



GrubStreet

Access & Inclusion

A guide for GrubStreet instructors

GrubStreet

2nd Edition

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Introduction

GrubStreet actively works to be a truly inclusive community, shaped by a broad range of voices representative of American, immigrant, and international populations at large. We are committed to welcoming, fostering, and developing a broad range of voices and want to infuse the creative writing world with writers who can expand the racial, social, and cultural boundaries of contemporary literature. As instructors, we must play an integral part in giving all of our students the best chance at succeeding.

This guide is the result of a collaboration between GrubStreet staff, instructors, students, and the contributions of experienced leaders, who generously shared their thoughts and materials. We intend for the guide to continue developing an open discourse between our diverse pool of instructors and students. It is important to remain aware of the socio-cultural experiences and challenges many of our students face, and ensure that their experience at GrubStreet is a positive one. With the above in mind, our main goals are: 1) For instructors to be equipped with information, strategies, and approaches that can minimize blind spots related to gender, race, culture, identity, class, and disabilities, and be able to recognize and address micro aggressions or other sociocultural tensions that can arise in the workshop. 2) To make our classrooms a more inclusive place—socially, culturally, and artistically speaking—by encouraging thoughtful and nuance dialogue with every student. 3) To create an environment in which students of all backgrounds can take authentic artistic risks and feel respected as complex individuals. 4) To nurture a pedagogical atmosphere that de-centers whiteness from creative writing discussions, allowing for a genuinely democratic exchange of literary ideas and views.

We know that the path to achieving these goals is not always straightforward. We may not always know exactly how best to handle a difficult teaching moment. Our expectation is not perfection. Instead, we're looking for accountability, humility, and a willingness to engage and improve. Thus, this guide will be a live document, subject to input and revision so that it can reflect our collective evolution and growth as a community. We welcome your feedback and ideas, which can be sent to programs@grubstreet.org.

There will be unexpected challenges, messy conversations, and unsatisfactory solutions. But we firmly believe that as long as we approach ourselves and our students with generosity and honesty, we will be making a difference. We also understand that at times some of these topics and situations can be taxing or even triggering. If you're ever feeling overwhelmed, underprepared, or targeted, please know that the GrubStreet staff is available to chat, prep, and brainstorm. Come speak with us!

Literary Access

Literary Access (n.) — the removal of institutional barriers for aspiring writers, so that anyone regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or identity can become the best writer they can be.

Literary access means challenging the institutional structures that privilege the white, high-income, straight, Western, often male writers. It means intentionally questioning, revising, and sometimes tearing down those structures and building new, exciting, inclusive structures in their place. It means recognizing the danger of a single story and promoting POC, Black, indigenous, queer, trans, non-Western narratives and more—any and all intersecting identities and experiences that have been historically silenced and underrepresented. It means examining the way we teach the craft of writing for inherent bias. It means, in short, treating the process of teaching and learning writing the way we teach the process of writing: by taking it apart and looking at every element, accepting feedback, and then building it back up until it's the best it can be.

While we're committed to offering reading lists, handouts, and other resources to further our instructors' awareness, this work depends on every GrubStreet instructor committing to these values—by doing their own research and self-examining their processes. We believe that true artistic excellence cannot be achieved without the genuine inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives. To do their best writing, students need to know that they belong, that their experiences matter, and that they can have agency in their own artistic growth. Thus, this work is an integral part of our mission as an organization. We intend to make our classrooms the best they can be for all writers. We thank you for doing your part, and we hope that you will continue to participate in and contribute to this conversation going forward!

A Closer Look at Inclusion

What is inclusion all about?

TWO MAIN DEFINING POINTS:

1. EMBRACING DIFFERENCES
2. CREATING PEDAGOGICAL CONDITIONS THAT FOCUS ON ACHIEVING A MUTUAL GOAL

...And what does that mean for us?

Well...

this process includes providing access to information and social support to every single student; ensuring that underrepresented groups can influence, challenge, and help shape accepted workshop norms; and creating a culture where everyone can feel secure to explore artistically and authentically. Full acceptance of membership in an organization depends on the ability to be seen as an integral member of that organization. In other words, at GrubStreet, full acceptance means everyone can consider themselves as Grubbies!

An important point to remember

[A Welcoming Spirit] ≠ [Inclusion]

At GrubStreet, this is particularly important. An instructor can be well-intentioned and still not be inclusive. This can be difficult to manage, because a student who doesn't feel included can then feel self-conscious if they were to mention it to otherwise nice people. They can feel like potential troublemakers or people who would be rocking an otherwise peaceful boat. Therefore, an instructor may never become aware of how the student feels.

How can I have a strong, coherent, well-defined pedagogical aesthetic or identity that isn't exclusive?

