

NOVEL WRITING I
Writing the First Novel

Instructor: Mark Sarvas

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Course Goals: To build your confidence and prepare you for this undertaking. You should finish the class with a considered first chapter, and a clear plan how to proceed.

Course Description: That novel is inside you waiting to emerge, but deciding where and how to begin and the demands of writing the manuscript may seem daunting. It need not be. Weekly assignments, group interaction, and instructor feedback help you explore various methods of writing your first novel while learning the key craft points of plot, structure, point-of-view, sense of place, and voice. The goal is to complete the first chapter of your novel by establishing an intimacy with your characters as you artfully shape their journey, and to develop an overall concept to guide you through your story.

Writers' Program Contact Information: For assistance with any administrative issues, including refunds, please call (310) 825-9415 or write to writers@uclaextension.edu.

Required Text: *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald (TGG)

Recommended Texts:

The Art of Fiction, David Lodge

How Fiction Works, James Wood

Aspects of the Novel, E.M. Forster

Grading Criteria: Grades, when desired, will be based on attendance, completion of written and reading assignments, participation in class, and upon degree of improvement. Please limit homework assignments to 5 pages, double-spaced 12 point Times Roman with 1-inch margins. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Work-shopping Guidelines: Most of my students will be new to the process of work-shopping, which can be as intimidating as it is productive. We will discuss these in more depth as the term progresses, but to ensure you all get the most out of the workshop experience, I ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be specific (without becoming lost in minutiae), do not generalize. "I liked this" or "This was boring" doesn't help anyone.
- Be mindful of the writer's intention. Don't try to rewrite a piece the way *you* would have written, rather help the writer improve his or her vision of their own work.
- Stay impersonal, polite and respectful. Remember you are discussing the text, not the author.
- Begin with the parts of the writing you think work best, and why, before discussing the parts you feel need more attention.

Additional rules: No texting, please. Set cell phone to vibrate. Class will begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. and will resume promptly after breaks. As a courtesy to your classmates, please confine eating in class to the first 20 minutes.

DETAILED LESSON PLAN

Week 1. *Introductions & Beginnings*

Introductions & Expectation Setting. Review of syllabus.

Lecture/Reading/Discussion: Effective openings. *The Great Gatsby, White Teeth, Beloved, Regeneration, Eclipse.*
What makes these openings inspire us to keep reading?

Exercise: Write a great first sentence for a novel – any novel, not necessarily your own. A sentence that catches your ear and makes you want to read more.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 1-20. Writing: Turn your first sentence into a first paragraph (or page).

Week 2. *Reading Like A Writer*

Lecture/Reading/Discussion: Re-read last week's openings "like a writer." Understanding "close reading."
Discussion of current reading and favorite reading.

Exercise: The life of objects. Select an item from a box of objects and sketch some notes about it but try to write about its essence, its nature, not its use. Think about more than description, resist first impulses. Then write a short scene in which the object is central but not in its obvious capacity.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 21-40 Writing: Connect this new object with the opening begun last week. OR continue writing new pages of your novel.

Week 3. *Characterization*

Lecture/Reading: Party scene TGG.

Discussion: Some favorite characters. Character archetypes. Names, names, names. Revealing character through action. Arcs, arcs, arcs.

Exercise: Character creation from photographic prompts.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 41-60 Writing: Write a first person narrative in which you develop another character by describing that second character's house or room (or gym locker or car trunk or anything else that belongs to your character). Do not allow second character into the narrative. Use characters from your novel idea if you have one. OR continue writing new pages of your novel.

Week 4. *Voice, Language and Point of View*

Lecture/Reading: POV discussion. 1st person: Remains of the Day; 2nd person: None because it's awful, pointless and impossible to do well (OK, we'll talk briefly about it); 3rd person omniscient reading: White Teeth; 3rd person close reading: Seize the Day.

Discussion: The eyes of Dr. Eckleburg. (TGG)

Exercise: Write from memory about a once-beloved object, person or pet. If working in the third person, try to employ the free indirect style.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 61-80. Writing: Create an argument between two of your characters in the point of view you've selected for your novel. Then rewrite the same scene in a different point of view. OR continue writing new pages of your novel.

Week 5. *Structure, Setting and Theme*

Lecture/Reading: Aristotle and the three-act structure. Outlining or not? Plot or no plot? Subplots. The closing of Gatsby as recapitulation of themes.

Discussion: Discussion of original, one-page outline of *Harry, Revised*.

Exercises: 1) Sketch the structure of your novel in the third-act model. 2) Select the central setting of your novel, and write a detailed description about it. 3) Describe, if you can, the theme of your novel in a sentence or a paragraph; then outline a scene which addresses the theme without directly expressing it.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp.81-100 Writing: Develop outline from class into a detailed working outline. OR continue writing new pages of your novel. Uploading of workshop volunteers to Blackboard.

Week 6. *Work-shopping*

Lecture: Work-shopping: Pros and cons; finding workshops; rules of the road.

Discussion: Work-shopping of pages uploaded previous week.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 141-160 Writing: Continue writing your novel.

Week 7. *Dialogue*

Lecture/Reading: Nick visits the Buchanans. (TGG)

Discussion: Modes of listening. Modes of speaking. Character through dialogue. Great literary talkers.

Exercise: Write a scene in which one person is listening to two other people have an argument or discussion. For example, a child listening to her parents argue about money. Have the third character narrate the argument and explain what is going on, but have the other two provide the entire dialogue. It is not necessary to have the narrator understand the argument completely. Miscommunication is a major aspect of dialogue.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 121-140 Writing: Continue writing your novel.

Week 8. *Scene and Conflict*

Lecture/Reading: The shirts scene in *Gatsby*. The archetypes of conflict (person vs. ...).

Discussion: Dissecting memorable scenes in literature and examining how they are built and why they work.

Exercise: Think of a situation in which a long-held fear or anxiety that you have comes true (this should be a situation which could, but has not yet happened). Now create a scene between two of your novel's characters, in which one desires this feared outcome. Try to make both sides as sympathetic as possible.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 101-120

Week 9. *Revising*

Lecture/Reading/Discussion: Killing your darlings. Reviewing an early segment from Trimalchio, prior to Fitzgerald's revisions. The lifecycle of a novel through multiple revisions and drafts. (Discuss chapter on revision from *The Writer's Notebook*, which looks at the revisions of *Gatsby*.)

Exercise: Take a scene written in a previous class or for a homework assignment and change the point of view. OR if you have been workshopped, take a criticism you received that you agree with and make the necessary revision.

Assignment: Reading – TGG pp. 161-end. Continue writing your novel.

Week 10. *The Business of Publishing and Where We Go Next*

Lecture/Discussion: Agents, queries, publications, sales, publicity, workshops, festivals, booksellers, the publishing business.

Exercise: Write out a plan for proceeding with your novel beyond this class, which should include how much you will write and how often. Commitment to your craft and your project.

Closing