Preliminary Course Syllabus

Course Title: Learning to Be a High-Velocity Writer: National Novel Writing Month
Course Code: NVL 21
Instructor: Chris Baty

Grade Options and Requirements

For this class, all students will write their own 50,000-word (or longer) novel drafts in November. This is a challenging but doable undertaking, even for people with busy lives and no novel-writing experience. To unleash the magic that comes from a group working towards the same ambitious goal, we ask that you only enroll if you're committed to writing a 50,000-word novel draft in November.

No Grade Requested: Come to class and bash out your 50,000-word first draft.
Credit: Come to class, participate in discussions, and bash out your 50,000-word first draft.
Letter grade: Come to class, participate in discussions, bash out your 50,000-word first draft, and write a supplemental three-page reflection and a two-page novel-revision plan. The reflection and revision plan are both due to Chris by December 11.

Week One

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH IN A NUTSHELL
• Introductions and course goals
• NaNoWriMo: A brief history
• The curious benefits of cramming a novel into a month
• Why 50,000 words?
• What counts as a "novel"?
• The power of imperfect first drafts
• Writing as a social activity—boosting fun and building accountability
• The kinds of stories we should be writing in November
• The secret to "winning" NaNoWriMo

Week Two

READYING YOUR LIFE FOR A MONTH OF LITERARY ABANDON
• Registering on NaNoWriMo.org
• What it takes to write 1,667 words a day
• Friends, family, and other noveling distractions
• A month without our inner editors
• Planning your writing schedule and incentives
• Setting up your writing space
• Writing tools
• Planners vs. Pantsers
• Outlining: How much is necessary?
• The book we think we're writing vs. the book we'll actually write
Week Three
NERDING OUT ON STORY STRUCTURE
• Why understanding story architecture is so helpful
• A primer on three-act structure
• The hero's journey
• Character arcs
• Setting and world-building
• Historical and geographical research

Week Four
CHARACTER INTENSIVE
• Who are these people in your book, and what do they want?
• Exploring appearance, age, family, passions, pet peeves, guilty pleasures, weaknesses, talents, fears, and secrets
• Character changes: Who are they now? Who will they become?
• Backstory: Plumbing your character's past
• Great antagonists (external and internal)
• Deciding on point of view

Week Five
STORY INTENSIVE
• Possible turning points, subplots, and conflicts in our book
• What your novel is "about": Story vs. Theme
• Honing our elevator pitches
• The power of tone in shaping a story

Week Six
FINAL PREP
• Tips on making writing sessions fun and productive
• Momentum vs. speed
• NaNoWriMo write-ins happening in Palo Alto
• Virtual class write-ins via Google Hangout
• Things to know for the upcoming first week of NaNoWriMo

Week Seven
AND WE'RE OFF!
• Public word-count check-in and treats
• Excerpt sharing
• Plot doctoring
• In-class writing sprints
• Confronting the urge to start over
• What to do if you're falling behind
• Things to know for the upcoming second week of NaNoWriMo
Week Eight

GETTING OVER THE WEEK TWO WALL

- Public word-count check-in and treats
- Excerpt sharing
- Plot doctoring
- In-class writing sprints
- What to do when you want to quit
- Some thoughts on the 20,000s
- Jumpstarting stalled stories
- Handling character mutinies
- Things to know for the upcoming third week of NaNoWriMo

Week Nine

THE HOME STRETCH

- Public word-count check-in and treats
- Excerpt sharing
- Plot doctoring
- In-class writing sprints
- The magic of 35,000
- The home stretch
- Surviving Thanksgiving with your word-count intact
- Things to know for the upcoming fourth and final week of NaNoWriMo

Week Ten

I WROTE A NOVEL! NOW WHAT?

- Party and novelist crowning ceremony
- Revision intensive, focusing on editing tips and timelines, fixing story vs. polishing prose, and how to get great feedback from beta readers.
- Wrap up