

Memoir School

24-28 March 2025

*'I'd lost my way with my memoir
and lost confidence in my writing but
I finished the week feeling reinvigorated,
with a real sense of direction'*

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A WEEK FOR CREATING AND SHAPING YOUR MEMOIR

Claire Hynes Hannah Lowe Jane Rogers Margaret Wilkinson

SPECIAL GUEST: Literary agent Juliet Pickering



Mslexia Memoir School is an online course for writers who are embarking on a new memoir, or rethinking an existing draft.

This will be a whole week to make real progress with your book – with expert tuition from renowned tutors, a professional writing coach to keep you on track, an on-call counsellor to provide emotional support, and a lively group of fellow writers to cheer you on. All this and more, in the comfort of your own home.

Course structure

Craft tuition

Four leading writer-tutors will each focus on a single aspect of the memoir craft, creating a varied week of high-quality workshops.

Our four core craft tutors are:

- ▶ *Claire Hynes* on harnessing the power of place and historical atmosphere
- ▶ *Hannah Lowe* on exploring the theme and message of your memoir
- ▶ *Jane Rogers* on structure and chronology
- ▶ *Margaret Wilkinson* on dramatising your memories

More details about our craft tutors and their workshops are overleaf.

- ▶ Our special Friday guest, literary agent *Juliet Pickering*, will answer questions about submitting a memoir for publication.

Small-group teaching

We know individual attention is all-important, so our workshop groups will be limited to around 12 people – which means your tutors will have time to get to know you and your writing. There will be only four groups on the course, so book early to secure your place!

A writing community

The core teaching takes place from 10am-4pm, but groups will come together for the coaching workshops and social aspects of each day – to form a community of memoir-obsessed writers who will become your friends for life.

Motivation and support

Because this is Mslexia, we know how important it is to nurture the whole writer. That's why, in addition to our core Memoir School teaching, we're also including motivation and goal-setting workshops led by experienced writing coach Bec Evans, drop-in surgeries with counsellor Sue Spencer for anyone who's feeling a bit lost, all held together by our MC Rosie Garland – novelist, poet and performer *extraordinaire* – who will introduce you to fellow writers on the course. More details about our motivation and support tutors and their workshops are overleaf.

Praise for our previous memoir courses

'This week has reignited my flame. Thank you all so much!'

'The tutors! OMG, the tutors! All of them first class, their experience shone through, both as experienced writers and as teachers. I am sure we did a mini MA this week.'

'Really inspiring. I was worried I would feel out of my depth, but I was supported and encouraged throughout.'

'The week gave me the tools I needed to progress from the very stuck point I had reached, and the fuel to keep going for months.'

'Having a counsellor with her experience on hand was just wonderful.'

(anonymous comments from our Virtual Visitors' Book)

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Memoir School

Our four craft tutors have each designed a bespoke day of workshops, based on their many years' experience of teaching creative writing at the highest level. From Monday to Thursday each group will spend a day with one tutor, divided into manageable tuition sessions, with breaks for refreshment and private writing.

At the end of each day, from 17:00-18:00, is Happy Hour – when all workshop groups will come together for expert-led sessions designed to help you prioritise your creativity and maintain the momentum of the course into the future.

Friday will be a day to consolidate everything you've learnt, network with other writers, set goals for the coming months, quiz your tutors in a lively Q&A session – and gain valuable insights about the memoir market from a specialist literary agent.

Our course counsellor will be available for a private chat by phone or on Zoom during the longer refreshment breaks (12:30-13:30 and 16:00-17:00). Contact Kay in our admin team if you want to book a slot (0191 204 8860 or kay@mslexia.co.uk). For more information, contact postbag@mslexia.co.uk.

