Section 9, Master Class: Finish, Polish, Publish
Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat

For writers of literary/mainstream or genre fiction.
Including true-based stories.

June 16-20, 2014
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison

UW-Madison Continuing Studies & UW-Madison Dept. of English

Instructor: Christine DeSmet

Limit 6; full manuscripts critiqued, up to 90,000 words/300 pages (see details at end of syllabus). Fee: $750 includes class and critique.

The magic in a manuscript that makes it sell can feel elusive when you face the enormous task of finishing a first draft well and then revising and polishing your next draft. But that magic isn’t as elusive as you might think.

Like a master magician’s tricks, creating a memorable story in 300 pages (fewer or more depending on target market) requires attention to technique, quality, and honest reflection by the writer. And like a magician, you can’t fool an audience with slap-dash efforts and expect your name on the marquee. You can’t get an agent or dazzle a reader or reviewer with less than stellar storylines and structure, details, voice and style, characters, plot, setting, point-of-view, dialogue, and scene work. Your manuscript—like a magician honing his or her routine—warrants time set aside for professional polishing before the curtains go up.

The instructor will read your entire manuscript prior to class, and participants are highly encouraged to do so as well. Discussion during the week will address your entire manuscript, its problems and pluses, and provide suggestions for polishing.

Writers can expect revision exercises and/or discussion on their manuscripts each day, so please be prepared to bring either a printed copy of your entire manuscript to this retreat or have it on your laptop/tablet device.

Your instructor stays available for further critiques, questions, and marketing help in the year following your enrollment. That’s included in your fee.

See more about this master class in the day-by-day syllabus.
Your instructor, Christine DeSmet, UW-Madison Continuing Studies, is a published fiction writer and professional screenwriter who specializes in manuscript makeovers for new writers. She taught this retreat’s section for first novelists for many years and was thrilled to see her past participants go on to great things—including some rewarded with novel publication.

**Status of the last two years’ Master Class writers:** One writer self-published a vampire novel… A women’s fiction writer is in the thick of querying agents. …A YA writer has had success with her query letter and synopsis and has been getting invitations to send pages to literary agents… Another writer is polishing her YA time travel novel… One women’s fiction writer is doing an agent hunt now… A couple of women’s fiction writers will be pitching to several agents attending the April “Writers’ Institute” conference in Madison…

**Who is this section for? Are you ready? What if you’re still working on your first draft?**

This master class is for those who have finished a first draft or will have done so by June class time. It’s also for those who have garnered rejections and are stumped as to how to lift their writing to the next level. This retreat section is designed for those writing mainstream/literary fiction mostly, but popular genre fiction books are welcomed.

Types of novels that should consider this section: women’s fiction, historical novels, literary suspense or thriller, mysteries, bestseller suspense, character studies, coming-of-age stories for adult readers, literary science fiction or fantasy, and humor.

*If you’ve just started your novel, please consider sections taught by Tim Storm, Christopher Mohar, Kathy Steffen, or for YA—Bridget Birdsall.*

For fee and how to apply for this Master Class, please see the end of the syllabus.

Christine DeSmet is a novelist and short story writer, screenwriter, and writing teacher at UW-Madison where she specializes in one-on-one coaching of writers. In 2012, Christine sold a three-book cozy mystery series (debuting this fall) to Penguin Random House and editor Danielle Perez; the first book of that series, *First-Degree Fudge*, spent 10 weeks on the Barnes & Noble mystery bestseller list when the book debuted in Fall 2013. Christine’s agent is John Talbot. Christine’s previous novel, a romantic suspense, *Spirit Lake*, was an award-winning, best-selling novel for publisher Hard Shell Word Factory/Mundania Press. Also a short fiction writer, her humorous romantic mystery series set in Wisconsin appeared in two volumes for Whiskey Creek Press: *Mischief in Moonstone and Men of Moonstone*. Christine, with script co-writer Peggy Williams, is a past winner of the Slamdance Film Festival and optioned that screenplay to New Line Cinema. Christine is a member of Writers Guild of America, East; Wisconsin Screenwriters Forum; Romance Writers of America; Sisters in Crime; Mystery Writers of America; and Jewels of the Quill. Her stage play co-written with Peggy Williams, “Climax!,” about a struggling writer, was a top-ten finalist in a Wisconsin Wrights New Play Contest. Christine’s next novel, *Hot Fudge Frame-Up*, will be published in summer 2014.
Comments from a past Master Class group:

