

Well-being and Satisfaction with Life: Outcomes and Methods of a Military-connected Experiential Writing Program



*Charlie Mike: An
Anthology of Military Life
Ed. 1*



*Charlie Mike: An
Anthology of Military Life
Ed. 2*



“It's the being witnessed without any agenda. Like, no one's trying to fix you. No, these are people who can sympathize and empathize and share. Even if they haven't had the direct experience, there's a camaraderie and a brother- or sisterhood”

- Writing Workshop (Research) Participant



- - Agenda - -

Workshop Model & Research Outcomes

1:30 - 1:40 *Workshop Model Overview, Theory, & Costs*

1:40 – 1:45.....Example of
Theory (*Gravity*)

1:45 – 1:50
.....*Research Outcomes*

20 min

Demonstration: Write a Memoir

1:50 – 1:55.....Introduction to the Memoir Genre

1:55 – 2:10*Write a
Memoir (Session 1)*

2:10 - 2:20*Share and Respond + Closing
Thoughts*

30 min

N/AWrite a
Memoir (Session 2)

N/A
.....Share
and Respond



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MILITARY-CONNECTED WRITING WORKSHOP

CHARLIE
MIKE



Writing Workshop Overview

Materials Needed

- Space for ~12 people, a facilitator, desks, chairs, prompts, pen, and paper.
- Visual support is not necessary, but having prompts on a screen is nice.

Setting the Stage: Pressure Cooker Writing

- Workshop meets weekly for 2 hours in the evening.
- Two 25-minute writing sessions, with sharing and feedback after each.
- The facilitator shares a personal and vulnerable story first to set the tone.
- Silence is expected and accepted after heavy stories
- Participants can choose what to write—prompts are helpful but not necessary.

Sharing and Feedback

- Participants respond to each other's pieces with compliments, and critiques are only given if requested
- One major 'rule': complements are welcome, and critiques are requested by the reader.

Publication Opportunities

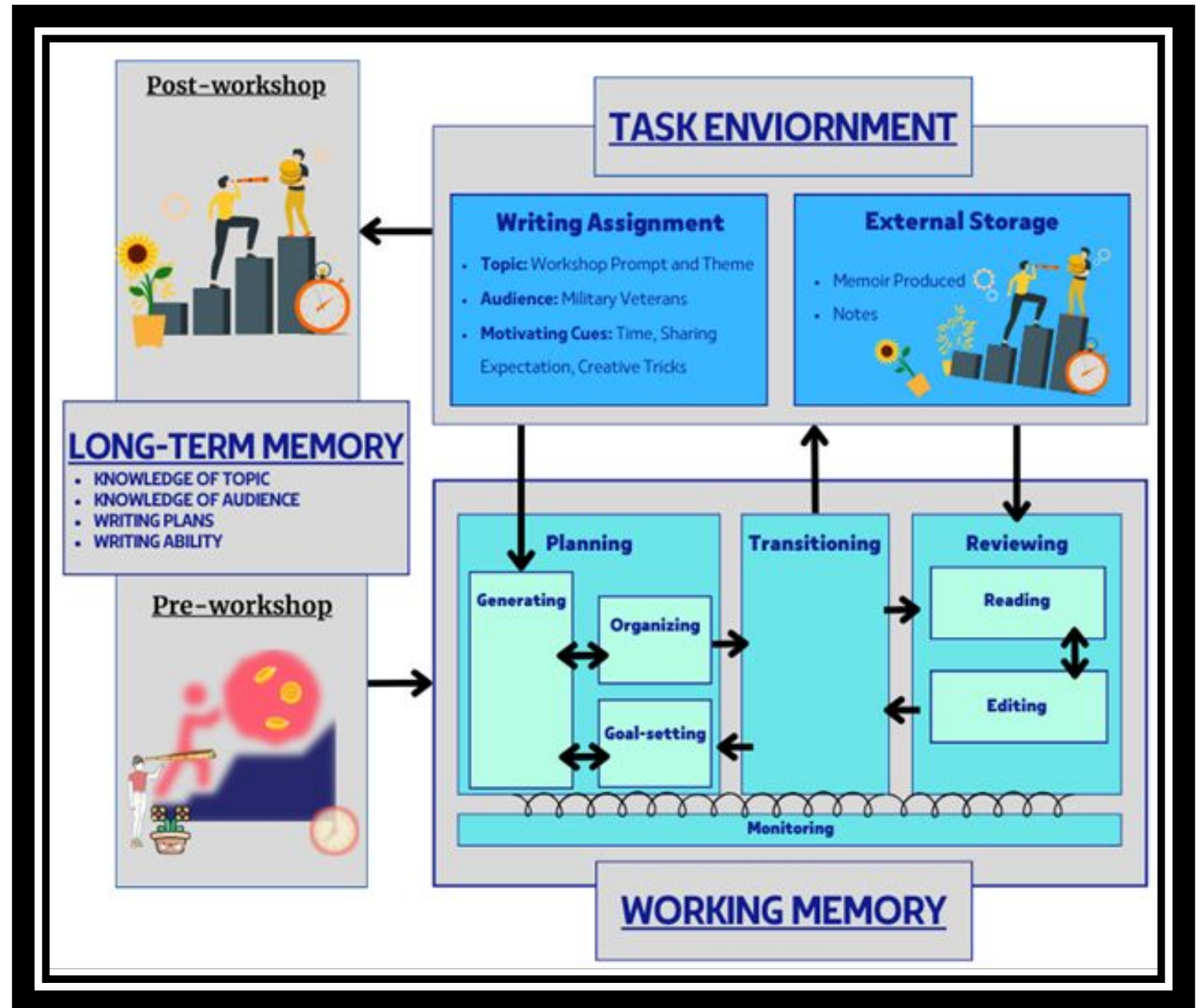
- Participants' writing is published in two anthologies (2020, 2023) titled, Charlie Mike: An Anthology of Military Life and distributed locally at reading events, libraries, competitions, and colleges.
- Public reading events are held in the community, allowing participants to share their stories with a general audience.

