

Instructor Letter

Where to Begin: Steps Toward Creating a World

Hello everyone,

Thanks for signing up for this eight-week course. Together, we'll be practicing the key elements of fiction, figuring out how to use them to get a new story started, and improve ongoing work.

During the first five weeks I'll suggest readings and writing exercises that will help build your skills in characterization, dialogue, setting and backstory—all aimed at shaping a vivid world in the opening pages of a new work. Then, in the final three weeks of the course, we can workshop up to ten pages of writing that you've produced during the class, or that you've been working on outside of class (and hopefully improving with ideas from the course). You can tailor all of the exercises in this course to fit your previous writing; for instance, you might develop the backstories of your favorite characters from a piece you've been working on. I will also continue to give optional writing prompts for participants who want to keep generating new materials.

There is no prerequisite for the class. This might be your first attempt at creative writing, or you might arrive with previous work that you'd like to revise. Although the lessons will focus on fiction, they should be relevant to projects in memoir or creative journalism, and you can share work in those genres in the final weeks of the class. Most readings will come from the *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, the shorter 8th edition, so you might want to pick up a cheap copy, though I'll try to choose famous stories that can be found online at various links.

In the first week of class I hope to skype with those of you who are inclined, to get acquainted and have faces to match our written interactions. We'll also have at least one other opportunity for video interaction before the end of the term, as well as plenty of online discussion. The emphasis in discussion will be on constructive comments, helping each other move forward. Your level of participation in all aspects of the course can depend on your schedule and writing interests.

I'm looking forward to working with you,

Laura Brodie