Because identity by definition has limits, we simply can't be everything to everyone. However, we should still question whether there are **patterns of exclusion that stack the deck against particular people.**

Examples of exclusion in the classroom:

- pushing students toward a particular style or tradition
- exposing them only to culturally or racially homogenous literary examples
- failing to validate student writing whose context might seem different or unknown to us
- having strict workshop or class time rules

As a result, it is important to make sure that:

Traditions

Preferences

Conveniences



Requirements

A few examples to consider

Class Time	Class Dynamics
<p>Time is a huge factor. Classes that constantly go over time can be tough for those without a lot of flexibility because of limited means of schedule constraints. Some students need to take public transportation on set schedules, others juggle work commitments, childcare and family responsibilities. And so, when class constantly goes on after the allotted time, they feel like they're missing out. Excluded. They often go through great pains to carve out those 3 hours, and it's not as easy to expand that time.</p>	<p>If the class goes out regularly after workshop, but it's just the same people all the time, consider changing the pattern— maybe a tea shop instead of a bar, a park picnic on warm evenings, etc. Ask yourself if you even need to go out after class all the time. If the students set that pattern, this is fine, but does it need to be initiated by the instructor?</p>

Questions To Consider While Running a Workshop

Question	Subtext
<p>What do we mean when we use words such as “normal,” “literary,” or “traditional” in a workshop?</p>	<p><i>Sometimes these terms are used to mean “white American literature” or even just “American literature.” Literature has a diverse global history.</i></p>
<p>Are the overall language or specific terms we use inherently dismissive of other traditions, cultures, or identities?</p>	<p><i>Think about the implications when using terms like “accessible,” “mainstream,” “Western,” and “show, don’t tell” (which can be code for “silence your politics”).</i></p>
<p>Are we subjecting students solely to our own view of literature and creative writing?</p>	<p><i>We encourage you to question how much taste and familiarity with certain styles and traditions are influencing your reading lists, lectures, takes on craft, and critiques. Classes can be an opportunity for instructors to expand their knowledge as well.</i></p>
<p>Are we using texts only by white authors, or male authors, or contemporary authors, or dead authors, or American-born authors?</p>	<p><i>Aim to have a diverse reading list in every sense of the word. A narrow pool of craft examples will shortchange students, and some might feel left out.</i></p>
<p>Are we allowing writers sufficient space and time to engage with the readers’ feedback? Are we inadvertently silencing the writer by letting readers dictate the conversation?</p>	<p><i>Writers of color and those working within non-American traditions can often feel misunderstood if they’re not given the opportunity to contribute to a conversation about their work. It’s important to question what workshop structures or approaches benefit which students.</i></p>

Examples of Diversity Topics in the Workshop

Workshop Dynamics

In order to create a truly inclusive environment, instructors should be able to detect when a student might be feeling silenced, attacked, mocked, dismissed, or misunderstood. This can often be the case for writers from underrepresented communities, particularly when the makeup of the workshop is largely different from said writer in terms of race, class, gender, socio-cultural background, or literary tradition. Because each circumstance is different, however, knowing how to effectively respond to such a situation becomes even more crucial. Although it is impossible to explore every possible scenario, we have put together four examples that capture common workshop-related issues, the likely subtext for such moments, and ways in which an instructor can respond. More than fixed approaches, these examples should be used as guidelines, as a starting point or road map to handling similar topics. Always remember that it is okay to not get it right! We all have blind spots, and these conversations can often become uncomfortable and difficult. The important thing is to listen, foster dialogue, ask tough questions when necessary, and be willing to learn. The more experience you gain by engaging with these topics, the more tools you will have at your disposal, making it easier to serve all of your students.

Scenario 1

A student of Pakistani descent (with a slight accent) writes a fictional story of a young man returning to Pakistan, winding through the memories of Partition—the time when India was split into two countries—India and Pakistan, along sectarian lines of religion.

During workshop of this story, some students in the class mention how wonderful it must have been to write a *foreign* story about Pakistan and Partition. It's so wonderful to show "a world so different from the American experience." Other students talk about how they enjoyed the "exotic" details and that they wanted more of them. One student mentions that although they loved the story, they did find some slightly formal or awkward phrasing. "It's as if the sentences are translated," the student says, "and not as if an American writer has written them." They add that the story would benefit from editing so that it sounds more like a contemporary piece of writing and is easier for American readers to engage with it.

Undercurrents of this Scenario

While the comments are largely complimentary, many members of the class kept referencing the student author as well as the main character as “foreign.” Just because the author or the main character in a story have parents/family from another country or have accents does not mean that they are foreign. People with accents or who were born in other countries can still be American.

To think of details as *exotic* may have undertones of cultural exploitation and ethnocentrism, and it can make the writer feel as the absolute “other.” To wish for more of these kinds of details might also be a sign of wanting to consume what’s superficially attractive about a culture and not truly grappling with the nuances and complexities of said culture.

To automatically assume that the writing style of a story should conform to what is considered contemporary or mainstream in America is to dismiss other traditions and styles that may be at play. Stories that sound or read differently shouldn’t by default be steered toward an archetypical style that pleases everyone without exploring the author’s intentions.

Possible Workshop Approaches & Questions to Ask

We can acknowledge the impact and power of the story’s subject matter while also reiterating the strong and necessary role such stories play in the current American and global literary landscape. There are plenty of stories written by American authors from diverse backgrounds that explore similar experiences in other countries, and this should be acknowledged. Questions to ask as a starting point: What makes a story American or foreign? What is problematic and/or contradictory about the definition of each? Who is the audience for this story?