Estimated Workshop Cost by Year and Event
Thousands of Stories, Two Publications, 7+ Community Reading Events, 100+ Veterans Impacted over 7 years

Semester	Description	Workshop Runtime	Culminating Event	Expenses	Estimated Cost	University Funds	Community Donations
Spring 2017	No Workshop	Not Started Yet	N/A	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fall 2017	Pilot Workshop	4-Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	Family and Friends Reading Event @ Library	Paid Facilitators \$200 Each	1,200.00	1,200.00	0.00
Spring 2018	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (1.5 Hours, once a week)	Public Reading event @ Wolverine Press	Food Truck for Event	750.00	750.00	0.00
Fall 2018	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (1.5 Hours, once a week)	None	Coffee/Snacks	150.00	0.00	0.00
Spring 2019	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (1.5 Hours, once a week)	Public Reading Event @ Library	Coffee/Snacks	150.00	0.00	0.00
Fall 2019	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (1.5 Hours, once a week)	None	Coffee/Snacks	150.00	0.00	0.00
Spring 2020	Online Workshop Pilot	8 Weeks (1.5 Hours, once a week)	None	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fall 2020	No Workshop (Covid)	No Workshop (Covid)	Book Launch Scheduled and Cancelled	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.00
Spring 2021	No Workshop (Covid)	No Workshop (Covid)	None	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fall 2021	No Workshop (Covid)	No Workshop (Covid)	Reading @ Local Community College First Book Launch & Workshop Event	Cost of Publishing	1,500.00	350.00	1,200.00
Spring 2022	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	None	Coffee/Snacks	150.00		250.00
Fall 2022	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	Public Reading event @ Wolverine Press	Food Truck for Event	1,100.00	1,000.00	450.00
Spring 2023	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	None	Food Truck @ Reading Event	150.00	0.00	1,500.00
				Publication Cost (150 copies of first & 300 of second)			
Fall 2023	Traditional Workshop	8 Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	Reading Event @ Local Event Space: Avagadro's Number Launch of Second Book	Graphic Designer ISBN Cost	4,000.00	1,300.00	1,200.00
Spring 2024	Traditional Workshop	1.5 Hours	None	Coffee/Snacks	150.00	0.00	250.00
Fall 2024	Research Workshop	8 Weeks (2 Hours, once a week)	Reading @ Local Brewery: Gilded Goat	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.00
				Totals	9,450.00	9,450.00	
					4,600.00		4,850.00

Cognitive Process Theory of Writing: In a Military-connected Writing Workshop

- The task environment influences operations in the working memory.
- Memories in the workshop are triggered through writing prompts and brought into the working memory.
- Through the planning of the composition of this memory, the writer must organize and set goals (Audience, Length, Tone, Purpose, etc.), and meet workshop expectations (prompt fidelity and time management).
- Through the composition itself, the story changes. Editing as we write, we bend and shape the story—our memory—even more.
- This process not only generates a new story, it generates a new perspective of an old memory—reimagined, reworked, and reinforced in the workshop space.