Course timetable

MONDAY - THURSDAY

09:00 *MONDAY ONLY! Welcome starts earlier, at 09:00, followed by 'Meet your group'*

09:30 Welcome and writing warm-ups

10:00 Group tuition*

11:30 Caffeine/snack break

12:00 Group tuition*

13:00 Meal break

14:00 Group tuition*

16:00 Caffeine/snack break

16:30 Whole school social time

17:00 Happy Hour talks and workshops

**Tutors will alternate tuition, writing exercises and feedback differently according to their individual approaches to their particular topic for the day.*

FRIDAY

09:30 Group contacts

10:00 Goal setting

11:30 Caffeine/snack break

12:00 Meet the agent

13:00 Meal break

14:00 Panel Q&A with all tutors

Course tutors



Claire Hynes

Claire's day of workshops will help you explore the rich context of your life story – its settings and historical backdrop – and weave them through your narrative like the bright silks of embroidery. What often makes one memoir stand out from others is the unique alchemy that occurs when a personal drama is played out within a distinctive time and place. What were the particular sights, sounds and smells that accompanied your story? What was dominating the media at that time? How were world events impinging on your life?

Claire Hynes is an Associate Professor in creative writing at UEA, that renowned centre of creative writing excellence. She is an award-winning writer of fiction, creative nonfiction and theatre monologues, whose work has been widely published and performed, including by the BBC, Contact Theatre Manchester, Wasafiri and Lighthouse. She has been awarded a Civitella Ranieri Writing Fellowship for 2025-26. Prior to teaching at UEA, she worked as a BBC documentary filmmaker.



Hannah Lowe

Hannah will lead a day of workshops on theme and focus, and ask you to consider the Unique Selling Point of your memoir. Through exercises and discussion, you'll explore not only what your memoir is about, but also what it is *really* about. What do you want your reader to learn from your story? In particular, she will focus on Vivian Gornick's assertion that a memoir should aim to 'deliver wisdom'. Hannah's exercises will tease out the universal strands running through your memoir, and how to use them to draw readers into your world.

Hannah Lowe is a poet, memoirist and academic. Her memoir *Long Time, No See* was a Radio 4 *Book of the Week*. Her poetry collection *The Kids* was a Poetry Book Society Choice, won the Costa Poetry Award, and was Costa Book of the Year in 2021. Following the publication of her first collection *Chick*, she was named as one of 20 Next Generation poets. She undertook her AHRC-funded PhD in Creative Writing at Newcastle University, and now lectures in Creative Writing at Brunel University. Her memoir *The Woman in the Chinese Collar* will be published in 2026.



Jane Rogers

Jane's day of workshops will look at how to structure your memoir. Where do you begin? At birth or adolescence? In the midst of a dramatic crisis? We live our lives chronologically, but a memoir can follow any timeline you choose – Maggie O'Farrell's memoir *I am, I am, I am* relates 17 near-death experiences in a sequence that bears no relation to real time. Jane will use examples, exercises, and discussion to explore different ways of ordering your memoir, and consider how vital story-telling ingredients such as pace and suspense can be woven in.

Jane Rogers has published ten novels, a collection of stories, TV and radio drama. Her novels range from historical (*Mr Wroe's Virgins*, which she adapted into an award-winning BBC2 serial) through contemporary (*Island*, about a young woman who sets out to murder her mother) to science fiction (*The Testament of Jessie Lamb*, ManBooker longlisted, winner of the Arthur C Clarke Award). She is Professor Emerita of Writing at Sheffield Hallam, and has taught writing to a wide variety of students. Her latest collection of stories, *Fire-Ready*, is out now.



Margaret Wilkinson

Margaret will lead a day of workshops on storytelling and readability. There is a temptation when writing memoir to narrate events in the style of a historian, which can result in a one-dimensional reading experience. Margaret will help you enliven your story by dramatising your memories, turning them into scenes, and creating a balance of showing and telling, action and reflection. She will explore ways of animating your past with a series of guided exercises investigating scene shape and structure, including tips for writing great dialogue.