It would be good to discuss why the word “exotic” is problematic, and why the focus should be on engaging with the nuances of the culture and characters presented through the arresting details. Practicing empathy and showing genuine interest is crucial when exploring a place and people that may appear different from ourselves in a piece of writing. To simply say, “I want more exotic details” can come across as “satisfy my superficial American-centric curiosity,” which is not helpful feedback to any writer.

A dialogue with the writer about the story’s style might help explain why some of the phrasing can appear to be slightly formal or awkward. What are the writer’s influences? Are there any particular cultural or artistic traditions not being taken into consideration? Involving other students in the discussion can help determine if there is a consensus or some disagreement about the phrasing and style. Pointing to particular examples is helpful, but only if the writer is allowed to participate in the conversation. It is important for the instructor to explain the difference between clarity and wanting a story to fit a certain stylistic mold because it’s what we’re used to reading. Ideally, an instructor should be able to discuss examples of successful contemporary works written in English that defy widely accepted mainstream styles.

Scenario 2

A student turns in a story about the obstacles a black family faces in an otherwise all-white neighborhood. The story explores issues of race through the family's relationship with friends and neighbors, in which tension rises when someone leaves a condescending, ambiguously racist note on the father's car following a housewarming party. The family struggles to agree on how to handle the situation.

During workshop, a classmate states that they found the conflict interesting, but that the characters in the story don't feel authentic, that they speak and act similarly to the white characters. "They didn't sound like they were African American," the student says. "They spoke too properly." Another student suggests that if the topic of race were removed from the main conflict, the story would feel more intimate and relatable and therefore have an even broader appeal. "I feel like including race made the story feel like it had an agenda," this student adds. A few others discuss elements of craft, praising how well written and engaging the plot and characters are, never once mentioning race or class as an aspect of the piece.

Undercurrents of this Scenario

Despite the complimentary feedback, the lack of acknowledgement from some about the story's central theme of race can feel like avoidance if the instructor does not address it. Craft should be discussed as related to the writer's intent, so to ignore what the story is about is to discount or minimize the socio-cultural space the writer is exploring. The same can be said about the comment of removing race as an element in the narrative. It implies that race may not be a topic worthy of compelling or accessible literature.

Also, to assume that black characters in a story should speak and act in a certain way is Stereotyping 101. It's one thing to feel that some characters may not be sufficiently developed or that they lack distinct personalities, and quite another to bring one's own racial or cultural biases into the reading of a story.

Possible Workshop Approaches & Questions to Ask

Engage the writer in conversation to find out what the intent is behind using race as a theme in the story. How did they envision readers responding? What about these characters and circumstances did they find most compelling and worth exploring? Allow them to react to the feedback as well, so that a productive and inclusive conversation can take place.

This is also a great opportunity for the instructor to ask questions to the reader who commented on the story's authenticity: How are the characters sounding and acting the same as the white characters? How should they be speaking and acting instead? What is problematic about this expectation? What racial biases might be emerging from this perception, and how might they limit the reader's understanding and appreciation of a creative piece?

Another point to be considered is that no character or set of characters should be seen as a monolithic representation of an entire race, social or cultural identity, nation, etc, nor should they have to conform to the reader's particular worldview in order to be "authentic." Discuss with the class the difference between a story that may not be succeeding yet at the craft level and one that is simply challenging preconceived notions about people and race, as well as the importance of open-mindedness and empathy when encountering characters different from oneself.

Scenario 3

A student turns in a story in which a white American college professor falls in love and has an affair with a student who's a Latina immigrant. The man uses Spanish words and phrases when describing the woman's physical appearance, makes references to how sexy her accent is, and describes her personality as "fiery." The narrative explores the man's frustration with his own family, his insecurities when being around the Latina student, and the professional regrets surrounding all of it. There's an obvious attempt at portraying the main character as a slightly tragic, pathetic figure with whom we can empathize.

During workshop, students praise the sense of humor and vulnerability displayed by the central character. They like that the story explores cultural differences between two people, and say that the writing is strong throughout. Two female students, however, note that the Latina character could have been better developed, and that the use of Spanish felt a bit stereotypical since it was only used to describe the woman. A lively discussion ensues, in which the class is split in regards to the Latina student's portrayal, some finding it an intentionally flawed depiction from the central character's POV, others stating that something about this portrayal feels culturally inappropriate and slightly objectifying.

Undercurrents of this Scenario

Because the main lens in the story is that of a white American male, the student in the narrative could by default be treated as the “other” in this story. The use of Spanish words to refer to a woman’s body, as well as references to a “sexy” accent and employing the word “fiery” to describe personality can indeed be culturally stereotypical and sexist depending on the context. Therefore, these instances deserve careful attention on the part of the instructor and the class.

Effective use of humor, a willingness to portray a flawed character, exploration of complex cultural differences, and strong writing at the sentence level aren’t enough to justify a potentially problematic treatment of a minority character, especially if some students in class are pointing it out (and even if they didn’t, the instructor should be prepared to bring it up as part of the discussion, no matter how uncomfortable the prospect of such a conversation may feel).