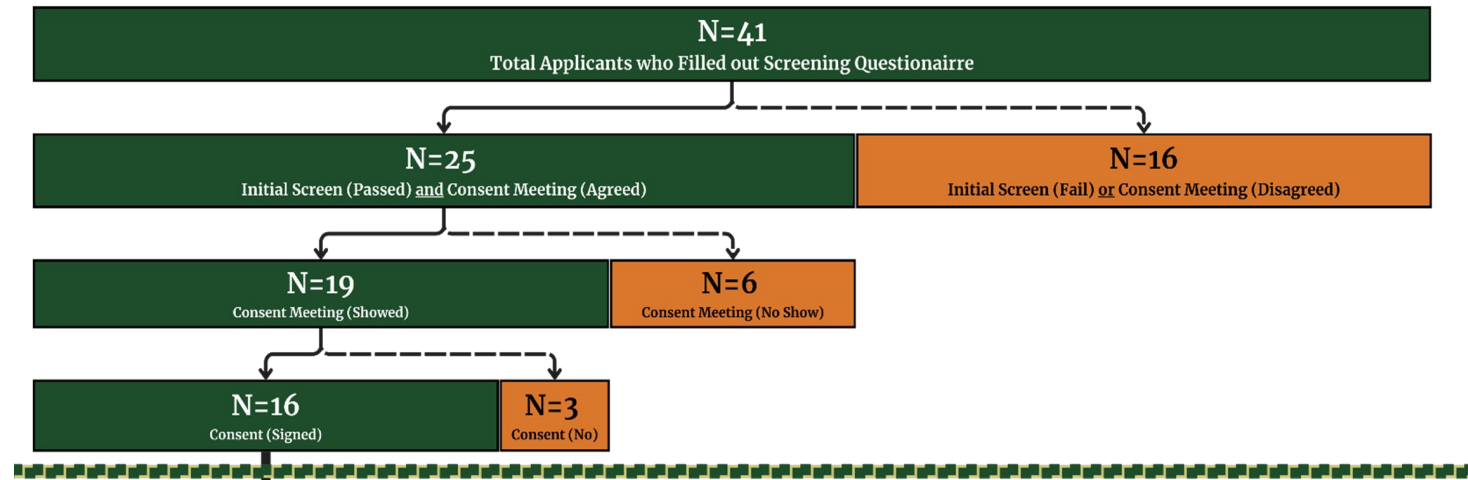


Gravity

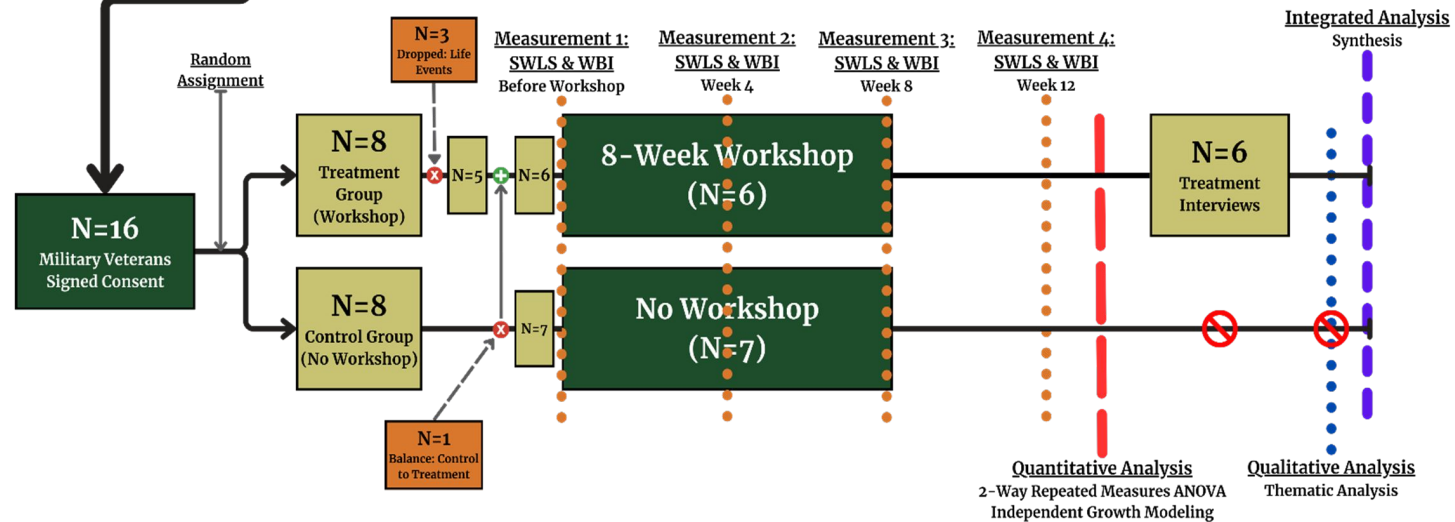
Ryan Lanham

Run. Run away. He was running away when I caught him. I—my
bullets—caught him. Up to him. Into him. Lodged in his back.
Left of spine. An upward strafe. Toward heart, home.
How many steps with me in him?
How many feet between us—my heart, his—my life, his—when they drag him
back, on his back,
slide him in the truck, beneath my feet, beneath my gunner platform?
My hands still shaking. Sweat rolls down my cheek. A tear, salty. Emotionless.
Pools on chin. Holds there. Sways bulbous. Then slips, falls—
One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven.
Me on him. In him.
