

INTERMEDIATE AUTOFICTION: Nail Your Protagonist to Find Your Plot

Course Schedule & Outline

Writers in this class meet twice a month from April 7 through July 14, 2026.

- A monthly lecture/discussion attended by the full class of 8 writers.
- A monthly workshop made up of the instructor and a subgroup of four class members — writers are assigned to subgroup A or B at the first class meeting — who meet once each month to review class exercises and to give and receive feedback on their works in progress.

April 7, 2026 — **WELCOME** Introductions, Schedule, Workshop Process for Subgroups.

Lecture 1 - Three Essential Steps to Nail Your Protagonist in Chapter One

- 1) Differentiate YOU as protagonist (from You as author and You as narrator) with a distinct voice
- 2) Define your protagonist's *story problem* (weakness, false belief, blind spot)
- 3) Choose a *precipitating incident* that best reveals this problem and establishes a *surface want*.

Exercise for Workshop: Be prepared to articulate 1) a single protagonist who is some version of YOU 2) a precipitating incident 3) a surface want 4) your protagonist's voice 5) an overall tone/feeling for your story

Workshop A (04/14) & Workshop B (04/21) Writers give and receive feedback on first chapters and workshop exercise responses.

April 28

Lecture 2: Going Deeper into Your Protagonist Using a Trauma Perspective (also applicable to story question or theme)

- (How to) apply a trauma-informed perspective to your protagonist's story problem and use it to identify the deeper want that will drive their *character arc*.

- Identify *escalating complications* resulting from the mismatch between surface vs. deeper want.
- How specific trauma experiences can shape behavior and verbal expressions (inner/outer) and create complications for your protagonist.
- Choose a POV, tense, and timeline to carry these complications.
- Purpose and placement of flashbacks and flash forward

Exercise for Workshop: Map out and define six points in your protagonist's trauma-informed character arc 1) What did 'before' look like i.e., normal life 2) the precipitating incident that makes normal life impossible 3) the mismatch between their surface and deeper want 4) the personal trauma underlying this mismatch 5) three major complications that raise the stakes 6) the fundamental change they must make before achieving their true desire.

Workshop A (05/05) & B (05/12) Writers give and receive feedback on second chapters and character arc exercise responses.

May 26

Lecture 3: Protagonist Break Point as Story Climax

- Story elements before, during and after the break point in your protagonist's character arc, including:
 - (How) Protagonist's acting out of trauma informs and shapes their breaking point and the aftermath
 - Allies and enemies (internal and external) mirror character change or lack thereof in response to rising complications.
 - Resistance and surrender building to a final test and climax
 - Uses of narration, reliable and unreliable, to build tension
- Depicting protagonist's changing internal and external realities in the climax and dénouement.
- Endings: Varieties of resolved ('happy') and unresolved (ambiguous) endings

Exercise for Workshop: Identify your protagonist's key ally and their primary antagonist and how these characters reflect and effect key points in their character arc.

Workshop A (06/02) & B (06/09) Writers give and receive feedback on a chapter from their WIP that contains scenes involving protagonist's key ally and/or primary antagonist, in light of exercise responses.

June 23 Lecture 4: Revise, Revise, Revise

An in-depth look at manuscript revision, how to incorporate feedback and the process for reviewing and revising your first draft with an eye on: character, voice, point of view, action and dialogue, beginning and ending, language, sensory details, plot, theme or story question — and, if applicable, trauma.

Exercise for Workshop: Re-examine your story beginning and ending to see if the story question you raise in Chapter One is answered in your last chapter.

Workshop A (06/30) & B (07/07) Writers give and receive feedback on their opening and closing pages in light of their response to the story question exercise.

July 14 Lecture 5: How to Discover your Readers and Choose a Publishing Strategy

Final class discussion: self-assessments about progress made on WIPs. Questions on next steps. It's a wrap.

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