Section 9, Master Class: Your First Fifty Pages
For writers of literary/mainstream or genre fiction as indicated below

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat
June 15-19, 2015
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison

Instructor: Angela Rydell

Limit 8; first fifty pages critiqued (see details at end of syllabus). Fee: $495 includes class and critique. To apply for this Master Class, please see “How to Apply” (in red font) towards the end of the syllabus.

Master Class: Your First Fifty Pages

Today, more than ever, you must lure your reader with your opening or risk losing him forever. Page one is the first of many hooks. When agents and editors love your query or opening three pages, they often ask for more—the first fifty pages. Find out what must feature in those early chapters to inspire the words, “Send me the whole thing!”

This master class helps you pinpoint your inciting incident, introduce a protagonist to love, balance scene and summary, and craft enticing openings for each chapter. You and your instructor will read everyone’s fifty pages prior to class. Each writer’s work will be touched on daily through select scene critiques, group discussions, or revision exercises. Whether you’re in the midst of a draft or preparing for publication, you’ll take away tips for polishing pages until every opening hook gleams.

You and your instructor will read everyone’s first fifty pages prior to class. Each writers’ manuscript will be touched on daily through select scene critiques, group discussions, or on-the-spot revision exercises. Whether you’re in the midst of a draft or ready to polish for publication, you’ll take away tips for optimizing an opening that keeps readers on the edge of their seat from first page to last.

Who is this section for? Can you apply if you’re still working on your first draft?

“Your First Fifty Pages” is for writers polishing openings for queries and publication, or writers who’ve written at least fifty pages and want to use their openings as a solid launching pad to help get their plot on track and propel their novel forward with page-turning momentum. It’s also for those tired of rejections, looking to transform slow starts into memorable first impressions.
All writers are highly encouraged to read their peers 50-page manuscripts, and prepare to participate in daily in-class critiques of each other's work. You'll not only receive feedback, but become part of a likeminded group of writers eager for peer critique and a supportive community.

**Preferred genres.** This section is designed for those writing mainstream/literary fiction, including women’s fiction, historical novels, literary suspense and humor. Also considered: middle grade, YA, and science fiction/fantasy genre novels. Writing in a different genre? Feel free to query, though the other genres may take precedence (see “How to Apply” towards the end of the syllabus).

**Fee and what it includes.** $495. Instructor will read your first fifty pages prior to class; all submissions (50 pages each, plus a one page synopsis) will be shared with the entire class via email attachment (.doc or .rtf). Instructor will provide a letter with suggestions on your complete submission, & a detailed written critique with suggestions for polishing your first 10 pages as part of the course fee. Classroom discussion will address select scenes’ strengths and weaknesses, with an eye towards how they relate to the whole, and provide specific direction for revisions (a critique schedule will be circulated before the workshop begins).

Writers may also be asked to revise their work throughout the week. Please bring a printed copy of your first fifty pages to this workshop.

While a syllabus is provided, expect that each day’s content may change based on the needs of the group.

*Please note:* You’ll read everyone’s first fifty pages, but we won’t critique all 50 pages in class. We’ll zero in on key sections in each participant’s manuscript. So to help you prepare for those selected critiques, and to lighten your overnight reading load during our retreat, everyone will receive “Critique Schedule” email by June 1 indicating what scenes we’ll critique on which days. Expect those scenes to focus on critical “first impression” elements, such as opening page, inciting incident, scene & setting development, and character intros. Your instructor will select pages, with the help of the writer, to share for the critiques.

**Syllabus**

**Master Class: Your First Fifty Pages**

**Day 1: Hooks and Barbs.**

What are agents and editors looking for on page one, paragraph one? Book browsers turn to page one and if the first few sentences don’t hook them, back it goes. Agents and editors rarely read past the first three pages, even when they do ask for the first fifty. How do you get them to eagerly read every page, and want more? Fortunately, great openings flaunt their secrets for all to see. We’ll discuss successful hooks and identify the characteristics that make a reader care. They’re different today than they were in the “dark and stormy” Victorian era. Successful contemporary openings raise questions, flaunt an inviting voice, instigate conflict, make startling revelations, thwart expectations, evoke lyric intensity, and more. Sharpen your opening hook until it gleams.
Bring your own opening pages for group critique, and in class exercises.

*In class critique:* Everyone gets a power critique of page one. Each critique will include comments on how your first page launches your whole novel.

*In class exercise:* Hooks—first sentence, first paragraph, first scene.

*Assignment:* Optional exercise for instructor feedback.

**Day 2: Scene and Summary.**

Build your novel from the ground up, starting with the smallest building block, the scene. Good scenes need a character with a goal, and complications that force change—for better or worse. Complications thicken plot and move your story forward. And when you not only open but end scenes with a hook, you propel readers forward into the next scene, too. But does everything you write need to be in scene? You’ll spend the day analyzing well-constructed scenes, and trying successful techniques on our own work. Discover how to render the most important events in scene and cut to the chase with relevant summary. We’ll also discuss the most essential scene in your opening, that infamous inciting incident. How might it not only launch your plot, but point towards the ending, too?