Possible Workshop Approaches & Questions to Ask

Since the central character’s POV is the one driving the story, it is fair to ask the following questions: Has the student’s character been treated with a comparable level of attention and care as the central character? Does the writer use similarly stereotypical details to describe the main character, or are they just used for the woman’s character? Is there an opportunity to explore her views, goals, and personality in a way that feels equally nuanced? How would Latino/a readers feel about the current portrayal of her character? Are there concrete artistic reasons for the use of stereotypical and/or sexist signifiers? Would the story feel more complex and nuanced if these signifiers were replaced with more surprising or layered details?

There’s a long, problematic history of minority characters being unfairly and poorly depicted through a white lens and of women being portrayed in the same manner by male authors. Perhaps it would be a good idea to present this as context for the workshop discussion about the way the student’s character comes across on the page. Some questions could be asked to invite the writer into the conversation: Why did you decide to write about a Latina student? Who do you envision being the ideal reader for this piece? What do you hope they will get from the cultural explorations? Encourage everyone to think critically about their views and choices, to practice empathy when asking questions about a particular story, putting themselves in other readers’ and writers’ shoes, and to avoid lazy or biased approaches, especially with women characters and characters who are LGBTQ or people of color.

Finally, it would be a great service to the class if the instructor could recommend readings that show successful depictions of similar characters. This goes back to the importance of reading a diverse range of American and international authors, and to have those works as part of your teaching arsenal. Also, instructors should feel comfortable asking students in the class for recommendations and examples, if they have any to offer. These kinds of situations can be (and often are!) opportunities for instructors to learn as well.

Scenario 4

A student turns in a personal essay in which he explores the fractures in his family during the 2016 presidential election cycle. It is clear from the text that the writer is a pro-Trump, religious conservative who believes Obama's presidency made working class white America feel left out, and that religious values were being ignored by Hillary Clinton during her campaign. However, the work does not contain any racist or sexist undertones. Also, the writer acknowledges the other side of the coin by giving voice to those in his family who disagree with him politically, and that tension makes for a fairly engaging essay.

A few of the students immediately point out how the essay made them uncomfortable because the writer didn't really tackle or even acknowledge some of the problematic statements, actions, and policies that can be attributed to Trump. "What about his bigotry, racism, and sexism?" someone asks. A student points out that she is Latina and an immigrant, and that Trump's campaign and presidency has put in peril people in her community. Another person says that she found the narrator and those in the family who sided with him to be self-centered and unaware of the social realities of the country. The writer responds that he is feeling attacked and that he doesn't agree with everything Trump has said or done, but that his political views should be respected.

Undercurrents of this Scenario

Considering the realities of the Trump campaign and presidency, it makes sense for some students to react viscerally to the essay. However, when virtually an entire class negatively piles on a writer because of his political views, this can be problematic.

Although some classrooms can clearly have a majority of people who share certain views/values, we should always keep in mind that a workshop is a democratic space, open to various perspectives and beliefs. Ultimately, artists should aim to bring nuance back to the discussion. It is hard, especially in this climate, but it's integral to the success of a workshop that difficult topics be explored in thoughtful ways beyond what's popular or in the majority at the time.

Disagreement on political or social issues shouldn't be grounds for attacking or dismissing a person's writing. Any writer, regardless of their political or religious views, deserves the opportunity to receive constructive criticism.

Possible Workshop Approaches & Questions to Ask

It is important for the conversation to remain focused on the essay. Unless the writer expresses a problematic or aggressive view verbally or through their writing, students should be encouraged to discuss whether or not the essay achieves what it sets out to do. Not being able to identify with the narrator's political views is worth discussing, but always within the context of the essay, its intended audience, etc.

Some questions worth asking include: Who is this essay for? Has the author considered different points of view and treated every person/character in the essay fairly? Is the conflict nuanced, complex, layered? Are political biases and contradictions explored or at least acknowledged in the writing? Is the essay itself trying to make a persuasive political point, or are the readers' reactions purely based on the socio-political context/reality beyond the piece? How much of our own personal baggage are we bringing into how the essay has been read? Are we allowing space for empathy, or is the content of the piece failing to tap into the emotional or psychological core of a reader who might not completely identify with the narrator? Are there elements or moments in the essay that some students found compelling?

Ultimately, a writer should have the opportunity to feel that they have been given a chance at receiving fair criticism and improving their work. If a class slips into more personal territory and the instructor, with all the information at hand, doesn't feel that it is merited, they should steer the conversation into more productive waters. It takes courage for a writer to submit work that obviously goes against the grain. The last thing we want to do is shut down a voice. If we do so, we're failing as artists. The key is to make more room at the table, not less, even when the work is challenging our own beliefs or comfort levels.

Transgender Example of Diversity Topics in the Workshop

With transgender visibility on the rise, transgender stories are appearing in fiction at a significant rate, demanding workshops to grow their awareness of how to best critique such stories. However, with much of the information still so new to cisgender (non-transgender) students, misguided reactions threaten to dismantle the helpfulness of workshops, potentially blocking the editorial improvement of transgender stories and stalling transgender visibility in fiction.

As you'll see in the workshop example below, sometimes cisgender students will confuse curiosity or discomfort about transgender life with the discussion of craft, thereby turning their uninvited questions and opinions into part of the workshop. Some will even feel that these questions and opinions about transgender people need to be satisfied before a proper discussion on craft can begin, occasionally veering into irritability if cisgender workshopers feel their needs are not being met. This practice shifts the workshop's attention away from the writer and toward the other students, turning the workshop into a focus group.

