Wendy Goldman Rohm, The Rohm Literary Agency ©2019

*Syllabus, 12-Week Online Master Class*

Ways of Seeing

*Book development course for authors of fiction and nonfiction*

with

Wendy Goldman Rohm

*NY Times Best-Selling Author and Literary Agent*

**--Classes meet online once a week, live with Ms. Rohm. See particular class**

**schedule for your group.**

**--You will be receiving the login instructions by email a few days prior to class. No special equipment is needed. You will be using the audio built into your computer, or a headset if you are in a noisy environment.**

**--In addition to the live classes, printed lectures are posted to writers every week prior to the class. You will also receive notes and editing on your work each week, returned to you individually by email.**

**--Assignments are due each week 24 hours prior to our live classroom time, or by private arrangement with instructor.**

**You will be given a list of suggested reading each week, for discussions on structure, plot, and other ingredients of narrative.**

**Week 1**

Introduction and Overview: Getting to the Essence. What is a great book?

Whether you’re just starting your book, or fine-tuning a manuscript or book proposal, sharpening your focus is key. Our opening session will help you start to lay the foundation for the creation of your best possible book.

Assignment 1. Share what you hope to gain from this course and any other

background info you’d like to provide about yourself and your project. Write a one-paragraph blurb about your book, similar to what might appear under the title on the NY Times bestseller list. Why should editors and agents be eager to read your book?

**Week 2**

We will discuss the ingredients of narrative, the building blocks of your book, and take our first step into your manuscript, whether fiction or nonfiction.

We explore place/setting, character, theme, dialogue, temporal frame (time envelope), belief systems, point of view, and how to transform inert information into dynamic “scenes.”

Assignment 2:

Submit the first chapter or scene of the book, with attention to the opening setting and establishing a problem or challenge, as explored during class.

Additional exercise for nonfiction authors:

Draft an Overview that clearly but broadly states what your book will cover, its sources (which for nonfiction writers may include original interviews, first-person observations, other references) and an evaluation of what makes your book unique versus other titles on the market.

**Week 3**

Constructing Scenes, and the Role of Research, Interviews, Reference Material, and Personal Experience

Assignment 4: Nonfiction authors will make a bullet list, organized by chapter, of all information you’ve collected thus far, and information you still need to gather, including: people you’d like to interview, existing research reports from experts and organizations, places you need to visit, or, in the case of memoirs, a list of scenes you need to explore or resources to enhance your historical accounts of real places.

Fiction writers will break their story into scenes, and learn to recognize how to weave background information into a strong foreground story that moves forward, carried by the voice of a narrator.

**Week 4**

A Primer on Dramatic Structure No Matter Your Topic

Many authors don't like the discipline of outlining and structural concerns, thinking these will kill the free flow of creativity. But the opposite is true. Mastering these things will save you a lot of time, and help you build a strong foundation for your best work.

While moving ahead into your chapters, we will look into how to build "narrative muscles," using disciplined tools to sculpt your raw material and create a strong story.

Assignment 3: Sketch out a preliminary draft of book organization; first draft of Table of Contents and chapter summaries. Do not worry if this first version is an improvisation—your content will change the deeper you get into the book. This Table of Contents and outline will be greatly expanded upon in coming weeks, homing in more specifically on plot, character, voice, and place. (If you are writing a self-help book or a book of essays that does not involve traditional plot and character concerns, we will look at the structural ingredients through a different lens that applies dynamically to your work.)

**Week 5**

The Role of Character

We will review your work so far and determine if your story has a list of characters who are essential to the story. Make a list of key and minor characters. Remember, a “place” can also play the role of a “character.” That is, if you are writing a book about New York, New York itself can become a character in the book. Or, perhaps the protagonist of the book is you, and you are writing a travel piece about New Orleans and its journey to becoming whole again. New Orleans, the city, can likewise become a “character.” Once you’ve made your character list, after each character, write a brief phrase that describes that character’s driving goal in the book. What does each character want? If you have been having trouble making your book more active, you will learn how to reveal character through action.

**Week 6**

The Plot Outline

Create a plot outline for your book, no matter the genre. Your previous, rough chapter outline will provide some raw material for this. You will merge your plot outline with your character outline and, slowly but surely, create a matrix for building the most dramatic novel or nonfiction book.

**Week 7**

Honing Your Unique Voice

Assignment 8: Push forward with a draft of your next 4,000 words, revising with the goal of going out on a limb: experiment with your most powerful voice.

**Week 8**

Creating a Production Schedule, Writing A Thousand Words A Day, and Other Antidotes to Writer’s Block

Based on what you’ve identified thus far as your remaining research tasks, and sketchy areas identified during the creation of your plot and character outlines, create a schedule for completing your remaining research. Next, with whatever raw material you’ve already gathered for your early chapters, do your best to write 1,000 words a day from this point forward, no matter how rough. Submit a 4,000-word draft of the beginning of your book

**Week 9**

The Evolution of Ideas

It is not uncommon for your book to change shape as you get more deeply into it. This is a wonderful opportunity for revelation, versus a deal-breaking problem. You’ll see why.

Assignment 9: What obstacles are you encountering in your writing? Class members will submit a revised 8,000-word draft of their work thus far, and identify their needs and goals at this point.

**Week 10**

The Art of Suspense

Works of nonfiction and fiction alike have opportunities for suspense. Revisit your draft thus far with a more polished 12,000-word version, paying particular attention to chapter openings and closings, climax points, background sections, and the flow of the story. Your goal is to create a real page-turner, using the structural guidelines presented in this week’s lecture and building upon what we’ve learned in earlier lectures.

**Week 11**

Collaboration Agreements, Photo Opportunities, Permissions, “Fair Use,” and other Author Concerns

Identify whether your book requires the use of photographs or other materials for which permissions are required, or if access to unique material will be possible only via a potential collaborator.

Fiction authors will continue to work on the particular challenges of their narrative. Other special-content-related questions should be submitted at this time. Your 16,000-word draft should also be ready.

**Week 12**

Agents, Editors, and Query letters, Tips and Questions

Write a query letter – we’ll troubleshoot what works and what doesn’t. Submit your 22,000-word draft if you’re ready (you WILL be if you’ve done your homework), pose final questions.

A full length manuscript normally will be between 80,000 – 90,000 words for a 300-page book. Many authors continue the class beyond week 12 to finish the full manuscript, and you will have an option to do that.

We will also discuss publishers’ expectations, non-standard book formats, and the market for short fiction and nonfiction.