

From Essay to Memoir

This is a sample syllabus. Actual course topics and assignments may vary by instructor and class.

Week 1

Introduction. What this class will cover. Personal essay versus memoir.

Assignment: Post an essay-length piece that you think forms the backbone of your memoir; write a 1-2 paragraph summary of how you see this essay being expanded into a full-length narrative.

Week 2

The importance of character development. Understanding the change your protagonist goes through. What does your protagonist need?

Assignment: Identify the major change that you as the protagonist went through; write a scene or essay (1000 words or less) in which your protagonist undergoes a change.

Week 3

The hero's journey. Defining the twelve steps of the hero's journey. Adapting the narrative model to fit your memoir. Identifying the main steps in your story.

Assignment: Organize your story according to the steps outlines in the Hero's Journey; post your outline.

Week 4

The theme question. What is your story about? Using the theme to structure your story. How to frame your theme question.

Assignment: Formulate your theme question; post a scene or essay that centers around your theme.

Week 5

Index cards: How to organize the building blocks of your story. What makes a scene?

Assignment: Index card organization; post a revised outline, keeping theme and character development in mind.

Week 6

The book proposal. How to land an agent and sell your book. The main elements of a book proposal. The overview What your book is about and why it needs to be written.

Assignment: Draft the overview section of your proposal.

Week 7

The book proposal: part 2. Writing the annotated table of contents and building in suspense. Figuring out your structure. How many chapters and what length?

Assignment: Draft your annotated table of contents.

Week 8

Wrapping up. A few words about not writing and tips to avoid procrastination. Resources for the pitching and submission process.

Assignment: Post a sample chapter or up to 3 essays.