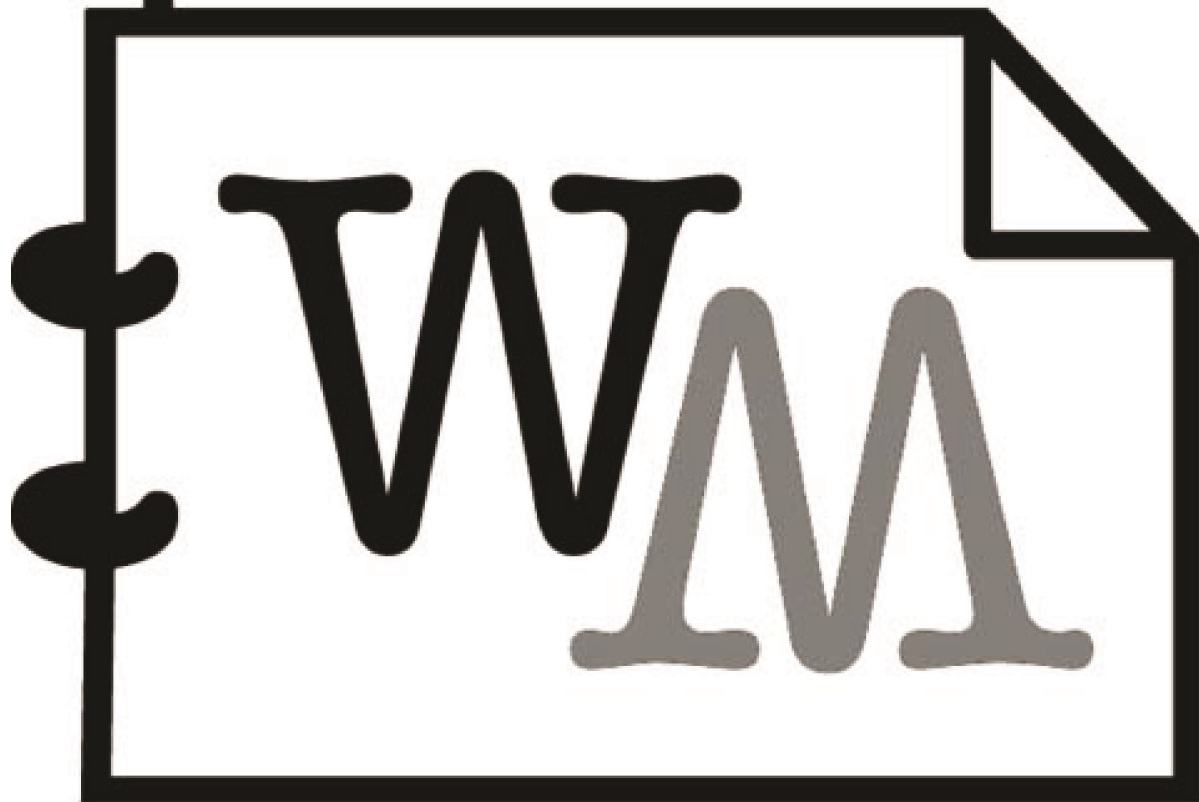


New Orleans



Writing Marathon

“New Orleans Writing Marathon” Handout
Richard Louth (richardlouth7@gmail.com)

OVERVIEW: *The Writing Marathon gives everyone a chance to write on anything they want and to share their writing in small groups, with no criticism, while experiencing the city as writers.*

1. Natalie Goldberg conceptualized the “Writing Marathon” in *Writing Down the Bones*

Everyone in the group agrees to commit himself or herself for the full time. Then we make up a schedule. For example, a ten-minute writing session, another ten minute session, a fifteen minute session, two twenty minute sessions, and then we finish with a half-hour round of writing. So for the first session we all write for ten minutes and then go around the room and read what we’ve written with no comments by anyone. . . A pause naturally happens after each reader, but we do not say ‘That was great’ or even ‘I know what you mean.’ There is no good or bad, no praise or criticism. We read what we have written and go on to the next person. People are allowed to pass and not read twice during the marathon. Naturally there should be some flexibility. If someone feels the need to pass more often or less often, that is fine. What usually happens is you stop thinking; you write; you become less and less self-conscious. Everyone is in the same boat, and because no comments are made, you feel freer and freer to write anything you want. (150)

2. Hemingway contributed a sense of place to our “Marathon” concept in *A Moveable Feast*

“The story was writing itself and I was having a hard time keeping up with it. I ordered another rum St. James and I watched the girl whenever I looked up, or when I sharpened the pencil with a pencil sharpener with the shavings curling into the saucer under my drink.

