Western Massachusetts Writing Project

Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing

May 2nd, 2026 - Program of Sessions

Day at a Glance

8:30 AM	Breakfast & Networking
9:00 AM	**Keynote** — *Brett Vogelsinger* | *60 minutes*
10:30 AM	**Session 1** — *Pedagogy, Practice & the Writing Classroom* | *60 minutes*
11:30 AM	Lunch — *60 minutes*
12:40 PM	**Session 2** — *Voice, Identity & Community* | *60 minutes*
1:50 PM	**Session 3** — *Expanding What Writing Is* | *60 minutes*
2:50 PM	Wrap & Closing — *Writing Out of the Day*

All sessions run concurrently within each time block. Participants select one session per block.

Keynote

The Writing Renaissance: Teaching for Mastery and Humanity | 9:00 –10:00 AM

Presenter	Session Title & Description	Room
Brett Vogelsinger *Central Bucks High School* 	Brett Vogelsinger is a National Board Certified English teacher with over two decades of classroom experience, currently teaching AP Literature and Composition at Central Bucks High School in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He is the author of two books from Corwin Press — *Poetry Pauses: Teaching with Poems to Elevate Student Writing in All Genres* (2023) and *Artful AI in Writing Instruction* (2025) — and is a regular contributor to *Moving Writers*, a widely-read blog on writing pedagogy. He also publishes a new Substack newsletter, *Declarative, Imperative, Interrogative, Explanatory*, for educators thinking carefully about writing and teaching. His work has been featured on *Edutopia*, NPR's *MindShift* podcast, and *The New York Times Learning Network*. Brett brings a practitioner's eye to the big questions facing writing teachers right now: How do we hold onto the essential humanness of our work in an age of AI, standardized demands, and competing priorities? How can listening and learning from students help us to learn and grow as teachers of writing in times of great change? And will poetry, as it has throughout history, rise to the occasion and help us light a way? (Spoiler alert: It will!)	Loughman Living Room, Scanlon Hall

Morning Conference Sessions

Session 1: Pedagogy, Practice & the Writing Classroom | 10:30–11:30 AM

Presenter	Session Title & Description	Room
Kevin McKenna & Nicole Godard *UMass Amherst, IDEAS Team / Hampden Charter School of Science*	**Rethinking Resistance: Proactive Teaching for the Age of AI** Rather than relying on reactive tools like AI checkers, this session asks: how do we design writing pedagogy that makes authentic engagement more appealing than AI shortcuts? Drawing on frameworks of academic integrity and trust, participants will explore proactive, preventive strategies for building writing cultures in which student voice matters. *Informed by: Savini; Trust; Rettinger & Gallant*	Parenzo 208
Ed McCarthy *Catholic Memorial School*	**Feedback** Participants will develop comfort with a constructivist protocol for providing meaningful, student-centered feedback. A hands-on demonstration of feedback practices grounded in process writing theory. *Informed by: Peter Elbow, National Writing Project, Johns Hopkins*	Parenzo 212
Dr. Maria Jose Botelho, Sara Berliner, Jana Pickart, & Meghan Whitfield *College of Education, UMass Amherst*	**Writing Through the Arts: Multimodal Pedagogy and the Teaching of Writing** This session challenges the isolation of literacy practices in school settings, arguing that drama, movement, music, painting, and collage can serve as legitimate modes for meaning-making and writing development. Participants engage in arts-based activities and explore how multimodal approaches expand students' expressive resources and foster a sense of belonging. *Informed by: Gunther Kress, Cope & Kalantzis, Gaztambide-Fernandez, Finnegan*	Parenzo 226

Lunch

Community & Conversation | 11:30–12:30 PM

Food will be served in the Loughman Living Room in Scanlon Hall.	Lunch is an intentional time for connection, reflection, and collaboration. Participants are encouraged to continue conversations sparked during the keynote and morning sessions, share classroom practices, and build relationships across schools and grade levels. Dessert and raffle will follow at the close of lunch!

Afternoon Conference Sessions

Session 2: Voice, Identity & Community | 12:40–1:40 PM

Presenter	Session Title & Description	Room
Walker Resnick *Chicopee Comprehensive High School / UMass M.Ed.*	**The Boring Story Game: A First-Day Activity for Building Voice and Community** What if the most powerful way to help students find their voices was to ask them to be as boring as possible? In this hands-on workshop, participants will experience a first-day classroom activity from the inside, writing, sharing, and reflecting together, before unpacking why it works and how to bring it back to their own classrooms.	Parenzo 208
Allyson Smith *Argosy Collegiate Charter School*	**Culturally Responsive Teaching of Writing Within Published Curriculum** Connecting Ladson-Billings' foundational work to Muhammad's five pursuits (identity, skill, knowledge/intellect, criticality, and joy), participants explore how to transform existing curriculum — specifically Savvas MyPerspectives — into culturally responsive writing experiences. Includes collaborative brainstorming for a takeaway lesson or unit blueprint. *Informed by: Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad*	Parenzo 212

