# Western ContinuingStudies

## Writing Mysteries and Thrillers
WRCR6221

**Course Outline (online)**

**Description:**
Whether a cozy mystery with an amateur sleuth, a psychological suspense story with a serial killer, or a high-tech cat and mouse thriller with a genius FBI Cyber Agent, tension is the secret sauce that keeps readers engaged. Through discussions based on readings, viewings, and writing assignments, we will explore techniques authors use to build tension in the gripping, blood-chilling, page-turning genres of Mysteries and Thrillers.

**Course Goals:**
- Explore classic and contemporary mysteries and thrillers
- Approaches to generating and maintaining tension and suspense through a story
- Evaluate what distinguishes unique sub-genres such as noir and techno-thrillers

**Course Objectives:** At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:
- Discuss what defines a thriller, and its various sub-genres
- Develop a character profile for a detective
- Write a killer first line, first paragraph, and first page
- Maintain tension and pacing in thriller writing
- Write a short story in the Mystery or Thriller genre

**Texts:**
TBD

**Evaluation:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Online Engagement/Giving Constructive Feedback | 25% |
| Assignment 1 (Killer Opening) | 10% |
| Assignment 2 (Character Outline) | 10% |
| Assignment 3 (Tighten, Tighten, Tighten) | 10% |
| Assignment 4 (Circling in on Tension) | 10% |
| Assignment 5 (Virtual Trip) | 10% |
| Short Story | 25% |

**Notes on assignments (papers and reports):**
- Must be academic in style and content
- Must have a clear focus
- Must present ideas in a logical and well thought-out flow
- Arguments, analysis and conclusions must be based on clearly identified research and sources
- Must cite all references from other sources
- Must be in paragraph format
- Must be double-spaced, and typewritten
- Must follow APA style

**Grading:**

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A+ | 90-100 | One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level |
| A | 80-89 | Superior work which is clearly above average |
| B | 70-79 | Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory |
| C | 60-69 | Competent work, meeting requirements |
| D | 50-59 | Fair work, minimally acceptable |
| F | below 50 | Fail |

**Online Engagement Grading Chart:**

The following chart will act as a guide for assessing student participation in an online course.

| Grade | Criteria |
|---|---|
| 9-10 | The student participates frequently, providing relevant responses and feedback to peers on a weekly basis spread evenly over the length of the course. |
| | Replies to discussion questions, instructor comments, and peer feedback in a positive and critical manner. |
| | The student responds in a timely manner (allowing enough time for fellow students to respond, and not posting on the last day of the unit). |
| | Responses are of a high quality, an obvious effort has been made to research the answer.  Responses and feedback offer new perspectives on course material and spark discussion and thought amongst the class. |
| | Replies and posts are free of grammatical and spelling errors. |
| 7-8 | The student participates consistently, providing relevant responses and feedback to their peer's writing over the length of the course. |
| | The student responds in a fairly timely manner (allowing enough time for fellow students to respond, and not posting on the last day of the unit). |
| | The student offers new ideas and responds to the contributions of others. |
| | Replies are mostly free of grammatical and spelling errors. |
| 6 | The student provides some relevant contributions over the length of the course. |
| | The student responds before the end of the unit, but usually on the last day. |
| | The student occasionally offers new ideas and responds to others. |
| | Responses have the occasional grammar or spelling errors. |
| 5 | The student's contributions are inconsistent in both quality and timing over the length of the course. |
| | The student's responses are not always on time. |
| | The student does not offer any new ideas, and responses to fellow students are few. |
| | Responses have a few spelling and grammar errors. |
| 4 | The student rarely provides contribution or feedback to their peer. |
| | The student does not always respond on time. |
| | The student has difficulty understanding the course content, and does not respond to the contributions of the other students. |
| | Several grammar and spelling errors appear in their responses and feedback to peers. |
| 0-3 | The student provides little or no discussion or feedback. |
| | Information is contributed only when asked to by the instructor, and responses are negative or disagreeable to the instructor/fellow students. |
| | Responses show little in the way of comprehension of course material.  The responses are usually limited to "I agree", "Me too" or the like. |

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**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 to introduce the topic of the week, followed by guided discussions in OWL. Instructor will check email on a daily basis.

**Policy on Late Assignments:**

Assignments and forum posts in this course are to be shared among the class to stimulate discussion on weekly topics. Failure to contribute assignments on time, or participate in the discussions, negatively impacts the quality of experience for the entire class.

Thus, assignments are to be handed in on time. Late assignments will be downgraded by 5% per day, including weekends, up to a maximum of 7 days, after which assignments will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be assigned unless documentation for accommodation has been provided in advance.

**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 using the assignment or short story tool. Failure to meet deadlines without the instructor's written permission will be subject to the late assignment policy. 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

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responsible for contacting the instructor and arranging an alternate method of delivery (e.g. e-mail attachment) for the assignment.

**Course Schedule**:

**Week One      Introduction to Mysteries and Thrillers**
Introduction to the course. We will examine what defines a Mystery or Thriller and their various sub-genres. We will experiment with the hook that draws a reader into a story on the first page.
**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*
**Writing Assignment:** Write a killer opening: the first line, the first paragraph, the first page
**Synchronous Meeting**

**Week Two      Whodunnit? – Detectives and other characters**
Character is everything. This week we will look at a number of different characters in Mysteries and Thrillers. What makes them so interesting? Why do we care what happens to them? Who are their adversaries? Speaking adversaries, how do we create a compelling villain? Once we understand these elements, how to we harness them to ensure our characters leap of the page and into the hearts and minds of readers?
**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*
**Writing Assignment:** Write a detailed character outline
**Synchronous Meeting**

**Week Three    Keep it moving – Plot and Pacing**
The worst thing that can happen in a thrilling story is for the reader to lose interest. How does that happen? What can we do to avoid it? How can we craft dialogue, description and action on the page so that our story rockets along, refusing to let our readers put it down.
**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*
**Writing Assignment:** Tighten, tighten, tighten
**Synchronous Meeting**

**Week Four      Make it a page-turner – Tension**
It's not enough for a thriller to be interesting. It has to excite the reader. It's right there in the name! Mysteries need provide a challenging puzzle for the reader to solve along with the characters in the story. To hold a reader so tightly that they cannot put the book down, even to go to bed, there needs to be tension. Readers must *need* to know what happens next. We'll look at sources of tension this week, and how to use them effectively in your writing.
**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*
**Writing Assignment:** Circling in on tension
**Synchronous Meeting**

**Week Five      Getting the details right – Research**
But it's fiction, can't we make up whatever we want? Yes! And no! Readers have expectations when they pick up a book, often from reading potentially dozens or even hundreds of books in the genre. Mystery and Thriller readers are educated. That means you need to be too. Certain details need to be right, or a variance explained so that the reader doesn't lose faith in you as the storyteller. Things like police procedure, firearms, historical facts are of particular concern. We'll talk about the best ways to complete this research without getting lost down infinite rabbit holes on the internet.

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**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*

**Writing Assignment:** Virtual Trip

**Synchronous Meeting**


**Week Six    It's about the story – Pulling it all together**

We will review the topics discussed in previous weeks and how they all come together to create stories that readers can't put down. We will also use this opportunity to close the gap on any questions or topics that come up in previous weeks that the class would like more information on. It's also a great opportunity for any last minute questions on your short story assignment.

**Reading Assignments:** Each week, continue to read whatever you are currently reading. There will also be selected short pieces to read to provide a common context for discussion. Provided chapter(s) from *TBD*

**Writing Assignment:** Short story assignment

**Synchronous Meeting**

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