

Introduction to Fiction

WRCR6207

Course Outline (Online)

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 new writers who want to try to write fiction or those who want 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 textbook is required for this course.

Students will be encouraged to read short examples of fiction each week in the Book Club forum that is a required component of the course. You can expect these selections will be at least 2500 words. You are also encouraged to re-read your favourite works of fiction. Other custom readings and course materials will be available online. Some of the course material is mandatory reading and some content is a "Deeper Dive" into the art of fiction. For those who wish to participate, there will be four optional drop-in speed writing sessions using a prompt.

Evaluation: This is a graded course where a complete or incomplete will be issued. In order to receive a completion for this course, a student must:

- Submit the three writing assignments
- Complete all four quizzes
- Participate in the Book Club Forum
- Participate in the Writing Lab (either by attending the drop-in session or submitting your writing work in forums)
- attend 5 out of the 6 scheduled Zoom sessions (please contact the instructor for written permission to miss more than one Zoom session)

Fiction writing exercises: You learn the art of fiction by writing in a frequent and consistent manner. The

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writing exercises in this course are designed to give you tools to help you be a productive writer. There are three mandatory assignments including:

1. Character – what does he/she want more than anything else
2. Plot: Beginning, middle and end
3. Scene: give your character some action

Each assignment will have a grading rubric that defines the following:

- Outstanding
- At expectation
- Needs work

Quizzes: There are four short true-false, multiple choice quizzes that test your knowledge of each of the main topics covered in the course: character, story arc and plot, scene and structure, narrative voice and dialogue.

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 student 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.

The optional drop-in speed writing sessions, held on Thursday at noon, are un-graded, but provide an opportunity for writing practice and participation. For those unable to join at that time the writing prompt will be posted and you can participate and share your work with classmates online in the Writing Lab Forum.

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

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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.

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.

All other assessments (quizzes and fiction writing assignments) have deadlines. Every effort should be made to submit by the deadline.

When will I receive my grades?

Final grades will be available 2 weeks after the last scheduled day of the course. A grade report 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.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to Fiction

At the first Zoom meeting, we will discuss how creative writing can give us important skills of observation that are useful in our careers and lives. As well, we will explore how to train all of your 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 find and share 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 a grade 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).

Week 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 – an important goal of good fiction writing. 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?

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Week 3: Plot and the Story Arc

Show, don't tell. That is a simple but potent way to think about plot. There is technique to writing – structure – and plot, like your high school English teacher may have told you, is about the bones or architecture of a story. Plot is often described as a road map - how the story goes from point A to point B with a conflict thrown in between to show a 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.

Week 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 different techniques for narrative summary, interior monologue and dialogue. These are the three tools that give voice to your characters. 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.

Week 5: Scene Building

Scenes are the building blocks of your story and almost stack one after the next. You will learn how important each scene is to the plot and why anything extraneous must be cut. 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 wind? Are the birds chirping? Can you make your reader feel like they can see or almost touch something in their mind's eye in the scene you are building?

Week 6: Theme and Setting – and Course Review

Where am I? Why should I care? Your reader will ask these questions and you must be prepared to 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 a character moves through a story you have to re-orient the reader 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.