



CLAIM YOUR VOICE

and Share Your Truth

MODULE 4

womenforONE
share • inspire • grow



Authenticity and vulnerability are extremely powerful.

Every single one of us is drawn to stories that emerge from a raw and fundamental place. We don't usually fall deeply in love with "perfection"—we fall in love with words and experiences that are breathtakingly real.



Many of the factors that writers tend to worry about are secondary when it comes to creating a potent and moving story. In order to continue the process of claiming your story, remain courageously open to life, whatever it brings you.

Our **authenticity** glimmers through the cracks in our armor when we bring forth our uncensored feelings and experiences. When we articulate our deepest truths (especially the ones that we may persistently think about but believe nobody would ever understand or relate to), we touch something that is far more valuable than other people's approval or praise: We tap into our own humanity.

Pure magic occurs when we let ourselves open up to this humanity. Our truth begins to flow effortlessly through our fingertips, becoming the force that single-mindedly guides us. When we let go of the need to look and sound good to others, our language and expression become similarly liberated...free to take bold risks, turn unexpected corners, and make intriguing discoveries.

Our words are brought to life by our **vulnerability**, which is our willingness to be open and to expose the parts of ourselves that are tender, for the sake of revealing our authentic humanity. But it's not easy to be vulnerable, especially as we are conditioned early in our lives to develop a protective armor that keeps us from getting hurt.

Opening our hearts exposes us to both the pain and pleasure of the creative process. On certain days, our writing might feel divinely inspired, and on others, it may come across as awkward, clunky, or inelegant. This isn't a sign that we should go back to our day jobs and back-burner our writing. It means that we simply have to remain open and trust that the floodgates are about to release some awesomeness.

When we become rigid about getting it right or fearful of failure, or when we think we need to control our writing and make it "good," we shut ourselves off from the passionate, raw brilliance of our authenticity—which is full of endearing quirks and hidden gems. We plug up the very source of our inspiration with our doubts, like "I'm not sure if it's good enough," or "This is just too hard."

Editor Chuck Sambuchino says, "As you're writing, remember that to be human is to feel. So get all that on the page—all that anger, hope, passion, love, rage, despair, anxiety, and shame. When what you're writing scares you, it's usually a sign that you're being real."

