend towards the Socratic, and have been known to answer a question with a question.)
- An annotated bibliography listing books read, responses to those books (both personal and professional), meaningful connections made, and how reading them is informing your own writing.
- A critical essay on some aspect of writing that relates to your journey and goals as a writer, and to your current project(s). This is a place to go deep, beyond the obvious. Leave, as they say, no stone unturned. All cited works must be listed. First semester students: two essays, 4-5 pages each. Second semester: one longer essay. Third semester: thesis work. Fourth: graduation lecture time!
- Creative work, up to 40 pages (double spaced). Can be 20 pages of new, 20 revised. This is where everything you are learning is applied. Send nothing less than your absolute best, then we'll see what we can do to make it even better. Expect to revise, then revise some more.
- First packet should also contain a short autobiography of your life as a writer, and also what you do when not writing. Give me a mental picture of your life away from VCFA, complete with a photo.

I will respond to packets with line editing and marginalia on the text, and cover the big-picture issues in an editorial letter. When appropriate I will also assign writing exercises, specific readings, and focused revisions, and things for you to mull. You should feel free to email me with requests for clarification, additional guidance, and any good jokes you've heard lately. Phone calls are fine, too, although I turn off my cell when writing, and tend not to answer when rock climbing, skiing, or mountain biking. Otherwise, I'm available. It's part of the whole-meal deal, and my commitment to you.

Coe Booth

I've published realistic YA novels and short stories, but I'm comfortable working with other genres and with writing for younger children as well. I will be a good choice for those writing fiction (realistic, contemporary, historical, and fantasy) or non-fiction on any subject. However, I don't have as much experience with picture books, poetry, or science fiction.

Packet Process

During the residency, we will develop a plan of study and set the due dates for your packets. Each packet should contain:

- a letter detailing what you've been working on since the last packet, your writing ups and downs, and any questions you have for me. For your first packet, I'd like you to send me a 2-3-page biography about yourself and your writing life. (Feel free to get creative with this!)
- your creative work, consisting of 40 pages of writing. What you submit will vary, depending on the type of writing you're doing and where you are in your process. I will also assign exercises to help you flesh out your characters and figure out the story.
- your critical work, which will also vary depending on your semester. Your essays should be based on your readings or some aspect of craft. All critical essays must be written in MLA format with both in-text citations and a Works Cited page. I will suggest topics and assign essay revisions as needed.
- an annotated bibliography listing the books you've read during the month. There should be at least 8-10 books listed (a lot more if you're primarily reading picture or chapter books.) Approximately 3-4 books must be annotated. I'm not interested in book reviews. Rather, I'd like to see your reaction to these books from the perspective of a writer – how you responded to the books and what (if anything) you learned from them. I will also recommend books throughout the semester.

Packets are due by noon (EST) on the scheduled dates. I will respond to your work in 4-7 days. Please email your work to me in Pages, Word, or as a PDF file. I'll insert comments on your manuscript and send a separate letter with my detailed comments.

In addition to my written feedback, I will schedule phone calls with you once or twice throughout the semester. However, if you have questions or if you're feeling stuck in between packets, feel free to email me!

Bonnie Christensen

The majority of my published books are nonfiction picture books but I've written full-length plays and novels, as well as having edited a YA memoir anthology. I'm comfortable in most genres but not strong in science fiction or fantasy.

My work as an illustrator has given me insight into what constitutes a quality picture book manuscript. I'd be delighted to work with anyone who wants to dip a toe into the illustration pool.

Please send me your packet as Word documents attached to an email. I'll make comments using "insert comment" or "track changes".

During the residency we'll meet to determine your course of study as well as arrange due dates and time for packet delivery.

Each packet should include:

A letter: Please tell me about your writing, and reading experiences during the past month, as well as any revelations or confusions brought about by same.

Your creative work: Up to 40 pages of new and revised writing. We'll discuss specifics during the residency.

Your critical work, will vary depending on your semester. Please link critical essays to your reading, writing and any particular aspect(s) of craft encountered. Essays should be well structured, clear, and concise.

Bibliography (MLA format): An annotated bibliography of books you've read during the month. I'm looking for observations on craft gleaned from your reading not a synopsis.

For your first packet please include a brief autobiography and have fun with it.

My response:

It will take me roughly 4-7 days to respond. My feedback will include margin comments (possibly line edits) and a detailed letter which may include suggestions for further reading or specific exercises. Please take some time to consider my response and then send me an email with questions or concerns.

Alan Cumyn

Statement

My specialty as a teacher is in fiction -- novels and short stories -- but I'm interested in all types of writing and in the special bond that happens between writers and readers as they work together to create and to re-create the story. I pay close attention to what's on the page and how to improve that, although I'm also very interested in wider discussions of characters, motivations, story line, the structure of the piece. I don't see huge differences between the very best writing for children and for adults. For me it's all about creating a particular world, exploring and adhering to the logic of the universe the writer has made.

