

ADVANCED Fiction Writing WORKSHOP
Beginning a Novel

Fall 2017
CRWR 22117/42117, Section 01
Taft 102, Tuesday 2:00-4:50

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Office Hours: TH 1:00-3:00

Overview of the Course

This class is for any student who has taken at least one other fiction workshop at the University and is interested in or already working on a novel. In the first few weeks of the course, we will read and discuss a selection of first chapters from some exemplary novels and discuss what a first chapter can—even should—do and the different ways that it can do these things. How do certain novels introduce its characters, its plot, its setting, its principle concerns and philosophies? How do they dive into the narrative in ways that intrigue or even challenge us? How do certain opening chapters teach us how to read the rest of the novel? These and other crucial questions will be addressed throughout the course, particularly during our workshops, where everyone will present the first chapter or two of their novel-in-progress. Along with the fundamentals of craft like language, characterization, plotting, and structure, etc., we will look at how we can adjust or rethink our opening chapters so that we can move forward more effectively with the larger project.

Your Workshops

For this course, you will submit the first chapter—or first two chapters—of your novel-in-progress (10-25 pages) for a class workshop where we will critique it and suggest ways of improving it. Workshops will begin in Week 3 and continue the rest of the quarter so that you are actively engaging with the work of your peers. And because *writing is ultimately revising*, you will also complete a **significant revision** of your workshoped chapter, which some of you will be able to put up for a second workshop. Everyone else will turn in their revision—the Final—to me by **3:00 on Tues Dec 5**.

You will write **all new and original work** for this course: material that has not yet been workshoped in another class. Please see the *Story Guidelines* and *Grading Rubric* for a sense of what is expected out of you. Chapters should be typed in Times New Roman font and double-spaced with one-inch margins, and the top right-hand corner of every page should bear your last name and the page number. Most importantly, they should be **rigorously proofread**. Errors in grammar, spelling, etc. are not acceptable. The top left-hand corner of the first page should have this information:

(Your Name)
Vu Tran Workshop
Advanced Fiction: Beginning a Novel
(date of workshop)

You are responsible for uploading your chapter to *Canvas* as a **Microsoft Word** document no later than 3:00 of the day your submission is due.

Critiques of Workshop Submissions

For each of your classmates' workshops, you will print out a copy of the submission (unaltered and in the author's intended format and pagination), bring it to class marked up with your edits and specific comments, and give that copy to the author. You will also type up at least **one single-spaced page** of honest, constructive criticism on the submission and turn in one copy to the author and one copy to me. Your critiques are an essential part of this class. I can assure you that although your own workshop is very important, a good deal of what you'll learn will come from your classmates' workshops and how you respond to their work.

Reading Responses

For every assigned reading of first chapters from famous books, I would like you to write a response discussing **some** of the following questions:

- *What do you think this novel is about?*
- *Who are the main characters so far and why are they interesting? Whose point of view are we in?*
- *What questions about plot and/or character are you already asking yourself?*
- *What is important so far about the point of view, the language, the structure, the “style”, etc? In other words, how is this first chapter teaching us how to read the rest of the novel?*

Your responses need not be formal essays; I’m just looking for some **honest, insightful thoughts** on the readings. Do be as concise and specific as possible. Half a page to a page on each chapter is enough.

Attendance

Because this is a class where everyone’s feedback is crucial, especially during workshop, attendance is **absolutely mandatory**. Each unexcused absence, beginning with your second, will cost you two-thirds a letter grade. Please also come to class **on time**. I will not tolerate tardiness. Class begins at 3:00, not 3:05 or 3:10 or any time thereafter. Continual tardiness will mean a deduction in your participation grade.

Grading

Class participation & attendance	10%
Weekly reading responses & writing exercises	20%
Workshop critiques	20%
First Chapter (10-25 pages) - your Workshop	20%
Revision of workshopped chapter - your Final	30%

What Your Workshop Grade Might Mean

100-95 (2% of grades) - Send it off to a magazine for publication.

94-90 (10% of grades) - Needs a little tinkering here and there—some small, some big—but the piece is generally very successful.

89-85 (37% of grades) - Certain aspects of the piece need to be rethought and strengthened, but overall it is headed in the right direction.

84-80 (50% of grades) - The piece might have some strong elements, but it needs significant revision on many levels. Might require comprehensive rethinking or overhaul.

79 and lower (<1% of grades) - The writing in this piece is fundamentally flawed, and the piece itself should be entirely rewritten. You’ll need to come talk to me.

Canvas

Please check *Canvas* regularly for supplemental course material, writing assignments, topics for responses, and copies of published and student stories.

Confidentiality

Creative Writing workshops rely on trust in a safe environment, so as to facilitate open and critical exchange while protecting a boundary of privacy around the class. Students should be aware, however, that workshop instructors are obliged to share certain kinds of information with appropriate university administrators according to University policies aimed at providing a safe, non-discriminatory environment for all students, which can be consulted at <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/university>.

Plagiarism

Don’t do it. Plagiarism includes direct copying of texts as well as using someone else’s ideas without citing credit, and will mean an F for the course and a report of the offense to the Dean of the College.

A Final Note

The art of fiction, like any art, is a subjective endeavor. You'll rarely, if ever, please everyone, and during this course you may not always agree with what I or your classmates say. Just try your best to be an **honest** and **constructive** critic and an **open-minded** reader and writer, and the workshop process will benefit you in some way. Also bear in mind that there are legitimate "rules" of craft in fiction writing. Learning the rules, however arbitrary they might seem at first, is **vital**. Once you know the rules and can follow them, break them at your discretion.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Sep 26	Introductions "First Chapters & First Sentences"
Week 2 – Oct 3	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>The Age of Innocence</i> by Edith Wharton <i>Invisible Man</i> Ralph Ellison <i>The Secret History</i> by Donna Tartt Writing Exercise #1 due
Week 3 – Oct 10	<i>Beloved</i> by Toni Morrison <i>Disgrace</i> by J.M. Coetzee Workshops #1 & #2 Writing Exercise #2 due
<i>Mon Oct 16</i>	<i>Catherine Lacey: New Voice in Fiction Reading</i>
Week 4 – Oct 17	<i>The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle</i> by Haruki Murakami <i>The Virgin Suicides</i> by Jeffrey Eugenides Workshops #3 & #4 Writing Exercise #3 due
Week 5 – Oct 24	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> by Gabriel Garcia Marquez Workshops #5 & #6
<i>Thurs Oct 26</i>	<i>Garth Greenwell: Fictions & Forms Reading</i>
Week 6 – Oct 31	<i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> by Junot Diaz Workshops #7 & #8
Week 7 – Nov 7	Workshops #9 & #10 Revision Workshop #1
Week 8 – Nov 14	NO CLASS
Week 9 – Nov 21	Workshops #11 & #12 Revision Workshop #2
Week 10 – Nov 28	Workshops #13 Revision Workshop #3 Revision Workshop #4
Tuesday Dec 5	Final Revisions due at 3pm