Western Continuing Studies

# Introduction to Fiction
**WRCR6207**

**Course Outline**

**Description:**
This course provides support for anyone who wants to write fiction. We study the basic elements of story, including: character, plot, scene, setting, point of view, theme, narration and dialogue. Helpful tips and shortcuts, such as timed speed writing with prompts, will strengthen your writer's craft and encourage you to get words on paper.

**Course Goals*:***
*Introduction to Fiction* is intended for anyone who wants to brush up on the basics or hone new skills in fiction writing. You may have a solid idea for a character, scene or short story that you want to develop. This course will help move you beyond self-doubt and procrastination to a system where you can write a well-crafted story with a strong character. The student will learn the building blocks of fiction writing including characterization, point of view, dialogue and narrative summary, plot, scene and structure. As well, the student will obtain a greater understanding of the craft of writing and be encouraged to share work with fellow students.

**Course Objectives:**
At the completion of this course, the student will be able to get a character or scene that is real to them down on paper. You will develop a skills toolkit in fiction writing that include these critical elements; how to plan, write, edit and re-write your work. You will also develop the ability to look critically at works of fiction to find the telling details that can help animate your own stories. Going forward, this will help feed your writing skills and creativity – a boost no matter what your field of interest. Your three assignments receive constructive feedback – an essential component of the creative process.

**Texts: *No text.***
Students will be encouraged to read four short examples of fiction in the Book Club Forum that is a required component of the course. You can expect these selections will be at least 2000 words. You are also encouraged to re-read your favourite works of fiction. Other custom readings and course materials will be available online. Required Material is mandatory reading and some content is a "Deeper Dive" into the art of fiction – and can be perused as you choose.

**Completion Requirements:**
To receive a complete in this course you must:
- Submit the three mandatory writing assignments. Complete the quiz
- Participate in the Book Club Forum and Writing Lab
- Attend 4 out of the 6 scheduled Zoom sessions (please contact the instructor for written permission to miss more than two Zoom sessions)

**Policy on Cheating and Academic Misconduct:**
Academic honesty is a cornerstone of conduct at Western University. We cannot have freedom of expression without integrity. Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences; please refer to the section on "Scholastic Offences" in the current University Academic Calendar, or on the web at http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca. Such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in this University or elsewhere (without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to

whom the work is submitted). Students enrolled in non-degree courses are expected to abide by the University's code of conduct.

**Code of Student Conduct:**
The purpose of the Code of Student Conduct is to define the general standard of conduct expected of students registered at Western University, provide examples of behaviour that constitutes a breach of this standard of conduct, provide examples of sanctions that may be imposed, and set out the disciplinary procedures that the University will follow. For the complete Code of Student Conduct: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf.

**Plagiarism:**
All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com ( http://www.turnitin.com).

**How Often will the Instructor Communicate with Me**
We will have a weekly, synchronous class on Zoom to introduce the topic of the week, followed by guided discussions in OWL. The instructor will check email on a daily basis.

**Policy on Late Assignments**
Online Forum discussions in Book Club and the Writing Lab are to be completed in the week they are assigned. This allows everyone in your group to contribute to the conversation. The online week will run from Monday to Sunday.

The fiction writing assignments have deadlines and every effort should be made to submit by that date. However, they will be accepted and assessed without penalty if received before the last day of our class.

**When will I receive my complete/incomplete grade?**
The final completion assessment will be available 2 weeks after the last scheduled day of the course and can be printed from myWCS.

**How do I hand in assignments?**
All assignments will be submitted electronically through OWL. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all assignments forwarded to the instructor arrive before the due date. If you experience difficulty in submitting assignments through OWL, you are responsible for contacting the instructor and arranging an alternate method of delivery (e.g. e-mail attachment) for the assignment.

**Evaluation**:
This is a non-graded, complete-incomplete course but feedback of your writing work by the instructor, is a valued component. Your complete-incomplete evaluation is based on the following:

**Fiction writing assignments**: You learn the art of fiction by writing in a frequent and consistent manner. The writing exercises in this course are designed to give you tools to help you be a productive writer. There are three assignments in core topics including:

1. Character
2. Narration
3. Scene

**Quiz**: In unit 6, there is one, 20 question, true-false quiz that tests your knowledge of each of the main topics covered in the course: character, story arc and plot, scene and structure, narrative voice and dialogue. This quiz is meant to help you review the material and remember the key points.

