Stanford | Continuing Studies

Course Title: Novel IV: Manuscript Preparedness
Course Code: OWC 306 A
Instructor Name: Dominic Russ-Combs

Class Schedule and Recording

Meeting days and times: Thursdays, 6:00 to 7:30pm PT
Meeting location: On Zoom

Class sessions will be recorded

Live Session

Zoom sessions are optional and will be follow-ups/elaborations to the week's lectures/discussion topics and will provide you with the opportunity to comment and ask questions.

Assignments & Coursework

This studio-style course is specifically optimized to help you get the most out of your precious writing time as you attempt to finish your book. There will be weekly lectures, some minimal reading materials (provided on Canvas), and a few written assignments, all meant to keep you inspired, intellectually engaged, and organized throughout the daunting (and often messy) task of novel writing. This class will also provide you with several opportunities to hone your skills in terms of discussing, pitching, and critically evaluating your book, and this class will offer a variety of supplemental writing prompts to assist you through the drafting process.

As your instructor, I'll furnish you with detailed, one-on-one feedback on approximately 10,000 words of your novel-in-progress and will generally serve as your project manager, assisting you with whatever insights and recommendations I can to keep your project in stride with your specific aims. By the end of this course, you will have developed practical ideas about how to best amplify and hone what you're already doing well, and you should also understand more about how to best accommodate your individual writing process as you continue to work on your novel project.

On the use of AI
The use of generative AI tools is permitted in this course for brainstorming, researching topics, and checking grammar/spelling. However, it is prohibited for drafting papers, assignment submissions, or discussion board posts. Use of AI tools for prohibited activities may be considered academic dishonesty, and thus a violation of the student Code of Conduct.

Small Critique Groups and Workshopping
During week four, you will be assigned to a workshop cluster (3-4 participants each). Within these clusters, you will share significant chunks of your novel-in-progress (anywhere from 40 to 100 double-spaced pages), as well as supply whatever synopses, outlines, storyboards for context (to expedite and ameliorate the critique-writing/feedback process). You may also list your broader concerns and questions to help guide your peers' insights and suggestions. By the beginning of week five, everyone will have posted their novel excerpts for workshop, and each of you will follow a specific critique-letter template while crafting your responses to your peers' work. The actual workshops will begin in week seven, ending during the final week of the course (week 10).

Weekly Discussions, Lectures & Exercises
During the first couple of weeks, we will immerse ourselves in multiple lectures, readings, and discussions that will introduce you to my idiosyncratic approach to workshop and the writing process. The preponderance of these lectures/discussions/exercises will be practical in terms of finishing and attempting to pitch your book. You will write synopses, bios, query letters, outlines; you will also post the opening pages (300-1000 words) of your novel-in-progress and an action plan for what you intend to accomplish in the class (and beyond). Throughout, I will field any and all questions you may have regarding the contemporary writing life and the current literary/publishing landscape. I will also post/provide several supplemental/optional writing prompts in an effort to help you through the rewriting process and generate new material (if need be).

Individual Meetings
I strongly encourage scheduling a one-on-one meeting with me after your manuscript has been workshopped to recap and strategize your path ahead.

Grade Options and Requirements

- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
    - To receive an "A" in this course you'll need to complete the following:

Weeks One through Ten:
Read the lectures and materials posted for any given week, and participate on the discussion board at least three times a week. Posts can be a response to a peer, a question, a comment, an insight, a recommendation, etcetera. None of your written work will be graded, so participation is essential in terms of establishing your grade.

Mandatory Writing Assignments Over Weeks One, Two and Three:

- Provide the opening of your book (first 300-1000 words), a brief writing bio, and a succinct list/action plan detailing your goals for this course.
- Write a one page synopsis, a one paragraph synopsis, and a single-sentence synopsis of your novel.
- Write a sample query letter.
- Post an original comment and respond to two of your peers' posts each week.
- Complete the Outline Assignment.

Week Four:

- Provide a significant chunk of your manuscript (40 to 100 double-spaced pages) for your workshop cluster discussion thread.
- Hand in up to 10,000 words of your project for my specific feedback.

Week Five & Six:

- Read and reread your peer's work and begin preparing your reviews.

Weeks Seven through Ten:

- Post critique letters for each manuscript offered in your workshop cluster.

Week Ten:

- A post recapping the progress you've made and the work you have left to do.

**__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

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week One

Introductions, Openings, Action Plans, and The Writing The Tool-Kit.

Post/Complete: Your Action Plan, Opening, and Bios.

Week Two

What Makes A Novel? Also: On Embracing Complication AND Summoning the Belief—When to Stick to Your Original Concept vs. When to Evolve.

Readings: A story with a novel's resonance: "Sonny's Blues".

The Workshop Sign-Up Sheet.

Post/Complete: The Three Synopses Exercise (One page, one paragraph, one sentence).

Week Three

Getting the Most Out of Your POV: The Intricacies of Character and Non-Character Narration.

Readings: "Magic"; "Nipple Jesus".

Post/Complete: The Outline Exercise.

Week Four

Questions that Persist: On Motive, Character, and Other Means of Narrative Propulsion. Also: How to Manage Background Characters.

Readings: "Place in Fiction".

Post/Complete: Query Letters.

Week Five
On Scene, Dialogue, and Exposition; Outer Story vs. Inner Story.

Week Six
Keeping Things Fresh: Strategies for Revision and Time Management.

Week Seven
Processing Workshop.

Week Eight
Processing Workshop.

Week Nine
Processing Workshop.

Recapping Our Course.

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