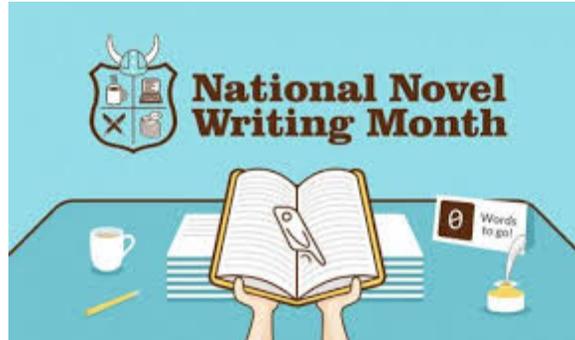


Professor Rebecca Entel  
[rentel@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:rentel@cornellcollege.edu)  
Office: 105 South Hall  
Classroom: Van Etten-Lacey House Reading Room

## ENG 383: Novel Writing \* Block 3 2019



Welcome to a course inspired by National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo)!

The NaNo online writing challenge model is to generate a 50,000-word first draft of a novel in the month of November. In timeline, intensity, and ambition, the model aligns fairly closely with the block plan. The model diverges, however, from traditional creative writing courses, which typically focus on workshopping and revision of shorter projects rather than generation of an entire first draft of a novel. The generative model, however, serves many purposes, particularly for novelists.

Through the generative model, you will learn to push onward without having all the answers, which is essential for novelists to be able to do, and you'll learn the discipline of writing every day and meeting short-term goals, which are essential for the completion of long-term projects. This course will help you develop a process for making progress on a book-length project.

The course will adopt some of the tenets of NaNoWriMo, privileging generation over revision at the early stages of the writing process and providing “structure, community, and encouragement.” In addition to producing a significant portion of a novel draft through ambitious daily word count goals, you will study some foundational techniques of fiction writing, will be introduced to the work of some contemporary novelists, and will reflect on what you learn from other writers and from immersing yourself in the novel-writing process.

This course will diverge from NaNoWriMo in a few significant ways:

- Word counts at the end of the block will count for some, but not all, of your grade (i.e., our idea of “winning” NaNoWriMo will be more complex);
- Our challenge will run the dates of the block, reaching completion on November 13<sup>th</sup>;
- We will study how first chapters can help novelists continue to generate and complete their manuscripts, so you will be revisiting the opening piece of your novel before you finish a draft;
- Reading will be an important part of your writing process.
- Our community will not just be online: we will work together as a class to help everyone make progress, and we'll be visited by some alums who are NaNo pros.

Course objectives:

- *Inquiry*: we will be using the creative process as an approach to inquiring about complex ideas and concepts;
- *Communication*: we will be learning about different ways to communicate information in a piece of fiction;
- *Citizenship*: we will be working together as a community to help one another through difficult stages of the writing process;
- *Knowledge*: we will be reading other novelists' work and grounding our own work in a larger understanding of the world of fiction;
- *Discipline and Perseverance*: we will be learning about self-motivation and developing a productive artistic process. We will be working to produce in the intensive format of the block plan and also laying the groundwork for completion of a long-term project beyond the term of this course.

You'll be working hard this block. The writing process is a rollercoaster ride of good days and bad days. Part of your challenge this block is to develop methods for continuing to progress through the bad days. In the midst of this intensity, don't forget to have some fun.

Just think: in three-and-a-half week's time, you'll be well on your way to a draft of your novel!

### Required Readings:

Many on Moodle (M)

Bethany Morrow, *Mem*

Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*

### Schedule:

Class will meet 1-3 on Monday-Thursday and 9-11 on Friday. We will meet a little less as a full class than is typical for a block course in order to maximize writing time. Our reading load will also be less consistent throughout the block to allow for writing time. Plan accordingly. Please note the 4:00 reading on Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>.

