

# MWA UNIVERSITY – CLASS DESCRIPTIONS

## 1. After the Idea

"If you wish to be a writer, write." But how? You've got the great idea, the one that won't let you go, that embellishes itself as you walk around your day. How do you grow that kernel into a compelling story? This class gives you the tools to turn a good idea into a great novel. Bring a notebook and writing utensil.

Included in this class:

- a. Creating a road map to transform an interesting idea into a full-length novel in seven manageable steps.
- b. Brainstorming and free-writing to flesh out the heart of the novel.
- c. Crafting a compelling, one-sentence summary of your idea.
- d. Creating a character and setting bible to give the people and places in your novel depth and create consistency within standalones and across a series.

## 2. Dramatic Structure & Plot

Since Aristotle, the three-act structure for storytelling has reigned supreme, but does it still hold true for modern crime writers? Is it the best way, or the only way, to tell your tale? Is plotting simply sequencing your scenes or is there more to it? This class will teach you the art of storytelling and plotting so your manuscript will attract the attention it deserves.

Included in this class:

- a. Does the three-act structure still work for contemporary crime writing?
- b. What can the novelists learn from the screenwriter's bag of tricks?
- c. Plotting: Not just one damn thing AFTER another but rather one damn thing BECAUSE of another.
- d. Outlining: Necessary or a waste of time? Good planning or confining?

## 3. Setting & Description

"I guess God made Boston on a wet Sunday," Raymond Chandler once said, and this seemingly tossed-off remark has much to teach us about the gentle arts of setting and description. This class will guide you through the process and potential pitfalls of choosing a setting, and explore the ways in which descriptive passages can be honed to illuminate characters and themes.

Included in this class:

- a. What we talk about when we talk about setting – is it just a place, or another character in the story?
- b. There's a certain slant of light – making the small details count.
- c. From the House of Usher to the mean streets -- lessons from the masters.
- d. How much is too much? The telling detail versus the tedious factoid.

#### **4. Building Character**

From Agatha Christie's Miss Marple to Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins, character is arguably the most memorable element of a mystery novel and a series. How do you create a full-realized unique protagonist that leaps from the page? How should you develop secondary characters as well as the protagonist's nemesis? This class will challenge you to eliminate cardboard characterizations and create something new and fresh.

Included in this class:

- a. Interview your lead character to find what makes him/her tick.
- b. Point of view. Should you go first or third person? Who's telling the story?
- c. Secondary characters and the nemesis. How much is too much and too little?
- d. Dialogue: Let's be real.

#### **5. Writing as Re-writing**

If editing was good enough for William Shakespeare, it's good enough for you. More often than not, it's the things you remove, the tweaks you make, and the tinkering you do, that are the difference between another slush pile manuscript and a new book contract. There are some easy methods to learn and follow to help you develop an editorial ear. Give us fifty minutes and we'll give you a better chance with agents and editors.

Included in this class:

- a. When to edit: Should I edit as I go or first get it all down on paper?
- b. Serving the story: What stays and what goes.
- c. How to recognize clunky language and overwriting: The art of reading aloud.
- d. Avoiding the most common mistakes: Death to adverbs and clichés.
- e. Less is more: If your word count is at 100,000 and you're halfway done, something's wrong.

#### **6. The Writing Life**

"I write when I'm inspired, and I see to it that I'm inspired at nine o'clock every morning." That's how Peter DeVries balanced art and craft. What's the reality of the writing life?

The journey from your great idea to 90,000 words will mean hours of solitude. Days of self-doubt. Revision. Rejection. And then--rejoicing. You'll often say: "I wish someone had explained this to me!" In this class, they will.

Included in this class:

- a. Commitment. How experienced authors get going and stay on track.
- b. Calendars and computers. Secrets of organization, mechanics and making your deadlines.
- c. Courage. Oh, you'll hit the wall. How to pick yourself up-and stay inspired.
- d. Confidence. Every best-seller was a beginner once. You'll get the inside scoop from those who have made the journey.