Seven feet I peer down into darkness. Shadows.
Black in my heart, seeping in.
It beats steady now. Fat on blood, adrenaline.
No holes pulsating red ooze.
No red shirt, red pants, red socks, red shoes, red legs, red arms, red back, red face.
No grimace or Quran. No moans or prayer beads. No Allah tonight.
Just the click of karmic debt, a handcuff locking souls.
Tug of my new black moon.

Participant Recruitment



Mixed-Methods Research Design



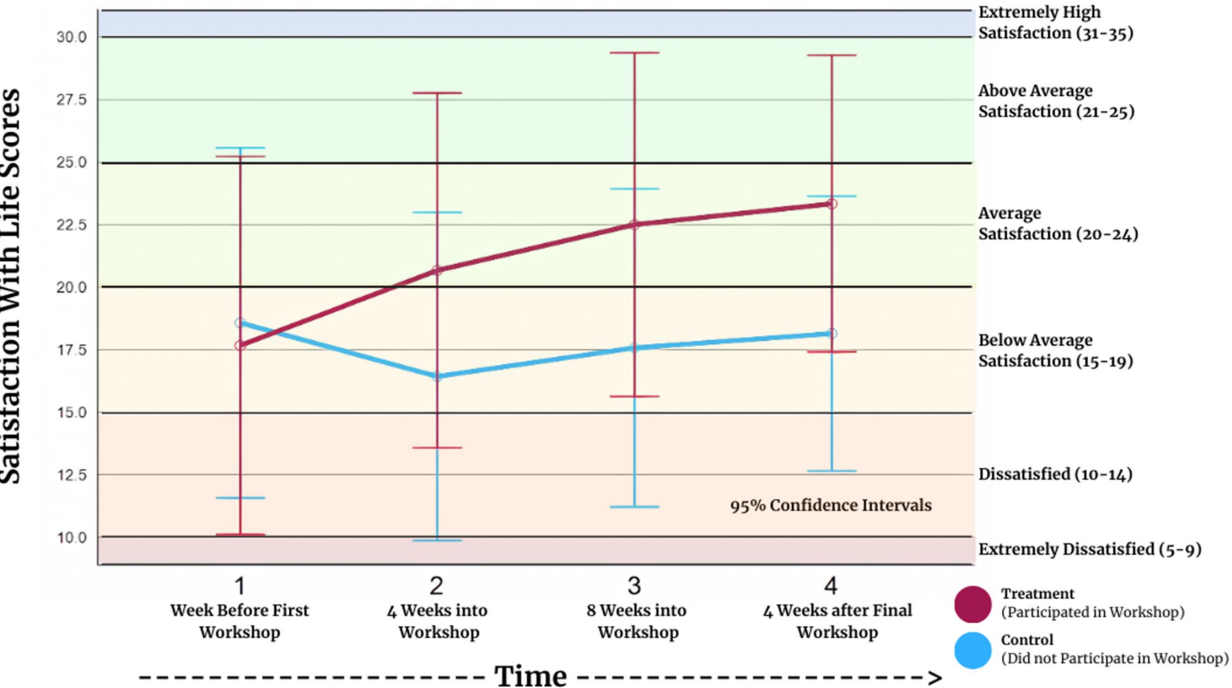
ANOVA: Quantitative Research Results

Treatment (workshop) and Control (no workshop) groups measured over time using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). Life satisfaction is a subjective measure of well-being.

