

CRW 2100 Beginning Fiction Writing

Section 1655

Instructor: Travis Fristoe
Class Time: M, periods 9-11
Location: AND 21
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Office: 302 Tigert
Office hours: M,W 11am-12:30pm & by appointment

Required Texts

The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories (ed. by Ben Marcus)
CRW 2100 course packet – available at Target Copy (1412 W. Univ. Ave.)
Miss Lonelyhearts and Day of the Locust / Nathanael West

Recommended Texts

Elements of Style / Strunk and White
Writer's Digest Grammar Desk Reference / Lutz, Gary

Course Objective

During our semester together we will read, generate, and discuss short fiction. Critical thinking and precise writing will be our focus. We will study how writing functions on a nuts-n-bolts level. Not solely what a story *means* but also how it *works*. Do the assigned reading beforehand and be prepared to engage in lively discussion.

CRW 2100 has multiple, complimentary parts. The first half we'll discuss setting, tone, point of view, character, voice, narrative arc, etc.—the crucial elements of fiction. Our exploration of these stories will help as we attempt our own fictions. We will then workshop each other's stories in the second half of the course. This means giving specific, insightful, and constructive criticism.

Writing Requirement

This course meets the Writing Requirement of 6,000 words of written work that will receive feedback and a grade. All work must be completed to satisfy the Writing Requirement.

Assignment Requirements

The major written assignments in this class are 1-2 short stories (5-10 pages) and 1-2 critical essays (5-10 pages). A copy of all major assignments, including instructor comments, should be retained and handed in together at the end of the semester. This portfolio will be kept on file for a year and referenced in the event of a grade appeal.

Coursework (Grade Distribution)

Writing Journal/Exercises (10%)

We will often do short writing exercises. These are fun exercises meant to jumpstart your creativity and encourage you to experiment with language and techniques in a non-threatening environment. Nearly every meeting during the first half of the semester we'll start an exercise in class, which you'll then finish at home that week (for a total of 10 entries). Editing and revising are key.

Reading Responses (10 %)

For those class meetings that have published stories assigned as reading, you will write responses of 1-2 pages. If we are reading multiple stories, choose any one of them. The response should address one or more of the aspects of fiction (i.e., plot, structure, character, point of view, style, setting, theme). These exercises sharpen your critical thinking and help develop your voice.

Critical Essay on Craft (20%)

During the first half of the course you will write a formal 5-10 page essay. Choose one of the published stories we discussed in class and then analyze aspects of its craft. Our weekly readings and discussions should give you the critical vocabulary and understanding to write the essay. I can also help you develop your argument and assist in working through drafts.

First Short Story (20%)

Approximately 5-10 pages. You will produce your first short story while engaged in the study of craft. I do not dictate subject matter. Vampire romances will get the same treatment as a Hemingway knockoff. The quality of writing is what ultimately matters, not the genre. Do, however, create a story worth telling. This is daunting, I know. Revising & fearlessness will help. You're welcome to submit a draft of the story to me early to feedback and assistance.

Second Short Story OR Revision of First Short Story (20%)

For your final assignment you must:

(1) Write a new story, following the same guidelines as above. Having already written one story, however, you should have a better sense of your craft and voice; therefore this story may weigh more heavily on your final grade.

or

(2) Write a revision of your first short story (to be submitted along with a copy of the original draft). This must be a *significant* revision, taking into account the feedback you received during workshop.

or

(3) Submit another criticism essay. This must be new work and related somehow to the readings/topics addressed earlier in class.

Workshop Critiques (10 %)

In addition to the comments you make during class discussion, you must provide two typed copies (200 words min.) of critiques for each the stories submitted to workshop excepting your own. One copy is for me, the other for the story's author. Providing responses to your fellow writers is a fundamental element of the workshop; accordingly, you are expected to offer your peers the same high level of useful, pointed criticism you hope to receive.

Participation (10%)

You are expected to attend class regularly, participate fully in class discussions and also critique the work of your peers with diligence and respect. Failure to do any of these things will lower this portion of your grade. I also reserve the right, in cases of disrespectful workshop behavior or lack of adequate peer critique, to lower your individual story or paper grades accordingly.

Course Policies

Attendance

What happens in our class sessions is essential to meeting the requirements and objectives for the course; attendance is mandatory. If you must miss one class, it is not necessary to tell me why. I will assume you had a good reason and I don't judge between an excused and an unexcused absence.