These are circumstances that reflect what transgender people continue to face in everyday life, and as such cannot be neatly or easily solved in the classroom. In the end, the answer to conducting a helpful workshop for a transgender writer (or their transgender story) is the same as any other successful workshop method: Make sure the writer's needs are being put before that of the workshopers.

Scenario

A transgender student submits a story about a transgender man who ends up homeless due to discrimination from his family, landlord, and boss. The student has purposely included slang and references that might not be known to cisgender people in order to create a more intimate and authentic portrayal of transgender life. The student clarifies upfront that he's most interested in critiques on craft and structure instead of gender content.

Early into the workshop, a fellow student says they were unable to understand the slang and references, and that because they're a straight (cis) man maybe they were not considered as an audience for this story. Another student says that they didn't understand why the main character was discriminated against and that they couldn't help feeling the main character ends up homeless because of his own doing. A third student comments how they wanted to know more about the character's "background" and trans culture at large, to the point that they couldn't focus on the narrative arc

because they were just confused. A couple of people in class refer to the trans male character as “she” during the discussion. When the writer asks that they please use the correct pronoun of “he,” the students say they’re having difficulty doing so.

Undercurrents of this Scenario

While the workshop started off by honoring the student’s wishes, a question arguably related to craft and structure (i.e. the slang) quickly turned into exactly what the student didn’t want: a talk about gender content. Also, the first student’s claim that they’re not an audience for the story moves the focus of the workshop from the (transgender) writer’s intent to the (cisgender) reader’s needs, and an additional burden is created in which a marginalized writer is expected to balance (or forsake) their authentic content to please the mainstream.

In the context of transgender content, a request for “background” information can often not be a craft concern but rather more of a fascination of seeing the trans character before they could live as themselves. It also shouldn’t be the job of the writer to provide context on trans culture at large and educate the readers. Just as it’s inappropriate—and often even disrespectful and harmful—to ask for details of a transgender person’s life before they could live as themselves, it’s inappropriate to ask for “background” that wasn’t offered in a transgender character’s storyline, especially when that information wouldn’t impact the story.

Referring to a transgender person or character with incorrect pronouns is never okay, and the matter is only made worse when the importance of correct pronouns is minimized by someone’s argument that they’re confusing and difficult to get right, insinuating that the request for correct pronouns is unimportant or unreasonable. When this rebuttal is used, it’s often an attempt—whether consciously or not—to gloss over the problem instead of growing from it. It also turns the focus of empathy onto the person who is misgendering instead of the person being misgendered.

Possible Workshop Approaches & Questions to Ask

A good starting point is the notion of intended audience, which the writer can help provide. Begin by exploring productive ways in which a reader whose gender and cultural experience differ from the main character’s can still find points of connection through empathy, respectful curiosity, imagination, and—in the context of the workshop—craft. Making a story more mainstream can be code for asking marginalized writers to make their narratives less authentic or challenging. Regarding the slang, discuss how it could be seen as a craft problem, regardless of identity, and how context clues might be helpful to readers who are eager to learn.

In terms of “background” information and cultural context, giving the writer more agency could be a productive approach. Check in with the writer before or during class and offer them the opportunity to lead the conversation in the direction that would be most useful to them without having to delve into information or context that they’re not comfortable providing. Some relevant questions to ask of the class could include: Why do some people feel like they need more background information? Is there some work readers can do outside of the story to deepen their understanding of the character’s struggles? Are questions of craft and questions of gender identity or cultural context being conflated when they shouldn’t be? Are we bringing blind spots or biases to our understanding of the story and the character’s plight?

Regarding pronouns, we highly encourage establishing proper usage of them from the beginning of the class (more details on pronoun usage are available later in this guide). When discussing stories, require that students use correct pronouns for the character. If misgendering continues, request that they use non-gendered pronouns instead (such as “they/them”) or no pronouns at all since they seem to be struggling so much. If they continue to misgender, ask them to refrain from further comment until they’re better able to engage with the given content, since correct gendering is part of what a conversation about the story requires.

Writing Exercises Addressing Issues of Identity

The Reviewer's Journal

Every week, ask students to write a one-paragraph journal, assessing their experiences in reviewing their peers work. Here are some possible questions for them to address:

- What was the easiest aspect of the review for {student name}'s work?
- What were some difficulties encountered in reviewing {student name}'s work?
- What do I wish I could have done better or understood better in service to my peer's story?

A copy of these journals will go to the instructor only.

Students don't like to hurt one another's feelings, and also don't like to look like bad people or racists. However, they tend to be very honest about their own worries and anxieties, which could then provide some fodder for future discussions—or at least something for the instructor to be more aware.

At the very least, outside of any diversity-related issues, these journals help students reflect on their role as reviewers and how they want to push themselves each week.

Note: students will often be more honest in these reflections, and it doesn't take long to scan the journals and notice patterns. This way, the instructor can address certain themes or issues in the next class after doing some preparation.

