



9-Month Online Novel Intensive
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Syllabus

This course is designed to guide you through the writing and/or revising of your novel. We'll read excerpts from published novels by authors including Han Kang, Tommy Orange, Lina Meruane, Mitchell S. Jackson, Deborah Levy, and Susan Steinberg, as well as craft essays by authors including Dorothy Allison, Jane Alison, and Alexander Chee. Some weeks you'll have craft assignments to complete outside of class, and other weeks we'll do in-class exercises together. Two students will workshop each week.

My goal is to teach you concrete skills to help you navigate the novel-writing process. We'll work together to create a supportive community of writers to provide each other with constructive feedback and encouragement.

1. What is a novel, and how does anyone actually write one?

In this first class meeting, we'll talk about what students are currently working on, or the novels they hope to begin in this class, what excites them about those projects, and what their challenges have been so far. We'll talk about our processes and writing routines. Each student will create and commit to a weekly writing routine for the duration of the course. We'll also talk about what makes a novel a novel, what the form allows the writer to do, and what its limits are. Each student should come to class prepared to talk about a favorite novel and what they love about it.

2. Exploring and developing ideas

We'll explore some of the techniques writers can use to coax the seed of an idea into something robust enough to support an entire novel.

3. Beginnings

So much rides on the opening pages of a novel. Will you pull the reader in, or will they put the book down and walk away? This week we'll discuss the opening scenes of three published novels. What choices did the authors make, and how do they affect the reader? And equally important: what promises are being made to the reader in the opening scenes? What expectations do they set up for the rest of the book?

We'll also talk about workshop guidelines and expectations in anticipation of next week's first workshop. How can you be most helpful to your classmates? And how can you make the best use of the feedback you receive when it's your turn?

4. Research

The amount of research will vary from project to project, but there's no escaping it entirely. How does the novelist's research differ from the academic writer or journalist? We'll talk about research as curiosity-fueled play instead of drudgery.

Workshops begin.

5. Voice

What is voice, exactly? And how do you find the right one for your novel? We'll analyze samples from a variety of published novels to see how different authors have combined the elements of voice (tone, word choice, rhythm, etc) to create something that's entirely their own.

Workshop

6. Structure

Drawing on an excerpt from Jane Alison's craft book *Meander, Spiral, Explode*, we'll look at the traditional narrative arc alongside more experimental structures, and discuss how those choices impact the narrative.

Workshop

7. Writing outside of the novel

Freewriting is a great tool for exploration and problem-solving outside of the boundaries of your manuscript. We'll do in-class exercises to get you thinking about the problems and challenges of your novel, to puzzle through the peripheral and backstory elements that the reader doesn't need but that you, the author, should know.

Workshop

8. Point of view

A story changes depending on who's telling it. Which characters are the right ones to lead the reader through your novel?

Workshop

9. Characters and their motivations

What do your characters want? What are they afraid of? What are they hiding? We'll look at how to develop compelling, complex characters strong enough to carry your novel.

Workshop

10. Plot/conflict

Desire drives fiction. We'll draw on last week's lesson to talk about how characters' motivations move narrative forward to create an organic, earned plot.

Workshop

11. The writing that happens off of the page

Your mind is always working on your novel, whether you're at the page or not. We'll talk about the parts of the writing process (reading/daydreaming/showering/walking, etc) that don't involve getting words down in the manuscript, and how to make the most of those moments.

Workshop

12. Setting

We'll consider the importance of place in the novel, and discuss techniques to make it really count.

Workshop

13. Function and Use of Detail

The world of a novel is grounded in specific details. We'll use in-class exercises to engage all five senses in our writing.

Workshop

14. Dialogue

Dialogue is one of the most powerful tools in the novelist's arsenal, but it can be tricky to get right. We'll look at dialogue in published work, and then do an in-class exercise.

Workshop

15. The use of time in the novel

A novelist can slow time down, speed it up, go backward, or leap far into the future. Time gives your novel shape and context. It is an inescapable element, but one that you're free to play with. We'll explore that.

Workshop

16. Managing multiple points of view

Novels with multiple point-of-view characters require a special kind of wrangling to keep the various threads moving along harmoniously. We'll discuss strategies for avoiding common pitfalls and making the most of all of those voices.

Workshop

17. When you feel stuck/when it all falls apart

There comes a point in the writing of every novel where it all just seems to fall apart in your hands. It's a normal part of the process, but knowing that doesn't make it easier. What does it mean, why does it happen, and what can you do when it happens to you?

Workshop

18. Finding inspiration in other books

Let's talk about the books we love that are feeding our own writing, and share recommendations with each other.

Workshop

19. What's important in first draft?

Rome wasn't built in a *etc etc*. Writing the first draft of a novel is a MONUMENTAL undertaking. What should you be focusing on, and what can you worry about in subsequent drafts?

Workshop

20. How characters change

We'll circle back to the character motivation work you did in the beginning to see how the characters are holding to it. Do the motivations need adjusting? Do the characters? Let's take stock of where things are at.

Workshop

21. Creating a timeline for your narrative

As you'll know by this point, I'm not a huge proponent of outlining, but I *am* a fan of mapping out where you've already been. This week you'll draw up a timeline of the action of your novel so far and use it to consider plot and pacing.

Workshop

22. Dealing with Doubt

Doubt is inevitable, but you don't have to let it drag you down. We'll read an essay on doubt by Stacey D'Erasmus and investigate that sticky feeling and how we might turn it to a positive force.

Workshop

23. The Climax

It's the moment you've been working toward! Is it everything you hoped for and more or does it just sort of...fizzle out? Let's take a look.

Workshop

24. Endings

They're hard. (Okay, yeah, they're hard AND they're important. We'll talk about sticking the landing.)

Workshop

25. Revising 1

Revision can be daunting. Having a process to follow makes it less overwhelming and much more effective. I'll lead you step by step through my own revision process, including in-class exercises.

Workshop

26. Revising 2

Last week's lecture continued, with more exercises, because, frankly, it's a lot to cover.

Workshop

27. Finding your draft readers/sustaining a writing process outside of a class

What do you do once this class is over? No one can go it entirely alone. We need draft readers to help us as we revise. We'll talk about what to look for in a critique partner, how to find them, and how to be a good critique partner in return. We'll also make plans for writing schedules and accountability outside of a workshop structure.

Workshop

28. Publishing/finding an agent

When you've written and revised your novel and you're ready to send it out into the world...how exactly do you go about *doing* that? We'll talk queries, publishing, and agents.

Final workshop.

29. Last class

Readings from student work, making a work plan for future drafts, questions, wrapping it all up.