

Stanford | Continuing Studies

Course Title: The Writing Life: Form and Theory of the Novel

Course Code: OWC 101 A

Instructor Name: Ammi Keller

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Tuesdays, 12:00 - 1:15pm PT

Meeting location: On Zoom

Class sessions will be recorded, and will include a mix of large and small group discussions, craft lectures, Q&A, and in class writing prompts.

Assignments & Coursework

This course includes:

- Weekly writing assignments to make progress on your novel draft, as well as providing feedback to classmates' short assignments,
- Craft and process Discussions in Canvas,
- Reading and analysis of two novels,
- Instructor feedback on assignments,
- One required, private 20-minute conference with the instructor.

Grade Options and Requirements

Each week, I will make it clear which components are required. If a student completes all required work thoughtfully and on time, they will receive an A in the course. Though other activities and readings will be offered, completing or skipping them during any or all weeks will not impact a student's grade.

The following are required most weeks:

- Freewriting new novel pages using the weekly writing assignments or by simply continuing drafting one's novel
- Responding to three or so other writers' weekly writing by posting detailed and supportive feedback
- Responding to another student on at least one Discussion board each week. While students are encouraged to post on both discussion points boards and to

further dialogue on these, one response post is sufficient for the grading requirement.

Each student also gets one week to skip coursework without it negatively affecting their for life responsibilities, if needed. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns about grades.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to observe and adjust their writing practice to encourage more ease and accomplishment, using the techniques of published writers and peers.

Students will be able to analyze the fundamentals of novel structures, especially their beginnings, middles and endings.

Students will be able to devise a “throughline” for their own novel project and to use the techniques of summarizing and outlining to get a handle on what to draft next.

Students will be able to define and identify narration and scene, to choose the appropriate technique for each part of their story, and to transition between them.

Students will be able to analyze the stakes in a published novel and practice amplifying their own in a way that deepens rather than distorts their unique project.

Students will develop increased appreciation and fluency as readers of diverse novel projects, and gain language for offering supportive feedback.

Students will learn how to write forward and get to the end of their drafts while absorbing (but not overusing) feedback along the way.

Students will learn to trust themselves and their guts, appreciating craft but ceding to the muse when the two seem to be in conflict.

Textbooks/Required Materials

Required:

Element of Fiction: Beginnings, Middles and Ends by Nancy Kress, 2nd Edition
ISBN-13: 978-1599632193

Nothing to See Here by Kevin Wilson
ISBN-13: 9780062913494

Should the Waters Take Us by Stephanie Soileau
ISBN 9780385551786

Special note: Stephanie Soileau is tentatively planned as a guest visitor, date TBA

The Modern Library Writer's Workshop by Stephen Koch
ISBN-13: 978-0375755583

Optional:

Slow Writing by Louise Desalvo
ISBN: 9781250051035

- I will recommend optional chapters for students to read and discuss their process of writing.

Saves the Cat! Writes a Novel by Jessica Brody
ISBN: 978-9780399579745

- Optional chapters from this book will be assigned during Week Ten.

Pre-class Assignment

No coursework is required prior to our start date. However, if you will have other responsibilities in November, you're encouraged to pre-read *Should the Waters Take Us* by Stephanie Soileau over the summer. We will be analyzing about 110 pages of the book a week in November, so advance reading may be helpful if you have significant other commitments during that time.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week One

How to Write a Book in 45 Minutes

How do initial inspirations become fully-realized novels? How do we cultivate a writing practice that supports us?

The Modern Library Writer's Workshop "Beginnings." Recommended: *The Art of Slow Writing*, part 1.

Week Two

At the Beginning

How can we invite meaningful conflict into our fiction?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Introduction, Chapter 1 and 2;
Nothing to See Here by Kevin Wilson, first third.

Week Three

Throughline

What takes readers—and writers—through the middle of a novel?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Chapter 4, The Modern Library Writer's Workshop
"Shaping the Story." Nothing to See Here by Kevin Wilson, second third.

Week Four

Summary, Scene and the Modes

How can we gain facility with the modes of narrative prose? What makes a book's ending feel satisfying?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Chapter 3 and 7. Finish Nothing to See Here by Kevin Wilson. Recommended: The Art of Slow Writing, part 2.

Week Five

The Week Long Writing Residency

No reading. No discussion questions. A full week to make and hit stretch writing goals.

Week Six

Character

How can our characters surprise us?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Chapter 5, The Modern Library Writer's Workshop
"Making Characters Live." *Should the Waters Take Us* by Stephanie Soileau, first 1/3.

Week Seven

Point of View

Who will tell your story and how?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Chapter 6
Should the Waters Take Us by Stephanie Soileau, second 1/3. Recommended: The Art of Slow Writing, part 3.

Week Eight

Reverse Engineer Your Ending

How can you design an ending that feels both surprising and credible?

Beginnings, Middles and Ends, Chapter 7 and 9 (Chapter 8 is optional)

Finish *Should the Waters Take Us* by Stephanie Soileau. Recommended: *The Art of Slow Writing*, part 3.

Week Nine

Research, Revision and the Hypothetical Book Shelf

What role should research play in your writing process? How might planning for future revision support your drafting?

Reading: The Modern Library Writer's Workshop, "Working and Reworking."

Week Ten

How to Write a Book in Two Years

How will your initial inspiration become a full-fledged novel? What do you know about your novel now?

Recommended/optional reading: *Saves the Cat! Writes a Novel* Chapters 1-3 and your choice of a subsequent "genre" chapter.

Additional Information

The use of generative AI tools for writing or revising fiction, Discussion board posts, or responses to others is not permitted in this class. Using AI for research or other non-writing tasks is permitted but not recommended. Use of AI tools for prohibited activities may be considered academic dishonesty, and thus a violation of the student Code of Conduct.

It is never permitted to upload your classmates' writing/content to an AI tool without their permission.