Margaret Wilkinson is a prose, stage and radio writer. Her fiction has been widely published, her plays have toured the UK, and her radio plays have been broadcast on BBC Radio 4. She worked as Senior Lecturer on the MA in Creative Writing at Newcastle University, where she taught fiction and script at undergraduate and postgraduate level. An inspirational teacher, Margaret is a regular contributor to *Mslexia* and is author of our Mslexia Minis ebooks *Writing for Radio* and *Writing Short Stories*. Her acclaimed novel *Lublin* (written as Manya Wilkinson) came out in 2024.



Juliet Pickering

Juliet will be available on the final day to answer questions about the market for memoir, and how to prepare your manuscript for submission. She represents a list of conversation-starting writers in non-fiction and fiction. In both genres she believes that vital qualities are emotional depth, authenticity, and an engaging voice. She's drawn to multi-layered stories of women, families and relationships, and prefers the small and intimate to the epic and world-affecting. She says, 'I'm a feminist and celebrate books that empower us, or make us feel recognised and heard'.

Juliet Pickering worked for Waterstones as a bookseller before joining the agency A P Watt in 2003. She moved to Blake Friedmann in 2013, becoming Vice Head of the Book Department and a Director in 2020. She was a *Bookseller Rising Star* in 2017 and Romantic Novelists' Association Agent of the Year in 2021. She has judged the Bristol Short Story Prize and Manchester Fiction Prize, and is on the board of the Working Class Writers' Festival. Her current client list includes Diane Abbott, Natasha Carthew, Kerry Hudson and Lucy Mangan.



Bec Evans

Bec will lead Happy Hour sessions on overcoming obstacles to writing – such as procrastination, poor time management and lack of confidence – and on building resilience and a long-term writing practice. Bec will also be leading a goal-setting workshop on Friday that will help you develop a realistic plan to navigate your memoir-writing journey, including visualising success, dealing with setbacks, and setting up accountability structures. These practical sessions will give you the tools to keep going long after the course has concluded.

Bec Evans is an author, coach and consultant dedicated to helping writers stay motivated. Starting her career as a bookseller, Bec moved into publishing, managed teams of writers, and was a centre director for Arvon. She supports writers, writing groups, universities and publishers through The Written Academy, and shares insight in her weekly newsletter *Breakthroughs and Blocks* on Substack. She is co-author of *Mslexia's Diary & Planner 2025* and her latest book is *Written: How to Keep Writing and Build a Habit That Lasts*.



Rosie Garland

Rosie will be your MC and guide during the course. She will get your creative juices flowing each day with freewriting exercises, introduce our whole-group sessions, and lead workshops on the importance of self-care in a writer's life – and on ways of outwitting the internal critic that often sabotages our creativity and motivation. Rosie will also introduce our guest literary agent, lead the Q&A session with our craft tutors and networking with your fellow writers.

Rosie Garland writes long and short fiction and poetry, and sings with post-punk band The March Violets. Her writing is published internationally and her latest poetry collection *What Girls do the Dark* (Nine Arches Press) was shortlisted for the Polari Prize 2021. Her most recent novel *The Fates* is a feminist retelling of the Greek myth of the Fates. The Times has described her writing as 'a delight... with shades of Angela Carter'. Val McDermid has named her one of the most compelling LGBTQ+ writers in the UK today.



Sue Spencer

Sue is a qualified coach and creative supervisor, with experience of working with a wide range of writers and artists in one-to-one consultations and group sessions. Her practice is also informed by four decades of employment in health care and higher education. Sue has helped steer many writers through the sometimes choppy emotional seas of the creative process and will be available for a private chat by phone or on Zoom during the longer refreshment breaks on the course.

Sue Spencer is also a published poet, editor and academic, with an MA in Poetry from Newcastle University. She has recently completed her term as an Associate Editor for *Medical Humanities*, and is a member of the writing for wellbeing organisation Lapidus International. Sue was our in-house counsellor during the Mslexicon writing weekend. She says, 'My aim is to offer restorative conversations that build strategies to help people continue to create in ways that matter to them'.