“Chris is fabulous. I gained even more than I bargained for and I expected a lot.” – Cheryl Hanson, Minocqua, Wisconsin

“Chris’ wisdom and insight into not only the creative process but the publishing and marketing aspects of writing really helped me become more certain of my next steps.” – Julie Holmes, Arlington, Minnesota

“Chris really pours her heart into the class and is so helpful! Even though I have a lot of work to do, I have direction and focus.”
--Barbara Belford, Batavia, Illinois

Comments from past participants in Christine’s “First Novels” section of this retreat (taught prior to the Master Class):

“One of the best experiences of my life. Thoughtfully put together. I can't imagine the work preparing for this. Learned a lot and made great new friends.” – Kris O'Horo, Delafield, Wis.

“Wonderful, nurturing environment. I was completely taken by surprise how much I learned not only from having my own work critiqued, but by listening to my classmates' work being critiqued. Much more effective than just lecture alone. Great experience!” – Debbie Hart, Algonquin, Ill.

“You are an excellent teacher. My book crawled out of the mire and stared me in the face.” – Lisa Bandt, Poynette, Wis.

“Christine provides thorough, accurate, and insightful feedback—on the spot. She’s analytical and empathic. Great handouts packed with tips! Great assignments and exercises.” – Kristine Miller, Warrenville, Ill.

(See syllabus for day-by-day details and credits option.)

Syllabus

Section 9 Master Class: Finish, Polish, Publish

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat
June 16-20, 2014, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Led by Christine DeSmet, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Held at the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St. Phone (608) 262-3447, fax (608) 265-2475. Email:
Please note: To help you prepare for the critiques during the week, and to help lighten your overnight reading load during our retreat, participants will receive a “Critique Preparation List” email by June 1 indicating what scenes we’ll be critiquing on which days. Expect those scenes to focus on critical areas such as plot point scenes or whole chapters. Your instructor will help each writer select his or her pages to share for the critiques, including additional scenes of your choosing that you want feedback on from the group.

Monday, June 16

First impressions: We put ourselves into the role of literary agent or reader or reviewer. What will an agent or reviewer say about your manuscript? Strengths? Possible weak points? Is it destined for bestselling status within its genre and publishing niche? Why or why not?

What’s your audience? Are you sure? What published novels and authors are you aligning yourself with?

Pitching and marketing: At this point in time, what’s your logline look like? Synopsis? First pages of your manuscript? We’ll help each other reach greatness in all of these things. Guaranteed.

Fast start on polishing: We strategize immediately and begin to create your individualized, clear plan for polishing toward publication. What are the areas for revision for you? What should you do first versus last? Why revise? What’s “necessary” versus “just an opinion”? You get help in creating priorities for revising, plus help with the actual revising.

Six things to fix. Your manuscript gets a checkup on the elements that make up a novel, including elusive things such as “author voice.” Who are you as an author? What will the reviews say about your plot, setting, dialogue, scene work and more?

Have you lost your way with “structure”? We’ll review this crucial element for novelists. There are a lot of books on structure, but when you get in the middle of your plot, is it all a muddle for you? Let’s make your structure seamless and satisfying.

Let’s work on ways to make you stand out yet fit in with other bestsellers in your genre.

We also measure your manuscript’s “health” by looking at the six most common items agents mention in rejections. We must also keep in mind that some of you will bypass agents and publish on your own. In that case, what are common problems for self-published novels? We’ll review those.