Procedures for working with students:

I work with students primarily via e-mail. Packets are due on previously agreed-upon dates, usually with three or four weeks in between. I live in Ottawa, Canada and require that the packet arrive by noon on the given day, Eastern time. Attachments should be in Rich Text Format (.RTF) or Portable Document Format (.PDF) files so that I can read them either in MS Word or Adobe Acrobat. I mark up the manuscripts on my tablet, including margin notes, then return them along with a detailed letter explaining my thoughts. I usually also offer students a chance for a follow-up phone conversation after they have had a few days to review my comments and suggestions. My emphasis is on making a piece better, on bringing out aspects of good writing through close examination of the work at hand: everything from structural elements to individual word choice. I try to be as positive as possible -- it's at least as important for a writer to know what is working in a given piece as it is to know what isn't working -- but a lot of the craft of improvement lies in focusing on what needs help. Normally I am able to return comments within a few days of receiving a packet. I do have a busy writing life outside of my VCFA teaching time, so I request that students keep to the schedule, although changes of course are negotiable if life intervenes in inescapable ways.

Sharon Darrow

I emphasize Characterization and Motivation, Logical Plot Sequence, and Point of View/Voice. While I tend to work a lot with novels, I also welcome picture books and poetry and I encourage those who haven't written either to give them a try. I like to see students being adventurous in their writing and reading widely for their annotations. The real story is found in revision, first drafts being exploratory forays into the imagination, middle drafts discovery drafts (the most exciting part) as you mine the imagination, and final drafts for polishing and finalizing the choices you've made. I want to see a good balance of new and revised work during the semester.

Semester Packet Procedures

At the residency we will develop your study plan and set the calendar for the semester. Each of the five packets are due around 3 ½ to 4 weeks apart with plenty of time for end of semester evaluations to be sent to the program office. You will turn in the packet materials by email and I will email that I've received them. I'll return the packet with the majority of my comments included on the manuscripts. I will also answer questions and respond to your comprehensive cover letters for each packet. I ask for an email confirmation of receipt of the packet, then after a day or so, if there are questions, we can email or speak on the telephone. I sometimes arrange a telephone conference after the first packet and/or at midterm.

Each Packet must include:

Letter dealing with the reading, study, and writing of that packet period. I want to hear about successes, struggles, attempts, questions. These letters should document your writing process throughout the semester. Much more than a list of the packet contents!

Annotated Bibliography in MLA format of current month's reading. These annotations should be a study of writing techniques and not book reviews. You may either keep a running bibliography with the new annotations highlighted or turn in only the current reading. If you do a partial list each month, be sure to send a **comprehensive semester bibliography** in the fifth packet.

Critical Work is expected of all semester levels. **First and second** semester students will send 2 short essays (3-5pages) per packet for a total of 10 essays, with the *second* semester student combining the two in one of their packets to form a longer paper (8-10 pages), a total of 9 essays. These essays should analyze a technical aspect of creative writing, one that you struggle with or want to study in depth. **Third semester** students will send a first draft of the thesis in the first packet and continue developing and revising the thesis until it is finished. **Fourth semester** students will begin work on the **graduating lecture** early in the semester and will send outlines or other requested and assigned materials throughout the semester. The lecture will be a major critical effort in the semester and will allow for learning about the differences and similarities between preparing critical or analytical material for the reading audience and the listening one. **All In-text citations & Works Cited lists must be in correct MLA format.**

Creative work will be the semester's primary focus. In **each semester**, the first packet will contain examples of your current writing for my comments and response. In the **third semester**, however, the first packet will be devoted to work on the thesis with the fiction or poetry included in order to indicate the scope of the first two semesters' creative production. This is an important moment because it will help determine what creative work must be done along with the critical thesis so that you will have sufficient graduate level work to take into your fourth **Creative Thesis** semester. The **fourth semester** is devoted to the production of a high level work of creative writing, a culmination of all you've learned and been inspired to create in the program, from which you will also select and prepare a **graduate reading**.

My Writing and My Approach to Feedback

I've published four contemporary, realistic YA novels, several short stories and one non-fiction picture book. When it comes to teaching, teen and middle-grade fiction is my sweet spot. I often find myself urging writers to "get out of the way" of their works-in-progress. In other words, I believe readers enjoy watching and listening to the characters, with as little narrative intrusion as possible, especially early on. If you dig exposition, or you're in love with the sound of your own voice, I might not be the best fit. I favor substance over style – though language is incredibly important to me. I get excited about work that takes risks. I believe revision is the key to great writing, and I will expect students to do extensive revising on both the micro and macro levels.