Table 1: Within-subjects: Two-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects							
Measure: Satisfaction With Life Scores							
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Sphericity Assumed	58.873	3	19.624	4.235	.012	.278
	Greenhouse-Geisser	58.873	2.568	22.928	4.235	.017	.278
	Huynh-Feldt	58.873	3.000	19.624	4.235	.012	.278
Time * Condition	Sphericity Assumed	80.027	3	26.676	5.756	.003	.344
	Greenhouse-Geisser	80.027	2.568	31.166	5.756	.005	.344

Figure 3: Estimates of Group Mean Difference in SWLS Scores



Within-subjects effects, shows a significant result the *Time* ($F(3) 4.23, p = .012$) and *Time*Condition* interaction ($F(3) = 5.75, p = .003$) (see Table 1).

This result suggests the workshop had a differential impact on participant SWLS scores over time.

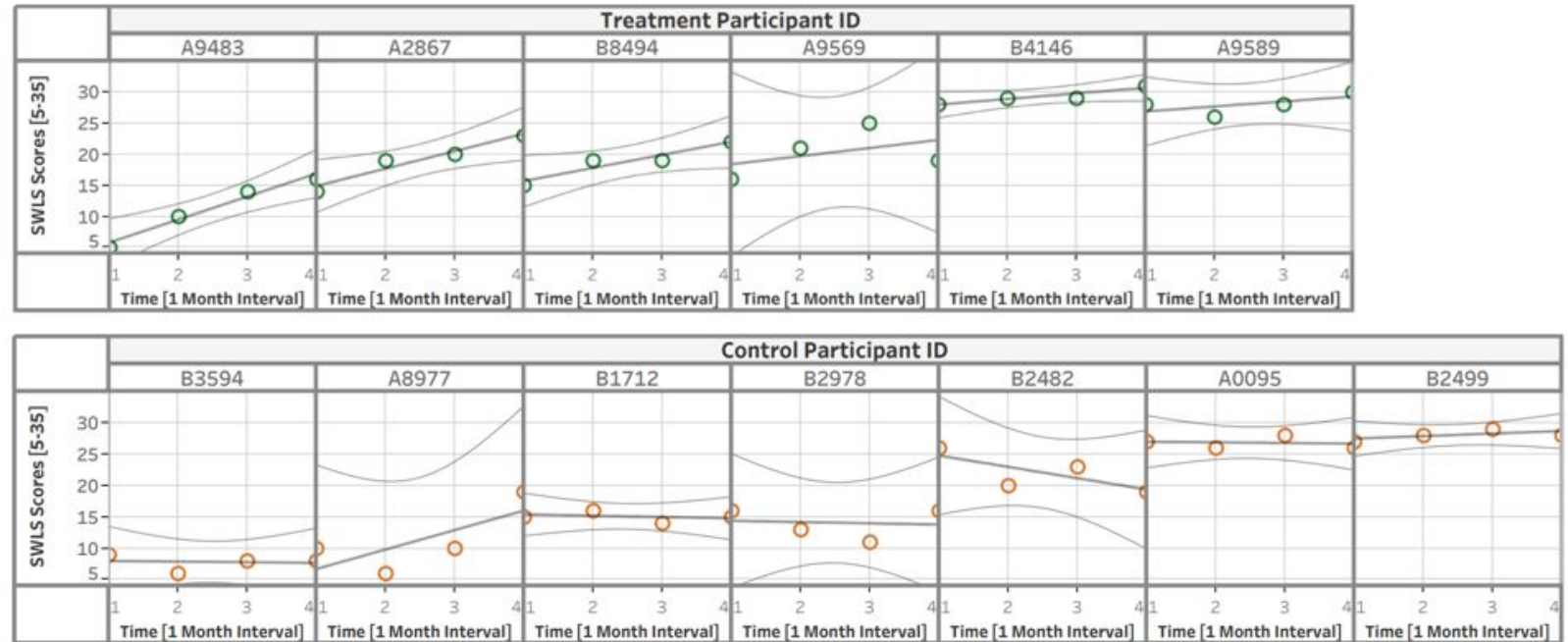
Between-subjects effects the *Time*Condition* interaction is significant ($F(3,9) = 4.06, p = .044$).

This result suggests participation in the workshop over time (*Condition*Time*) does predict the variation in SWLS scores between groups (see Fig. 3).