I’ve seen you, beauty, and you belong to me now, whoever you are waiting for and if I never see you again, I thought. You belong to me and all Paris belongs to me and I belong to this notebook and pencil.” (6)

3. The “New Orleans-style Writing Marathon”

A “New Orleans Writing Marathon” combines Natalie Goldberg and Ernest Hemingway with a format developed by Richard Louth at the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project. Every year since 1994, National Writing Project teacher-writers have met in New Orleans to hold writing marathons lasting from a few hours to five days. The basic format is always the same. Writers usually begin a marathon by turning to each other and saying, “I’m a writer.” We split into small groups to go to restaurants, coffeeshouses, pubs, parks, etc., where we eat, write, and share our way across the city. We spend about an hour in each place, and then move on. If the place is particularly good, we may stay longer. We follow Goldberg’s basic rules: allow about 10-20 min. of uninterrupted writing time, share, and limit responses to a simple “Thank you” after each reading. While there is always time for socializing, the emphasis remains on the writing, and doing it for yourself. Groups find their own path, can cross paths, join, and turn into new groups. Emphasis is on enjoyment and giving yourself time and space to write in good company.

4. Writing Marathon Reminders

We’ll work in small groups of your own choice, mixing in refreshments and local color. Try to keep the groups small (3-5 persons) to get quick service at restaurants, etc., and go to places with good acoustics and seats. Don’t fret if your first piece of writing seems forced. That’s not unusual. Just relax and keep at it. If stuck, just look around and record what you hear and see. As Kim Stafford advises in *The Muses Among Us*, become “a professional eavesdropper” who listens “to the muses among us.” And whatever you write, enjoy yourself! You may want to write for longer than 10 minutes once you get started. Remember these four steps: 1) Write. 2) Share writing without response. 3) Socialize (eat/talk). 4) Move on. Repeat.

5. Schedule: Some continue till 3:30, and meet at Molly’s on Decatur. Let your group know your schedule.

- After an intro, small groups hit the streets to write and share without comment all across NOLA.

6. Background: • *The Writing Marathon: “In Good Company Revealed.”* (R. Louth, LULU.com, 2011).

• NOWM Website: <www.writingmarathon.com>. • Facebook: *New Orleans Writing Marathon*

• *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* (Summer 2022): “Coming Full Circle.” *Louisiana Literature* (2011-2021): Anthologies.

• <<https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/b7e7445be68f9f2286b804503877311e/writing-marathon-map-of-new-orleans/index.html>> NOLA writing spots on StoryMap by Susan Martens.

• “The New Orleans Writing Marathon: An Oasis for Wordsmiths,” Chris Romaguera, *French Quarter Journal*.

NOWM “Writing/Eating/Socializing” Spots

As Melville wrote in *Moby Dick*, “It is not down on any map. True places never are.” Below are some suggested writing spots, but in New Orleans you’ll also discover your own places. Feed your senses. Even when not writing, you’re a writer on a marathon, so enjoy observing the world as a writer when you venture from place to place. Practical advice: When your group stops to write, seek places with tables big enough for all. Avoid loud and crowded places and long lines. And remember to purchase refreshments at bars, cafes, etc., to pay for your seats. And when asked, remember to say, “I’m a writer!” And write!

Upper Quarter (Near Monteleone)

Café—*Patula*, 619 Royal: Great courtyard! New place ideal for writing groups. NEW!
Café—*St. Pat’s Irish Coffeehouse*, 933 Conti: Great courtyard tables, indoor table, welcomes writers.
Café—*French Truck Coffee*, 217 Chartres: good coffee and pastry. Can become crowded.
Café—*PJ’s*, 501 Decatur: Good seating for groups!
Café—*Sucre*, 217 Royal (across from Monteleone) & 636 Royal: Macaroons, coffee, good seating.
Café—*Café Beignet*, 334 Royal, 311 Bourbon; & 600 Decatur (in Jax Brewery);
Café—*Spitfire Coffee Bar*, 307 Exchange Place: Small, across from Michalopoulos Art. Odd hours.
Bar—*Backspace Bar & Kitchen*, 139 Chartres: It bills itself as a writer’s haunt, Hemingway theme, food.
Bar—*Carousel Bar* (Monteleone Hotel), 214 Royal: Try to get a carousel seat, but sofas and tables nice.
Bar—*Napoleon House*, 500 Chartres: Famous bar that serves food such as warm muffelata. Courtyard!
Food—*Felix’s*, 739 Iberville: Corner of Bourbon, casual seafood, across from more crowded Acme.
Food—*Original Pierre Masparos*, 440 Chartres: Casual rest. broad menu, across from Napoleon House.
Food—*Sylvain*, 625 Chartres: Gastropub, fine food, casual, neat courtyard where Faulkner met Anderson.

