Anne Lamont, in *Bird by Bird*, suggests that what we need to do to write a book is complete a "shitty first-draft." Then, after that, we'll really get to the work of writing. I agree with this. The first and most important goal for us as writers is to complete this 1st draft. It is comprised of nothing else but,

1. A beginning, middle, and end,
2. A certain number of typed pages, depending on the form (short short — approx 6 - 750 words) (short story or essay, approx. 750 - 10,000 words) (novella length, over 10,000) (novel/book length: 45,000 words +).

While this might seem like a callous reduction of your art and your calling, I reduce under Lamont’s advisement. I'm not saying a single thing about what subject you take or your style or any of the words you choose or even if they are spelled correctly. Right now, none of that matters. All those things can and will develop after the first draft is completed. All that matters is the typed words on the page. However, I also know that **IT ISN'T EASY!**

**The Course Consists of 5 Principle Elements**

1. **Daily writing:** the foundation of this course is daily writing--producing material. The expectation is that you write approximately
500 words a day (two pages) over a 5 day week. I will ask you to keep a Writing Log—a simple list of the date, time, and your word count. We'll have a discussion board dedicated to our Writing Logs where we will lay bare the trials, tribulations, and occasional joys of doing this foundational work. Your first task in this course is scheduling your daily writing time.

2. **Posting and Review:** We will share one of these writing—or any selection of 750 words—each week. Others in the class will read this selection and respond to it. Our responses will be positive and encouraging—that's a mandate. Not critical. We are dealing with burgeoning work and one thing I really believe is that all writing is good writing. We will nurture. We will cultivate. We will love, respect, and admire the energy and risk involved in producing work and sharing it with others. Guided by your work and you as individuals, I will also work toward gently leading students to new ground.

3. **Craft Talks:** each week I'll have a Craft Talk. In these I will share some ideas with you about process and writing craft. These will be primarily about structure and the infinite mutability of language. They are never designed to suggest that there is something "wrong" with certain writing and "right" with other writing. First, that is simply not the case.

Too much education seems centered on NOT doing certain things. Writing is classically taught this way. I could not object to that stance more strenuously. It is antithetical to the artist's process. Suggesting "mistakes" is further repression—exactly what we are trying to escape from. In my world, there are no mistakes. All writing is good writing. All expression is good expression. We need more freedom—not less. My suggestions are all designed about the simple principle that writing exists to be a form of communication. As such, it involves two
people, a very human writer and an identifiable human reader. It is a relationship and there are things we can do in our writing that make that relationship mutually beneficial and to ease the discomfort that is part of the territory of any relationship.

You might decide to use the craft talk to shape some of your daily work. You might find these don't apply to your work of the moment.

4. **Weekly Reading**: we will have weekly readings from our required text, *Best, American Essays 2015.*

We will read the essays in order, as per the table of contents. These are extracurricular readings, for your enjoyment and for our discussion. They are "essays" so that means they are a particular type of nonfiction form. Sometimes they will provide excellent object examples for our work and sometime they won't. They are not primary to the course. Your work and process is of primary concern.

5. **Zoom meetings**: Zoom meeting, occurring on Wednesday at 12 noon PST are not required; however, they are usually pretty fun.

**Overview of our 10 Weeks**

Week One: Boots on the Ground: Scenes and Summary
Week Two: Big Picture 1: What is a Story and How do I Find It?
Week Three: Foundation and Inspiration: Research
Week Four: The Narrator's Stance: Becoming a Story-teller
Week Five: Narration and Point of View
Week Six: Necessary Complexity: A-Story and B-Story
Week Seven: The Big Picture 2: Character Arc and Action
Week Eight: Advanced Chunking
Week Nine: Big Picture 3: Beginning, Middle, and End!
Week Ten: Our Story and the Purpose of Art