

CRW 1101: Beginning Fiction Writing

Section 1649, W9-11, Matherly 051

Instructor: Colin Bailey Williams (cbwilliams@ufl.edu)

Office Hours: Thurs. 5:30pm and by appointment in Rolfs 501

Welcome to Beginning Fiction Writing. In this course, we will be looking at a variety of techniques used in fiction – this will not only prepare you to write compelling stories but also to refine your use of the English language. We will not only be working on fiction itself, but also on critical texts; since reading is one of the most essential skills needed in writing, the course will also involve several (short) critical responses to the stories we examine during our workshop. At the very least, this course will teach you basic writing and critical thinking skills as well as meeting the Gordon Rule word count.

Fiction is a loose term. For the purposes of this course, we can understand fiction to correspond to the concept of storytelling. Exposure to and analysis of fictional texts will help expand on this idea by taking apart and examining the inner workings of successful stories. Topics covered will include plot, character, chronology, dialogue, conflict and perspective. The stories covered will include works by contemporary authors as well as authors whose time has come and gone. By the time this course is over, students will learn how to express a wide spectrum of emotions, choose their words selectively, revise and refine their work and critically respond to both published authors and their peers in the classroom.

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Skill alone cannot teach or produce a great short story, which condenses the obsession of the creature; it is a hallucinatory presence manifest from the first sentence to fascinate the reader, to make him lose contact with the dull reality that surrounds him, submerging him in another that is more intense and compelling.

– **Julio Cortázar**

Course Policies and Requirements

Required Texts

- *The Art and Craft of Fiction* by John Kardsos (Bedford St. Martins)
- Course Pack TBD
- A novel or short story collection of your choice (to be approved by

For additional help with grammar and style, see *The Brief Penguin Handbook*. This book is helpful and well-organized, but not required for this course.

Other texts will be furnished by the instructor as needed.

Assignments and Grading

For this workshop, you will be required to write the following:

- Two 1500-word critical reading responses to stories read in class
- One 3000-word paper and presentation of a novel or collection of short stories (essentially, a book report). For this assignment, you will write a short paper to be graded by the instructor (~2000 words) **and** write an outline for a 5- to 10-minute presentation to be delivered at the beginning of class which will make up the rest of the 3000-word count. The “batting order” for these reports will be determined at the beginning of the semester.
- Two 1000- to 2000-word short stories (one of these may be substituted with a series of two or three 500- to 1000-word flash fiction pieces)
- One revised draft of an earlier story taking into account the feedback received both in workshop and from the instructor
- One 3000- to 5000-word short story. This will be your final story and will be graded by the instructor with detailed feedback at the end of the semester.

The course will also involve a number of in-class story exercises, flash fiction pieces, a prose poem or two and several other activities to be determined.

Assignment	Points and Percentage
Reading Response 1	75 (7.5%)
Reading Response 2	75
Book Report	150 (20%)
Short Story 1	100 (10%)
Short Story 2	100
Short Story Revision	100 (10%)
Short Story 3	200 (20%)
Participation	100 (10%)
In-class work	5x 20 (5x 2% = 10%)
Total	1000 (100%)

The grading for this course breaks down as seen above. A word on in-class work:

- Participation, as noted, is essential to the functioning of this course. The grade for participation will be based not only on your contribution to class discussions but also on the critical feedback you contribute during actual workshop sessions.
- The in-class work grade will be composed primarily of check, check-plus or check-minus grades given on the writing you complete during our course sessions. Think of it as a “quiz” grade to judge your participation during class.

Your final grade of 1000 points will thus be composed not only of your submitted assignments but your in-class contributions. There will not be opportunities for extra credit on assignments, but you may earn some extra credit points by attending the MFA@FLA Readings during the fall semester (they will be held on Thursday, dates TBD). Final grades may be appealed by contacting Carla Blount in the English Department.

Grading will be based partially on quality and partially on technical execution. A good story should be interesting to read and original in its style but should also follow the rules of spelling and grammar — as in art, technical mastery consists not only of incisive content but also of skill. Picasso had to learn how to draw a realistic human form before deconstructing one, after all.

Grades break down as follows:

A	4.0	930-1000 (out of 1000)	C	2.0	730-769
A-	3.67	900-929	C-	1.67	700-729
B+	3.33	870-899	D+	1.33	670-699
B	3.0	830-869	D	1.0	630-669
B-	2.67	800-829	D-	0.67	600-629
C+	2.33	770-799	E	0.0	0-599

Attendance and Expectations

This course is organized in a three-hour block in order to maximize the amount of time we have to discuss, critique, read and analyze. Because of this, you will be expected to arrive on time and to limit your total absences to **two missed courses maximum** (six course hours). Students missing more courses than this will **not pass** unless the circumstances surrounding the absences are extenuating (e.g., a family emergency, extreme illness, etc.). Please discuss any extenuating circumstances with the instructor **before** any absence.

