Wendy Goldman Rohm ©2010

Syllabus

MASTER CLASS

12-Week Book Development

with

Wendy Goldman Rohm

*For authors of narrative nonfiction and fiction*

**SYLLABUS**

**--Classes meet online once a week, live with Ms. Rohm. See particular class**

**schedule for your group.**

**--Printed lectures are posted to writers every week prior to the class.**

**--Assignments are due each week 24 hours prior to our live classroom time, or by private arrangement with instructor.**

**Week 1**

Lecture 1:

Introduction and Overview: Getting to the Essence. What is a great book?

Whether you’re just starting your book, or fine-tuning a manuscript or book proposal,

sharpening your focus is key. Our opening session will help you start to lay the foundation

for the creation of your best possible book.

Assignment 1. Share what you hope to gain from this course and any other

background info you’d like to provide about yourself and your project. Write a one-paragraph

blurb about your book, similar to what might appear under the title on the NY Times

bestseller list. Why should editors and agents be eager to read your book?

**Week 2**

Lecture 2: Enticing Your Audience: Before we get to the creative part, for nonfiction authors, “Overview” and “Competition” concerns are key when drafting the first rough version of your book outline and the first draft of your manuscript. This is particularly important for nonfiction authors, but also a concern for novelists who would like their books to sell while also being a wonderful literary experience.

In week 2, we will also begin to discuss the building blocks of narrative, including: place/setting, character, theme, dialogue, temporal frame (time envelope), belief systems, point of view, and how to transform inert information into dynamic “scenes.”

Assignment 2: Draft an Overview that clearly but broadly states what your book will cover, its sources (which for nonfiction writers may include original interviews, first-person observations, other references) and an evaluation of what makes your book unique versus other titles on the market.

**Week 3**

Lecture 3: The Table of Contents and Chapter Outline: A Primer on Dramatic Structure No

Matter Your Topic

Assignment 3: Sketch out a preliminary draft of book organization; first draft of Table of Contents and chapter summaries. Do not worry if this first version is an improvisation—your content will change the deeper you get into the book. This Table of Contents and outline will be greatly expanded upon in coming weeks, homing in more specifically on plot, character, voice, and place. (If you are writing a self-help book or a book that does not involve traditional plot and character concerns, we will look at the structural ingredients of your book through a different lens that applies dynamically to your work.)

**Week 4**

Lecture 4: The Role of Research, Interviews, Reference Material, and Personal Experience:

Methodology for Fleshing Out Your Chapters—for Fiction and Nonfiction Authors

Assignment 4: Make a bullet list, organized by chapter, of all information you’ve collected thus far, and information you still need to gather, including: people you’d like to interview, existing research reports from experts and organizations, places you need to visit, or, in the case of memoirs, a list of scenes you need to explore or resources to enhance your historical accounts of real places. Fiction writers will have specific exercises related to fleshing out plot, character, theme, place, and voice.

**Week 5**

Lecture 5: The Role of Character

Assignment 5: Review your work so far and determine if your story has a list of characters who are essential to the story. Make a list of key and minor characters. Remember, a “place” can also play the role of a “character.” That is, if you are writing a book about New York, New York itself can become a character in the book. Or, perhaps the protagonist of the book is you, and you are writing a travel piece about New Orleans and its journey to becoming whole again. New Orleans, the city, can likewise

become a “character.” Once you’ve made your character list, after each character, write a

brief phrase that describes that character’s driving goal in the book. What does each

character want? If you have been having trouble making your book more active, you will

learn about how action-driven characters can make all the difference in the world.

**Week 6**

Lecture 6: The Plot Outline

Assignment 6: Create a plot outline for your book, no matter the genre. Your previous, rough chapter outline will provide some raw material for this. You will merge your plot outline with your character outline and, slowly but surely, create a matrix for building the most dramatic novel or nonfiction book.

**Week 7**

Lecture 7: Creating a Production Schedule, Writing A Thousand Words A Day, and Other

Antidotes to Writer’s Block

Assignment 7: Based on what you’ve identified thus far as your remaining research tasks, and sketchy areas identified during the creation of your plot and character outlines, create a schedule for completing your remaining research. Next, with whatever raw material you’ve already gathered for your early chapters, do your best to write 1,000 words a day from this point forward, no matter how rough. Submit a 4,000-word very rough draft of the first portion of your book.

**Week 8**

Lecture 8: Honing Your Unique Voice

Assignment 8: Push forward with a draft of your next 4,000 words, revising with the goal of going out on a limb: experiment with your most powerful voice.

**Week 9**

Lecture 9: Reality Check: The Evolution of Ideas

It is not uncommon for your book to change shape as you get more deeply into it. This is a

wonderful opportunity for revelation, versus a deal-breaking problem. You’ll see why.

Assignment 9: What obstacles are you encountering in your writing? Class members will submit a revised 8,000-word draft of their work thus far, and identify their needs and goals at this point.

**Week 10**

Lecture 10: The Art of Suspense

Assignment 10: Believe it or not, works of nonfiction and fiction alike have opportunities for suspense. Revisit your draft thus far with a more polished 12,000-word version, paying particular attention to chapter openings and closings, climax points, background sections, and the flow of the story. Some of this will overlap with earlier lectures, but the name of the game when creating a book is continual fine-tuning. Your goal is to create a real page-turner, using the structural guidelines presented in this week’s

lecture and building upon what we’ve learned in earlier lectures.

**Week 11**

Lecture 11: Collaboration Agreements, Photo Opportunities, Permissions, “Fair Use,” and

other Author Concerns

Assignment 11: Identify whether your book requires the use of photographs or other materials for which permissions are required, or if access to unique material will be possible only via a potential collaborator. Fiction authors will continue to work on the particular challenges of their narrative. Other special-content-related questions should be submitted at this time. Your 16,000-word draft should also be ready.

**Week 12**

Lecture 12: Agents, Editors, and Query letters, Tips and Questions

Assignment 12: Write a query letter – we’ll troubleshoot what works and what doesn’t. Submit your 22,000-word draft if you’re ready (you WILL be if you’ve done your homework), pose final questions.

A full length manuscript normally will be between 80,000 – 90,000 words for a 300-page book. We will also discuss publishers’ expectations, non-standard book formats, and the market for short fiction and nonfiction.