

SYLLABUS
For Independent Study - Fiction

Course Description:

This course is intended to assist a creative writer to move a story collection/novel in progress beyond first draft, motivating and encouraging and gently critiquing. At the end of the class, the student should see his/her way to completing the work of fiction. Although anyone can take the class, South Asian students will benefit most from exploring the art of fiction with mentor Shauna Singh Baldwin.

Sample Syllabus

General guidelines

To give the mentor a sense of your voice:

In the first week, please record and send a 5-7 minute MP3/MP4 sample of your reading from the text. Thereafter, this useful exercise will help your revision, but you don't need to send it.

It's important that you find your voice and style. Hence the mentor will be unlikely to use her fiction as guide, except to illustrate a discussion point.

Follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* or *The Globe and Mail Style Guide*.

Excerpts

1. 15 pages in WORD Docx file.
2. Excerpts should be continuous as far as possible
3. Please do not resubmit revised excerpts
4. Please format double spaced, in Times New Roman or Arial font, 12 point
5. Insert Header with Name, document title, date on each page
6. Insert Footer with page numbering x of y at bottom centre

Submissions are due on Thurs evenings by 6 pm EST. Mentor will comment using track changes, or mark up and send in PDF -- then discuss on the phone.

Mentor contact information: Cell: _____, Land line: _____.

Book Reports (2 minimum):

See list of reading material/books.

Hopefully, the booklist will include books outside your genre and comfort zone.

- Book reports should be 750-1000 words.
- Begin with a hook to draw us into the subject of the book.
- Since it's a report, not a review, you may summarize the plot, critique the problem set up *and* the solution/ending.
- State what you learned that you can/will use.
- State what the author could have done differently.

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- Critique only what is on the page, then mention what you feel should have been included.
- If you choose to discuss a novel, please describe what you admired first, what worked, and then why/why not?
- Please format double spaced, in Times New Roman or Arial font, 12 point.
- Please insert name, document title, date, and page number on each page.

Book reports are due on Thurs evenings by 6 pm EST.

Phone discussions:

Either **Sat a.m./Sun p.m.** as convenient for both.

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Week 1

Submissions:

- Recording: a 5-7 minute sample of you performing/reading from the text. Send via Whatsapp.
- Cast of characters, with the five/six leads getting a sentence of explanation, a phrase for the rest
- A plot synopsis
- First 5-10 pages
- An artist's statement. Do you have a sense of your “project” as an artist? What gaps in the universe does/will your work address?

Introductory discussion

Week 2

Submission

10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
- What is the contract you are making with your reader?
- Why are you writing a novel -- why not a poem/short story/play?
- What is the difference between a situation and a story?
- How will you make your novel into a story?
- What is a plot? How is it different from story? Is your plot different from your story?
- What is a masculine/feminine narrative structure?
- How do men's/women's/South Asian/LGBTQ stories differ, if at all?

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Week 3

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - What are the limits of research and the limits of imagination for your story -- if any?
 - Whose story is this? What are the ethical questions involved in the writing?
 - How will I include as many points of view as possible? (even if writing in first person)
 - Which historical events will be included, if any?
 - How will I make this story my own, and itself?
 - Is there a specific text or subject treatment that my text will oppose by existing?
 - Can I sustain this opposition for 300-400 pages?
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Week 4

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
- How am I managing time in this novel?
- How am I using jumps and white space?
- When will I have to use a flashback? Will I need any flash forwards in your story?
- What segments will I use in this book?
- What is the deep structure of my novel?

Submission: 15 pages

Book report

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Week 5

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction (optional)

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission

What is Point of View?

- How do I mark it for the reader? How do I signal when it changes?
- How can I tell if I'm writing *about* a story or writing the story through the eyes of the characters?
- How many Points of View are useful for different genres?

Exercise:

1. Interview an immigrant of different origin than your own/a domestic violence survivor about their experience/an older person.
Write about how it feels to ask him/her questions.
Then write a page from his/her point of view about how it feels to be asked questions.

OR

2. Volunteer to serve at a homeless shelter. Write one page about the experience from the point of view of the homeless person.
Show what may be going through his/her mind. First make it sympathetic, then turn it negative toward the interviewer.

No Submission from fiction-in-progress

Week 6

Submission

None

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
- **Midway review of objectives and progress.**

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Week 7

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - Who are my characters in this novel? How are they special?
 - Whose story is it anyway?
 - Which ones are on stage, which are off stage or in back story only?
 - Have I interviewed the right people, enough people, representative people?
 - Do I know enough about these characters to be convincing?
 - Do the characters care about something/anything?
 - Why should the reader care about their story?
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Week 8

Submission(s)

Book report (750-1000 words required)

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction (optional)

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - Why did I decide to on first/second/third person? Have I tried others?
 - What is the value of different tenses?
 - Where is my narrator in time and space?
 - How much narrative distance am I providing -- will it vary?
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Week 9

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

OR

Book report (750 words)

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - Language, voice, tone
 - The head and the heart
 - Depth and breadth
 - Symbolic language and the language of labels
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Week 10

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - What is my creative process, what are the ways that work for me?
 - What are my most creative times, spaces?
 - What are my creative triggers to generate new text?
 - What do I need at this point to go forward?
-

Week 11

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
 - Remind me again, why am I writing this?
 - What did my first few pages promise/What is my contract with the reader?
 - What am I trying to communicate?
 - What techniques and tools can I try for re-vision?
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Week 12

Submission

Excerpt 10-15 pages of fiction (optional)

Discussion:

- Comments from mentor re last submission
- How am I managing time in my novel? Do I have timelines?
- Do my timelines show personal and political events? How will I integrate the larger history into the personal (and if not, why not)?
- Outstanding issues/concerns.

Submission

Action plan for future!

Additional Discussion Topics

- Could this book be set anywhere else? Why/why not?
- How am I managing space? Do I know distances (real or imagined).
- How does the setting interact with the story?
How do people react to their surroundings? Are they aware of other places, other ways of being?
If not, why not?
- What did my first few pages promise/What is my contract with the reader?
- What am I trying to communicate?
- What techniques and tools can I try for re-vision?
- How can I integrate this novel?
- Why should I bother editing? What is my high-level objective in editing my text?
- What are the limits of an editor's responsibility?
- What are the different kinds of editing? Which one do I need and when?

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Suggested Reading:

Choose a book that inspires you. Write a book report.

[*Negotiating with the Dead*](#) by Margaret Atwood

[*Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook*](#) - by Aimee Buckner

[*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*](#) - Helene Cixous

[*Confessions of a young novelist*](#) / Umberto Eco. / Umberto Eco

[*Prodigy: a novella*](#) by Nancy Huston

[*Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life*](#) by bell hooks.

[*Revision: A Creative Approach to Writing and Rewriting Fiction*](#) by David Michael Kaplan

[*Bird by Bird*](#), by Anne Lamott

[*Structuring your novel: From basic idea to finished Manuscript*](#) - Meredith and Fitzgerald

[*The Woman Upstairs: a novel*](#) by Claire Messud

[*Beyond words: Translating the World*](#) edited by Susan Ouriou.

[*The Echomaker: a novel*](#) by Richard Powers

[*Sleep*](#) by Nino Ricci

[*Building a Character*](#) by Constantin Stanislavski

[*The Creative Habit*](#) by Twyla Tharp

[*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*](#) by Christopher Vogler