DESCRIPTION

Our course, “Start Your Novel and Keep It Going,” is designed to help you get off to a great start on what will most likely be a long, satisfying journey. We’ll focus on producing the opening section of a novel, pages that have enough energy to help you go the distance. Does this mean that when you’ve finally finished your book the opening you’ve produced in this course will still work? Possibly. Possibly not. In fact, the end of your first draft may offer a whole new perspective on what the beginning needs. That’s where your revision process will kick in. But in this class, we’re focusing on the opening section of your first draft, that essential place for discovering your characters, their dramatic potential and the world they inhabit. These pages at this stage do the essential job of engaging you, the writer, giving you room to discover the kind of material that will keep you vitally attentive for the long-haul and setting yourself up to respond to all kinds of creative provocation. In lieu of an outline for the rest of the book, at the end of the course I’ll ask you to write a précis—a one-page narrative summary of what you imagine will happen in the rest of the book based on the dynamics you’ve put into play with your first pages. A précis is often what a potential agent or publisher requests to accompany a sample chapter or two.

Each week, short one- to two-page writing assignments will help you work with your own subject matter as you practice handling the elements of fiction. These assignments, as well as class discussion and instructor feedback, are designed to help as you develop an opening section of your book for workshop.

SUPPLIES

*Writing the Breakout Novel* by Donald Maass (available in print and electronically)

GRADING

You’re more than welcome to take the course for the No Grade Requested option (NGR).

If you opt to take the class for a letter grade:

- **65%** Satisfactory completion of portfolio, to include four of six weekly writing assignments and one 10 to 15-page opening section of your novel
- **35%** Participation, to include in-class discussion and thoughtful feedback on classmates’ workshop submission

SCHEDULE PREVIEW

We’ll focus on outside readings, discussion of the elements of fiction, and writing assignments that explore these elements and spark the creative process. The last four weeks we’ll also focus
on workshop, reducing the number of outside readings and assignments in favor of focusing on classmates’ writing. Workshops not only provide direct feedback on individual work, they also bring up helpful topics for all of us to think about while writing our own stories.

This syllabus is still very much in progress and subject to change.

**Week 1: Character and Point of View**

**Week 2: Place, Time, Culture, the Material World**

**Week 3: Dialogue and Narrative Pace**

**Week 4: Beginning in the Middle, with History**

**Week 5: A Hard Look at Tension**

**Week 6: Thinking about the Road Ahead—What have you done? What could it mean?**