

# Fiction Writing Craft I

Fall Term, Year One

Course Outline

**Cohort Director:**  
Stephen Kimber

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## Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of King's College is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all Treaty people.

We encourage you to find out more about the Indigenous lands you may live and work in. A good starting point is [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca).

## Overview

Fiction Writing Craft I combines an intense June residency at the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with a series of online seminars, discussions and written assignments completed during the fall semester.

In advance of the June residency, you will also read assigned readings, watch pre-recorded videos and submit short writing assignments.

During the June residency, you will attend daily lectures and panels offered by faculty, mentors and guest lecturers who will introduce you to:

- fiction, its history and various sub-genres,
- the contemporary fiction publishing environment,
- the ways in which evolving publishing technologies are influencing the role of the fiction writer within the profession and in society,
- the role and importance of establishing a writer "platform," and
- ongoing professional, craft and ethical debates in the world of fiction.

You will work with faculty, mentors and fellow workshop participants to develop, refine, and critically evaluate your ideas for book projects before selecting—in concert with mentors and faculty—the major fiction project you will undertake during the program.

Following the residency, you will submit a one-page preliminary pitch for your book, as well as a one-page (maximum) artist's statement.

By September 1, you will have chosen a topic for your 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical, or professional issue related to the craft of writing fiction.

During the fall semester, you will present your paper online, and respond to papers submitted by your fellow students.

During the fall semester you will also learn to “read like a writer,” by closely reading three novels and analyzing each for lessons you can apply to your own work.

### **Relationship to Other Classes:**

Writing Craft I is the entry point for the entire program, providing you with an understanding of the fiction genre you will carry forward into your mentorships, residencies, projects and beyond.

During the June residency, you will select the topic of your fiction book project, which you will then write, revise and complete during Mentorship I, II, III and IV.

You will learn how to write a fiction book proposal that will guide you in writing and — eventually — pitching your completed manuscript to a publisher.

By the end of the residency, you will have finalized with your mentor a contract of deliverables that will guide your writing in Mentorship I.

The post-residency one-page pitch assignment will deepen your understanding of your book project as you begin Mentorship I.

The artist statement assignment will create a reference point for you as your project evolves through Mentorship I, II, III and IV.

Lectures on the current and future book publishing landscape, the business of writing and the importance of a writer’s “platform” will help prepare you for issues that will be developed in Publishing I and II and the January online residencies.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of Writing Craft I, you will have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- Developed a literacy about fiction writing and its history, including its many sub-genres.
- Developed an understanding of ethics, craft, and professional issues relating to fiction writing.
- Developed a basic understanding of the contemporary fiction publishing landscape.
- Learned how to develop your own research and/or writing plan for your book.
- Enhanced your fiction writing skills through workshopping your own and other students’ writing.

### **Important MFA Dates**

June 17-25, 2023	June residency, Halifax
	Fall academic term begins

	Fall academic term ends
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## Assignments

### Summary & Deadlines

Assignment	Due	Value
Mentor selection deadline	May 1	N/A
Submit Bio/Project Description	May 15	N/A
Submit writing sample for workshopping	TBD by your mentor	
Pre-residency readings	June 1	N/A
Writer-in-Residence assignment	June 1	P/F <sup>1</sup>
1-page written pitch	June 30	5 per cent
1-page artist's statement	June 30	5 per cent
Submit research essay topic	September 1	N/A
Book choices for reports	September 1	N/A
Book Report 1	September 20	10 per cent
Book Report 2	October 18	10 per cent
Research Essay	October 25	40 per cent
Essay responses	November 15	10 per cent
Book Report 3	November 22	10 per cent
"Exit interview"	December 1	10 per cent

### Pre-residency assignments

**Readings:** The books listed below are course texts we expect you to have read *before* the residency begins. (Please see an additional list of recommended texts at the end of the Syllabus.)

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<sup>1</sup> P/F= Pass/Fail; N/A= Not applicable.