Packet Procedure: We'll meet during the residency, decide on a course of study, and set due dates for each of your packets. I'll expect the packet to arrive by email as a Word document (or PDF file) by 9pm Eastern Time on the appointed day.

Packet Contents:

- **First Packet Only:** Please include an autobiography and a bit about your intended audience. This can be presented in any form you'd like: a letter, a series of bullet points, from the POV of your main character, etc.
- **Cover Letter:** Each packet should include a letter detailing your thoughts about your progress, posing questions about the work you're turning in, reviewing which type of comments were most helpful in the last round.
- **Annotated bibliography:** A list of books you've read since the last packet. I'd love to see specific notes and observations about what you've read. I will recommend books throughout the semester, but I'm also interested in what you find on your own no matter what genre (adult novels, picture books, graphic novels, craft books, etc).
- **Your Creative Work:** Up to forty pages of creative work (twenty new pages, twenty revised pages). Please double space all work and use standard manuscript format.
- **Your Critical Work:** Based on your readings or some aspect of writing, ideally exploring some concrete aspect of writing related to your creative work.

My response: I will respond to your work within 5 – 7 days. You'll find the majority of my comments in the margins of your work, followed by a letter at the end of the manuscript where I'll dive deeper into a few key points. I'd also like to schedule one phone conversation during the semester. Please read my comments carefully and sit with them for a while before emailing with questions.

Susan Fletcher

I try to discover what my students are reaching for, and help them to realize their visions. Often this involves exploration – opening up a story to new possibilities; experimenting with a different point of view; listening to the voices of different characters. Sometimes it involves contraction – focusing on the fine points of craft, paring away what’s extraneous. I ask a lot of questions, throw out a lot of ideas. I’m a compulsive reviser, myself; I may ask for quite a bit of revision.

There are times, especially in the early semesters, when I might ask a student to set aside current work and, as an experiment, plunge into something entirely new. Often this happens when I see untapped potential and want to expand the student’s creative repertoire.

In my own work, I’ve spent a lot of time navigating faraway, ancient, or imaginary landscapes. But I’ve also published realistic novels, nonfiction magazine articles, and a picture book. I enjoy working on all genres, but I’m not your best choice if you want to spend your semester exclusively on picture books or poetry.

I work mostly online. Send your packets as Word attachments. Usually, I get back within 3-4 days. I’ll use the “insert comment” or “track changes” functions in the body of the text, and I’ll send a separate letter about my overall impressions and broader issues. Please email to let me know you’ve received my response and, a couple of days later, to tell me briefly how you’re doing with it. If you hit a snag, feel free to email between packets.

It’s your responsibility to be aware of the deadlines set by the office, and to be sure that all of your requirements -- evaluations, workshop materials, etc. -- are turned in on time.

Your packets should include:

- An annotated bibliography of all reading relevant to your study,
- Approximately 20 - 40 double-spaced pages of creative work, including new work and revision, and
- A letter telling me about thoughts, problems, triumphs, and questions about your work over the packet period.

In addition:

First and second semester students: Include 2 short essays (2-5 pages, double spaced) responding to some portion of your reading.

Second semester: In one or more packets, I’ll ask that you combine the two shorter essays into one longer one.

Third semester: We will agree on a schedule for your critical thesis.

Fourth semester: We will agree on a schedule for your creative thesis.

In your first packet, all semesters, please include a brief autobiography and a photo of yourself.

When necessary, I’m willing to read entire novels in the first packet for second - fourth semester students; I prefer that first semester students begin with new work, though this is negotiable.

A.M. (Amanda) Jenkins

My strength lies in novels and in novel revision. I'm game for anything, but may not be as helpful with picture books. I'm rusty on poetry, but not afraid of it.

Due Dates: We'll set these at residency, with your input.

Letters: Send one with each packet. Tell me (or ask me) anything pertinent to your writing or your feelings about your writing.

Essays: I want tight, plain, and clear rather than vague, academic, or wandering. I prefer that you use your essays as practical tools to help you figure out your own WIP.

Annotations on bibliography: Required on everything except my own books. I also assign one lengthier and more detailed annotation per packet, on a midgrade or YA novel of your choice. Purpose: to practice reading with an editorial eye, in a way that can help you revise your own work.

I am willing to read entire novels. I may or may not be willing to read novels under contract. I will not put myself in the middle of your relationship with your editor. However, I may be willing to provide a sounding board as you work out your own approach to your ms or revision.

I prefer to talk to you via e-mail because my schedule is erratic. If you want to call, we'll need to arrange a time in advance, and I'll need to know what you want from the conversation so that we can address it in the time available.

E-mails from me may arrive at any time. There's a good chance I'll be thinking about your work over the entire month. Don't be surprised to see notes from me at odd moments.

