
What is Plein-Air Writing?

As far as we know, we invented the term “plein-air writing,” right here in the Gorge. We know of no other place in the country, where that term is being used, or has been used, to define a writing event.

With that in mind, we feel free to define it, as we would like.

Our definition is thus: Plein-air writing is writing outdoors, with the goal of capturing in an artistically compelling way, what is going on in the moment.

It is different from other forms of writing, in the same ways that plein-air painting is different from other forms of painting.

First, writers are involved in a process of intense observation, absorbing what’s going on around them, and choosing words to reflect the impressions they’re getting about the scene. Just as painters are attuned, writers are attuned to the light and the colors of the day, the sounds or lack of them, the wind, the scents . . . everything.

Second, plein-air writers need to put words down on a piece of paper quickly, before the scene changes. They need to capture their impressions as they occur, in real time, without benefit of subsequently rethinking, reframing, and editing what they think they may have felt or heard or saw at the time.

Third, plein-air writing is every bit as challenging as plein-air painting. Writers need to be highly skilled, to come up with just the right word, just the right emphasis, just the right flow . . . just as painters need to be able to quickly choose the right color and brush, and make just the right stroke.

Finally, because it happens relatively quickly, works written en plein air are primarily short works of art, just as paintings done in plein air are usually small in size.