To prepare for Monday:
Please re-read the first chapter or up to 20 pages of each writer’s manuscript. Please also read their synopsis and logline. We’ll discuss and critique each of those for all six writers the first day.

**Overnight work:** Our focus is on polishing our manuscripts, so plan to have some fun doing instant makeovers of your pages, scenes, or chapters. In addition, optional and useful exercises to help you bring your writing skills to a pro level will be suggested each day. Please bring copies of your new pages to class for sharing each morning. Copying services are included in your fee. More information in class.

*Please consult the emailed “Critique Prep List” for critique pages assigned for Tuesday’s critique session.*

**Tuesday, June 17**

We start the day with critique of the overnight assignment and other pages of your novel (assigned or suggested the day before).

You learn how to illuminate and expand your novel’s “Image System”—and learn why you even need such a thing.

What if you were fearless on the page with character (antagonist as well as protagonist)? Let’s be fearless with polishing: Would your publisher be able to sell the film rights and attract an actor? What makes your protagonist and antagonist memorable? What would you sell about them on a billboard? How can your characters be strengthened so that your manuscript is miles better overnight? We’ll attempt nothing less than greatness in a flash.

Get tough love about your scene work on this day, too. Get ideas for better scene structure, true conflict instead of fluffy nonsense, better hooks and transitions scene by scene. We identify patterns you may have fallen into that aren’t effective and help you find fresh ways to bring entertainment and emotion into your scenes.

Dialogue makes or breaks a novel manuscript many times. What’s more, many novels and their scenes today are dialogue-driven and editors actively seek great dialogue. You hone your dialogue-writing skills to the pro level today and all week.

Tuesday gives you yet another honest, kind, thoughtful assessment from your instructor and five other serious writers. We map out your character’s transformational arc, find his or her fatal flaw, and identify the Central Question that drives your novel. Then we help you sharpen it all.

**Overnight:** More instant makeovers of your manuscript’s pages. Fun optional exercises related to today’s discussion topics.

*Please consult the emailed “Critique Prep List” for critique pages assigned for Wednesday’s critique session.*

**Wednesday, June 18**
Each day features critique of the overnight assignment and other pages of your novel (assigned or suggested the day before).

Other topics we focus on this day:
—Powering up your story’s tension and trouble. Without dramatic tension, novels don’t exist. Those that please readers most seem to have some secret code about how to create tension on every page. After all, a comic novel, or a sweet, cozy mystery, doesn’t have tension on every page, does it? But of course it does. We’ll crack the secret code of what makes “tension” and the various levels and forms of tension you can use to deepen your pages and story.
—Powering up your style and voice. Your story’s plot and characters, setting, and many other things may be dynamite, but if your writing style isn’t up to snuff and is leaning on too many clichés like “up to snuff,” you could be “dead in the water.” Your pages get put under a microscope as we look at how you can improve in the areas of word choices, generalities versus specific language, the private language of your book’s era or the professions, verbs, sentence structure, paragraphing, and more. You get a list of “clutter” words that make agents and editors cringe.
—Powering up YOUR unique talents based on your writing skills, life lessons and background, culture, family history and more. Your unique experiences and word choices must be given respect and space on the page. Too often we’re afraid to “use that clichéd saying Grandma always used.” How do you “marry” who you are with what an agent or editor might want? Let’s turn YOU into the next fresh voice talked about by agents.
—Powering up your metaphor and theme. For some writers, theme and metaphors feel elusive, sometimes even unnecessary. After all, in a fast-paced thriller, why worry about a metaphor when it’s the killer we need to worry about? In a romance or mystery, why waste space with metaphor development when it’s the relationship or clues we’re after? But if we mention genre author names like Debbie Macomber, Lee Child, or James Lee Burke you get a “story picture” in your mind instantly, don’t you? Genre novels of all types that are memorable and sell well excel with the usage of symbols and symbolism, objects, metaphors, and the lessons that arise from the milieu of the story. What is the lesson learned from your novel? The metaphor? What do we come away with that’s memorable? Let’s talk. And revise based on today’s revelations in class.