- *Writing Fiction, Tenth Edition: A Guide to Narrative Craft* by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French, Ned Stuckey-French. University of Chicago Press (2019)
- *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting* by Robert McKee. It Books (1997)
- *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them* by Francine Prose. Harper (2006)

#### **Other Pre-residency assignments:**

- 2,000-word writing sample for mentor group workshopping
- Writer-in-Residence Assignment (TBD)
- Brief Bio and Project Description
- Submit Mentor choices

### **Residency assignments**

**Present a 5-6 minute “elevator pitch”** for your novel to members of your mentor group and a member of faculty. Respond to pitches from members of your mentor group.

Your mentor will determine other reading and writing assignments during the residency.

### **Post-residency assignments**

**Write a one-page, single-spaced pitch for your book project.** (Approximately 400 words.) Think of this as a slightly extended version of what you might find on the cover of your book. Intrigue me, but don’t give away the ending. Sell, but don’t oversell. Make me want to buy in a way that won’t disappoint me when I finally read the book. Include:

- Title:
- Subtitle:
- Author:
- Description: Buyers read cover copy the way they browse the newspaper. The first paragraph must grab their interest and attention. Subsequent paragraphs should flesh out the story. What is the most important selling point about your title? Don’t make the buyer dig for the most salient points.

**Write a maximum one-page — 350-word — Artist Statement:** Sound highfalutin? It isn’t really. This is simply your opportunity to explain — briefly — who you are,

why you write what you write, who you write for, what you see as your role as a writer, as a literary citizen?

What are your greatest writing challenges? What craft issues do you need help with (voice, structure, POV, etc.)?

If you'd like to read more about writers' artist statements, check out:

- [What Writers Can Learn From Visual Artist Statements](#)
- [How To Write A Writer's Artist Statement](#)
- [How to Write an Artist Statement - All you Need to Know](#)

**3,000-word Essay + Comments:** This is not an academic essay assignment. It's an opportunity for you to think more deeply about broader ethical and craft issues in fiction writing. *Truth and fiction in fiction...? Whose story is this to tell...? Art v entertainment...? Etc.*

I'll circulate a collection of potential topics during the residency. You can choose one of those or you can come up with your own, which I'll need to approve in advance.

I'm looking for a thoughtful, well-sourced, well-crafted and carefully argued personal narrative of 3,000 words, more or less. Think, and make me think. Remember, it's also a writing assignment. Make me want to read it. (You don't need to do academic footnoting but if your sources aren't apparent from the text and context, make sure they're flagged in endnotes or some other way.)

You will also read and comment on at least five other posted essays.

**Book Reports:** You will closely read three novels, exploring at least five craft, structural or other writerly choices each of the authors made. (See: "[Read like a writer.](#)")

These may include everything from the how-to of employing suspense/surprise, to scenic construction, to sentence structure, to character development, to use of dialogue, to word choice, to cliffhangers, to ... well, whatever.

Each 1,000-word report should include short "about" sections describing the book, genre and author, but the primary focus should be on each author's craft choices and what you learned that you can apply — or not — to your own writing.

### **Exit interview**

One of the most useful things you can do for you — and for me — is to take a few moments at the end of the semester to consider what you've learned from your residency and from your assignments about the art and craft of fiction writing and about yourself as a writer.

Are there topics you wish we'd covered but didn't?

What are your own priorities as a writer going forward?

This is not your feedback or evaluation of the residency or the course. We invite you to comment on specific elements of the residency in our own survey at the conclusion of the residency. And you'll have an opportunity to respond to the course itself in a university survey.

This is your reflection on what *you* learned.

## Rubrics

**A word or two about rubrics:** Creative writing, even about academic subjects, does not lend itself to checkbox marking.

When I read your assignments for marking, I prefer to consider the sum of the parts rather than focusing on individual elements to determine if a particular sentence or paragraph demonstrates excellence in content, or writing style, or, mechanics.

That said, I use the rubrics as a rough thinking-while-marking guide.

If you ever have questions or concerns about your mark, please don't hesitate to contact me. We can talk.

### One-page pitch

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<b>Content</b> (70)	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting an engagingly written, carefully constructed, succinct pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to a particular group of readers.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting a professionally acceptable pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to readers.	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting a pitch that isn't professionally written and/or doesn't include all the key elements of the pitch.
<b>Writing style</b> (15)	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics</b> (15)	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style mostly consistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

**Artist Statement**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exceptional "A"</b>	<b>Acceptable B</b>	<b>Failure &lt;B-</b>
<b>Content (70)</b>	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of what makes an effective artist statement by submitting an engagingly written, carefully constructed, succinct statement self-describing the author's goals and challenges.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of what makes an effective artist statement by submitting a competently written, statement self-describing the author's goals and challenges.	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of what makes an effective artist statement.
<b>Writing style (15)</b>	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (15)</b>	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style mostly consistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.