I ask questions. Be willing to *think*, and to do so outside your usual parameters. Expect to write pieces that aren't intended to end up in a finished ms. Be prepared to question yourself.

I like weird, interesting, and challenging ideas/projects. But I'm not going to lie; if what you've got seems boring or self-indulgent, be prepared to hear that and to discuss what you want to do about it.

You are unlikely to produce a completed novel ms in your time with me. Excessive focus on external goals can impede your writing, your story, your characters, and your process. Sometimes it allows you to ignore the depth in which you truly need to consider your ms. A trained monkey can pound out a 300-page draft in a semester, but it's unlikely to have typed anything worth caring about.

I've mostly published picture books, but I am also interested in and have worked with students on YA and middle grade novels, as well as poetry. I am probably not the best person to work with nonfiction. I enjoy working closely with students on such elements as character development, sequencing and voice, as well as on honing language to give vividness and sensuous life to writing. I'm an obsessive reviser of my own writing and will undoubtedly ask you to do quite a bit of it. After all, the real story often does not emerge until you are actively revising. I like writing that is adventurous, even quirky. What I would most like to see is for you to produce writing that bears your own signature, that is, writing that is uniquely your own. Most of all, I would like to help you make something you truly care about.

Packet Process. Please double space all your writing. Each packet should contain the following.

A letter in which you discuss your writing over the last month. Did you make any breakthroughs this month? Were there any problems I should know about? Be as honest and clear-eyed as possible. Be sure to let me know anything which you feel is pertinent to my assisting you to reach your goals as a writer.

Your creative work. Forty page maximum, usually 20 new pages and 20 pages of revision. If you're working with picture books and/or poetry, your page count will most likely be less. You do, of course, want to focus on the type of writing you most love, but, now and then, you might also want to try some new genres. You might find that this helps your own genre, or you might even discover a new love. I'll give you suggestions for this.

Critical work based on your readings or some aspect of writing. Your critical essays should relate to your creative work. Think of your essays as an opportunity to learn more about the craft of writing, both as you see it in your own writing and in the writing of others. Be sure to write an analysis, not a book report. Depending upon what we both feel is useful for you as a writer, we will both generate topics. All in-text citations and works cited should be in correct MLA format.

An annotated bibliography. You should read not as a general reader who simply absorbs books, but as a writer or editor who tries to decipher how the book has accomplished its goals. Look at the craft of writing – the intimate detail, the well-developed character, the plot that keeps you up all night reading, etc. How do good writers accomplish this? Do you see the book you have just read as a model for what you can do in your own writing – or as what you should avoid doing at all costs? You should read about 8-10 books each month (depending upon the type and length of book), which you should list in your bibliography. Half of these should be annotated. Read across the genres in children's literature, and let that reading delight and instruct you. I will recommend books throughout the semester.

My response will include comments in the margins of your work and a detailed letter which critiques all the material you have sent me. I will give suggestions for how to proceed. When it seems useful, I will also ask you to do a brief assignment or two, which will not necessarily become part of a finished piece but which will help advance your understanding of your characters, your story's conflict, etc.

Packet due dates. We will arrange due dates during the residency. Your packets should be emailed to me as a word doc. by 11 a.m. EST on the due date. I will let you know when I receive them. My response to your writing will arrive within 3-6 days. As soon as you receive my response to your writing itself, let me know as soon as possible that you received it. After 2 or 3 days have passed, email me again if you have any questions about my responses. Please avoid emailing me immediately – give yourself several days to digest my comments and to gain perspective on them.

Telephone conference, at midterm, in which we discuss your progress and goals.

The best way to reach me is by email. Please do email me if you have any questions or concerns during the month. Phone calls are at times also useful in clarifying some of my comments or your responses to them. If you would like to discuss something by phone, please email me first and we can arrange a phone appointment.

I'm interested in helping you locate and bridge the gap between your intentions and what's on the page. I'll tangle with you and your work at two levels: the larger story (its structure, progression, sequence, layers) and your discourse, or how you put that story into words. All that we work on—your reading, your letters, your creative and critical writing—will relate in some way to one of these elements. Don't look for easy answers. I want you to wrestle with questions, live with ambiguity, and learn to navigate the labyrinth of your own writing. I'll expect you to use, or learn to use, the vocabulary of critical reading and writing, and to make your essays feed your creative work. And when you make your own discoveries, know that I will be there to cheer.

Cut to the logistics, you say? Sure, why not?