**Participation**: You are expected to participate in several ways in the course. Each week you will have opportunities to share your opinion on works of fiction with other students in the Book Club Forum, as follows:

- would like to read more,
- neither liked nor disliked the reading, or
- would not recommend this reading to others.

As well, for units 2-5 there is a Writing Lab with a short prompt related to the weekly topic. You are asked to set a timer and try to write your guts out, without judgment. Then you will look over the prompt material, make some edits, and post to the Writing Lab where you can get feedback from classmates. To get you familiar with how this works, you have also been asked, prior to Class 1, on March 10th, to upload the names of your favourite author and work of fiction into the Book Club Forum.

If you have fiction work that you feel would benefit from a critique, you can post this work in the Feedback section of the Forums and ask your classmates to review for comments. This can be an invaluable source of support as you work to edit and finalize your writing.

## Course Schedule:

**Unit 1**
**Introduction to Fiction**

At the first ZOOM meeting, we will discuss how creative writing gives us important skills of observation that are useful in our careers and lives. As well, we will explore how to train all of our senses to find those nuggets and telling details that put flesh on the bones of our stories. We will talk about what a story is and how to establish writing habits that produce results. You will be given a form to fill in with jot notes about your character. Ask yourself, what is it about the character that grabs your interest? What do they look like? What are they wearing? What aura do they give off to a casual observer? Can we tell their social class? Are they confident? These sheets will not be submitted for evaluation but be prepared to share this at our next Zoom meeting. Please re-read your favourite book and see what you liked most and least about the main fictional character(s).

**Unit 2**
**Character**

Character is the key element, the fundamental building block, of fiction writing. Character leads to plot, theme, and style. But it is not enough to imagine and describe a character. Characters need to act, and need conflict or a challenge or a predicament to come alive. There are many different types of characters such a protagonist or antagonist, the hero or villain. We will discuss how you pick the right character to offer the point of view. How do you find the right voice for your character? Do you want to be the character? Where else can you find inspiration? How do you look around and distill the essence of your life experience into a character?

**Unit 3**
**Plot and the Story Arc**

Structure in fiction is important and your plot is a key technique to writing. Plot is about the bones or architecture of a story and is often described as a road map - how the story goes from point A to point B. Beginning writers need only to focus on the beginning, middle and end of a story – that is the arc. But not every plot is linear. That is why authors always throw in a conflict to show the fork in the road. The climax leads to the logical conclusion of the conflict and the story's end. We will discuss rising action and development - the art of building suspense and dramatic tension - for readers love a good struggle. As well, we will review the Freytag pyramid, the classic plot tool for fiction writers.

**Unit 4**
**Tools of Voice and Point of View: Narrative Summary, Interior Monologue and Dialogue**

We will discuss narration and how to see the world from your character's viewpoint – inside and out. You will learn the primary narrative categories in most works of fiction: narrative summary, interior monologue and dialogue. These are the three tools that give voice to your characters and allow the story to unfold. We will also discuss point of view – whether a story is told in the first, second or third person. The key point is that the narrator can also be a character, depending on how distant you want that narrator to be. A good narrative voice is generally consistent, and doesn't switch from first to third point of view.

**Unit 5**
**Scene Building**

Scenes are the building blocks of your story and almost stack up one on top of the next. Scene writing is essential to the plot and anything extraneous, which bogs down your story, must be cut out. We will also discuss the importance of sensory detail - what would your character see, hear, smell, taste or feel? Is it cold or hot? Is there a breeze? How does that feel on your skin? Are the birds chirping? What makes it smell like spring? The objective is to make your reader feel like they can see or almost touch something in their mind's eye in the scene you are building.

**Unit 6**
**Theme and Setting – and Course Review**

Where am I? Why should I care? Your reader will ask these questions and you must give them a satisfactory orientation. Setting is not just an exercise in geography but a means to see the scene in terms of an era - or an emotional terrain written on the heart. And as your character moves through a story the reader needs to be re-oriented to every major change in setting.

Theme in fiction is often under-stated. But it is an important part of storytelling. We will review the basics of theme and review how it can enhance your plot and tell a nuanced story.

We will also review the Fiction Resource Package to help you continue to write your stories at the end of our time together.