

# How Writers Write Fiction 2015

CLASS SEVEN • Discussion Topics

## How to use these questions:

These discussion questions are based on the video and required reading for each class. You can use them to lead a discussion with your group, or you can use them to think about the class videos and readings on your own. You do not have to use them in the order given below, and you do not have to use all of them. Onward!

## Class 7 Questions for Beginning Writers

Choose one or more of the options below to discuss with your group:

*From Venise Berry's talk:*

One of the techniques for revision and editing that Venise Berry discusses is a process she calls “layering”: taking a simple sentence or scene and gradually building it into something much bigger. How could this process help you to build a story out of basic ideas you have? Look back at the writing assignments you’ve completed for this course, and identify one that you think is not yet finished. Are there scenes or sentences that you could expand through the layering process?

*Optional assignment preparation question for beginning writers:*

Consider the following sentence: “Martha walked into the dark room, straining her eyes to see what was inside.” Use Venise Berry’s layering technique to build this sentence into a paragraph-long scene.

*From Susan Taylor Chehak's talk:*

Susan Taylor Chehak describes revision as beginning with the process of revisiting your work. In order to discover how to improve a piece of writing, she recommends that you try to see it as a whole rather than as a collection of individual parts. Read John McNally’s essay “The Secret Life of Subtext” (the link to this essay can be found in the Class 7 Readings document). Think about the writing assignments you completed earlier in this course. Do you see the potential for a deeper exploration in one of your assignments? What does it look like as a whole? What craft decisions would you like to make in order to revise it?

## Class 7 Questions for Experienced Writers

Choose one or more of the options below to discuss with your group:

*From Venise Barry's talk:*

Venise Berry’s “layering” technique – the process of taking a basic sentence or scene and gradually building it into something larger – can be used to make your rough draft of a story more complete and detailed. Have you ever discovered that there is a larger or deeper meaning present in a story you wrote, a meaning that you were not originally aware of when you were first writing the story? How might you use the layering technique to refine your use of subtext? In other words: say you have reread a first draft of your story and have



discovered what might be your story's subtext beneath the surface. How might you use the layering technique to make that subtext more prominent or effective in your story?

*From Susan Taylor Chehak's talk:*

There are some parallels between Susan Taylor Chehak's theories on revision as discussed in her talk, and John McNally's theories discussed in his essay "The Secret Life of Subtext" (the link to this essay can be found in the Class 7 Readings document). In a sense, both Chehak and McNally consider the revision process to be one of (1) revisiting the work to see it as a whole and (2) using this revisiting experience discover its deeper meaning. However, many authors prefer to revise as they go along, rather than completing a first draft and then looking back. What method do you find most effective? Take a look at one of the writing assignments you've completed for this course and try to see it as a whole. Describe its deeper meaning, its subtext, to your group. Listen to the words you use to describe your subtext, and then look at your assignment again. Now that you have articulated its wholeness, and its subtext, what craft decisions will you make to revise it?