

# Stanford | Continuing Studies

**Course Title:** From Writer to Author: Navigating the Twisty Path to Publication

**Course Code:** CW 28 W

**Instructor Name:** Malena Watrous

## Class Schedule and Recording

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

Meeting location: Online (Zoom link will be provided to enrolled students closer to start date)

Class sessions will be recorded.

*Course recordings will be available for three weeks after the quarter ends.*

The Zoom sessions are meant to be fun and dynamic, and we hope for as many students as possible to be there each week. However, students who are unable to attend live can post their questions in Canvas ahead of time, which can be asked for them. Class recordings are typically posted by the next morning, so even if students can't make a Zoom, they can still take advantage of the learning that happens in class.

Many sessions will only take 1 hour, but the extra 15 minutes is built into the class in case a conversation runs long.

## How This Course Works

This is a rare, behind-the-scenes look at the book publishing process, designed to help you better understand how writers turn into authors and get their published books into the world, and how members of the publishing industry work to serve and support their clients.

Each week in this class, an author and one of their publishing “teammates” will visit via zoom to share their expertise and answer questions from the instructor and members of the class. Visitors will include a literary agent, a developmental editor, an acquiring editor at a publishing house, a publisher, and a book publicist. You will come

to have a better understanding of each of these roles, by hearing not only from the experts who do this work but also from the authors that each one collaborated with. We will also hear from a self-published author, who worked with the developmental editor before publishing and promoting her own novel. This series of conversations is intended to help you understand how books get completed, published, and sold-from manuscript to bookstore-whether you're a curious reader or an aspiring author hoping to make more informed choices.

In the first half of each zoom session, the instructor will ask a curated list of questions designed to ensure a comprehensive overview of the role of the guests. In the second half, students can ask their own additional questions.

### Assignments & Coursework

There will be 5 books assigned for this class. You are encouraged to read them ahead of time (or to make as much headway as possible) so you don't have to read a book each week. While we won't go into deep discussions about what happens in each book, familiarity with them will enable you to raise more informed questions and understand the nuances of the conversations around what choices and changes these authors and their teammates made in the editorial process.

Aside from the reading, students taking this course for credit are required to post 1-3 questions ahead of time, in the Canvas discussion board, for either the visiting author or teammate. In addition, you must write a brief paragraph of response to each visit, conversationally describing what you learned that was surprising or illuminating, and any other takeaways.

### Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Post at least one discussion question per visit
  - Submit a brief paragraph each week (100-200 words) describing the takeaways from the discussion.

*\*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.*

## Target Audience and Prerequisites

Anyone who loves to read and write, and/or anyone who aspires to publish a book someday. The book industry can feel impenetrable and shrouded in mystery. This class seeks to demystify it.

Even if you aren't intent upon the goal of publication, and are more of a curious reader, it can be fascinating to find out more about the changes that a manuscript goes through--and the eyes and hands that work on it--on the path to publication.

## Learning Objectives

Students will learn the difference between conventional "Big Five" book publishing and alternative models like small presses, hybrid and self publishing.

Students will come to understand the different roles played by professionals who help writers become authors: from developmental editors to agents to editors, publicists and marketing specialists.

## Textbooks/Required Materials

Required (and listed in order of reading/presentations):

*Anyone But Her* by Cynthia Swanson  
979-8990807426

*We Loved to Run* by Stephanie Reents  
978-0593448069

*We Meet Apart* by Martha Conway  
978-1646037025

*Once More We Saw Stars: A Memoir of Life and Love After Unimaginable Loss* by Jayson Greene  
978-0525435341

*Just One More Game: A Pickleball Quest* by Claire Frank  
978-1419782862

## Pre-class Assignment

Read *Anyone But Her*, by Cynthia Swanson, in order to be prepared for the first guest's visit in Class 1. If possible, begin reading the other books as well, to get a head start on the rest of the weekly reading.

## Tentative Weekly Outline

### Week One

**Guest visitors:** Cynthia Swanson, author of *Anyone But Her*, together with Shawna Kelly, developmental editor.

#### To be covered:

In the first 10 minutes, instructor Malena Watrous will do a brief intro to the class, explaining the format and and guiding students through the Canvas site. Next, we welcome author Cyhtia Swanson, who will talk to students about *Anyone But Her*, and about why she chose to self-publish this novel after using conventional publishing for her previous books. Conversation will also cover how a self-published author can maximize their chance of finding readers, being distributed at bookstores and gaining publicity.

Joining Swanson is developmental editor Shawna Kelly, who will talk about her role in helping to steer the revision of this manuscript before Swanson published it. For reference: developmental editors are independent contractors that authors sometimes choose to hire, either before or after submitting their manuscripts to agents. Swanson and Kelley will answer questions about the work that Kelley did and how they collaborated together, to help students who may be deciding whether or not to hire developmental editors to work with them.

### Week Two

**Guest visitors:** Stephanie Reents, author of *We Loved to Run*, together with literary agent, Emily Forland

#### To be covered:

Students often wonder what exactly a literary agent is, whether you need one in order to sell a book to a publisher, and if so how to maximize their chances of getting

on. We will also cover the range of functions they perform on behalf of their clients, how they get paid, and anything else students are curious about.

At best, an agent helps to nurture an author's career over a long period of time. Emily Forland has represented Stephanie Reents for over a decade, and worked with her on the sale of two books before this novel, including a story collection. We will cover the genesis of their relationship, what stood out for Emily from Stephanie's initial query letter, and the way they've seen publishing evolve over the course of their relationship.

### Week Three

**Guest visitors:** Martha Conway, author of *We Meet Apart*, together with Regal House publisher, Jaynie Royal

#### To be covered:

Martha Conway, author of six previous novels, has published in a wide range of ways, from a Big Five publisher to a self-published novel to her most recent book, *We Meet Apart*, released by the small press, Royal House. She will answer questions about her reasons for making these choices, and how they impacted sales and reception.

In the second half of the class, Martha will be joined by her publisher, Jayne Royal. Together they will discuss the trajectory of Martha's most recent novel, *We Meet Apart*, answering questions about everything from the submission process to the editorial process to cover design, sales and marketing. Jayne will also discuss how and why she decided to launch a publishing company, the joys and challenges involved.

### Week Three

**Guest Visitors:** Jayson Greene, author of *Once More We Saw Stars*

#### To be covered:

Jayson will be our first guest writing and publishing in the memoir/non-fiction genre, joining us to talk about writing and publishing *Once More We Saw Stars: A Memoir of Life and Love After Unimaginable Loss*. In this class, we'll talk specifically about how a memoir gets published, often after selling a proposal and synopsis of a book that is not yet (or incompletely) written. Jayson will also answer questions about this specific book, how he navigated the writing and publishing process on such personal

and painful material, as well as its reception. He has also worked extensively as a music critic, and can speak to the process of publishing shorter nonfiction pieces (and criticism) as well as two books, including a recently published novel.

### **Week Five**

**Guest Visitors:** Clare Frank, author of *Just One More Game: A Pickleball Quest*, and her publicist, Taryn Roeder

#### **To be covered:**

Clare Frank will discuss the experience of writing and publishing her second book, *Just One More Game*, following the success of her first, *Burnt: A Memoir of Fighting Fire*. We will also hear from her publicist, Taryn Roeder, who has been a book publicist for twenty-five years. They will talk about the importance of getting press coverage, how to do that, and what publicity looks like today in an era when BookTok and social media influencers have taken over the role once played by traditional book reviewers.