

**Course Title:**

How to Sell Your Novel: Query Letters, Synopses, and Elevator Pitches

Course Code: NVL 33

Instructor Name and Bio:

Shirin Yim Leos

Author; Developmental Editor; Former Publisher

Shirin Yim Leos has coached writers who have secured multibook deals from Big Five publishers, and film and television options from major entertainment companies. She is the author of 21 children's books and was recently an editor and publisher. Leos now leads writing retreats and teaches writing and publishing for universities and conferences internationally.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times:

Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:20 pm (PT)

8 weeks, April 19 – June 7

Meeting location: Live Online via Zoom

THIS CLASS WILL BE RECORDED

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, demonstration, practice time for students, Q&A
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Guest speakers - pitch practice panel Meeting 7
 - Informal drop-in time for students
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Required discussions in Canvas
 - Instructor will provide feedback on discussions in Canvas
 - Guest speakers will provide feedback to pitch practice, live
 - Required reading and discussions in breakout groups
- Instructor will hold office hours as informal drop-in time for students, for half an hour before each class

Course Summary

This course is designed for the novelist or narrative memoirist who is ready to submit their work for publication—or who wishes to develop their pitch as an excellent guide for the writing and editing of the work.

The goal of the course is to help participants define their hook and theme, recognize what is singular and what is universal in their work, articulate their verbal pitch, and draft their query letters and synopses. Although participants may not always come away with every element finalized, they can expect to emerge thinking more clearly about their books and able to pitch them more effectively. They will also take home a wealth of actionable insights and resources.

This course will require writing (up to 1,000 words/week), reading (up to 15,000 words/week), and giving and receiving critiques—sometimes all within a single week.

This course also requires close work with a small group of peers, reading and commenting carefully, and exchanging feedback in a supportive and constructive environment. Attendance is therefore of utmost importance and will be factored into any grade or credit. If you know you will not be able to attend at least 7 full class meetings live, you are welcome to enroll in the course, no grade requested, and access the class recordings, attend class and audit the breakout group workshops. But because you will be missing more than one live workshop session, you will not be eligible to turn in work for group critique.

There will be no breakout group workshoping at our last meeting as it will be replaced by a live pitch practice, in front of a couple of agents/editors/publishing coaches.

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

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - Students must attend at least 6 class sessions.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - A - Students must attend 7 meetings and complete all assignments including the drafting of assigned pitch materials, and careful reading and commenting on the materials of others
 - B - Students must attend 6 meetings and complete 6 assignments including the drafting of assigned pitch materials, and careful reading and commenting on the materials of others

- C - Students must attend 5 meetings and complete 5 assignments including the drafting of assigned pitch materials, and careful reading and commenting on the materials of others
- D - Students must attend 4 meetings and complete 4 assignments including the drafting of assigned pitch materials, and careful reading and commenting on the materials of others

***Please Note:** *If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Textbooks/Required Materials

None

First Assignment

Please introduce yourself to the class before our first meeting by writing and posting a Dear Stevo letter in the Dear Stevo/Introductions discussion thread on Canvas. A "Dear Stevo" letter, a term coined by Anne Lamott, is when you write casually to your closest friend and best supporter, Stevo, about your latest project—what it is and what your hopes are for it. This is not a synopsis of the book (we will get to that later), just a quick sketch. Please spend as many words on why you're writing as what you're writing, and what dreams you have for your book. (The Booker Award? A blockbuster movie? To be loved by grandmothers around the world?) The whole thing should take no more than a couple of paragraphs, maybe 250-300 words.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1

What's your book really about?

Course overview

The singular and the universal

Understanding hook and theme

The elevator pitch

Real world examples

Homework: 150-word elevator pitch

Q&A

Week 2

So the story is...

Elevator pitch-review

Elevator pitch-critique (group exercise)

Writing the synopsis

Real world examples
Shirin's secret sauce
Homework: 1000-word synopsis
Q&A

Week 3

Stakes and plot

First synopsis-review
First synopsis-critique (group exercise)
When less is more
Homework: 500-word synopsis
Q&A

Week 4

Getting it down

Second synopsis-review
Second synopsis-critique (group exercise)
Down to the pith
Homework: 300-word synopsis
Q&A

Week 5

Now for the query letter

Final synopsis-review
Final synopsis-critique (class exercise)
Assembling the query letter
Shirin's secret sauce
Homework: One-page query letter
Q&A

Week 6

The final polish

First query letter-review
First query letter-critique (group exercise)
Whom are you sending these to?
Homework: Polished query letter
Q&A

Week 7

Getting ready to pitch

Final query letter-review
Final query letter-critique (group exercise)
From written to oral - Pitching technique
Homework: Polished 150-word verbal pitch
Q&A

Week 8

Now, you try!

Pitch practice in front of an agent/editor/publishing coach

Next steps/What to do at home

Final Q&A