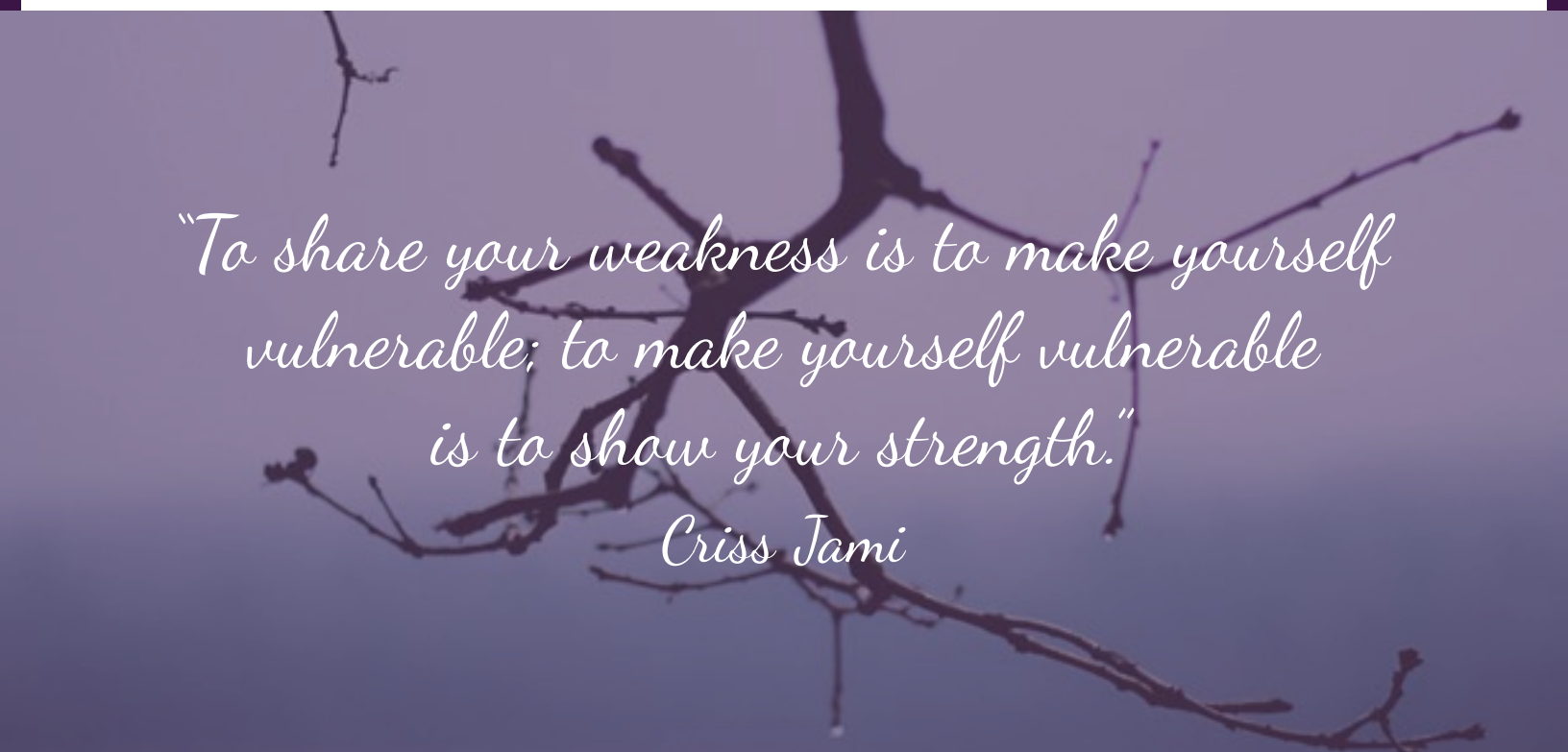
Let's try a technique that author Elizabeth Sims calls storm-writing. In this process, you don't avoid taboo subjects or judge what wants to emerge from your pen (or keyboard). Instead of using your writing to clarify or interpret something that happened to you, use it as a way to express whatever is on your mind, no holds barred. Purposely move toward the topics that have a tendency to kick up emotional dust.

Allow yourself to say the thing that you are often afraid to say the thing that we are often afraid to say. This is a powerful conversation starter. Claiming our stories with unapologetic openness invites others to let go of their own judgments and to respond with similar openness. These are wonderful learning moments in which we come to recognize each other's humanity with tenderness and curiosity.

Vulnerability isn't exactly the same as wearing your heart on your sleeve and spilling your problems out into the world with no filter. It's more like polishing the diamond of your truth and letting the most fundamental facets of who you are shine brightly.

Being vulnerable gives your story authority and allows it to spill into your writing so that you are able to access more of your creative power.

When it comes to letting your truth shine through, there is no "right" way to do it. Simply keep the channel open and flowing, connect with the depth of your feelings, and trust the process. Your writing will thank you.



"To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength."

Criss Jami

YOUR UNIQUE *voice*

In order to tell your story in only the way you can, you need to be aware of your creative voice.

Your **voice** is your personal style—not just as a writer, but as a human being. Perhaps you are poetic and relish the shadows of mystery; or perhaps you have a more brassy, direct, or conversational approach. Maybe you're a physical or visual person who tends to describe yourself in colors (char-treuse, violet, fuchsia) or textures (abrasive, silky, watery).

Many of us have different voices that arise in accordance with the situation we're in and the people we are interacting with. Your creative voice is the one that resonates most strongly within you. It is the overall tone of your values, way of speaking and thinking, personal taste, and lens through which you see the world.

Our individual voice tends to become more apparent to us over time. It is a diverse mixture of many things: people and entities that serve as sources of inspiration, pivotal life experiences, spiritual and political leanings, books we've read, places we've traveled, and the list goes on.