Point of View Exercise

It's common for writers to experiment with point of view. Whose story is this? Who would make the best narrator? How would the story change if it were told through the eyes of a different character? As writers, we acknowledge that each of our characters brings something to the story, contributes to it in some way. If we apply the same perspective to the workshop—that each member contributes something fresh, distinct, and individual to the experience that can be leveraged—then we should be able, as writers, to imagine each of the different contributor's perspectives, and in so doing, become stronger as a group and as writers.

The Exercise

Challenge students to write a private journal through the imagined point of view of the other student with whom they disagree. This will likely require some research and reflection. They should adhere to all the tenets of crafting good character: avoiding stereotypes, considering background, influences, etc. Really use the imagination to understand what makes that character a robust, rounded person.

Work on this privately (it will not be shared)—and if, by the end of the week or the term, you feel that this character is well-rounded, dynamic, and robust enough to use as a central character for an actual story, well, you've achieved a certain understanding that you didn't have before.

The Takeaway

To craft good, deep characters, we have to know and understand them. We can apply this same patient deep-dive into imagining what we could be missing in our understanding of our fellow human beings as well.

Tip Sheet: Handling Thorny Issues in Workshop

DO NOT:

try to educate, reason,
or sell

Some helpful phrases to use:

“This is our draft of a discussion—it’s going to be messy and unformed, but let’s work on revising it together as we move forward.”

“Help me make meaning of this.”

“Tell me more about that.”

“I appreciate the energy behind this conversation because it’s an important one that’s worth discussing.”

“This conversation is too important to try to rush right now. Let’s give this some thought and come back to it in a more prepared and deliberate manner.”

“We are here in service to Student X’s story. Are there perhaps preconceived notions or societal influences that hinder the way we might regard this piece? If so, what are they and how can we address them so we can strengthen the quality of our comments?” [After brief conversation....]

“With that in mind, let’s see what we can offer in this workshop while being conscious of those things. It might take some practice, but that’s why we’re all here. We’ll help each other along.”

DO:

- Join, process, and engage.
- Remember that you don’t have to fix everything.
- Ask questions without feeling like you have to make definitive statements.
- Show curiosity, interest, and attentiveness.
- Use cultural humility.
- Be okay with what you don’t know and what makes you uncomfortable.
- Show that you’re willing to sit with this discomfort to engage and explore.
- Use yourself as a tool. The more you can explore your own racial identity (white is also a race!), the more stakes you will have.
- Take a purposeful pause if things get heated. Encourage the class to breathe. Express appreciation for the energy.
- Strive to shape an arc for a beginning, middle, and end. Even if the end is tabling it and coming back to it.

Gender And Sexuality

Gender identity is a person's gender-related appearance, behavior, or identity, regardless of whether or not that appearance, behavior, or identity is different from what is conventionally associated with how a person looks or their sex assigned at birth. Some people may present in public as a gender with which they do not identify.

Everyone has a gender identity. When we talk about others, or ourselves, we inevitably use gendered language. References to another person's gender occur extremely often, and if used improperly can be extremely distressing for transgender or gender non-conforming people.

Writing, like every-day life, inherently involves gender because of the characters we create, write about, or critique. Therefore gender-stereotyping and assumptions about sexuality can also arise in writing, and we must work hard to challenge [heteronormativity](#), [cisnormativity](#), and the gender binary in writing spaces.

When critiquing and giving feedback during workshop, it is important to keep in mind how pervasive heteronormativity and cisnormativity are in our daily lives, and not make assumptions based on a person's appearance or presentation.

For instance, in a class full of people who are woman-presenting, not everyone is necessarily a woman. Refrain from saying "hello ladies," and opt instead for gender-neutral terms like "folks," "everyone," "friends," etc. In this same class, don't assume that everyone's partner is a man (or that everyone has a partner!)

Checking for Gender-Related Revisions

1. Have you used "man" or "men" or words containing them (like freshmen, congressmen, etc) to refer to people who may not be men?
2. If you have mentioned someone's sex or gender, was it necessary to do so?
3. Do you use any occupational (or other) stereotypes?
4. Do you provide the same kinds of information and descriptions when writing about people of different genders?

Pronouns

It can be a good idea to set an example for your class by stating your pronouns when you introduce yourself. This implicitly opens up the space for those who also want to share their pronouns and can ease any potential distress or discomfort stemming from being called by [the wrong pronouns](#). However, some people might not feel comfortable sharing their pronouns, be it that they are still questioning their gender, or are not comfortable being out. Having a conversational tone and opt-in approach will invite students to introduce themselves to whatever extent they're comfortable. Additionally, you should refrain from using the phrase "preferred pronouns" and simply say "pronouns," because "preferred" could imply that using the incorrect pronouns is still an option.

Gender Unicorn

A graphic by Trans Student Educational Resources that provides a general breakdown of the differences between gender, sex, and sexual orientation. Please note that this is only a general breakdown, as gender identity (and all of its components therein) is as varied as the amount of people in the world. This graphic is meant to provide a diving board for learning and should not be considered a definitive guide.

