

**Course Title: The Game of Publishing (online)**

**Course Code: EGL 59 W**

**Instructor: Sarah Stone**

**Spring 2016**

### **Course Summary:**

“A win-win or positive-sum outcome means everyone wins, usually through cooperation and joint problem solving. A win-lose or zero-sum outcome means that one side wins only if the other side loses; it is an adversarial approach. A lose-lose or negative-sum outcome means all the parties lose. These terms originated in game theory, which comes from the field of mathematics and analyzes behavior in specific situations.” (from the U.S. Institute of Peace)

It’s a little-known secret that publishing can be a win-win game, a process of discovery that teaches writers more about the world, their own work, and what they really want and can achieve. The best way to get your writing out into the world, whether you are working toward your first publication or making the jump to writing full-time, is to find the match between your own particular gifts and the right venues for your work. This course is for writers at any level—from those wondering if they even want to take their work public all the way through to those with polished full-length books ready to find publishing partners, and everyone in between.

When we have a community to support us, the steps toward publishing can turn from a dizzying array of options into a game where we learn to work with the rules, strategies, and—yes—the element of chance that can take us toward publication. The writers in this course will have a chance to map out the terrain of the contemporary publishing scenes for both fiction and nonfiction—including magazine, traditional large- and small-scale book publishing—and also to learn about the best self-publishing options. Although our approach will largely be positive, we’ll also learn to avoid some of the less useful approaches to publishing, in ways that can save substantial amounts of time, money, and energy.

In our weekly exercises and discussion, we will discover each writer’s strongest material, overcome blocks and common writers’ fears, provide accountability, develop strategies for query letters that do not sound as if they were written by a robot, identify intuitive social media strategies for both introvert and extrovert writers, and come up with customized lists of publications or publishing partners. You will finish the course with an action plan for playing the publishing game on your own terms. It won’t be all planning, though. We’re actually going to start playing together, with individual moves based on the discoveries you make about what you want and need as a writer, and your best long and short-term options in the varied landscape of today’s publishing world.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default administrative option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - This is the option I recommend: It will give you some sense of accountability but with fewer requirements than a letter grade. You can receive credit by submitting at least four of the exercises (during the course of the quarter—not all at the end), commenting on your classmates' exercises, and actively participating in most discussions.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Grades are based on your doing the work and being fully present and part of our processes rather than on the “quality” of your fiction so that you can feel free to take risks and experiment with your work. For this option, you will also need to submit five exercises (during the course of the quarter—not all at the end), comment on your classmates' workshop pieces, and actively participate in most discussions.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Since breakthroughs happen at different speeds and different times—troughs that appear endless to us may be followed by huge leaps, but sometimes not for a while—your grade will be based on turning in your work and writing helpful commentaries on your fellow writers' exercises. It doesn't work to grade exercises based on “quality,” because a) this kind of grading is highly subjective; and b) writing for a grade gets in the way of your sense of passion and inner purpose (this is always true, but perhaps most of all when the writing has to do with your query letters or publishing plans). Still, to get the most helpful reading from the rest of us, please make sure your writing is fairly well copy-edited for obvious spelling and grammar errors and is on time.

Your peer responses should be thoughtful and detailed enough to be useful to the writer and should demonstrate evidence that you are absorbing the lessons. Note the importance of turning in your work (including critiques) on time, and keep in mind that computers break down, people get sick, bosses suddenly come up with large last-minute projects, and so forth. You may want to post your assignments and workshop responses before the deadlines, especially if you know you find deadlines challenging. You'll get the most out of the class if you stay regularly active in the forums and put attention into the reading and your responses to your classmates as well as your own work. Of course, life comes along, and there may be moments when you have to miss an exercise or can't comment as

fully as usual on others' writing exercises. Email me if you run into trouble so we can figure out a solution.

### **Course Readings:**

There will be no required reading for the course. Each week we'll have optional readings related to the week's topic, along with suggestions for further reading. Since the contemporary publishing scene changes so quickly, and everyone has different goals and interests, these suggestions will form the basis for individual reading lists of recommended websites, articles, and books about publishing.