Amber Robert & Nicole Klaus *Hampden Charter School of Science (MS)*	**Teaching Writing in a Co-Taught ELA Middle School Classroom** Practical approaches to writing instruction in a co-taught setting, exploring how collaboration between general and special education teachers can support all writers. Participants will leave with strategies for differentiating writing instruction and building a shared pedagogical vision across two teachers.	Parenzo 226

Session 3: Expanding What Writing Is | 1:50–2:50 PM

Presenter	Session Title & Description	Room
Jen DiGrazia, Joe Courchesne, & Allyson Smith *Westfield State / Argosy Collegiate / Veritas Prep*	**Recentering Writing: Purpose, Audience, and Genre Across K–16** This panel challenges the dominant practice of treating writing solely as a response to reading. Using powerful writing pedagogy (PWP) as a framework, participants engage in process-based writing activities that center student inquiry, authentic audience, and genre choice — then reflect on how to bring these practices to their own classrooms. *Informed by: Nadia Behizadeh, Steve Graham, Peter Elbow & Pat Belanoff, and Donald Murray*	Parenzo 208
Tara Pauliny, Shakuntala Ray, & Matthew Morrison *UMass Amherst Writing Program*	**Exercises in Empathy: Contemplative Writing Pedagogy** Drawing on contemplative traditions and writing pedagogy, this session offers practical strategies for managing writing anxiety, navigating difficult conversations, and reframing failure. Participants will experience and discuss approaches they can bring directly to their students. *Informed by: Robert Boice, Pema Chodron, Kristie Fleckenstein, Thich Nhat Hanh, Barry Kroll, Alexandra Peary, Richard Swartz, Christy Wenger*	Parenzo 212
Amelia Fuss *Hampden Charter School of Science (HS)*	**Seeing Past the Silver Screen: Using Film and Film Criticism to Engage Apathetic Writers** This session explores how film and film criticism can serve as a gateway into authentic, engaged writing for students who resist traditional writing tasks. Participants will consider how close viewing, critical response, and the language of cinema can open new entry points for reluctant and disengaged writers.	Parenzo 226

Wrap & Closing — Writing Out of the Day

What is Writing Out of the Day?

Writing Out of the Day is a signature practice of the National Writing Project. Rooted in the belief that teachers of writing must be writers themselves, it invites participants to pause at the close of a shared learning experience and write to process, notice, and make meaning. It is an act of professional humility and presence: we ask our students to write, and so we write too.

Today's Prompt

You have spent the day in rooms full of people who care deeply about writing and about the students who do it. Before you leave, take a few minutes to write.

What are you carrying back to your classroom? It might be a practice, an image, a question that unsettled you, or a sentence someone said that stuck. It might be something you already knew but needed to hear again.

We will write for a few minutes. Then, if you are willing, share!

Thank you to all presenters and participants for a day of generous, thoughtful practice!

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER NOW

Western Massachusetts Writing Project

Upcoming Courses & Programming

Summer & Fall 2026

Graduate Certificate in Teaching Writing

Westfield State University | 15 credits

Our 15-credit Graduate Certificate in Teaching Writing supports ELA and Education teachers who are practicing, hold initial certification, and/or seek to strengthen their K-12 writing instruction. Credits can be applied toward a master's degree for initial or professional licensure through WSU's Department of English.

Entry requires successful completion of the Spring Leadership Institute (SLI) and presentation of a Teacher Action Research project. Apply at: **connect.westfield.ma.edu/apply**

Upcoming Course Offerings

ENGL 613 | Creative Writing Pedagogy

Summer II | Tuesdays, 4:30–6:30 PM, synchronous | In-person Intensive: Wednesday, August 5, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM (Zoom option available)

This course prepares students to teach creative writing in any of the three genres of fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction. Students will explore multiple creative writing pedagogy theories and apply creative writing strategies as they design assignments and workshop practices for K–12 classrooms and beyond. The course runs similarly to a low-residency MFA program, combining weekly synchronous sessions with asynchronous work and a full-day intensive.

✓ *Counts toward the WMWP Teaching Writing Pedagogy Certificate*

Instructor: Professor Beverly Army Williams

ENGL 612 | Teaching Writing With and Against Generative AI

Fall 2026 Semester | Tuesdays, 4:00–6:25 PM | On Zoom | 3 credits

Writing and teaching in the age of generative AI is fraught. The central question of this course is: How can we promote critical AI literacy amongst our students while ensuring students learn to write? Students will explore the ethical issues associated with AI, experiment with using AI in both the teaching and writing process, and leave with a set of practices and principles to guide them as AI continues to reshape the educational landscape.

✓ *Counts toward the WMWP Teaching Writing Pedagogy Certificate*

Instructor: Professor Catherine Savini | Questions: csavini@westfield.ma.edu

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