**Overnight:** More instant makeovers of your manuscript’s pages. Fun optional exercises related to today’s discussion topics.

*Please consult the emailed “Critique Prep List” for critique pages assigned for Thursday’s critique session.*

**Thursday, June 19**

Each day features critique of the overnight assignment and other pages of your novel (assigned or suggested the day before).

Today’s topics:
—Five scenes or five pages for fame and fortune. When an agent or editor flips to the five major plot points in your manuscript, what do they find for scenes? Have you crescendoed your scenes and pages to a harrowing pinnacle plot point by point? Shaped your prose with rhythms? Is the emotional content strong enough to make us gasp, sigh, and gasp again? Do we care? How might we care more?

—Create your perfect ending. What is the last big scene in your novel? Does it do its job? Is it too long or too short? (Hint: Most endings in new manuscripts are under-developed.) Will readers crave your next book based on your final pages? How might you make more magic with these final scenes? What might you need to add that you haven’t thought about before this?

—Last lines “all the way through.” Too often we spend all our energy on hooks and chapter openings while neglecting the final lines of scenes, chapters, and of our novel. But these last lines are crucial for pacing and for selling the story and character. Let’s do some instant makeovers on your manuscript’s last lines.

—Mischief and mayhem. More tips on how to raise the stakes even more for characters, plot, subplot, setting, and readers.

—Create a galloping pace via attention to chaptering, sequences, transitions, and the usage of quotes, recipes, journal entries and other tricks writers use. When do these things detract and destroy your chances versus make you look fresh?

Overnight: More instant makeovers of your manuscript’s pages. Fun optional exercises related to today’s discussion topics.

Please consult the emailed “Critique Prep List” for critique pages assigned for Friday’s critique session.

Friday, June 20

We wrap up with critiques of the overnight assignment and other pages of your novel (assigned or suggested the day before).

Today’s topics:
—Identify the nuggets that make your manuscript special and attractive to readers, including an agent or editor.
—Take your pitch to the pro level.
—Your revision/polishing plan. Setting up your success strategies so that you don’t lose your momentum. Why do some people get published after a retreat like this and others don’t? Let’s have an honest chat.
—Your marketing plan and efforts. Things that made the difference for writers who got an agent or any type of publication.

You leave this retreat with clear, specific direction for your next steps. You leave with more confidence in your writing, more mastery over your story and manuscript, and more appreciation for the magic you’ve woven with your words.

Fee and what it includes
$750. Instructor will read your full manuscript prior to class; full manuscripts will be shared with the entire class via email attachment. Instructor will provide a letter with suggestions on the *entire* manuscript, plus a written critique of your first 50 pages as part of the course fee; other written critiques are extra at $4/double-spaced page not to exceed 300 manuscript pages. Classroom discussion will address your entire manuscript's strengths and weaknesses, and provide specific direction for revisions with publication in mind. The instructor will remain available for further critique help and marketing questions in the year following the June week.

**How to apply**

**Please contact the instructor about possible openings before sending material. Apply by April 1 if possible, but applications will be accepted after that for spaces that remain.** To apply, please email a one-page summary of your entire plot, plus the first 20 pages of your manuscript to Christine DeSmet, cdesmet@dcs.wisc.edu. Manuscript pages must be double-spaced using 12-point Times New Roman and one-inch margins. Experienced instructional staff will review your application. If you are accepted, the instructor will ask you to forward your completed manuscript for sharing with the class. Manuscripts may not exceed 300 pages/90,000 words. (Obviously your finished book might be longer, but for the purposes of this class, that's all the material we can handle for this week. If you are approved for participation, you will be asked by the instructor to submit no more than 90,000 words.)

**Credit Option:** Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others' work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.