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by: **TSER**
Trans Student Educational Resources

- Gender Identity** (Rainbow icon)
 - Female/Woman/Girl
 - Male/Man/Boy
 - Other Gender(s)
- Gender Expression** (Green icon)
 - Feminine
 - Masculine
 - Other
- Sex Assigned at Birth** (DNA helix icon)
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other/Intersex
- Physically Attracted to** (Orange icon)
 - Women
 - Men
 - Other Gender(s)
- Emotionally Attracted to** (Red icon)
 - Women
 - Men
 - Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to: www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Trans Umbrella

A graphic by Trans Student Educational Resources that provides a general idea to some of the different kinds of gender identity. Please note the absence of non-binary individuals, who sometimes are considered synonymous with “genderqueer,” but don’t all identify as transgender, nor as genderqueer. Please also note that this graphic only provides general concepts and definitions to some of the more popular identities, are being presented in terminology specific to helping non-transgender people understand, and that gender identity, its definitions, and its labels are as varied as the amount of people in the world. This graphic is meant to provide a diving board for learning and should not be considered a definitive guide.

'TRANS UMBRELLA'

Trans*/Transgender
Someone who does not identify with their sex assigned at birth

Transfeminine/Transmasculine
Someone who identifies more female than male or more male than female

Trans Man/Trans Woman
Someone who was female at birth but identifies as male/someone who was male at birth but identifies as female

Agender
Someone who does not identify with a gender

Two Spirit
Someone who fills one of the many mixed-gender roles prevalent in Native American communities

Multigender
Someone who identifies with more than one gender (e.g. bigender)

Gender Fluid
Someone whose gender changes

Genderqueer
Someone who does not identify within the gender binary

Identities Not Under The Trans* Umbrella:

Cisgender
Someone who is not trans*

Drag Performer
Someone who wears flamboyant clothes for entertainment value (can be trans*)

Crossdresser
Someone who wears clothes associated with the a different gender (can be trans*)

Intersex
The presence of a less common combination of biological features that generally distinguish male and female (can be trans*)

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For more information,
go to transstudent.org/graphics

TSER
Trans Student Equality Resources

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal, or institutional messages that come across as dismissive, unaware, insulting, or derogatory to the individuals they are aimed at. Since they can have a profound negative impact when experienced regularly, and since individuals delivering these microaggressions are often unaware of harms they have perpetrated, it is important to understand their implications. Below are some introductory examples.

Examples of Microaggressions

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Alien in own land: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When some POC are assumed to be foreign-born 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Where are you from?” “Where were you born?” “You speak English so well!” A person asking a POC to teach them words in their native language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are not American You are a foreigner
Ascription of intelligence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigning intelligence to a person on the basis of their race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “You are a credit to your race.” “You are so articulate.” Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/science.
Colors blindness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statements that indicate a person does not want to acknowledge race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “When I look at you, I don’t see color.” “America is a melting pot.” “There is only one race, the human race.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being
Denial of individual racism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A statement made when someone denies their racial biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I’m not racist, I have several black friends.” “As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am immune to racism because I have friends of color Your racial oppression is no different from my gender oppression. I can’t be racist. I’m like you.

Theme	Microaggression	Message
<p>Myth of meritocracy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I believe that the most qualified person should get the job.” • “Everyone can succeed if they work hard enough.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. • People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.
<p>Pathologizing cultural values & communication styles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant culture/White culture are ideal • The notion that every person within a racial/cultural group speaks and acts or should speak and act in a certain way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking a black person: “Why do you have to be so loud?” • To an Asian or Latino person: “Why are you so quiet? Speak up more.” • Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in a work/school setting • “That character doesn’t sound black.” • “Immigrants should embrace American values and traditions.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilate to dominant culture. • Leave your cultural baggage outside. • Your character doesn’t fit my stereotypical views. • Your way of talking and being isn’t welcomed here.

People With Disabilities

To be truly accessible and inclusive, we believe that we have to educate ourselves regarding how best to serve those of us with disabilities. We want everyone to have a positive experience at GrubStreet and feel safe, welcome, and comfortable. To create such an environment, we should foster a culture of awareness and provide the best experience possible without overstepping personal boundaries, and respectfully interact with every student.

Etiquette

The first thing to always remember is that no matter our emotional, intellectual, and/or physical abilities and limitations, we are all equal. Some people have disabilities, but please remember that disabled does not mean unable to function. It is important to not make assumptions and follow the lead of the person in question in regards to how to treat them. If you lack clarity as to a student's needs, you can ask politely and privately for clarification. Students may need additional accommodation, but please do not assume you know a person's needs by looking at them—a wheelchair user may not want or need any assistance at all, while someone with limited hearing may not be immediately visible as such, but may need accommodation such as videos with captions, additional handouts, etc. If a person tells you that they don't need assistance, believe them and respect their wishes. If they ask for assistance, trust them! They know their needs better than you do.

Many disabilities are invisible! A student may have a disability that is not immediately visible, such as low vision, a seizure disorder, hearing loss, mental illness, a cognitive processing issue, etc. The best thing is to make your class as accessible as possible to everyone, regardless of ability: a blend of learning methods (e.g. handouts, lectures, discussions, and writing assignments) instead of over-relying on just discussion.

If your student discloses a disability to you, ask them about their preferences and accommodate those needs to the best of your ability. If a student does not disclose a disability to you, but does ask for an accommodation, do your best to accommodate it anyway (e.g. if someone requests a transcript of a video, provide one, whether they've disclosed a disability to you or not). Try not to set rules in your class that would make it inherently inaccessible to certain people (e.g. outlawing laptops or tablets, which can be necessary to some people with disabilities). If you're not sure how to accommodate a certain request, contact the office and we'd be happy to help.