1. Packets come by e-mail. You may send files as Word or text file attachments. I'll send each document back with comments and my letter.
2. Phone contact: At mid-semester, right after packet 3, I'll offer you the option of a phone call. You decide if you need one or not. Other than that, if you feel you have a compelling reason for that conversation, send me an e-mail letting me know; rest assured I'll call.
3. Between packets: After I've sent you my response to your packet I'll ask you to wait a day or two and then send me an e-mail message letting me know what you think. This is the time to clarify any doubts you might have, to ask questions and raise concerns. I'll reply, after which I will expect to hear from you again only in the next packet.
4. Online forum: I use an online forum to promote discussion among you between packets, and to make any packet deadline adjustments. I'll also post notes about my travel and related availability, and any questions of common interest. I'll post an article on craft or books once a month and invite you to discuss it.
5. Essays: In 1st semester you'll write mostly short essays; in 2nd semester you'll write a combination, depending on your needs. And you'll be revising. Count on it.
6. Bibliographies: I expect brief annotations, opinionated but professional. More than plot summary. I want to know what you think of the books you read and what you learned from reading them. Craft books—no more than one or two each month.
7. Creative work: If I need to read more than 40 pages, I'll ask for it. Mostly, we'll try to stay close to 40, or the equivalent in shorter work. I won't read an entire novel in packet 1, except in 4th semester. Sometimes I'll look closely at selected scenes, demonstrate rewrites to which that scene seems to be pointing, and ask you to use my suggestions and questions to guide your revision in other places.
8. Outlines and organizing tools: Sometimes I'll suggest an organizing tool or two to help you back away from the words on the page and find the larger story. Sometimes I'll tell you to dump the organizing and allow your characters to take over. We'll try to find what the story needs—and what you need as a writer.

“...suddenly she realized that what she had thought was freedom and joy was nothing but anarchy and sloth.”

[Norton Juster, *The Dot and the Line: a romance in lower mathematics*]

Julie Larios

I'm a poet. That means my students (all genres) get a close reading of their work— the small details like word choices, sentence sounds and subtleties of tone in addition to normal Big-Picture issues like structure, character development and voice.

GENERAL INFO / PACKETS: Due dates are determined at the residency – usually every four weeks, due in by 9:00 a.m. PST. If you need a one-time extension, get in touch with me ASAP, since late work affects the time it takes me to respond. I handle all packet material electronically: You send me your work as Word attachments to email; I email responses with inserted comments. Turn-around time is generally 3-4 days. Down-time for students can be used to begin new reading or new research for essays, but renewed efforts on other work should be saved until after my responses to the last batch have been read and reflected upon them. Hopefully, there will be new things to think about each time before you start in again on your creative and critical work. If you need clarification about anything, I'm happy to provide it. That said, I expect students in graduate school to be resourceful and self-directed.

SPECIFIC INFO / PACKETS: Each packet should contain the following:

1. **A Process Letter** (sent as an attachment – not in the body of the email): Tell me about successes and concerns over the month.
2. **An Annotated Bibliography** (MLA format) : Annotations should show attention to craft. Reading well – and reading like a writer - is half the battle in terms of writing well. If you send plot summaries, even short ones, I'll ask you to re-do your bibliography. For me, the only notes you provide must refer to writing strategies you found successful or not successful. I'll ask you to take off your reader hat (or librarian, teacher, or parent hats) and approach your annotations like a writer.
3. **Creative Work** : 20-40 pages, or up to four picture books, with new and revised work each time. Think quality over quantity. I prefer 20 pages of the best work you can send me over 40 pages of indifferent work. If you're in your 3rd Semester, you should not send any creative work in your first packet. If I see you're on track to complete the Critical Thesis successfully, you'll send creative work in subsequent packets. I make individual arrangements with 4th-semester students. Work that is under contract with a publisher or under revision with an editor or agent should not be submitted to me.
4. **Critical Work**: Focus on craft issues important to you. I will sometimes suggest possibilities. I encourage you to use secondary sources to deepen your understanding of the essay topic. Sometimes, I request revisions of critical work. For 1st-Semester students: Two 3-5-page essays per packet. 2nd-Semester: You will move up to one 8-10-page essay per packet by Packet 5 (earlier if I think you're ready.) 3rd-Semester students: Critical Thesis topics should be well worked out with me before the end of the residency. A first draft or substantial outline of the thesis is due in your first packet. 4th-Semester students: All critical efforts concentrate on the final residency lecture – the rough outline/draft of that should be in Packet 2 and a detailed outline/draft in Packet 3.

TRUTH IN ADVERTISING: First: I'm out of my comfort zone with Tolkein-esque fantasy. Second: Working on metered poetry is difficult in a low-residency program. If you're interested in it, I'll ask you to show me, at the residency, some basic understanding of meter. Third: Being a poet does not mean I'm the best choice for work that is sentimental. Work that has heart, yes; fresh language, yes; humor, please; work that has abstractions like love, joy and freedom, told via a talking flag - hmmm, probably not. Fourth: I take the words "graduate-level" seriously. I'm a sucker for intellectual curiosity, especially if it comes to me hand-in-hand with hard work.