On/Near Rampart Street

Café—*Twelfth Night Coffee*, 628 N. Rampart: good coffee, pastry, writing vibes.
Bar/Food—*Rampart Treehouse*, 740 N. Rampart: pizza and food too.
Bar/Food—*Schooner Saloon*, 700 Burgundy: Best Philly Cheesesteaks, fresh bread from Phillie daily!

Past Jackson Square (Lower French Quarter)

Café—*Croissant d’or*, 617 Ursulines: French pastries, lunch, courtyard. Worth the walk.
Café—*Envie*, Corner Barracks/Decatur: Good writing spot, breakfast or lunch. Hip corner.
Café—*CC’s Coffeehouse*, 941 Royal (Corner of Royal & St. Phillip): small local coffeehouse.
Café—*French Toast*, 1035 Decatur: great local café, indoor/outdoor tables, can be crowded.
Café—*Clover Grill*, 900 Bourbon: Funky breakfast place, 3-4 tables.
Bar—*Molly’s at the Market*, 1107 Decatur: Writers welcome! “Marathon central”; Great window seat!
Bar—*Le Bouchon Wine Bar*, 1118 Decatur: NEW! Wine, cheese, sandwiches, and cozy seating in rear.
Bar—*Harry’s Corner Bar*, 900 Chartres: Local’s dive, great jukebox, real atmosphere, outdoor tables.
Bar—*Icehouse Bar*, 1024 Chartres @Provincial Hotel: Good tables. Happy Hr. 3:30-6. PM.
Bar—*MRB Bar*, 515 St. Philip: Bar/casual eatery. (Next door—seafood house with crawfish boil smell.)
Bar—*Manolito*, 508 Dumaine: Cuban sandwich & Hemingway Daiquiri; Opens 4 PM
Food—*Coops*, 1109 Decatur: Next to Molly’s, local dive famous for food; but don’t wait in a long line.
Food—*1100 Block of Decatur*: Many spots—Turtle Bay, Flambo, Cane and Table, Zhang, etc.
Food—*Café Amelie*, 900 Royal: Attractive spot with small courtyard.

Frenchmen Street area (Marigny)

Places range from an “All Day Coffee” spot to Ayo Bakery, to Dat Dog (hotdogs) to NOLA Poboys.

Jackson Square area

Bar—*Pirate’s Alley Café*, Beside Faulkner House: Serves drinks (like absinthe!), not food. Outdoor tables.
Food—*The Gumbo Shop*, 630 St. Peter: Authentic food, good for groups, next to Tennessee Williams’ apt.
Food—*Tableau*, 625 Chartres: (to left of Cathedral): Upscale, Happy hr at bar, balcony & courtyard.
Food—*Muriels*, 801 Chartres (to right of Cathedral): Upscale. Bring a drink to balcony or Séance Room.

“Writing Marathon Moments”

*Excerpts from Louisiana Literature collections
Richard Louth, editor <richardlouth7@gmail.com>*

7:30 A.M. Café du Monde (Kim Stafford, “New Orleans in Words”)

Present Moment Observed

I’m just looking up at the painting on the wall—Jackson Square, the Cathedral, a black face surrounded by a halo of gold, and the inscription below: “It was just an ordinary day until I met Jesus at the Café du Monde”—when the Black waitress comes drifting toward me with a glass globe of coffee swinging in her hand.

“You wan’ an’thing mo’, baby? Yo wan’ an’thing mo’?”

11:11 P.M., Jackson Square (Dayne Sherman, “New Orleans in Words”)

Past Moment Transplanted

I still remember the spot, left side of Jackson Square and St. Peter. My back was to the Mississippi. It was 1985 and I was just five minutes off the Albany High School bus. This was our end of the year trip to the French Quarter, a cultural enrichment program for poor kids from a poor school in a poor state.