### **Writing Exercises:**

We'll have exercises every week, some a necessary part of the class, others optional. Some of these will help you discover your best markets or venues, others will raise your awareness of what you need to do to actually send out your work (We'll set up the practices and systems that help you with both the time-management and accountability that help turn good intentions into actual submissions.) Should you be looking for publishers or publishing your own work? Is there some alternative to "marketing" for getting your work into the world and finding readers? (You may have guessed that I firmly believe there is.) With the help of instructor and peer feedback, each participant will practice query letters and synopses; consider what to include in approaches to literary and commercial magazines, editors, or agents; and create individual publishing plans.

### **Weekly Routine:**

Each week, you'll log onto Canvas, our online platform, and work through the week's module, which will include my lecture (a set of art/craft/process thoughts to start the week), writing and reading assignments, any optional materials or links, and other announcements. The lecture and assignments for the coming week will be available on the Friday before the week begins, and the reading assignments will be available two weeks in advance. This way, if you know you're going into a busy period, you can get ahead on your work. Throughout the course, we'll have ongoing discussions of readings, the publishing industry, your own process, and the progress you're making on your own submissions plan and actions, and other questions and ideas that help you in getting your work to its readers.

**MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY:** Post your responses to the readings and discussion questions, respond to the work of your peers, ask any questions you have. I'll come into the online classroom at least three times during the week—generally on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—and will respond to work in the order in which it was posted (responding to required work before additional discussions, in order to make sure everyone is getting their responses). I read all of your responses to each other as well and chime in when I have something to add. If there are more posts than I can do justice to at one time, I'll get to the rest when I return to the classroom. I also check email at least once each week day, in case of urgent questions, and will email you all if there's some announcement or discussion thread I want to make sure we all see.

**WEDNESDAY:** Your writing assignments will be due by 2:00 pm Pacific Time (PT) every Wednesday (all times in the course are Pacific Time). You're welcome to post earlier, including the weekend ahead of time, if that suits your schedule better. Usually, as long as you're posting by the deadline, you will also receive my feedback on these pieces by Friday. Otherwise, I'll get to them as soon as I can in the following week. The earlier you post, the more time the rest of us have to respond to your writing and ideas.

**FRIDAY:** Every week, everyone will read and respond to at least three other students' writing exercises by 4:00 pm PT on each Friday (and more if you have the time, and earlier if it works for you).

**WEEKENDS:** Here is a chance for you to get ahead on the week's work if you wish to post exercises or responses to discussion questions for the following week. I'm offline on the weekends and am a believer in the benefits of taking an Internet break and restoring our single-tasking brains and our ability to concentrate. If it works for you to post on the weekends, though, please do. Come by the "classroom" whenever it works for you. The beauty of an online class is that we can all do our work when our schedules permit; we don't have to be working simultaneously. So log on when it's convenient for you, morning or night, weekday or weekend.

At the end of the week, we move into a new week in the forum. On Monday, once I've responded to the final postings over the weekend, the previous week will become closed for posting, though it will remain available for reading throughout the course. If you are late with an assignment (Friday or later), please post it in the new week, where there will be a thread for work from previous weeks. This is a way to make sure that we keep moving forward, and that no one's submissions get overlooked.

### **Chat/ZOOM:**

We'll have a weekly live video chat/ZOOM session/live office hour on Thursdays from 12-1:00 pm PT for the first two weeks of the term and the final week as well. In the weeks in between, I'll be available by appointment during those hours for anyone who wants a brief one-to-one chat about their own particular publishing situation and strategy. These sessions are an audio/video mixture of office hour and informal discussion of publishing. I record and upload the chats (you'll have a link, but it won't be searchable), so you can watch them even if you can't attend. Since everyone has different work hours (and we're in multiple time zones), attendance is optional. Our primary place for conversations and classwork will always be in our online discussions.

### **Etiquette and Acceptable Online Behavior:**

It can sometimes be hard to understand tone online, whether in email or on the boards. As much as possible, let's give each other the benefit of the doubt. If someone has said something that feels problematic, you can email them to work it out privately (by clicking on their name in the post). And please let me know as well if you would like me to step in and assist you. The vast majority of misunderstandings just come from each of us living out our own narratives and seeing through our own blinders. That said, very occasionally

something does need to be worked out. So let's do it with as much affection and compassion as possible.