## Research Essay

Criteria	Exceptional A	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<b>Purpose</b> (10)	The writer's central goal or argument is clearly stated and readily apparent to the reader.	The writing has a clear goal or argument, but may sometimes digress from it.	The purpose or argument is generally unclear.
<b>Content</b> (40)	Balanced presentation of relevant and legitimate information that clearly supports a central purpose or argument and shows a thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains important insights.	Information provides reasonable support for a central purpose or argument and displays evidence of a basic analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains some insights.	Central purpose or argument is not clearly identified. Analysis is vague or not evident. Reader is confused or may be misinformed.
<b>Use of References</b> (10)	Compelling evidence from professionally legitimate sources supports claims. Attribution is clear and fairly represented.	Professionally legitimate sources are generally present and attribution is, for the most part, clear and fairly represented.	Few sources, incomplete or unclear attribution.
<b>Organization</b> (10)	The ideas are arranged logically to support the purpose or argument. They flow smoothly from one to another and are clearly linked to each other. The reader can follow the line of reasoning.	The ideas are arranged logically to support the central purpose or argument. They are usually clearly linked to each other. The reader can—mostly—follow the line of reasoning.	The writing is not logically organized. Frequently, ideas fail to make sense together. The reader cannot identify a line of reasoning and loses interest.
<b>Writing style</b> (20)	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics</b> (10)	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style inconsistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

## Book Reports

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<b>Book Description</b> (10)	Provides the reader with a succinct summary of the book's contents, approach, and style and uses those as a jumping off point to effectively examine various craft issues and how they can be applied to the student's own work.	Provides the reader with a useful summary of the book's contents, approach, and style but fails to offer detailed analysis of the author's craft choices and/or how the student can apply lessons to their own work.	Fails to provide the reader with a useful summary of the book or analysis of craft issues.
<b>Author Biography</b> (10)	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant-to-the-book's topic biography that demonstrates the student has consulted with numerous sources.	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.	Fails to provide the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.
<b>Analysis</b> (50)	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, including an analysis of how the author employed various craft techniques, and a sense of how this information will influence the student's own book project.	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, but doesn't clearly connect an analysis of the author's use of various writing techniques to the student's own book project.	Fails to provide the reader with a clear analysis of the book or a comparison of the book with the student's own book project.
<b>Writing Style</b> (30)	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.

## Suggested Texts

Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (10th Anniversary Edition), Scribner, 2010.

Anne Lamont, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Anchor 1995.

John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Donald Maass, *The Emotional Craft of Fiction: How to Write the Story Beneath the Surface*. Writer's Digest Books, 2016.

James Wood, *How Fiction Works: Updated and Expanded* (Tenth Anniversary Edition). Picador, 2018.

Jane Friedman, *The Business of Being a Writer*. University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato, *Thinking Like Your Editor*. New York, 2003.

Richard Curtis, *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent: An Insider's Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Michael Larsen and Jody Rein, *How to Write a Book Proposal* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2017.

## Academic Information

### Academic Performance:

The course uses the following grading scale:

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
F	<70

### Grammar and Style

Proper usage and grammar are an expectation for all written work in this course. As the publishing content is intended primarily for book content, we will follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* for all written work.

### Deadlines

Deadlines are crucial in the publishing industry. Learning to meet deadlines is a necessity for writers. So, working to deadlines is a part of this course. Submit all assignments by the stated deadlines. If allowance is needed – for health or other reasons – please email or phone me to request more time.

### Ethical Conduct

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the Journalism School's [Handbook of Professional Practice](#) and abide by its ethical standards. For book writing, there may be some differences in approach from those of daily news gathering. If in doubt, please discuss with your mentor or cohort director.

