

SO YOU WANT TO WRITE A NOVEL

A generative novel writing workshop & salon for grownups
6 sessions, Wednesdays, 4 to 6 pm. Begins Sep 7

It's a belief universally acknowledged that many academics have a novel manuscript either hidden in a drawer or percolating in those very, very smart brains of theirs. This workshop cum literary salon is an opportunity to allow that novel the light of day with guidance by this novelist who currently occupies your Jenks Chair.

Why write a novel? Isn't your research and writing more than enough for one lifetime? But as every teacher knows, storytelling is fundamental to what we do to engage and shape those young minds. What is a novel but the story you harbor because of who you are, what you do and know, how you've lived, what *matters* to you in this life?

In this seminar, you'll respond to writing prompts around what I call the 5 P's of fiction, a shorthand borrowed from my former life in marketing management where the 4 P's were fundamental to selling a product or service: product, pricing, promotion & placement. During our sessions you'll respond to writing prompts which we'll share orally to try to unlock that novel in you. In-session writing is the beginnings of your writing assignments (yes, there is homework, what is school without *some* reason to make excuses about ravenous dogs or dying relatives??). These assignments will be "workshopped" to help you discover the effect of your writing. Some reading will also be provided. Come with an open mind to let your imagination run wild, and to engage with the craft of fiction for your novel.

The hoped-for outcome of this seminar is a draft opening or section of a novel that you can develop further on your own.

Seminar is limited to 12 participants. Please email me at xxi@holycross.edu to sign up; *first come first served*.




(a.k.a. Professor Chaos)

Xu Xi 許素細 • xxi@holycross.edu • Ext. 2365 • Fenwick 218

Novels: *Chinese Walls* (1994), *Hong Kong Rose* (1997), *The Unwalled City* (2001), *Habit of a Foreign Sky* (2010, finalist for the Man Asian literary prize), *That Man in Our Lives* (2016, "engrossing, whirlwind metafictional tale . . . demonstrates the far-reaching effects of politics and culture on the smallest, most personal aspect of our lives" *Publishers Weekly*) • Current novel-in-progress *The Milton Man* • Visit www.xuxiwriter.com for further information.

Seminar schedule

Come to our sessions with your laptop or pad or pen and paper and be prepared to write. We'll also discuss what story you're interested in writing and why and how to tell that story effectively. You'll be invited to read from the writing you do in this seminar.

Note: some reading will be provided.

WED	Topic	What we'll do
Sep 7	Defining the novelist: Who are you, what story do you want to tell, and why? The 5 P's of fiction: People, Place, Plot, POV (point of view) & (the writer's) Perspective.	Writing assignments due by 7 pm Saturday Sep 17. (People & Place)
Sep 21	Workshop 1 & discussion of writing assignments.	Guided discussion. Writing assignments due by 7 pm Saturday Oct 1. (Plot)
Oct 5	Workshop 2 & discussion of writing assignments.	Guided discussion. Writing assignments due by 7 pm Saturday Oct 15. (POV)
Oct 19	Workshop 3 & discussion of writing assignments.	Guided discussion. The BIG writing assignment due by 7 pm Saturday Oct 30.
Nov 2	Workshop 4 & discussion of writing assignments.	Guided discussion. Revise your BIG assignment or write further for your reading (no turn in assignment)
Nov 30	A final literary salon. How writers celebrate.	Everyone gives a reading! An informal roundtable with refreshments.

My office hours this fall are Tuesday 2 to 4 pm or by appointment if you wish to discuss your writing in between sessions.

Writing Assignments and Workshopping

The writing workshop gets a bad rap as critique sessions where we “tear apart the writer” through savage criticism. Although some writers probably deserve to be silenced, this is *not* what we’ll do in this seminar where we want writing to live and remain alive.

Instead, what we aim for in “workshopping” another writer’s work is to try to understand what the writer is trying to say. As *artificially* close readers, we feedback to the writer what we understand to be their meaning, as well as what we perceive they’re communicating through the story they’re trying to tell.

We also try to feedback how *effectively* this come across by telling the writer what works and what doesn’t quite work. For instance, we might say a paragraph gives us a very strong feeling for place because the specific details about the streets and houses are evocative and visual and point to examples. Alternatively, another passage may not quite evoke the physicality of a person portrayed, because descriptions such as “beautiful” or “tall” are too vague, whereas “she was our family’s beauty queen every female relative tried to emulate” or “at six foot six, he towered over all his peers” offer a more vivid picture.

Most of all, we read with *empathy* for another writer’s attempt to create a world for their story and to tell us what happens to the people in that world.

Each session, you’ll write in response to prompts that help to exercise your creative muscles and share a little of that orally. The assignments will be more fleshed out or revised versions of the in-session writing and submitted 10 days later on a Saturday evening. Excerpts from these assignments will be compiled by Sunday or Monday morning at the latest into a single document and emailed to everyone to read before the Wednesday when we’ll discuss them. The final assignment is a polished draft of a novel opening or section to take away with you for further development.

Some readings from modern and contemporary novels will be provided as possible models for your own writing, as well as articles about writing craft.

We’ll have fun.