Two of my buddies stood beside me. I was scared and sweating in the heat. This was New Orleans, the forbidden city. My right hand massaged the handle of the knife in my pocket.

Curtis Raspberry, a classmate, a black kid in a school full of Livingston Parish crackers, stepped in front of a mime, a statue standing atop a dark wooden box. The man was dressed in clownish clothes, a painted tear on his snow-white cheek. Curtis dropped a dollar bill into the mime’s pork pie hat, which was lying below a box on the sidewalk. At least a dozen people were watching, the early morning crowd of spring tourists.

This mime was an unmovable witness to human stillness. We were moved by his inner peace. He was not Homo sapiens sapiens, but rigor mortis man, the unmovable man.

Then Curtis rubbed his brow. His face crinkled and he touched his stomach. He stepped forward and reached into the felt hat and removed the dollar, or tried to, when the mime became homicidal, a man-killer, the screaming mime, the vicious mime. The statue began stalking Curtis, backing him to the tall wrought iron park fence, lecturing him about the words of Moses, “Thou Shalt Not Steal,” while the crowd stood with mouths wide open.

This was the French Quarter and these were the Lords of Misrule. It was about time for me to ease the knife out of my pocket.

12:00 P.M., The Clover Grill (Tracy Cunningham, “New Orleans in Words”)

A Decision

The waiter, George, is beautiful. Tall, dark, lean, with movements like a cat, he is in charge—in charge of the register, in charge of the front counter, in charge of the orders, in charge of himself. I’m going through a funk. I haven’t been in charge of myself for quite a while, and when he comes to the table, his swagger makes my head swim.

The menu says, “Ask about our pie,” so I ask George about the pie, so obedient and compliant. What I really want is his swagger.

He tells me about the pie, and something makes me say lemon, but I want blueberry. He writes down lemon, and says, “Okaaaay,” in a sad tone, and I say, “No. Not lemon.”

He looks at me, pleased that I’m about to take charge of myself and order what I really want. And I’m about to say, “Make it blueberry,” when he smiles mischievously, and then begins to really sell that lemon pie. He talks about the smooth filling, not too sweet, and he describes the crispy buttery vanilla wafery crust, and the sweet meringue—soft mounds with brown peaks.

“Ok,” I say. “I’ll have the lemon.”

“Okaaaay,” he says, giving me this look that says, “You poor child. You are not in charge of yourself. You cannot even order pie.”

He leaves me at the table craving blueberry pie and confidence.

Dear lady with the leopard print bandana, (Chet Hebert, “New Orleans in Letters”) A Person or Letter

You are a part of me. You’re the lady at the checkout counter of the local flower shop that sells flowers along with overpriced trinkets and home décor. You’re the woman next to me in church on the Sundays of my youth who recited every prayer a little louder than the rest because, well, you once knew them in Latin and may be a little hard of hearing. You’re the guidance counselor with the photos of your children—who happen to be dogs—dispersed among your desk along with all other available shelf space in your office. You’re the lady standing at the end of the bar at Molly’s at the Market, a cigarette in hand and a can of hairspray in your hair. You’re familiar to me; I know you. You smoke Virginia Slims and only half at a time. You walk into Harrah’s, find a nickel slot, and walk out three days later. The wrinkles upon your cheeks say you’re aged, but the energy within your soul screams otherwise. You’ll crack a sexual joke like you are a college boy, and a minute later speak the wisdom of an 80-year-old Yale Professor. You’ve been through more than most and have never stopped learning. You’re a daughter, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. You wake up in the morning, put your face on, and tie a leopard print bandana around your head because you want to and you can. Your confidence, however, does not make others feel inferior, but empowers and comforts them. You are the lady with the leopard print bandana and New Orleans, the world, thrives around your spirit.

Jackson Square (Bev Marshall, “Finding Your Muse in New Orleans”)