### WEEK ONE: Methods for Finding Your Way

M 10/21

Introduction, course plans, and getting to know a character (bring devices for plotting style quiz)

T 10/22

Fiction Writer's Toolkit

Discuss: Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, through page 72

W 10/23

Multiple Ways to Get Started (including NaNo account set-up: bring devices)

Visitor: Erin Casey, NaNo novelist, alum, and executive director of The Writers' Rooms

Discuss: Casey, excerpt from *The Purple Door District* (M) and bring questions for the author

TH 10/24

First Chapters and Character-Based Plotting

Discuss: Adichie, excerpt from *Americanah* and Morrison, excerpt from *The Bluest Eye* (M)

Recommended: Writer's Night at Mt. Vernon Creates (121 1<sup>st</sup> St. SW) @7:00

F 10/25 9:00

Process workshop and "Misfit" writing

Bring a paper copy to class and to turn in: initial description of your project to share (under one minute); something going well; something not going as well

Recommended: Freewrite Friday at the VEL @ 3-6

## **WEEK TWO: Visiting Novelist and Changing Plans**

M 10/28

Group-led class #1

Discuss: Morrow, *Mem*

T 10/29

Bethany Morrow class visit

Discuss: Morrow, cont. Bring questions for the author.

Morrow and Saunders papers due by noon (Moodle)

### **4:00 Bethany Morrow reading at the VEL**

W 10/30

Writers' research and revision attempts

Discuss: Research Notes (Kang, Arnett) (M)

TH 10/31

Visitor: Sam Frese, NaNo course veteran

Process workshop

Discuss: reading TBA (M)

Recommended: International NaNo Kick-off streaming live @ 3-4

F 11/1 *NaNo proper officially begins!* Class meets 11-3 on the OC (with lunch break)

Class-hosted campus write-in with ENG 215

Begin updating your word count on the NaNo site today

Recommended: Freewrite Friday at the VEL @ 3-6

## **WEEK THREE: Maintaining the Long Haul**

M 11/4

Group-led class #2

Discuss: Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

T 11/5

Discuss: Ng, cont.

Ng papers due by noon (Moodle)

Election Day – don't forget to vote

W 11/6

Visitor: Laura Famer, fiction writer

Reading TBA

TH 11/7

Discuss: Professor Entel's opening chapter versions (M)

F 11/8 9:00

Process workshop

Recommended: Freewrite Friday at the VEL @ 3-6

### **WEEK FOUR: Refining the Opening Act to Plan for the Future**

M 11/11

In-class workshop discussion of opening chapters

T 11/12

Writing day and conferences

W 11/13 **9:00**

Class reading and reports

Update final word count and submit validation by 3:00; first chapter reflection paper due by 1:00 (Moodle)

### **Assignments and Assessment:**

#### **WORD COUNT**

Due Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, by 3 p.m. (NaNo site)

Unlike in other courses, part of your grade will rest on quantity. This course teaches you how to continue producing; I am concerned with word count, not quality of what your first draft looks like.

If you produce 90-100% of the word count goal, you will receive an A for this portion of your grade; 80-89% of word count, a B, etc. Word counts will be assessed through your NaNo account (daily updates are recommended to keep on track); word counts must be finalized and validated by November 13<sup>th</sup> at 3 p.m.

#### **FIRST CHAPTER REFLECTION PAPER**

Due Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, by 1 p.m. (Moodle)

Your paper should be 4-5 double-spaced pages and should include a discussion of the following:

- how and why the opening of your project has changed or will change from the first draft at the beginning of the block. Include a discussion of what you learned about your book as well as what you decided made sense for the book's opening. It is OK to discuss more than one option or elements you are unsure of; the purpose of this paper is to allow you to reconsider the opening/framework of your project with the new knowledge you've acquired so that you leave the

block with plans for moving forward. We will be discussing various strategies for a strong opening in class;

- your plans for the book should you continue to work on it, particularly guided by the new knowledge you've gained from revisiting your opening chapter;
- what you learned this block about the writing process, about novel writing, and about yourself as a writer: share some highlights.

### **READING-AS-A-WRITER PAPERS:** (Choose 2: Saunders, Morrow, Ng)

Due Tuesday by noon (Moodle)

- Week 2 for Saunders or Morrow
- Week 3 for Ng

Write an analysis of about 500 words (double-spaced) in which you discuss what you learned as a writer from the reading. Show me your analytical skill in these papers and explain how what you learned plays out or might play out in your own work. Focus! Choose *one* aspect of the reading to focus on. (Note: there does not need to be a one-to-one correlation between the novel you read and your own novel-in-progress; for example, you can discuss the omniscient point of view in Ng's novel and what you learned from it/how you made a point of view decision in your own work without writing your novel in the omniscient point of view.)