While it's wonderful to look up to other writers or storytellers as inspiration, don't try to be the next Elizabeth Gilbert or Maya Angelou. Remember—anything other than the stamp of your own glorious authenticity is a recipe for writer's block!

Be sure to refer to the writing and storytelling supplements on the course homepage, which offers you valuable advice on translating your personality to your writing so that your words are a clear reflection of your spirit. Also, remember that your voice is an extension of your **genius**. So if you ever have trouble identifying your voice, go back to the exercises in Module 2 that helped you identify your genius.

There is no formula when it comes to discovering your voice, but a useful way to begin is by simply recognizing that you have one. Out of the 7.4 billion people in the world, there is only one you. The way you perceive yourself and the world around you is thoroughly unique—and the best ways to access this uniqueness are to simply keep writing and to continue to take exuberant risks.

*"I don't know what I think until I write it down."
Flannery O'Connor*

Take a quick look at all your past writings from this course and come up with three key words that describe your general style and approach. Write them below, and then answer the following questions.

1. Do these words feel true when it comes to the way I use my voice in conversation (either internal dialogue or talking to others)?

2. Are there any other words that would most accurately describe my genuine style?

Using the words you identified as being part of your style, write for five minutes about the guiding story that you are focusing on during this course. For example, if you know that your approach tends to be conversational and funny, imagine what your story would be like using that voice. If it's easier for you, speak the story into a recorder and transcribe it below.

Share *your truth*

Sharing your truth can be both exhilarating and terrifying. Every single one of us is lucky enough to have several supportive people in our lives—the ones who “like” everything on our Facebook page and who encourage us to speak loudly and proudly about our innermost thoughts.

Then again, it's likely that we've also experienced the opposite: opinionated relatives with divergent political views we do our best to avoid engaging in conversation, for fear of stirring up an emotional shitstorm; acquaintances (or even friends) who seem especially adept at poking us right in our most tender parts; or people whose harsh reactions make us want to curl up under the covers and never come out.

Just remember, you don't have to share your truth with the people who are less supportive to you. You are the one who ultimately gets to decide how you want to share, and with whom.

Once in a while you might want to welcome the chance to invite spirited and even contentious debate around your story. You might welcome the chance to connect with your detractors. Other times you might prefer for your story to speak for itself rather than adding to the conversation around it. And then there will be times when you will have no interest in allowing your story to live beyond the pages of your journal or a secret file on your computer.

It's all good.

When it comes to claiming your truth in writing, especially if you're doing it for the first time, you don't have to follow any specific guidelines. However, one of the greatest ways to challenge yourself is to take a walk outside your comfort zone—even if that only means standing right on the border!

“Language is critical...it really does give you a story that you have in your head, and that story tells you what reality you should concede to.”

Dominique Christina

But it's also crucial to know where your safe places are (e.g., among supportive friends and community, or alone in a room where you can read your story aloud without interruption). Validation from others and compassion from ourselves can fuel and inspire us, as well as make us feel welcome and relaxed.

However, it can be equally important to welcome the voices of dissent. That doesn't mean that we have to agree with them or internalize them as being true. When we are faced with opposition, we have the opportunity to clarify our values and beliefs, solidify our sense of self, articulate what is most important to us, and stand more strongly in our convictions. Those who might make us feel insecure carry an important gift in that they challenge us to be more protective and honoring of our truth. They can also prompt us to stand up for ourselves, develop a thicker skin when it comes to withstanding criticism, and learn how to demonstrate neutrality and equanimity no matter how people react to us.

Opposition can also, on occasion, create bridges of understanding between people with wildly different viewpoints and beliefs. Depending on how open we are with each other, reading a story with a distinct perspective can provoke someone to question their own ideas and to invite greater nuance and empathy.

It isn't usually the nicest place to be, but the dumping ground of criticism holds just the fertilizer we need to grow as human beings. Granted, the haters are gonna hate—but the people you touch will be deeply transformed by your honesty.

