



Course Title: Novel 1: The Powerful Beginning

Course Code: OWC 303B Winter Quarter 2023

Instructor: Malena Watrous

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Thursdays, 12-1 PM, PT

Meeting location: Zoom (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

The meetings are optional but recommended, and class sessions will be recorded for anyone who can't make them. In our weekly zooms, we will do brief novel planning exercises, small group breakout sharing, and discuss student work in informal workshops. In addition to hour-long weekly class zooms, students who would like to meet for informal silent writing sessions will have the option to also meet on Monday mornings from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM, to write in community.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, and Q&A
 - Brief assignments, writing time for students
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Time for student Q&A
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Required discussions in Canvas
 - Students will submit 500-750 words per week, weeks 1-9
 - Instructor will provide feedback on weekly assignments
 - Students will assemble the work that they've done throughout the course into **lightly revised complete** beginnings to submit in week 10.
- Individual conferences available by request

Course Summary

The goal of Novel 1 is to help you write an opening of your book that will give you a sturdy jumping off point to move forward with the rest of your novel. The goal of *this* section of Novel 1 is to assist students who are still in the “discovery draft” stage in generating new material and moving forward, week by week, accruing new pages and gaining confidence both in their writing process and their growing novels. This is a

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section for people who know that they benefit from accountability and *regular* deadlines. The focus is on process and steady writing rather than evaluating or editing.

Writing a novel can be exciting, daunting, frustrating, and empowering. Questions arise even before you write the first sentence. Who is the protagonist? Who is telling the story (it may or may not be the protagonist)? Is the story told in present tense? In first person? What is the climax? You may already know the answer to some of these questions, and others you'll discover (or change) as you go along. You won't know the full scope of your story until you write all the way to the end of it. As you write, you learn what works or doesn't work, and you come to know more about the story and characters.

For this reason, this section of Novel 1 is focused on just that: writing. I've assigned two books on craft, and we will have a directed discussion on a different writing topic each week, but mostly I want you to write without worrying about getting it right or perfecting it, since you won't really know what the perfect opening is until you write all the way to the end of your story. To that goal, students are required to submit 500-750 words of new writing each week, into small groups. We will also have an optional hour of "silent writing, together" via zoom every Monday for those who can attend (not a requirement).

Other sections of Novel 1 offer the opportunity to get feedback on longer submissions (4,000-plus words). In this section, although you will give and receive feedback on your shorter submissions (via small groups), we concentrate instead on the weekly routine of writing. There will be no long submissions, but the amount of writing that you do weekly will add up to at least as much as those in the other sections of Novel 1.

We will also, as a group, read and discuss a variety of novel openings and 1 concise novel, *Bad Marie* by Marcy Dermansky, with a zoom visit from the author.

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

Grade Options and Requirements

- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - To receive an A, students must submit all assignments, including:
 - Weekly writing submissions of 500-750 words to small groups
 - Constructive feedback, submitted on time, to small group members
 - Beginning compilation / zoom workshop submissions in weeks 9-10
 - Every week there will be one or more discussion questions related to the assigned reading and/or lecture topic. You are required to post a short response to each question (25-200 words).
- If you are going to be late with any of your work, you must let me know ASAP and schedule a new deadline that we agree upon mutually.

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Due Dates (quick overview)

Monday: 9:00 AM-10:00 AM, PT

Silent group writing session (optional, no RSVP required)

Monday to Thursday

Post your discussion responses

Wednesday by end of day:

Post your 500-750 word submission

Thursday: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM, PT

Class Zoom session (optional but recommended, recorded)

Friday by the end of the day:

Post responses to *all* the submissions in your small group.

Textbooks/Required Materials

Ursula Le Guin, *Steering the Craft*

The Writing Life: Writers on How They Think and Work (A Collection from the *Washington Post*)

Marcy Dermansky, *Bad Marie*

First Assignment

Before starting class, I would like you to prepare a brief story synopsis, of approximately 200-300 words, describing the novel you are writing/would like to write. It may be more or less detailed, depending on whether you're still in the early stages of discovering your story or further along. You can't do this wrong. I just want to start class in week 1 able to discuss your premises and get to know you and your novels at the same time.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Overview of Readings and Topics (subject to change)

(Note that in addition to reading *Bad Marie*, we will also be looking at a variety of novels' opening pages throughout the course)

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Week 1: Promises: Beginnings Strategies

Assigned Reading:

Steering the Craft, Introduction and Chapters 1

Writers on Writing, “The Seduction of the Text”

Week 2: The Tripwire

Assigned Reading:

“Ten Essential Story Questions,” <http://dramatica.com/theory/essential-questions>

Bad Marie, pages 1-50

Week 3: Desire and Subjectivity: Character and POV

Assigned Reading:

Steering the Craft, Chapters 7 and 8

Bad Marie, pages 50-100

Week 4: Building and Sustaining Tension

Assigned Reading:

Steering the Craft, Chapter 9

“Writing to the Tension” <https://centerforfiction.org/writing-tools/writing-to-the-tension/>

Bad Marie, pages 100-150

Week 5: Time In Fiction

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Assigned Reading:

Steering the Craft, Chapter 10

“How to Effectively Handle Time Shifts in Your Story”

<https://www.janefriedman.com/time-shifts/>

Bad Marie, pages 150-end

Week 6: Language as Lens

Assigned Reading:

Steering the Craft, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5

Week 7: Story World

Assigned Reading

Writers on Writing, “Being a Product of Your Dwelling Place”; “Describe the World As It Is”

Week 8: Theme and Meaning

Assigned Reading:

Writers on Writing, “The Writer as Outlaw”

Week 9: Narrative Design/Structure and Outlining

Assigned Reading:

Writers on Writing, “From Memory to the Imagination”

Mouth to Mouth, pages 150-end

Week 10: Moving Forward

Assigned Reading:

Writers on Writing, "Acting Out, Letting Go"

Beginning compilations due/class reading and celebration