

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

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Helping Writers Write

It is January, and I'm doing what I do at this time of the year. I'm getting ready to teach. The class is called "Writing, Publishing, & Promoting Your Nonfiction Book." It is offered by the Continuing Education Department of St. Louis Community College.

My living room looks like a cyclone struck it and scattered papers to the winds. But there is order to this seeming chaos. In one pile are pages about the writing process; in another, options for publishing. There is a huge stack on how to promote a book on the Web and one on the essential elements of a proposal. These are handouts to be duplicated, three-hole punched, and added to the workbook binder each student will receive on the first night of class.

I love this process almost as much teaching. When the pieces are assembled and the class plans completed, I will be filled with a sense of

anticipation. While I know what I *intend* to teach, I have no idea of the dynamic I will encounter on that first evening. Up to 15 adults, each with a different reason for taking this class, will listen attentively while I spend that first hour explaining what I hope to accomplish in the six Wednesdays we will be together. Then, they will have to determine if this is what they thought it would be or if they are in the wrong place.

Some will decide this is too much work. Others will discover that the novel they're planning is *not* a "nonfiction" book. A few will have no idea what they want to write about and look a little lost. But the majority, I hope, will become excited about what is ahead and commit themselves to the process of writing a book.

These potential authors will, in a single evening, mesh into a cohesive, supportive author's group. And I will do what I love most: live my vision, which is *to help writers write*. ■