Keep in mind that some people are in a moment of their life in which the course can be central, others have multiple outside obligations. If all you can do is the minimum requirements, it's still enough to begin playing the publishing game, and to be a full member of our classroom community. Don't worry about what anyone else is doing! To help keep the workload manageable and to make sure that you're getting your own writing done even as you work on getting that writing into the world, if you are pressed for time in a week, here's an order of priorities:

1. Post your exercises each week. Post on time to give everyone the maximum time to respond (if necessary, pretend that your work is due a day early—great practice for making friends with your editors).
2. Write thoughtful responses for your colleagues (at least three per week, and more if you have time, rotating responses so that the later posters get some as well—i.e., if someone already has three responses, move on to pieces that don't have as many comments, coming back to respond to others only if you have time).
3. Engage as fully as you can in the reading and process discussions, but when you're busy, you can post just a paragraph or so and still learn from thinking about the lessons and questions for that week. You might well post your paragraph or more of discussion response as part of a dialogue with someone else, so that we have a real conversation going on in ways that support each of you and the group as a whole in your publishing process.

### **And from Stanford Continuing Studies:**

Students in this course are expected to behave with good academic citizenship. Good academic citizenship essentially means respect and honesty. It includes professionalism, fairness, and generosity to fellow students; openness to suggestions from fellow students and instructors; and reasonable expectations about the course and the instructor. Students are asked to treat both their instructor and their colleagues with the same respect that they would like to receive. The kinds of activities that will not be tolerated include repeatedly stirring controversy, insulting, or broadly characterizing large groups of people (e.g., women, members of a particular race), fixating on another student whose views are different, seeking confrontation, being dismissive of other students' comments or writing, seeking to undermine an instructor's authority, and demanding an unreasonable or disproportionate amount of attention from the class or the instructor.

### **Preliminary Schedule:**

Here is a preliminary schedule for our topics and activities this term. In each week we'll have a mixture of lectures, exercises, and readings to demystify publishing, including

magazine, traditional large- and small-scale book publishing, and a variety of self-publishing options. You'll also have weekly exercises (with feedback from both instructor and class members) to discover your strongest ideas and material and to figure out how they intersect with publishing options. Since so many of the difficulties for writers are internal, as well as external, we'll have an ongoing discussion thread to address blocks and common writers' fears and to provide accountability.

Keep in mind that, since we're covering so much ground, we'll be looking at overviews of each topic, and that there's always much more to know. Still, by the time we finish a week, you should have the tools and information to know what you still need to learn and what resources will help you out, including where and how to acquire additional knowledge about the constantly changing publishing industry.

### **Week One: The Publishing Scene and the Individual Writer**

In the first week, we'll begin both by exploring your own ideas, projects, and background and taking a bird's-eye look at the history and nature of the publishing industry.

### **Week Two:**

You'll have a choice of readings and exercises to help you more deeply understand your own goals and aims, as well as whatever blocks you may have (internal or external) to getting your work to its readers. We'll also do work on niches and a publishing survey to help you find your work's kin and likely venues.

### **Week Three:**

Combining the work on your own ideas and on publishing options, we'll consider best practices in reaching out to editors. We'll work with examples to practice those non-robotic query letters for magazine submission for fiction and nonfiction, mainstream, and literary or genre.

### **Week Four:**

We'll move from magazines to traditional and innovative forms of book publishing, including nonfiction and fiction book proposals and novel submissions. Do you need an agent? Which of the traditional ways of finding an agent still work? What other options exist? How about small versus large presses—What are the real advantages and disadvantages of each? We will learn about and practice book descriptions/synopses, a crucial skill for both traditionally published and indie writers.

**Week Five:**

This unit is all about self-publishing, including finding your publishing partners and evaluating whether self-publishing is a reasonable option for your work. We'll do a practice game plan, so that if you decide this may be the option for you, you'll know exactly what your next moves are likely to be (and where to go for real, non-hyped information).

**Week Six:**

We'll take a look at what it means to “market” work, how to reach readers in a way that feels good and manageable to you and plays to your strengths, including social media solutions for introvert and extrovert writers. This will include information about websites, Twitter, Facebook, bookstore tours, talks, and other online and IRL ways of building your community. This is also the week when you'll make your “next steps” plan, bringing together your discoveries from the course and setting up accountability systems to move forward after the course ends.