You will not cover all of the following topics but should choose the most salient:

- point of view
- character development/character-based plotting
- structure/format
- revelation of information/turns of plot
- style/language
- use of conventions (specific to a genre)
- other topics covered in author interviews and/or relevant to your writing

### **PARTICIPATION**

In some ways, writing is a very individual process, and you'll feel the insularity of focusing on your own project this block. That said, the community created by this course will be essential for all of us. Everyone is expected to participate thoughtfully in: discussion, process workshops, and group-led activities. Please check in with me at any point about your participation grade-in-progress.

### **GROUP-LED CLASS**

Due Monday of week 2 or 3 depending on which novel you choose

You will work in groups of 6-7 to lead class about one of our novels. I expect the group to use about an hour of class time, though you may use more; please check with me so I can plan accordingly. Your group may decide how best to use the time, but I recommend a combination of discussion, activities, and perhaps a writing exercise developed from the reading (whether in-class or take-away).

In planning your group's discussion, consider the following points. You will not talk about all of them but should cover some of them. We are reading as writers to see what we can learn from a variety of contemporary authors.

- point of view
- character development/character-based plotting
- structure/format
- revelation of information/turns of plot
- style/language
- use of conventions (specific to a genre or fictional technique)
- knots of interest or what's weird/different/new/unexpected/particularly well done

I will give the groups additional resources, such as links to author interviews, that may be used to prep and/or can be used in the class period itself. Your group may assign any of these materials to the class.

*Tips:* be prepared and organized; work together to create an exciting class period; check in with me as often as you'd like for input on your plans; use the book, be specific, and back up your analysis of the book with examples and passages; think through why the activities you're planning help the class learn from the book and learn about writing – and clearly communicate those objectives.

#### Grading:

Word count achieved	30%
First chapter reflection paper	25%
Participation (discussion, process workshops, group-led class)	20%
Two reading-as-a-writer papers	25%

#### Additional requirements:

- Each of you must meet with me individually at least once during the block. (You are of course very welcome to meet with me more often.)
- Use of the NaNo site is required; I will be checking your word count progress after November 1<sup>st</sup>, and you must be connected to my account (username: rental) as well as those of your classmates.
- Though we will not be formally workshopping, since our focus is on pushing through to a full draft, be prepared to share short excerpts of your work with classmates at various points in the block.

#### Policies:

**Commitment to the course:** I expect you to be in class, to be prepared, to eliminate distractions (and only use devices for our work during class), and to participate fully. This class will only be as strong as (1) your commitment to challenging yourself and (2) the community we create with one another. Speak with me about any problems you're having or ideas you have about the block. Bring something to write with (laptop, notebook, etc.) to every class session.

**Learning Disabilities:** Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a documented learning disability and will need any accommodation in this course, you must discuss the accommodation(s) with me within the first three days of the block. Additional

information about the policies and procedures for accommodation of learning disabilities is available at: [http://cornellcollege.edu/academic\\_affairs/disabilities/](http://cornellcollege.edu/academic_affairs/disabilities/). If you anticipate any issues with the writing experiences assignment, you should also discuss concerns with me during the first three days of the block so that we can make a suitable plan.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the act of taking the work of another and presenting it as one's own, without acknowledgement of the original source. This course assumes utmost academic honesty; plagiarism will not be tolerated. Acts of plagiarism will be reported to the College. If you have any questions about your use of others' work this term, see me about citation guidelines and proper use of sources. Our librarians and writing consultants are also wonderful resources for questions about the use of sources.

**Finally:**

This class is a bit different from other courses and is in many ways an experiment. Please keep in touch with me throughout the block so that we can deal with any issues that arise and make adjustments as needed.

Use the resources available to you: pep talks and other resources on the NaNo site; recommended events; recommended reading and listening; your classmates, your professor, and other writers on campus.

Opportunities to immerse yourself in a writing project are few and far between in the writer's life. Let's all make the most of this special block!