As Fig. 3 shows, the treatment group moved from the 'below average' to the 'Average' category in life satisfaction over the course of the 12-week workshop intervention. The control group stayed relatively flat in the 'below average' category.

Independent
Growth
Modeling:
Condition vs.
No Condition

Individual Trajectories of Change in SWLS: Treatment & Control Group



Note: The above figure shows individual trajectories of change for participants in both the treatment group (top), who participated in the workshop condition, and the control group (bottom), who did not participate in the workshop condition. Each subplot represents a participant, with their SWLS scores plotted over time. The x-axis is the measurement occasion (time variable), and the y-axis represents SWLS scores. The first measure was before any workshops and the final measure was one month after workshop participation ended.

**Writing Memoir:
Think of Memoir like
a Slice of Pizza**





Memoirs have Boundaries

(This is not an auto-bio):

Unique Time – Being in a specific moment.

“Everything was eerily still as I listened to the raindrops drape over the shipping container I took cover in. The dense sound of rain on metal masked the approaching gunfire enough to allow thoughts of home to penetrate.”

Unique Location – Being in Kuwait.

“Kuwait has some seriously nice people, but goddamn it if it wasn’t as hot as a devil’s armpit. I’ve been there twice, and that is two times too many. The first time was on R&R...”

Unique Experience – Being shot at.

“Being shot at feels, in your stomach, similar to standing with your toes on the edge of a cliff and looking over—paralyzing.”

Tips/Tricks	Example	Effect
<p>Use Sensory Details: Describe what you felt, saw, heard, touched, and smelled. Dig into your senses.</p>	<p>Ex. <i>"I walked into my grandmother's kitchen and smelled the aroma of freshly baked bread, heard the sizzle of bacon on the stove, and felt the warmth of the oven on my face."</i></p>	<p>Places the reader in the moment with you.</p>
<p>Dialogue: You do not need to remember the EXACT language. It won't happen. Capture the feeling and remember key words/phrases.</p>	<p>"Doctor, I need to see you right now." John glanced around at her, "Okay, did you check in?" "Yes, but the nurse didn't seem to understand." John looked for a nurse. They were all busy. "Okay, just a minute." He went back to writing his note. She pulled on his lab coat again. "Doctor, I need to see you. Right now!" John sighed and pushed back from the high counter, got off the stool and turned to her, "Okay, let's go in here." He proceeded to walk into the room in front of her. Mistake. She walked in behind him, shut the door, pulled out a long butcher knife and said, "I'm going to kill you, and then kill myself." She came at him, knife held high.</p>	<p>Capturing the 'feeling' creates the effect the initial words had. That is what the reader cares about.</p>
<p>Start Generic: All it takes to start writing is to put words on the page. I often start my stories with an easy catch phrase and just get rid of it later.</p>	<p>Examples: <i>So this one time...</i> <i>Before I knew it...</i> <i>So there I was...</i> <i>You wouldn't believe...</i></p>	<p>Gets the flow going when you can't seem to start writing.</p>
<p>Find and Replace Adverbs: Not all adverbs need to go, but if you find yourself using words that end in -ly a lot, replace some with a metaphor or simile.</p>	<p>Ex. <i>"I quickly ran to the store," turns into something like, "I ran to the store as if being chased by my childhood fear." Or... "I to the store like a bat out of hell"</i></p>	<p>Creates a more robust memoir with more imagery for the reader to connect with.</p>

<p>Bring it Back: Try to create a circular narrative that comes back to the same place it started.</p> <p><u>Or</u> Introduce an item or idea that is significant within a larger narrative and bring it back in the end.</p>	<p>Wizard of Oz – <i>Dorothy starts and ends in Kansas after a long journey.</i></p> <p>Alice in Wonderland – <i>An adventure bookended by Alice’s “real life” on the riverbank.</i></p>	<p>Creates a sense of cohesion and planning within the writing. Satisfying for the reader.</p>
<p>In Medias Res: Start a story in the “midst of things.” Want to tell a story about basic training? Place us in the mud, crawling under barbed wire first, before explaining the setting. Tell me about the time you broke your arm and start in the hospital.</p>	<p>Breaking Bad Opening Scene is <i>Walter White driving his RV into the desert, jumping out in his tighty whities. Not him in a classroom.</i></p> <p>Forrest Gump <i>doesn’t start when he is young, it starts with him at a bus stop speaking to a bored woman next to him.</i></p>	<p>You can begin the story fast-paced and engaging. A way to hook the reader and draw interest.</p>
<p>Zoom in and Out: Try to focus on an object in your story. Describe it in great detail, and then zoom out to show us the entire scene.</p>	<p>Example: <i>Describing a single bullet, the markings and weight, the power and fear it instills, the cold brass like the cold death it brings; then zoom out to it being loaded into a weapon, describe this action, the pulling of the charging handle; zoom out again to see it being fired at a military funeral, describe this scene.</i></p>	<p>Creates the feeling of depth to your story.</p>
<p>Borrow, Beg, and Steal: Borrowing elements of form and style from others who we admire can help us begin to identify our own writing voice. If you hear something you like, try it.</p>	<p>Tip: <i>Be adventurous. Pay attention to things like the flow and structure of another writer’s work. Do they always use full sentences? Are they playing with literary devices like metaphor and alliteration?</i></p>	<p>This is how we improve our own writing.</p>