Do not draw unnecessary attention to someone's disability, but neither should you deemphasize it if they want to talk about it. If someone asks you in private to speak a little louder because they are hard of hearing, do not then shout, "IS THIS LOUD ENOUGH?" at the person during class. If, however, an autistic person writes an essay about their experience with autism, and another student references autism in their feedback in a way that is appropriate and relevant to the piece, do not interrupt to say, "I don't think we need to talk about that." (That said, as in every class, make sure you keep the focus on the writing, not the person, if someone is writing about themselves and their disability—just like you would with any other student). While different people may have different feelings about their disabilities, a disability is not something to be ashamed of. Don't treat it like it is. As noted before, follow the lead of the person in question, and never make assumptions.

Below are some practices that can help students with a disability feel respected and at ease when interacting with instructors in our space.

Actions

ALWAYS

- Listen to the person with the disability. They know their needs better than you do.
- Talk directly to the disabled person first, and not the aide, friend, family member, unless requested by the person with the disability.
- Be conscious of your language. Do your best to mirror the language they use for themselves. Avoid offensive terms (see “Language” section below for examples).
- Identify yourself when approaching a person who you know to be blind.
- Talk to a Deaf person directly, even if there is an interpreter present.
- Treat adults like adults, no matter their disability.
- Keep in mind the needs of everyone in the class, and do not single out anyone because they have different needs from the rest of the group. For instance, if one of your students is in a wheelchair, don’t schedule an event at a non-accessible space. Don’t have the entire class take the stairs if one student has to take the elevator.
- Remember that diversifying teaching approaches to accommodate a range of learning styles often benefits all students, rather than just those with disabilities.

NEVER

- Touch someone’s wheelchair without permission.
- Take someone’s arm without permission (this goes for able-bodied people, too! In general, never touch someone without permission).
- Pet a service animal. They are doing a job for the person they are serving, and petting them prevents them from doing that job.
- Make assumptions. Do ask someone if they need help and respect their answer.
- Talk to a Deaf person’s interpreter, or to an aide for someone with a disability, as if the disabled person isn’t there.

Language

DO SAY (POSITIVE)	DO NOT SAY (NEGATIVE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible or Barrier Free (such as parking or entrances, seating, restrooms etc.)• Person who is hard of hearing• Person who has low vision• Wheelchair User• People or Person with Disability• Person with a developmental/ intellectual disability• Born with a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handicapped, the disabled, physically challenged, crippled etc.• Partially Deaf/ Hearing Impaired• Partially Blind• Vision Impaired• Wheelchair Bound• Retarded, mentally defective

People-First vs. Disability-first Language

There are a lot of different opinions on whether person-first language (language that leads with the person in question, e.g. “a person with autism”) is preferable to disability-first language (language that leads with the disability, e.g. “an autistic person”). While there is no universally agreed-upon language that will apply to every single disabled person (the disabled community, as with every other community, is not a monolith!), here are a few ground rules to keep in mind:

• **Don’t assume.** Do not reference a person’s disability if they have not first disclosed it to you, and do not assume that you know better than they do how to refer to them. Always defer to the person in question: they are the best person to tell you their needs, and how they prefer to be addressed.

• **Mirror the language the person is using.** If they refer to themselves as an autistic person, refer to them that way, and not as a person with autism. If they refer to themselves as someone with low vision, do not refer to them as blind.

• **Educate yourself!** While no community is a monolith, there are some communities, for instance, who widely prefer disability-first language. This includes, among others, the autistic community and the Deaf Community, as many members view autism and deafness,

respectively, as something that is integral to their personhood. (This is particularly true of people who use ASL and who view deafness as a cultural identity rather than a disability).

- **Always prioritize the person with the disability, not someone speaking for them.** For instance, in the autistic community, the call for person-first language is often coming from parents and loved ones, not the autistic person themselves. Listen to the person with the disability, not someone else.

- **Avoid using disabilities or terms that have origins in disabilities in as a descriptive term.** Avoid using the word crazy or nuts for something that's unbelievable, and use wild instead. Do not use blind or deaf to refer to someone or something that isn't, in fact, blind or deaf (e.g. "are you blind?" or "He's deaf to that concern."). Do not refer to yourself as OCD if you have not been diagnosed with clinical OCD, or sincerely believe that you may have it (as opposed to just liking things to be in order), and follow that same rule for other mental illnesses (e.g. don't say "I have PTSD from that workshop").

- **Do not use offensive language.** Hopefully this goes without saying, but there are some words you should avoid using altogether, as they are widely considered to be offensive. This goes even if you hear the person with a disability referring to themselves in this way; just because they say it doesn't then mean it's okay for you to say it. Some examples of words to avoid are on the next page.

- **Apologize when you need to.** If you mess up by using the wrong term, or if you ask someone a question that they take issue with, apologize quickly and briefly. Do not make a huge thing of it and flagellate yourself in front of them, thereby putting the burden of reassuring you on the disabled person. Simply say, "I'm so sorry, I'll remember that in the future," if it's a response to a concern or offense the person has brought to you.

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