*In class critique:* Consult critique schedule.

*In class exercise:* Inciting incident.

*Assignment:* Optional inciting incident exercise too hand in for instructor feedback.

**Day 3: Characters and Conflicts.**

Readers love conflicted characters they can empathize with. Conflict forces characters to make choices. The more difficult the choices, the greater the conflict, the better the payoff for the character—and your novel. Empathetic characters aren’t idyllic stereotypes of the girl or boy next door. Imperfections make your characters believable, and give them something to progress toward in the story. You’ll look at your cast of characters and identify quirks and scars, strengths and weaknesses. What does each character desperately desire more than anything else in the world? How do you set that up on the opening and make it hard to get without creating contrived characters? We’ll also explore how to introduce important characters that matter most, and even cut or consolidate those that don’t standout. One-the-spot exercises may include character sketches, character webs and “plot sparks” that force your characters out of the frying pan and into the fire. Start a plot point outline to help you keep turning up the heat from beginning all the way to the end.

*In class critique:* Consult critique schedule.

*In class exercise(s):* 1) The necessity of a good first impression—even for the bad guys. 2) Begin a point outline.
Assignment: Optional exercise for instructor feedback.

**Day 4: Place and Time.**

If readers don’t know where the scene’s taking place, who’s in it, what’s happening, or why they should care, things get stalled fast. Setting is a big part of that. But how do you ground without overstating, orient without describing every detail in the room? How much scenery do you need in a scene? Is setting more than just place? What about time period, class, politics, and more? We’ll look at examples in established writer’s work to find a balance between setting, atmosphere and your plot’s goals. We’ll also weave setting into your outline.

*In class critique:* Consult critique schedule.

*In class exercise(s):* 1) Setting the novel, setting the scene. 2) Plot point outline continued.

Assignment: Optional post-workshop revision exercise.

**Day 5: Voice and Vision.**

Is your voice the next best thing in publishing? How do you get your unique style, ideas, plot twists and turns into your opening pages, and make agents and editors proud to offer your work to an eager audience? We’ll discuss genre & genre bending, passion and productivity, growing from setbacks, celebrating successes and fueling dreams.

*In class critique:* Consult critique schedule.

*In class exercise:* 1) Vision and vulnerability. 2) Plot point outline.

Assignment: Revision exercises for you to take home.

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 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.

How to apply

Please contact the instructor about possible workshop 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 10 pages of your manuscript to Angela Rydell, ajrydell@wisc.edu. Please attached as .doc, .rtf or pdf. Manuscript pages must be double-spaced using 12-point Times
New Roman and one-inch margins. Please paginate. If you’re converting, be sure each paragraph is indented before you hit send. If you are accepted, the instructor will ask you to forward your one-page synopsis and first fifty pages for sharing with the class.

Angela Rydell, MFA, has taught for the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies since 2006, including Writers’ Institute, Weekend with Your Novel, Write-by-the-Lake, School of the Arts, and online writing courses. Her ongoing novel critique group and “Powerful Plots” weekend workshops have helped dozens of novelists structure their novels over the years. Angela’s a novelist, short fiction writer, poet and critique coach. Her work has appeared in The Sun, Indiana Review, Prairie Schooner, Crab Orchard Review, Beloit Poetry Review, Alaska Quarterly Review and other journals. She is a recipient of Poets & Writers’ Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award, winner of the Portland Review’s inaugural Flash Fiction Friday contest, a Pushcart Prize nominee, a finalist in the American Short(er) Fiction Prize & Passage North’s Neutrino Short-Short Prize, and has received honorable mention in the New Millennium Writings Awards. She lives in Madison, WI, and is at work on True North, a novel about an unemployed Wisconsin weatherman trying to make life more predictable. She’s on Facebook posting writerly tips here: https://www.facebook.com/AngelaRydellInstructorPage

What previous students have said about Angela’s novel workshops:

“Focused intensity on concrete steps for driving a story. Especially forced me to recognize several flaws in my storyline. Thank you!” ~John Keefe, Sauk City, WI (So You Want to Write a Novel)

“Very tangible lessons combined with just enough time to practice them. Really great for beginners or more practiced writers." ~Rochelle Isaacson, Appleton WI (Enticing Openings) "It was highly useful, without fluff." ~Elijah Meeker, Madison, WI (So You Want to Write a Novel)

“I really benefited from Angela’s Critiques… An excellent class. Very helpful." ~John Walsh, Madison, WI (Saturday Novel Critique Group)

“I’d give the class a ‘10’!" ~Sandy Mahony, Mukwonago, WI (Enticing Openings)

“I liked that the course put a very clear structure to much of what I thought I needed to do in beginning a novel.” ~Larry Lasee, DePere, WI (So You Want to Write a Novel)

“Practical information and exercises on organizing ideas and bringing out your story.” ~Carol Larson, Brooklyn WI (Powerful Plots)

“Very well organized and through-provoking. It gave me a lot of insight in my own work. Angela was an excellent speaker. Clear. To the point." ~Elena Bender, Verona WI (Powerful Plots)