



9 Month Novel Intensive
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Below is a rough class structure and reading list. Most meetings will be structured with the first half devoted to a discussion of the work of writing a novel, considering supplemental readings and author interviews, and the second half devoted to workshop of your work-in-progress. Every four weeks, we will check in on your writing plans and practice, adjusting for goals as well as practicalities. We will follow the needs of the class as they develop, so everything is subject to change.

WEEK ONE, September 22

What is a novel? We will look at the scope of the form, from Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* to Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the lyrical to the modernist, the strange to the straight-faced.

We will each create a personal writing routine and schedule. How much time do you actually have available for writing? What can be sacrificed to make time? And for how long can you realistically write in one day?

WEEK TWO, September 29

Where to begin? Not at the beginning. Or the end. Unless. We will discuss, and record, the material we have yet to write, and think about what we may have yet to discover. We'll use post-its, index cards, notepads, butcher paper, or whatever paper materials you enjoy working with. We'll discuss tools such as Scrivener, outlines, and Nabokov's index cards.

WEEK THREE, October 6

The importance of directed readings and discovered readings. We will each create an individualized reading list directed at the book we are developing, as well as give reading recommendations to one another. Bring in some of your favorite books, not necessarily just novels. Bonus: post-class trip to Powell's.

WEEK FOUR, October 13

Check in on your writing practice and routine. Have you created a realistic schedule for yourself? What adjustments need to be made? What feeds your writing (maybe walks)? What takes away from it (trying to write at the wrong time of day, maybe)?

Discuss workshop expectations and guidelines.

WEEK FIVE, October 20

Workshops begin.

WEEK SIX, October 27

What to do with all of that feedback? How to process and incorporate workshop feedback with an eye toward future drafts.

Workshop

WEEK SEVEN, November 3

Points of view: finding a perspective from which to tell your story, shifting perspectives, and changing your mind about POV.

Workshop

WEEK EIGHT, November 17

Check in on your writing practice and routine. How can we keep going through the holidays without expecting too much of ourselves?

Now or later? We'll consider the work that needs to be done now and what work can you note to address in future drafts (i.e. researching the weather in Miami on Christmas of 1977 because the temperature will change your character's behavior versus researching the type of cloth a dress would have been made of in 1956).

Workshop

WEEK NINE, December 1

Following the story means letting go of your plans. Why it's important to let go of your initial idea of what the story would be and let it become its own thing.

Workshop

WEEK TEN, December 8

Making our way through the murky middle. When the project starts to feel unwieldy, how can we wrangle it back into manageability? We'll start with making a timeline.

Many stories don't move linearly, but it's important to sketch out your story in real time, including character history. Together, we'll make initial attempts at tackling a timeline.

Workshop

WEEK ELEVEN, December 15

Check in on your writing practice and routine. Using your timeline, can you spot holes in your story that you need to fill? Revisit the list of what parts of the story you still have to write.

Workshop

WEEK TWELVE, January 5

How did holidays go? What do you have left to do to reach the end of your draft?

Workshop

WEEK THIRTEEN, January 12

Research! Love it or hate it, it's necessary for all projects. We'll discuss strategies for researching and how to avoid either getting lost in research or neglecting it to a fault. Bonus: after class trip to the central library.

Workshop

WEEK FOURTEEN, January 26

Characters coming to life. Are you dreaming about them, conversing with them in your head? How much do we know about our characters? Who are they? And what else do we have to discover?

Workshop

WEEK FIFTEEN, February 2

Developing dialog that does work. Are you characters speaking in a way we can relate to? Do they speak in different ways? And what work is the dialog doing for the story?

Workshop

WEEK SIXTEEN, February 9

Check in on your writing practice and routine. We're halfway there. How is the writing feeling? We'll discuss Henry Miller's idea, "When you can't create, you can work." And,

to keep us going, we'll discuss why we write, consulting some inspiring ideas from excellent writers.

Workshop

WEEK SEVENTEEN, February 23

Cut, cut, cut. Let's read through what we have and take out what we don't need. We'll talk about ways to be ruthless and discard what no longer fits the story.

Workshop

WEEK EIGHTEEN, March 2

Uh oh, plot? Where's the tension in your story? What are the primary problems your characters face? And how do we develop those?

Workshop

WEEK NINETEEN, March 9

Delineating character: do all of your characters talk alike, or move alike? How does detail define character and place? What gestures do your characters fall back on when they don't use words? What do they worry about?

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY, March 16

Check in on your writing practice and routine.

Developing setting with intention. From Chekhov's use of winter to Willa Cather's Nebraska, we'll consider where you are from, and where your story is set. How does the setting feed the story?

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-ONE, March 23

Finding your undeveloped scenes and marking them to flesh out in this draft or in future drafts, asking yourself, how will this scene change the characters and the story?

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-TWO, April 6

Has one book become two very different stories? Or a series? Perhaps things are getting a bit unwieldy, or other projects are knocking around in your mind. How do we pare down and the story's scope without leaving out too much? And how do we keep other ideas from curtailing this story's progress? We'll also revisit your directed reading list.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-TWO, April 13

Voice Lessons. Voice is an oft-lauded characteristic of writing that comes with a lot of mystery. What is voice? What is your voice? We'll consider a few favorite authors and read what other writers have to say about narrative voice.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-FOUR, April 20

Check in on your writing practice and routine.

Let's talk dead wood. Just actually a little bit. What words do you overuse? How many clichés are lurking in the dark woods of your pages? These monsters are in each and every one of our closets. Let's find and vanquish.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-FIVE, April 27

Putting pauses in your story: it's time to talk chapter breaks, even if, at first, they feel a little arbitrary.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-SIX, May 4

Finishing your draft, even when you don't want to. It's hard to let a story end.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-SEVEN, May 11

Endings. We'll consider the way novels end. Bring in the final few pages of one of your favorite books. We'll talk about what makes an ending, and why a story will never be truly over for its author.

Workshop

WEEK TWENTY-EIGHT, May 18

Where to begin. We will consider the openings of a few novels, and you will write (or rewrite) your novel's beginning, in class, starting with an oral storytelling exercise.

Final workshop

WEEK TWENTY-NINE, June 1

Publication discussion, with visitors discussing: drafting until you can't draft anymore, seeking an agent and publisher, and life after the first book.

LAST DAY! June 8

Wrap up: plans for future drafts and accountability, celebration.

SELECTED READINGS (copies of readings will be provided)

Excerpts from:

Artful Ali Smith

Triggering Town Richard Hugo

Create Dangerously by Edwidge Danticat

Big Magic by Elizabeth Gilbert

On Writing by Stephen King

Essays by and interviews with George Saunders, Claudia Rankine, James Baldwin, Elena Ferrante, Zadie Smith, William Trevor, Toni Morrison, Rae Armantrout, and more.