



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Creative Writing

Faculty of Arts

How to Write a Novel: Edit and Revise

Instructors: Nancy Lee and Annabel Lyon

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Experienced writers understand that novels improve incrementally with each draft. This course teaches the skills of revision and the attention to detail it takes to make a good story great.

In this course we'll explore the editorial process from macro to micro. From a far-reaching analysis of the three journeys every novel must take (internal, external, aesthetic) to a tight focus on the rigorous choices associated with prose style, learners will hone critical skills and develop a rewriting plan tailored to the needs of their individual projects.

Through self-evaluation and discussion with fellow writers, learners will build an autonomous writing practice and discover a community of peers familiar with the challenges and aspirations of novel writing.

WEEK BY WEEK BREAKDOWN

Every Week

Learners will read writing examples, watch instructor videos and view interviews with published authors. Each week will include multiple video lectures, at least one assignment and a group discussion topic. Instructors do not provide feedback on student writing – this is a craft-centered course, but will answer student questions regularly during a lively podcast.

Week 1: Preparing to Rewrite

First, we'll introduce students to the elements of the course, expectations, and what they can hope to accomplish. We'll discuss acceptable behaviour in feedback and discussion boards.

Then we'll open the course with a discussion of why rewriting is not just important, but a necessity for the novelist. As we say: rewriting is writing. It's where you take the material you've created in your first draft and shape it for the reader.

We'll discuss not only what rewriting looks like, but what types of rewriting you'll go through in the process of taking your novel from first draft to something complete enough to send to agents and editors.

We'll explore the three major stages of rewriting:

- The substantive edit
- The line edit
- The copy edit

Finally, we'll discuss how a writer evaluates what they have, and how to get started with the rewriting process.

Assignment: We'll ask you to analyze the scenes in your draft with an eye to each scene's essential elements, building up a simple tool to help you visualize your entire novel's structure.

Week 2: Rewriting Tools: Structure

This week we'll focus on structure. The backbone of your novel, structure is essential to making sure that your story is coherent, compelling and satisfying. Often in writing the first draft, writers make choices before they fully understand their characters, their narrative voice and the main events of their novel in progress. Rewriting is a chance to look at these choices in a careful and considered way and evaluate whether they add to or take away from the novel.

This week's topics include:

- The Three Journeys of your Novel. Connecting back to the structural work we discussed in our earlier courses, we review the three journeys of any novel: Internal, External and Aesthetic, and how they work together in all genres and types of novels. We also review the common three act structure familiar to anyone who's studied screenwriting.
- Common Problems and how to Solve Them. In a comprehensive review, we go through an analysis of the problems we see regularly in early drafts of novels – problems that exist in all novel acts and across the three journeys. For each act, you'll work with an analysis tool to put pressure on your draft.

Assignment: You will formulate a structural rewrite plan for your novel, using the scene analysis you created the previous week, and using the analysis tools detailed this week.

Week 3: Managing the Rewriting Process

In this week we'll review the actual process of rewriting, hearing from published authors who'll discuss their own rewriting process, as well as from Annabel and Nancy. There's no one right

way to review and rewrite your novel, and how you do it will change depending on what your rewriting focus is with each draft.

This week's topics include:

- Rewriting for character and voice.
- Dialogue and narrative voice.
- Methods of rewriting.
- Writers discuss their rewriting process.
- How writing and rewriting work together.
- Dealing with a daunting rewrite

Assignment: After discussing methods of staying organized as you rewrite, you'll commit to a rewriting method, create an initial plan and schedule and then start rewriting.

WEEK 4: Rewriting Tools: Prose Style

We'll focus more closely this week, moving from the large scale to the small, and examining how writers revise at the paragraph and sentence level.

This week's topics include:

- Revising for cliché.
- Avoiding stereotypes.
- Exploring prose style options.
- Revising for prose style.
- Imagery.
- Metaphor.
- Rewriting for theme.

Assignment: using the provided prose style analysis tool you will intensively review a section of your novel, moving through it multiple times, each time working on a different aspect of prose style, including cliché, flow and imagery.

Week 5: Working with Feedback

Rewriting by yourself can only take you so far. At some point, all writers benefit from thoughtful feedback on their writing. This can come from friends, a writing group, workshops, trusted readers, and even from paid specialists.

This week's topics include:

- When to get feedback

- How to choose trusted readers.
- What are expert and sensitivity reads, and do you need one?
- Assessing and incorporating feedback.
- Mentorship.
- The value of writing groups.
- Writing programs: to MFA or not to MFA.
- Writing conferences.

Assignment: you will brainstorm potential readers for your work, as well as continuing working through your rewriting plan.

Week 6: Preparing to Submit

This week, we'll look at the materials you'll need to assemble to best present yourself and your work in the marketplace. Along the way, we'll hear from an assortment of writers about how they got started in publishing, as well as some popular misconceptions about the publishing industry. From the meat and potatoes of submitting (a great query letter, a neatly copy-edited manuscript) to some lesser-known tips and tricks, we'll guide you to the publisher's door.

Although learners will still be deep in the revision process, and nowhere near ready for submitting their work to agents and editors, this week will serve to demystify some common misconceptions, and the material here will be here for you long after the course finishes, so you can take advantage of it at any point.

This week's topics include:

- Researching the market.
- Understanding when your work is ready to send out.
- Crafting a query letter.
- Creating a synopsis.
- The value of literary agents.
- What agents look for in a manuscript.
- Working well with an agent.
- The writer/editor relationship.
- Working effectively with an editor.
- Rejection and success.
- Indie publishing.

Assignment: This week's assignment will be to complete a detailed editing and submission plan for your manuscript, once it's finished.