Your Muses

New Orleans, Nola, the city, its people, its history, restaurants and bars, churches and circuses of tourists—my muses for over a decade when I began writing with the marathon some ten years past. The muses visit me again and again and again, and now sitting here on a bench in Jackson Square listening to the steamboat whistle blow, I think of all those precious days of writing stories this city, my muse, has bestowed. In Molly’s sitting on a stool in the window I wrote my only poem, “Ode to a Salty Dog.” On the first marathon after Katrina I sobbed as I wrote standing on the sidewalk behind St. Louis Cathedral, “The hurricane winds have taken away Jesus’s hand.” On Bourbon Street I wrote a memory of walking down that infamous street at 7 a.m. in a red-fringed dress and satin high heels. Beside the window in Harry’s Corner I wrote about my panties, lace-trimmed drawers, lost and found. “I have learned to keep them on.” On Muriel’s balcony overlooking Jackson Square I gave a mime words and a painter a story about his painting on a door salvaged from the Ninth Ward. A drum beats, a trumpet blares as I write this, and I remember the music I wrote to after dancing on a table top—after too many salty dogs. I don’t remember where. Beside the pool at Le Richelieu I wrote with tears streaming down my cheeks about my dad, the storyteller, who had passed on to me his last tale. Just outside the French Market I wrote about a photo that possessed a story it whispered to me, and in an alley on Royal Street the palm reader looking into her crystal ball told me a story foretelling my writing career. Many of the writing pieces I’ve penned through the years are about the writing project teachers, muses all, who shared their stories and lives, funny and heartrending stories I’ll long remember. The muses have been generous to this aging woman and this year their gifts continue to fill my pages and my heart. I toast to them all with a salty dog.

Kaldi’s Is Gone and So Are We (Richard Louth, “Finding Your Muse in New Orleans”)

A Place

Over the frozen Irish Coffee machine in Molly’s hangs a thick wooden sign for Kaldi’s, which used to be my favorite coffee house. It closed in the 90’s, then opened again as a tourist information center. They had a drink called the Venetian Creme—a tall, thick, cold coffee drink like no other, the color of the Mississippi River one block away. At the beginning and end of each semester, I’d come to the Quarter with my close friend John Coumes to celebrate, and whenever we arrived or departed, we’d usually stop at Kaldi’s for their Venetian Creme. Sometimes we’d drop in both coming and going. “Richard,” John would say, “it’s a city of excess.” John taught me my first lessons about the city. “You see that man?” he once said, pointing to a rough looking character hunched over a bar. “He mugged me once, on the street, and about a month later sat right beside me at a lunch counter.” John taught me that every time he came to the city, he did three things: he gave money to someone asking for it; he tried something new; and he researched a fact about the city. His dream was to retire from teaching, get a small apartment in the Quarter, and lead tours. One August, as we rounded the corner of the Cathedral and entered Jackson Square on our way to the balcony of the old Chart House Restaurant for a Sazerac, the entire façade of the Lower Pontalba building, which was under renovation, collapsed next to our destination. If we’d walked one minute faster, we’d likely have been crushed. “Well,” he’d said. “We always have Kaldi’s.” Most of the time when we’d sit in Kaldi’s tall window, looking out over the corner of St. Philip and Decatur, we’d say little. The past was behind us, the future did not exist, and we were only present, totally present, looking over the heads of passersby, sipping the thick, cold coffee, feeling the beaded sweat on the surface of our glasses. The wind of the ceiling fans would caress our backs. We’d hear the ring of a cash register and coffee beans grinding behind us. No words then, just the pleasant silver sounds of spoons searching the bottoms of our Venetian Cremes as we searched for one last drop of life’s sweetness before nightfall in this place now gone.

Souvenir (Ellen Steigman, “Writing n Good Company in New Orleans”)

On You as Writer

Writers return from New Orleans
With spiritual souvenirs.
Life itself is our luggage;
The weight of our words can’t be shipped.
We can’t check this time in a suitcase,
Though it might *just* fit into a pen.
So we pour our hearts into go-cups,
And carry on.

7/17, 8:10 A.M., Balcony (Marley Stuart, “Writing in Good Company in New Orleans”)

Epiphany/Friends

Last night we sat again out by the pool for hours, the bottle of whiskey between us. After dinner I only planned on staying for a little while—we were too tired to dance. But something about sitting in a circle with good friends, late at night, woke us up. I asked Kimberly, once, “Are you tired?” and she said, “I got my second wind.” That’s an interesting metaphor. My second wind: yes, like your breath, when running—the point past breaking point, when the pain turns into something else, when you can use your pain. But I like the way it’s carried to mental fortitude as well. The wind, the spirit. The wind, that whips a fire from the threat of death to new life, bright and hot around black logs like bones, your ribs.

We are each a vessel of fire.

*** Works cited above from *Louisiana Literature*: *New Orleans in Words* (2011); *New Orleans in Letters* (2013); *Finding your Muse in New Orleans* (2015); *Writing in Good Company in New Orleans* (2018).**