Martine Leavitt

The way I work with students over a semester depends on the needs of the student and the work. In general, however, I have the following expectations:

- My mandate is to help you produce a book that a child and an agent or editor can love. That is the prime directive, and we do what it takes to make it happen. Rarely, this may involve contact between packets.
- I will look at an existing manuscript from second, third and fourth semester students.
- For first and second semester students, I expect 20 new, brilliant pages with each packet. I will accept up to 20 more pages of new work or 20 pages of revision. I do not limit fourth semester students to any number of pages.
- Students are to e-mail me their packets by 9 a.m. my time on the assigned day. I respond by e-mail sometime the next day, usually before noon.
- I line edit only if there is a problem with grammar, punctuation or syntax. I use track changes to say what I'm thinking or feeling as I read. The letter talks about bigger craft issues.
- I am willing to work with students on any genre. While I have read thousands of picture books, because I have not published one I do not feel that I have an expertise. If picture books make up the majority of your creative thesis, I may not be the ideal advisor for you.
- I like story. Stuff has to happen.

All rules are up for negotiation based on what the work requires.

April Lurie

I want you to open up, fearlessly let down your guard, and invite me into the private lives of your characters. I'll be there to coax, challenge, and mentor you along the way. I will think hard about your work, and ask you to do the same. I want to foster your unique voice and your singular way of looking at the world. As a writer I like to challenge myself with each project and learn something new. I enjoy getting out of my comfort zone, and I will encourage you to explore new terrain as well. I've written historical, contemporary, humor, drama, mystery/suspense, and I've written across gender. I'm currently working on a novel with a mystical/fantasy element. I'm open to all genres, but I don't have much experience with picture books or poetry.

Packet Procedures

We will meet during the residency and discuss your goals, develop a plan, and establish due dates. Please send the packets as Word attachments, and email them by noon of the scheduled date. I will respond to you within seven days.

Each packet should contain:

Personal Letter

Tell me what you're excited about and what you've been struggling with. Please feel free to ask questions. I want to keep the lines of communication open. In your first packet please include an autobiography. Tell me things about yourself that will help me understand you better as a person and as a writer.

Annotated Bibliography

I'd like a list of books you've read for the month, and your response to each one. Did you connect to a particular character, and if so, why? Was there a moment when you discovered the heart of the story? Please use MLA format.

Critical Essay

I want your essays to be clear, focused, and well-structured. The topics that you choose should reflect what you have been working on. Please use the essays as tools to help you understand your own creative process. List all cited works.

Creative Work

I'd like to see up to 40 pages per month. The content can be new, revised or both. I will encourage you to take risks and explore new genres, but I'm also willing to work with you on previously written material. Please try to write creatively (or at least think creatively) every day. It's important to get into the zone and stay there. Don't rush this part. I want to see your passion and enthusiasm to create your best work possible.

My Response

I will insert comments into the margins (sometimes quite lengthy) letting you know when your writing really sings, when there are points of confusion, or when I think you can dig deeper for stronger language, voice, or characterization. I will write a detailed letter with questions, suggestions, and ideas for you to mull over. My goal is to ignite and inspire. I am open to email exchanges between packets or setting up a phone call, if needed.

Elizabeth Partridge

Please send me your letter and manuscripts attached to an email. I'll make comments using Track Changes. (Don't worry if you've never used it before. It's really easy and I can walk you through it). I'll put comments in balloons in the margins. I'll expand on any comments that need a more in-depth answer in the letter, as well as going through some of the bigger craft questions I'd like to see you address. I'll try to respond to each packet within a few days. If I won't have an answer for you in three days, I'll let you know. When you get your packet and comments back, go over everything for a couple of days. If you have any questions, shoot me an email.

I'm comfortable across a wide variety of genres, having published everything from picture books to historical fiction to young adult nonfiction. I'm not your best choice for sci. fi. or poetry, except when the poem is intended to be picture book text, then I love helping guide it to meet the requirements of a picture book.

Your packet should contain:

A letter to me. Let me know how your month has gone. What you have written, read, and studied? What you are mulling over? Any particular problems you've run up against in your writing? Let me know if there is anything I can help you with. That's what I'm here for.

An annotated bibliography. I don't need a synopsis of what you've read, but would like a couple sentences of your reaction to each book. What has it opened your eyes to? What did you admire/vow to never do?

Your creative work: Up to 40 pages of writing. We'll meet during the residency and come up with an overall plan for what you will be submitting. You are welcome to submit first drafts, no matter how clumsy and awkward they seem. As Ann Lamott says, Shitty First Drafts are beautiful in their own way. This is a great time to get inspired and work on new material. You'll also probably be doing some revising, also beautiful in its own way.

