

Nonfiction Book Writing

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

Week 1

Introduction. Instructor's statement of purpose and qualifications. Intentions and goals of the course. Don't bury the lead: answering the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your book.

Assignment: Write the overview and elevator pitch for your book.

Week 2

Aristotle always said, "Every story must have a beginning, middle, and an end." How to present a book-length narrative arc through an annotated table of contents.

Assignment: Write 7-10 page annotated table of contents.

Week 3

Focus groups, schmocus groups. Publishers look into the rearview mirror to predict the future. Using your research to create a list of 3-7 comparable/completive titles. Sample comp titles section.

Assignment: Write 3-7 comp titles.

Week 4

And people think it's hard to name a baby. How to come up with a million dollar title. And what about the pesky step-children—subtitles?

Assignment: Come up with a solid working title and subtitle.

Week 5

Talent not required. Revising, revision, and more revision. Writing a publishable chapter.

Assignment: Write a 12-15 page chapter.

Week 6

An ounce of revision is worth a pound of pay. Staying on top of your revisions promptly after workshops.

Assignment: Revise overview, table of contents, comp titles, and chapter.

Week 7

Actually, you are the lucky ones: Why selling nonfiction to publishers is so much easier than selling fiction. How to write a book proposal. Sample, sold book proposal.

Assignment: Write your bio and a publicity/marketing plan for your proposal.

Week 8

Voice, craft, and writing the actual book.

Assignment: Write another 12-15 page chapter.

Week 9

Stop, drop, and Keep Your pole in the water: How to find the right pond in which to hook the best agent. Sample query letter.

Assignment: Write another 12-15 page chapter.

Week 10

The future is now: How to keep your momentum driving forward after the class is over with writing partner(s), writing group(s), deadlines, attitudes, and goals. A look at former students who have sold books.

Assignment: Write a query letter.

Week 11

Risky business: An ambitious discussion of (nearly) everything you'll need to know on choosing an agent, agency agreements, advances, royalties, publishing contracts, and etiquette, what to expect (or not) from your agent and editor.

Assignment: Write another 12-15 page chapter.

Week 12

We hardly knew ~~ye~~ one another: Summary of the last 12 weeks with key lessons and encouragement on the writing as well as the business side, including an anecdotal report on the current nonfiction market.