### Learning & Support Resources

In addition to resources at King's, many are available to you at Dalhousie University. These include the [Student Health & Wellness Centre](#), the [Indigenous Student Centre](#), the [Black Student Advising Centre](#), the [LGBTQ2SIA+ Collaborative](#), and the [South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre](#), among others.

### Fair, Inclusive and Safe Conduct

All students in the School of Journalism, Writing & Publishing should feel they are participants in a respectful, fair and safe learning environment. Classrooms and online course delivery systems are spaces where everyone should feel welcomed and supported. The School expects students, staff and faculty to abide by the highest

standards of collegial learning. The University has policies, procedures and resources to guide students' experience. If you are concerned about your learning environment you may take a range of steps to initiate a discussion or a process:

Meet with the course instructor or mentor: You are encouraged to discuss concerns about a particular course first with the instructor or mentor. The instructor or mentor may be able to address concerns informally. Such concerns may relate to grading, course content, interpersonal issues with other students, or any other issue. The instructor or mentor may also direct you to other resources within the University. If you have an unresolved issue with an instructor or mentor, you can also:

- Appeal a final grade in a course by filing a Request for Reassessment of a Final Grade form.
- Provide written comment on an instructor in the Student Ratings of Instruction, distributed near the end of the course. Evaluations are reviewed by the Director each year and used in tenure and promotion decisions for Faculty.

Meet with the Director of Writing & Publishing: The Director welcomes any comment on the experiences of students within the Writing & Publishing program. Concerns may be addressed informally — especially as they relate to the curriculum, academic environment and interpersonal issues. The Director may refer students with more specific or serious concerns to individual policies, procedures and resources of the University. Inclusion and respect for others are key values of the School. An experience of racism, intolerance or inequitable treatment will typically prompt cooperation between the Director and the Equity Officer in working toward immediate and longer-term resolutions.

- Write a letter to the Director of Writing & Publishing to express a strong concern about an experience in the program. The Director may bring it to a meeting of Writing & Publishing Faculty and will keep the letter on file.

Meet with the Equity Officer: King's Equity Officer is available for consultation on any issue concerning equity, diversity, inclusion, discrimination and harassment. The officer administers the Policy and Procedures for Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment, found in the Yellow Book. If you have concerns about your experience in the Writing & Publishing program, you are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from the officer, who also receives complaints and administers the process for resolution under the policy. This policy is part of the University Code of Conduct, also found in the Yellow Book, which governs conduct by all members of the University community. The Equity Officer is Rhema Ferguson <rhema.ferguson@ukings.ca >

Meet with the Sexual Health and Safety Officer: The SHSO provides support around experiences of sexualized violence and administers King's Sexualized Violence Policy. This support is confidential and can include informal discussion, academic accommodations, and assistance with disclosures and reports. All decisions

regarding disclosure of sexualized violence are in the hands of the individual disclosing. Academic accommodations may be available to those who do not wish to make a formal report. The SHSO is also available if you are supporting someone who has experienced sexualized violence. The SHSO is Jordan Roberts <[jordan.roberts@ukings.ca](mailto:jordan.roberts@ukings.ca)>, 902 229-6123.

### **Academic Integrity**

At King's and Dalhousie, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. Plagiarism — stealing someone else's work and presenting it as your own — is a form of academic fraud and unethical behaviour within the writing community. The most common instance involves copying material from the Internet without attributing it. If you have any doubt about proper citation for an academic paper or proper attribution in a piece of writing, contact your instructor, mentor or Cohort Director. For more information, consult the section on Intellectual Honesty on p. 54 of Dalhousie's [Graduate Studies Calendar](#) (Find "PDF Versions" at the top of that page) or the [King's academic calendar](#).

### **Accessibility**

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers to inclusion related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. If you experience barriers related to the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course please contact the [Student Accessibility Centre](#). Please note that a classroom may contain specialized furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require them will be able to participate in the class.

### **Appeals**

Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism, Writing & Publishing. Students may appeal decisions of the Journalism Studies Committee to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. For more information, see the [King's Academic Calendar](#).

Students must achieve a minimum grade of B- in all classes. Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism, Writing & Publishing and the Dalhousie University Faculty of Graduate Studies. Students may appeal decisions of the Journalism Studies Committee to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. For more information, see the University of King's College Calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.