Military-connected Writing Workshop

NASPA Example

Time Travel Tips:

Imagine you've encountered a time travelling younger version of yourself. What tips, advice, reassurances, or grief would you give them? What would you warn them about?

Hole:

There's a huge hole. Maybe you're in it, maybe someone you know is in it, maybe it is lying in wait for you to fall in. It can be a metaphorical hole or literal hole. Something you have to climb out of, or something you're stuck in. How did this hole come to be? What is your relationship with it?

Tip 1: Sensory Details

As you write, focus on a moment in time, what do you remember?

What did you smell?

What did you taste?

What did you hear?

What did you see?

What did you touch?

What did this make you and others feel?

Tip 2: In Medias Res

Start a story in the "middle of things"—in medias res. Want to tell a story about basic training? Place us in the mud, crawling under barbed wire first, before explaining the setting.

Tell me about the time you broke your arm but start with landing.

Labels:

Write about your experience with being labeled, whether in military or civilian life: a marginalized identity, a medical diagnosis, a nickname expertly crafted by your high school bullies. Explore how it felt or feels to be labeled. What would you want people to know? Do any specific scenes come to mind? Show us.

Extremes:

Write about extremes you experienced in academia: weather, emotions, locations, terrain, personalities, physical challenges, food, sleep. Whatever comes to mind. Could be funny or serious or anything in between.



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 2

Time Travel Tips:

Imagine you've encountered a time travelling younger version of yourself. What tips, advice, reassurances, or grief would you give them? What would you warn them about?

Inside your Mind:

Pick a significant moment or time in your life—maybe this is the birth of your child, the death of a friend or loved one, a marriage, or an experience in boot camp/overseas—and imagine in that moment your mind is a tangible, physical place, what would it be like to be there? What would the landscape, sky, ground, air, and weather look like, smell like, feel like, etc.? Are there inhabitants? Etc.

Tip: Dialogue

Sometimes, words are what ground our story. A specific phrase spoken and remembered.

Other times, it is a feeling or an image we are relying on to remember.

You do not need to try and remember exactly what was said in dialogue, try to remember what you felt and capture that in the voice and words of your characters.

Lean on what you do know and fill in the rest.

Labels:

Write about your experience with being labeled, whether in military, in civilian life, as a veteran, even medical diagnosis. Explore how it felt or feels to be labeled. What would you want people to know about you or your duty or your condition? Any specific scenes?

Tripped and Fell:

Write about a time you tripped and fell. This could be metaphorical, a bad decision or mistake that made you fall from grace; or literal, a stubbed toe and a broken collarbone, what happened, how did you recover?



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 3

Hole:

There's a huge hole. Maybe you're in it, maybe someone you know is in it, maybe it is lying in wait for you to fall in. It can be a metaphorical hole or literal hole. Something you have to climb out of, or something you're stuck in. How did this hole come to be? What is your relationship with it?

It's a Process:

Describe a systematic process you are an expert at. Break it down step by step, and tie it into a larger life meaning. What did you learn from the process of cleaning a rifle, or the process of changing your name after marriage, or becoming a service member, or the process of building a new computer—anything really. You can list these steps and expound upon them: step 1: speak to a recruiter... I remember walking into the office...; step 2: raise my right hand... etc. Or you can choose to compose this in prose, whatever comes naturally.

Tip: Dialogue

Sometimes, words are what ground our story. A specific phrase spoken and remembered.

Other times, it is a feeling or an image we are relying on to remember.

You do not need to try and remember exactly what was said in dialogue, try to remember what you felt and capture that in the voice and words of your characters.

Lean on what you do know and fill in the rest.

