



Course Title: Novel 4: Manuscript Preparedness

Course Code: OWC 306 A

Instructor: Dominic Russ-Combs

Course Summary:

This studio-style course is specifically optimized to help you get the most out of your precious writing time as you attempt to finish your book. There will be weekly lectures, some minimal reading materials (provided on Canvas), and a few written assignments, all meant to keep you inspired, intellectually engaged, and organized throughout the daunting (and often messy) task of novel writing. This class will also provide you with several opportunities to hone your skills in terms of discussing, pitching, and critically evaluating your book, and this class will offer a variety of supplemental writing prompts to assist you through the drafting process.

As your instructor, I'll furnish you with detailed, one-on-one feedback on approximately 10,000 words of your novel-in-progress and will generally serve as your project manager, assisting you with whatever insights and recommendations I can to keep your project in stride with your specific aims. By the end of this course, you will have developed practical ideas about how to best amplify and hone what you're already doing well, and you should also understand more about how to best accommodate your individual writing process as you continue to work on your novel project.

Small Critique Groups and Workshopping

During week four, you will be assigned to a workshop cluster (3-4 participants each). Within these clusters, you will share significant chunks of your novel-in-progress (anywhere from 40 to 100 double-spaced pages), as well as supply whatever synopses, outlines, storyboards for context (to expedite and ameliorate the critique-writing/feedback process). You may also list your broader concerns and questions to help guide your peers' insights and suggestions. By the beginning of week five, everyone will have posted their novel excerpts for workshop, and each of you will follow a specific critique-letter template while crafting your responses to your peers' work. The actual workshops will begin in week seven, ending during the final week of the course (week 10).

Weekly Discussions, Lectures & Exercises

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
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650-725-2650

During the first couple of weeks, we will immerse ourselves in multiple lectures, readings, and discussions that will introduce you to my idiosyncratic approach to workshop and the writing process. The preponderance of these lectures/discussions/exercises will be practical in terms of finishing and attempting to pitch your book. You will write synopses, bios, query letters, outlines; you will also post the opening pages (300-1000 words) of your novel-in-progress and an action plan for what you intend to accomplish in the class (and beyond). Throughout, I will field any and all questions you may have regarding the contemporary writing life and the current literary/publishing landscape. I will also post/provide several supplemental/optional writing prompts in an effort to help you through the rewriting process and generate new material (if need be).

There is no required text for this course, but there will be readings assigned early on (available online).

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements:

To receive an “A” in this course you’ll need to complete the following:

Weeks One through Ten:

* You will read the lectures and materials posted for any given week, and participate on the discussion board at least three times a week, as previously stated. Posts can be a response to a peer, a question, a comment, an insight, a recommendation, etcetera. None of your written work will be graded, so participation is essential in terms of establishing your grade.

Weeks One, Two and Three:

* You will provide the opening of your book (first 300-1000 words), a brief writing bio, and a succinct list/action plan detailing your goals for this course.

* Write a one page synopsis, a one paragraph synopsis, and a single-sentence synopsis of your novel.

* Write a sample query letter.

* Post an original comment and respond to two of your peers’ posts each week.

* Complete the Outline Assignment.

Week Four:

* Provide a significant chunk of your manuscript (40 to 100 double-spaced pages) for your workshop cluster discussion thread.

* Hand in up to 10,000 words of your project for my specific feedback.

Week Five & Six:

* Read and reread your peer's work and begin preparing your reviews.

Weeks Seven through Ten:

* Post critique letters for each manuscript offered in your workshop cluster.

Week Ten:

* A post recapping the progress you've made and the work you have left to do.

Tentative Zoom Schedule*:

I'll be hosting optional, Zoom sessions most weeks (Thursdays at 6:00 pm PT). These sessions will be follow-ups/elaborations to the week's lectures/discussion topics and will provide you with the opportunity to comment and ask questions. They will also be recorded so that you may view/review them at any time. They typically run for an hour to an hour-and-a-half.

I will remain open to meeting up with each of you throughout the quarter—via Zoom—and I strongly encourage scheduling a one-on-one meeting with me after your manuscript has been workshopped to recap and strategize your path ahead.

**Please note that the Zoom schedule is subject to change.*

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One – Introductions, Openings, Action Plans, and The Writing The Tool-Kit.

Post/Complete: Your Action Plan, Opening, and Bios.

Week Two – What Makes A Novel? Also: On Embracing Complication AND Summoning the Belief—When to Stick to Your Original Concept vs. When to Evolve.

Readings: A story with a novel's resonance: "Sonny's Blues".

The Workshop Sign-Up Sheet.

Post/Complete: The Three Synopses Exercise (One page, one paragraph, one sentence).

Week Three – Getting the Most Out of Your POV: The Intricacies of Character and Non-Character Narration.

Readings: "Magic"; "Nipple Jesus".

Post/Complete: The Outline Exercise.

Week Four – Questions that Persist: On Motive, Character, and Other Means of Narrative Propulsion. Also: How to Manage Background Characters.

Readings: "Place in Fiction".

Post/Complete: Query Letters.

Week Five – On Scene, Dialogue, and Exposition; Outer Story vs. Inner Story.

Week Six – Keeping Things Fresh: Strategies for Revision and Time Management.

Weeks Seven through Ten – Processing Workshop.

Week Ten – Recapping Our Course.