As a rule of thumb, a picture book is considered to be "worth" eight pages. So if you submit picture books, I would expect two new and two revised picture books in a packet. For nonfiction, I'm a huge believer in narrative nonfiction, aka creative nonfiction. We'll use all the tools of fiction to make nonfiction compelling reading.

Your critical work. This will depend on your semester. First and second semester students send two short essays (4-5 pages, double spaced) each month, and second semester students will combine two of them into a longer (8-10) page essay. Use these essays as a chance to examine some specific aspect of writing you're struggling with or would like to understand more deeply. Third semester students work on their thesis, and fourth semester on the graduating lecture. Expect to do more revising.

Mary Quattlebaum

Packet Process: Due dates determined at residency. Please email by 8 a.m. EST as Word attachments; I email responses (big-picture letter and marginal comments) within 3 to 6 days. I may copyedit a paragraph or two as an example of how you might fine-tune the rest of your piece. Proof all work for grammatical errors and double-space creative and critical work (except poetry). Email me a quick “got it” once you receive my response and then let three or so days go by (to “digest” my comments) before emailing with questions. All communication by email.

Each Packet Should Include:

Letter to me: Share your writing process/challenges/successes over the past month. What do you feel are the strengths/weaknesses of the current work? In what ways did my previous suggestions help you re-see/revise (or not)? What questions do you have for me? (Send as attachment, not in body of email.)

Bibliography (MLA format): Read (as a writer) in all genres, at least 10-15 titles per packet. Do at least 5 annotations to include one craft book, one classic novel/chapter book, and one classic picture book. Annotations should be one paragraph (about 70-120 words) on how your close reading helped you better understand one or more craft issues; avoid doing book reports. (I will email samples after residency.)

Autobiography in Packet 1 for each student: Give me a sense of who you are (birth order, education, interests/hobbies, profession, etc.) and mention a few key moments in your life.

Creative Work:

Approximately 20 pages of new work and 20 pages revised. (Packet 1 should have only about 20 pages of new work.) Picture books and poetry are counted differently, with each picture book counting for 8 pages no matter the actual length. Take new work through several drafts before sending to me. If you are revising with editor/agent or have particular work under contract, please don't send that work to me.

First semester students: I encourage you to explore new genres and approaches and create new material—rather than revising an already completed novel. You may later discover, on your own, new directions for that completed novel. I will work with already completed novels in second semester and ask for a detailed synopsis and first 20 pages in packet 1.

Critical Work:

Become familiar with the Gary Library databases (online help available from librarians when you work at home). **Be aware of the scholarly publications in the field of children's literature** (*Children's Literature Quarterly*, *The Lion and the Unicorn*) and writing magazines (*Writer's Chronicle* (AWP), *The Writer*, etc.). For citations for critical essays, **do not use online sources such as Wikipedia** but choose scholarly resources (articles, monographs, conference lecture transcripts, interviews). Follow MLA style, tighten/hone your sentences, and proof your work carefully.

First semester: two critical essays per packet (3 to 5 pages each, with clearly stated thesis, supporting paragraphs, proper citations). Choose topics relevant to your own craft challenges. By Packet 3 or 4, you should cite a scholarly resource (see above) in at least one essay.

Second semester: two short critical essays in packet 1, one 8- to 10-page essay for packets 2 to 5. By packet 4, two essays should cite scholarly resources (see above).

Third semester: First draft of critical thesis (or a substantial outline and first third of thesis) due in packet 1. Ten pages of creative work in packet 1. Once we determine together that you're moving ahead successfully on the critical thesis, you can send in usual 20-40 pages of creative work.

Fourth semester: Rough outline of final residency lecture by packet 2.

Wordplays/Exercises: I assign short exercises to encourage you to play with new forms and approaches. Writing is a process of discovery and a heightened form of play. Plunge in and see what surfaces!

Areas of expertise: I've published picture books, poetry, realistic novels, folktales, magazine stories, nonfiction articles, and critical pieces/book reviews—but not fantasy or scientific fiction.

Leda Schubert

I schedule packets to arrive on Monday mornings by 9 a.m. my time, and due dates will be scheduled before you leave the residency. If you have a problem with any deadline, you must let me know in advance—and we'll work something out. I understand that emergencies happen. If you need an extension for any reason, please let me know as early as you can.

Packets should arrive in Word. I like to use the 'track changes' feature rather than 'comments.'

