

# Fiction Writing Craft II

Fall Term, Year Two

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 II 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 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 enhance your understanding of:

- 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 developing your 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 further develop, refine, and critically evaluate your major fiction manuscript.

By September 1, you will have submitted your own list of what you consider your "Top 10 Essential Books of Fiction." During the fall semester, you will produce reports on three of those books.

During the fall semester you will also produce — and find places to pitch — either a short work of fiction or a commentary or journal article that will help you develop a platform for your book and for you as an author.

**Relationship to Other Classes:**

Fiction Writing Craft II will deepen your understanding of the fiction genre, building on the work you did in Fiction Writing Craft I and Mentorship I and II.

It will prepare you for the work you will be doing in Mentorship III and IV and Publishing II.

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of Fiction Writing Craft II, you will have:

- Deepened your understanding of fiction writing as a genre with its own history, ethics, craft and professional issues/
- Expanded your knowledge and understanding of what constitutes essential works of fiction.
- Enhanced your writing skills through workshopping your own and other students' writing.
- Developed a comfort level doing public readings of your work.
- Learned how to write a short piece of fiction or a commentary, for possible publication, that will showcase your book project

**Important MFA Dates**

	June residency, Halifax
	Fall academic term begins
	Fall academic term ends

## Assignments Summary & Deadlines

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due</b>	<b>Value</b>
Mentor selection deadline	April 1	N/A
Update Bio/Project Description	May 15	N/A
Submit writing sample for workshopping	TBD by your mentor	N/A
Pre-residency readings	June 1	N/A
Writer-in-Residence assignment	June 1	P/F <sup>1</sup>
Essential Books List	September 1	10 per cent
Book Report 1	September 20	10 per cent
Book Report 2	October 18	10 per cent
“Write like an Editor”	October 25	30 per cent
Responses to “Write like an editor”	November 15	10 per cent
Book Report 3	November 22	10 per cent
Short fiction/Commentary	December 1	10 per cent
“Exit Interview”	N/A	10 per cent

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

## Writer in Residence Assignment:

To make best use of the limited time the Writer-in-Residence has with us during the residency, we ask you to do some advance reading and two short assignments. You will write a 500-word report on one of the W-in-R's books. This assignment will be circulated in advance of the residency and due the day before the residency begins.

## Book Lists/Reports

This is a two-part assignment.

**Part 1:** Your first task is to come up with your own list of “Ten Essential Books of Fiction.” For each title selected, provide a paragraph explaining why it is on your list.

**Due midnight Sept. 1. Submit as a MS Word attachment to [stephen.e.kimber@gmail.com](mailto:stephen.e.kimber@gmail.com)**

Compiling your personal Top 10 will be easy — and hard. Classic? Canadian? Historical Fiction? Mystery? Fantasy? Romance? What constitutes *essential*, anyway? We would like you to think about which books of fiction you believe others should read.

The best way to begin thinking about what you might deem essential is to take a look at other people's “best” lists. There are many out there. Here are a few to get you started:

[12 Novels Considered the “Greatest Book Ever Written”](#)

[The 27 Greatest Romance Novels to Read in Your Lifetime](#)

[The 30 best mystery novels of all time](#)

[The 25 most significant New York City novels of the last 100 years](#)

[Best recent books by Indigenous Authors](#)

[Best Canadian novels \(various genres\)](#)

[Best Books by Black Authors](#)

[Best Novels by Queer Authors](#)

**Part 2:** During the fall term, you will read — and write reports on — two of the books on your list. PLUS one book that's not. We're happy to leave the treatment up to you, but each report should include:

- a description what the book's about.
- a mini bio of the author.
- why you think it's an essential book; and why it did — or didn't make your list.
- your own critique of the book.

Suggestions:

- Don't “read” books you've already read. It's a waste of this opportunity.
- Read at least one book outside your genre comfort zone. If you love historical fiction, for instance, consider reading crime or romance fiction.

### **Short Fiction/Commentary assignment**

Publishers encourage — make that expect — authors to find ways to publicize their own work in advance of publication. There are many ways to do this including producing and pitching short fiction for journals, or op-eds or commentaries for publication. (The key is that the tagline/author bio at the end should connect you to your book.)

Assignment: Write a 1,000-word piece of short fiction or commentary.

### **“Write Like an Editor” Essay**

You will consult at least three books or other guides to the craft of editing fiction and write a 2,000-word essay analyzing how this professional advice is reflected in your manuscript and/or how it might be used to improve it.

You will also read and respond — in no more than 300 words each — to five “Write Like an Editor” essays from your fellow students.

Address the following questions:

- Does the essay make clear how the writer gathered and evaluated key information and advice used in the book?
- Is the essay written in an engaging way that goes beyond simply providing information about sources?
- Does reading the essay intrigue you enough that you’d like to read more by this writer?

### **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.

### Book Reports

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Book Description (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.
Author Biography (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.

<p>Analysis (50)</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Writing Style (30)</p>	<p>The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.</p>	<p>The writing is generally engaging but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.</p>	<p>The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.</p>

**Writing like an editor**

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<p>Content (60)</p>	<p>Provides the reader with clear, comprehensive, detailed information on the sources of all facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.</p>	<p>Provides the reader with information on the sources of most facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.</p>	<p>Fails to provide the reader with useful information on the sources of all facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.</p>

Writing style (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.
Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (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.

**Short fiction/Commentary**

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Writing Style and Readability	The writing is compelling. Hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is engaging, but has dry spots. In general, it keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.

## Course Texts

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.)

- *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)

## 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.