There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one know what they are.

W. Somerset Maugham

The Experiential Workshop

The Experiential Workshop is designed for writers to get a lot of work done, an unconventional workshop, where each week we write for the time allotted in class. The workshop is helpful for writers who wish to continue, begin, or complete a novel, novella, or memoir. In the past, students have worked on short story and poetry collections, but the class is not ideal for shorter works, and not recommended unless the work is linked.

Each week there will be work-in-progress checks and draft work submitted. The work-in-progress checks assist the writer to keep on task and work submitted will be available for the class to read, although not workshopped. It is work copy and can have notes and drafts and directions and scribble marks. When works-in-progress are placed in the box, workshop members are encouraged to add helpful remarks, tips, suggested readings, graphics, etc., anything that will assist the writer.

Over the course of the semester, I will be offering Craft Intensives on subjects pertinent to the craft of writing including contemporary issues that shape the course of contemporary fiction. You are welcome to join the conversation.

In addition, each of you will be responsible for delivering a 10-15 minute craft lecture. I will discuss this requirement in class. Suffice to say the talks are aimed at helping you better understand the craft, as well as prepare you for the job market.

Mid-to-late semester there will be sign-ups for smaller break-out sessions to workshopping generated in and outside of the class. The writer is welcome, in advance or at the beginning, to point the session toward scenes, sections or chapters in his or her work where the writer would like a closer read. We will pay particular attention to structure and timing. Is too much being revealed or not enough? What might deepen the character’s motives and increase the tension? Where does the story wander and why? The thrust of the workshop is to move the work forward, not necessarily back to the editing table. We will look to unravel difficulties in order to help the writer complete a draft.

Every class period you may request or schedule a meeting with me. Take the opportunity to ask questions about a particular element of craft that is tricky or posing problems within your own work. You may also suggest and announce a small topic workshop about a topic you wish to discuss, a literary article that intrigues you, a question you’d like to discuss, or an element of craft. Consider any of the books in The Art of the Series to deepen your discussion, or suggest a short story, or novel excerpt that illustrates your interests.

Course Requirements:

- Participation in course writing sessions and workshop break-out sessions.
- Completion of a section of a novel, novella, memoir, or shorter linked collection or a rough draft.
- Craft Lecture: You will be responsible for giving a brief craft lecture that is meaningful to your work. We will have independent meetings to discuss your ideas for the lecture. You may work on the craft lecture independently or give a tandem lecture with another colleague. A lecture sign-up sheet will be available.
- Suggested Assignments: I will offer small group topics and projects, from writing television pilots, to engaging in current writerly interests. If you’re interested, you may also suggest some topics, or propose a chat session on any literary topic that fascinates you, including meetings to discuss a particular element of craft you wish to explore in depth. You may join or use the class time as you wish. (Pretty much the same thing I suggest for each class period above.)

Tips and suggestions

- A laptop, journals, notebooks—whatever you write on.
- Music and headphones.
- A small light. We turn off the overhead lights to work so you might prefer to have a little more light than your keyboard or the table lamps provided.
- A coffee mug. (Tea and a hot water pot will be available for your use.)
- Research Materials: Bring books, articles, journals, notecards, photos to class—anything that will help you with your writing.
- A notebook for jotting down ideas and sketching room plans and settings, and for charting plot points and structuring chapters.

Rules
Do not use class time to write papers for other classes or to catch up on emails or surf the web. The class is designed for writers who want to write.

➢ Be courteous. Keep your music low enough so as not to disturb others.

➢ Turn off your cell phone when you enter the room.

Other Information and Suggestions

➢ Always feel free to move about the classroom. We will take short breaks on the hour but the workshop is not meant to restrict you. Get up and make yourself a cup of tea or grab a cookie or whatever snack is available. Think of the space as a writer’s coffee shop. Make yourself comfortable.

➢ Bring your own food if you wish or please volunteer to bring in a food item to share with the class at least once during the fifteen-week semester. People have brought everything from rice crackers and salmon spread to cupcakes or bags of chips.

➢ If anyone is interested I’d like to have a publication send-out-get-together where we gather a list of publication suggestions, and send out your work.

If you have any ideas for the Experiential Workshop, please let the class know.

Syllabus subject to change