What I want to see:

1. A thoughtful letter of one-two pages discussing your writing experience over the last month---what you've learned, questions you have, what you've thought about, etc. This is an opportunity for you to develop skill in analyzing your own work. You can also tell me anything personal that bears on your work (and you can always tell me about your dog.)
2. I like the idea of including your autobiography (short, obviously) in the first packet. It will help me get to know you.
3. Creative work: in general, 20-40 pages of new and revised work in each packet (picture books and other work to be discussed).
4. First and second semester: two short (no more than 4 pp each) critical essays in each packet. Second semester: one or two longer essays a possibility. Essay topics to be determined either by you, me, or both.
5. Third and fourth: third semester will focus on the critical thesis, followed by or joined with creative work, while fourth semester will consist of the creative thesis and the lecture.
6. An annotated MLA-formatted bibliography of everything you've read that month. Annotations should be quite short and not include a plot summary. What I want is a critical response: what you learned or didn't learn from the book, how it might influence your writing, why it worked or didn't work. Please read widely and read a lot, and not just within your particular genre. I may well recommend books.

What I'll do:

I will return your ms with a letter within a few days. I'll do line-editing where necessary (this can be quite extensive), or concentrate on one section, but most of our conversation will focus on the elements of a good story. I expect a quick email from you within a day or two of receiving my letter so you can let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Midsemester: A phone call check-in if necessary. I hate the phone, but sometimes nothing else will do. We'll set a convenient date and time.

I'm available between packets by email if something is unclear, confusing, or if you're stuck. Don't wait until your packet is due—talk to me!

Shelley Tanaka

Although I have written several books of children's nonfiction, my primary background is editorial. So I've seen at close hand how a wide range of professional writers develop and refine a manuscript, from concept to final draft. While every writer works differently, the basic process is surprisingly constant. Though in general I think character drives story and shaping comes before line-editing, there are no iron-clad rules. My goal is to help a writer bring out the absolute best in a work, while learning an enormous amount about his or her process, so the next manuscript can be even better.

I'm comfortable working in all genres. I like smart, character-driven stories with strong voices. If you're inclined to the quirky and/or subversive, so much the better.

Packet Process

* I ask for packets to be sent electronically every four weeks on preassigned dates. If holidays or other scheduling conflicts interfere, I can usually accommodate them if I know in advance. I will take up to a week to respond (though I am trying to get faster!). During the fallow week students continue with their reading, start new short essays, carry on with other creative work, and try to put some distance between themselves and their manuscript, so they can look at their own work with a cold(er) eye.

* My packet response primarily takes the form of a letter that addresses each part of the packet. This will include questions and comments, both specific and general. I do not usually provide line-edit suggestions until I think a work is ready for it, but I will sometimes focus closely on a small section of text as an example of the kinds of things a student might look for in self-editing, and because it can give a writer direction/hope to see what a polished section might look like even while shaping the whole. (There is much more on-text editing for the critical and creative theses in third and fourth semesters.)

* After students receive their packet responses I follow up with a phone call (unless you don't feel one is necessary), to address any questions and make a plan for the next packet.

* Students can contact me between packets — by phone or by email — if they have questions or concerns, but I do not read material between packets, unless the circumstances are exceptional.

Rita Williams-Garcia

Submission and Response Procedure

Email documents as attachments to me no later than 2pm EST on due date. I do not work on Sundays (this includes sending email). If your submission date falls on a Sunday, submit by Monday, 8am EST or earlier.

Files must be compatible for Windows XP 2003. Windows 2007, Vista and higher must be converted before sending.

All communication must be handled through e-mail. No social emails, no phone calls.

During our one-on-one meeting we will discuss your goals as well as any foreseeable events that might conflict with those goals, and come to some arrangement if necessary. I will not share my "off" time. I rarely grant extensions.

I respond within 3-4 days. My first letters are lengthy; take time to absorb letter and manuscript comments before panicking. Follow-up email is not required, but if you need further clarification allow 2 days to pass after your initial email, as I will be engaged in another student's work.

Packet Contents

Every packet should include a cover letter detailing your process, observations, and questions. Send letters as attachments, not within the body of your email.

Every packet should include an annotated bibliography of at least ten titles to include a range of children's and YA novels, picture books, and any special reading (graphic novels, craft, non-fiction) to aid your writing. Annotations should highlight your key observations as an apprentice writer.

You are expected to use standard manuscript format. You are expected to show graduate-level understanding of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and so forth. You are expected to put in a graduate-level effort and consistently submit work of graduate-level quality.

So long as you meet the minimum requirements, plan to err on the side of carefully considered writing rather than quantity for quantity's sake.

Third semester students must have a reasonable clarity on their critical thesis statement by the end of the residency, and must submit a first draft of their critical thesis in the first packet.

Fourth semester students must submit 125 pages of creative work or entire novel toward creative thesis, immediately after the residency. The remainder of the 1st packet contents will be due on packet submission date.