Anyone more than **ten minutes** late to class will be counted tardy and three tardies will count as an absence.

In addition to the basic expectation of timely attendance, everyone in workshop is expected to help ensure that, for the three hours of the course, everyone feels comfortable, safe and willing to share their writing. Writing can be very personal – much of the best fiction draws to some extent on the author’s own experiences – and some students are not as comfortable sharing their writing as others. For this reason, all students should be careful to avoid bigotry, insensitivity, insults and derision. A successful workshop should be a critical environment but not a hostile one. If a student personally offends other students, he or she may be asked to leave, which could result in an unplanned absence.

Course Credit and Academic Honesty

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For questions about meeting course requirements, see the course catalog or contact the Registrar’s Office.

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. Plagiarism is a very serious offence and may result in a zero for an assignment, failure of the course and/or a referral to the Dean of Students' Office. If you copy some or all of your work from a website, a peer, a book, a scroll, a tablet, a hieroglyphic inscription or any other source without citation – **including yourself in past courses** – you are committing plagiarism. Instructors at UF use software that cross-checks all electronically-submitted work with existing publications and submissions, so plagiarism is relatively easy to check and consequences will be immediate.

For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php> and/or consult with the instructor.

Sexual Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. As mentioned in the section on attendance, hateful or discriminatory language will under no circumstances be tolerated. Anyone found harassing or degrading course participants will be subject to expulsion from the class, a referral to the Dean of Students and/or other disciplinary action. Students should immediately report any intimidating or harassing behavior.

For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

Students with Disabilities

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities or other special needs. Students who meet this description should contact the instructor and/or the Dean of Students prior to the course's first meeting so that any arrangements can be made.

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Course Timeline

8/21 Introduction to course and syllabus

Experiences with stories, getting into the detail, writing exercise
HW: Ch. 1-2, Alexie in Kardos

8/28 Details and Beginnings

Effective beginnings, hooking the reader, establishing voice, Hemingway shorts, choosing book report dates
HW: Ch. 3-4 in Kardos, d'Ambrosio story in packet

9/4 Living Your Characters

Persuasive perspective and personality in fictional characters, creating character description
HW: Ch. 5-6, Moore in Kardos, **write first reading response**

9/11 What the Writer Needs to Know

Due: First response

Outlining a story, knowing your outcome, building your characters, raising the stakes

HW: Ch. 7-8 in Kardos, Chekhov in packet

9/18 Beginning the Ending

Book report 1 _____

Understanding conflict and tension, using charged language, in-class activity 1 & discussion using flash fiction (Varma, Atwood, Colette), brainstorming

HW: Ch. 9 in Kardos, Sparks & flash fiction in packet, **stories 1.1 due 9/25**

9/25 Proper Revision

Book report 2 _____

Giving proper feedback, using respectful critical language

_____ and _____ **first workshop**

HW: Brockmeier and Saunders in Kardos, **stories 1.2 due 10/2**

10/2 Writing Efficiently

Book report 3 _____

When to condense and when to expand, what to leave out

_____ and _____ **first workshop**

HW: Pancake in packet, **stories 1.3 due 10/9**

10/9 Imitation and Thievery

Book report 4 _____

Channeling your influences, "meta-," referencing pop culture

_____, _____ and _____ **first workshop**

HW: Canin in packet, **stories 1.4 due 10/16**

10/16 Voice pt. 1

Book report 5 _____

Understanding your voice and perspective, in-class activity 2

_____, _____ and _____ **first workshop**

HW: Diaz in packet, **stories 2.1 due 10/23**

10/23 Voice pt. 2

Book report 6 _____

When to sound like what, understanding your audience, in-class activity 3

_____ and _____ **second workshop**

HW: James in packet, **stories 2.2 due 10/30**

10/30 Darkness and Light

Book report 7 _____

_____ and _____ **second workshop**

HW: write second reading response, **stories 2.3 due 11/6**

11/6 Fictionalizing

Due: second reading response

Book report 8 _____

Building in autobiography or biography, using the everyday
_____ and _____ **second workshop**
HW: Kafka and Dick in packet, **stories 2.4 due 11/13**

11/13 Horror, Adventure and Fantasy

Book report 9 _____

Writing the fantastical, surreality in fiction, in-class activity 4
_____ and _____ **second workshop**

HW: Russo in packet, **stories 2.5 due 11/20**

11/20 Writing Outside Yourself

Book report 10 _____

Writing young & old, stepping sensitively outside of your demographic, in-class activity 5
_____ and _____ **second workshop**

HW: **Final stories due 12/4**

12/4 The End

Final stories due

Class wrap-up and evals, holiday break!