Claiming a truth that comes straight from your heart makes you more trustworthy—to both yourself and others.

It helps you identify where you stand and who you are, which makes it easier to draw in supportive community that shares your values. Your expansive stories, regardless of whether or not they emerge from painful experiences, can also create greater intimacy in your existing relationships.

You shouldn't feel like you have to put yourself out there straightaway by posting your story on social media or a website that gets a lot of traffic. Every great truth teller, past and present, has moved out of their comfort zone with baby steps.

But if you are up for the challenge, just get out there and be courageous in claiming your truth! Given that you signed up for this course, my guess is that you long to live in a world that is filled with greater acceptance, authenticity, and openness.

You have the power to bring that world into existence by being someone who personifies all those qualities. Whether you are choosing to make big waves or gentle ripples, claiming your truth is a powerful statement of self-acceptance that can truly empower you, others, and the world.

1. Who is it safe to share my truth with? Why?

2. Who feels unsafe? Why?

3. What do I need in order to feel safe sharing my truth?

4. Am I willing to challenge myself to go beyond my comfort zone in order to share what is important to me? What is one baby step I can take to commit to sharing my truth?



Feminine Wisdom

The Body Has Its Own Stories to Tell

Although some of us may not view ourselves as “storytellers,” every single one of us carries the stories that we were born to tell in our very bodies. Many scientists have discovered that our muscles hold entire memories. Even when we believe we’ve forgotten something, a spasm, twitch, or chronic problem can make ancient history surge to the surface of our consciousness. Repressed memories often make themselves evident in bodily symptoms.

But what if our bodies aren’t just containers for repressed memories? What if our bodies house stories that don’t yet know how to be expressed?

During this module, practice using your body to tell the guiding story that you’ve been working on throughout this course. Put on your favorite piece of music and let yourself bring to mind parts of your story that you don’t necessarily know how to tell in words. Connect with your breath (and go back to the feminine breath from Module 1). Do a quick body scan, from your head to your toes, and notice whether anything feels sore, tight, and uncomfortable, or relaxed, open, and flowing with vitality. Allow your curiosity to be piqued by everything you notice.

As you think about this story, allow your body to move in any way that it wants. Imagine that your body is expressing everything you can’t bring yourself to say. Let yourself move without inhibition—twirl around, crawl on the ground, sing, scream, moan, or come to stillness and silence. Feel free to experiment, even if you’re not quite sure what to do. Let your intuition lead you, and have fun with it. Afterwards, write down or record yourself speaking your observations. How does your body intensify and clarify your connection to your guiding story?

Feminine storytelling is about engaging all our senses, and reconnecting with our bodies can be a wonderful way to move through writer’s block and express our stories.



You've been building your truth-teller muscle in a pretty hardcore way.

The work you've put in is well worth the effort. Embracing your authenticity, revealing your vulnerability, and letting your unique voice bleed beautifully all over the page will enable you to live more decisively into your dreams—and to take the bold actions that will truly enable you to make life happen. You'll also establish deeper, more intimate relationships with others in the process.

Respond to the following prompt (and if you choose, post your response in the Facebook group):

What is the deep truth within you that you want to share with others? How will you challenge yourself to move beyond your comfort zone and be more vulnerable and authentic when you share?



HOMEPLAY

*Your
Truth teller
Story
Exercise*

During this module, you will focus on refining and completing the 750–1,000-word piece of bold truth telling you’ve been working on in the past few weeks and that you identified from a guiding story in Module 1. Please refer to your previous Homeplay and Soul Digs. Feel free to expand on or revise any of the pieces you’ve written so far, or embark on a new adventure altogether. Perhaps you’d like to transform a limiting story into an expansive story. Maybe you want to describe an experience you’ve never before talked about to anyone else. Trust your instincts. Remember that this is just a first draft—you can continue to work on honing your voice later down the line, but the most important thing to do this week is to focus on writing from a raw and real place.