Pulled in Different Directions:

Write about a time when you felt pulled in multiple different directions. Maybe you had a job offer and a love interest in another location, or perhaps an order conflicted with your moral code. How did you respond?

A Change of Heart:

Did you ever feel like you knew your life path only to have it change without warning? Tell me about a time when you thought you had it all figured out, only to have your understanding ripped out from under you. Were you certain this next job would be the one? Your next relationship? What event happened to change your mind?



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 4

Lost:

Write about a time when you were lost or felt lost. This can be literal, in a city or jungle or dense fog. Maybe relocating or moving. Or, it could be metaphorical or psychological: in war or returning home; some existential moment you felt completely lost.

Tip: Find and Replace Adverbs

Not all adverbs need to go, but if you find yourself using words that end in -ly a lot, replace some with a metaphor or simile.

Ex. Instead of, "I quickly ran to the store," you could say something like, "I ran to the store as if being chased by my childhood fear."

Or...

"I to the store like a bat out of hell"

Slow Motion:

Share a story about a time in your life that seemed to go in slow motion.

Extremes:

Write about extremes you experienced in military life: weather, emotions, locations, terrain, personalities, physical challenges, food, sleep. Whatever comes to mind. Could be funny or serious or anything in between.

From Mundane to Insane:

Compose a story about a mundane event or experience—eating dinner with family, going on a morning walk with your dog, cleaning your boots, etc.—goes completely awry.



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 5

Funny or not?:

Write about a time when something may have seemed frightening in the moment, but now you find funny. This can be 'haha' funny, or satirically funny.

Words and Impact

Write about a time when someone's words or actions, without them knowing, made a big impact on who you are as a person. They could be a friend, parent, coach, teammate, etc.

Try This: Zoom in, Zoom out

Try to focus on an object in your story. Describe it in great detail, and then zoom out to show us the entire scene.

Example: Describing a single bullet, the markings and weight, the power and fear it instills, the cold brass like the cold death it brings; then zoom out to it being loaded into a weapon, describe this action, the pulling of the charging handle; zoom out again to see it being fired at a military funeral, describe this scene.

Winning and Triumph:

Have you ever won something? A competition, event, promotion, a large sum of money? Perhaps you *won* someone's hand in marriage. Tell me a story of personal triumph—a story of winning.

Change in Belief

What is a prejudice or assumption you held that has changed? What was the catalyst for that change, and what do you believe now?



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 6

Opposite Perspective

Write a story or scene from the perspective of someone on the other side, perhaps a so-called enemy, or adversary. Try to get inside their head for a few moments and describe how they might see the world or the events unfolding.

Military Language:

Tell me a story using the most military jargon you can muster—acronyms, labels, sayings, analogies, rhetoric—don't be shy. We all know what the military sounds like.

Tip: Bring it Back

Try to Create a circular narrative that comes back to the same place it started. Have the story travel a great distance only to end up right where you started.

Or

Introduce an item or idea that is significant within a larger narrative and bring it back in the end.

Betrayal:

Write about a betrayal you experienced. This could be a secular or spiritual betrayal. A betrayal of trust by a friend or family, or religion, or perhaps you betrayed yourself.

Rant:

Rant about something bothering you. This can be personal, public, at work or home or school; it can be about someone or something; a challenge or compromise or acquiescence. Let it out.



Veterans Writing Workshop

Week 7

Play the Fool:

Describe a moment when you made a fool of yourself. What did you say, think, hear, feel? What was going on when this happened? And what it cost you?

Tip: In Medias Res

Start a story in the “middle of things”—in medias res. Want to tell a story about basic training? Place us in the mud, crawling under barbed wire first, before explaining the setting.

Tell me about the time you broke your arm but start with landing.

Workshop Reflection (to submit for research):

Tell me about your experience in this workshop. What did you gain? What did you lose? What was the overall feeling for you? How did you feel entering and how do you feel now that we are wrapping up? Would you ever do something like this again? Why or why not?

Workshop Reflection (to submit for research):

Tell me about your experience in this workshop. What did you gain? What did you lose? What was the overall feeling for you? How did you feel entering and how do you feel now that we are wrapping up? Would you ever do something like this again? Why or why not?

Crossing the Threshold:

Write about a time you crossed a threshold. This could be a bar mitzva, a quinceanera, or the moment you finished your capstone in basic training or boot camp. This could be your transition out of the service, or in, or a time you got a degree, or got married, or got divorced. Any threshold crossing moment is free game.