However, missing class will prevent you from meeting the full requirements of the course, and if you miss more than one class, for any reason, it will affect your grade. We meet only once a week—the equivalent of three single-period classes. Three incidents of tardiness will count as one absence (this also includes leaving class early). **Miss 4 classes and you cannot pass the class.** Any work done in class (i.e., in-class writing assignments) cannot be made up. If you miss a class, do not expect me to contact you; you should contact me to see if you missed any important information.

Academic Honesty

All work in this course should be original and individual, unless I have made a group assignment. Evidence of collusion (someone helped you write the assignment), plagiarism (using someone else's published or unpublished words without acknowledgement), or multiple submissions (handing in the same paper to different classes) will lead to the university's procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the academic honor code.

Grade Complaints

A low grade on a single assignment will not prohibit you from earning a reasonable course grade if your work improves. If you have a complaint or are confused about a grade, contact me and I will discuss it with you, so that you can improve your work for the next paper.

Participating/ Civility

Actively participating in class will enhance your learning experience. I expect you to be interested, engaged, and prepared. In addition, please be courteous to and respectful of others—your fellow students and your teacher—at all times, even when you encounter diverse opinions. You will be asked to leave class if your behavior is disruptive or offensive in any way, including anything that denigrates others on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. Your dismissal will be considered an absence. Seriously.

Class participation will shift your grade one way or the other. This is a workshop based largely on class discussions.

Turning in Assignments

All papers must be submitted at the beginning of class on the specified date. They must be typed, using MLA manuscript format and 12-point Times New Roman or Garamond typeface, printed in black ink on 8-1/2" X 11" paper, with one staple in the upper left-hand corner. Each assignment is due by the beginning of class on the date specified. Late papers will not be accepted, period. I do not accept papers over email. They must be hardcopies, in class.

When you are going to be workshopped, you must bring copies for every person in the class, including me, the PREVIOUS WEEK, that is, the week before you are to be workshopped. If you miss this class, and fail to have a good reason or to contact me, you will fail that assignment.

Semester Course Schedule

Reading and writing assignments must be completed prior to the day they appear on the schedule. Come to class prepared to discuss the items listed for that day. Bring your textbook, packet, and journal to each class for reference. Note: The second half of the course may change depending on enrollment and our progress. Stories not in the Anchor collection or the Target packet will be distributed in class.

Week One – Welcome & Preparation – Aug. 26

Introduction to the course and syllabus. Discussion of writing journal/exercises. Meet your fellow writers. Grammar and style review.
Hollywood (prose poem) / Milosz, Czeslaw
Justin M. Damiano (comic) / Clowes, Daniel.

Two – Plot – Sept. 9

Generating story ideas. Reading as a writer.
Happy Endings / Atwood, Margaret
The Colonel (prose poem) / Forche, Carolyn
Sea Oak / Saunders, George
All American / Williams, Diane

Three – Choices & Detail – Sept. 16

Using detail in fiction. Florida & elsewhere.
Scarliotti and the Sinkhole / Powell, Padgett
Eyewall / Groff, Lauren
The Five Billion Names of God / Clarke, Arthur C.
In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd / Menendez, Anna

Four – Characters Made Real – Sept. 23

Fake & real. History, memory, and legacy.
Sharks and Suicide / Williams, Joy
Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders / Hemon, Aleksander
Cortez and Montezuma / Barthelme, Donald

Five – Who's Talking? – Sept. 30

Reliability of the narrator. Race, class, gender.
When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine / Lahiri, Jhumpa
The Paperhanger / Gay, William
The Old Dictionary / Davis, Lydia
Forever Overhead / Wallace, David Foster

Six – What the Air is Like There – Oct. 7

College and beyond.
Super Goat Man / Lethem, Jonathan
Tiny Smiling Daddy / Gaitskill, Mary
Drinking Coffee Elsewhere / Packer, ZZ
Torrige / Trevor, William

Seven – What Does It Mean? – Metaphor & Theme – Oct. 14

Kindness / Li, Yiyun
Wants / Paley, Grace
Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned / Tower, Wells

Eight – What Now? – Oct. 21

Critical essay drafts due. Peer review & editing workshop.

My Father's Suitcase (Nobel Prize acceptance speech) / Pamuk, Orhan

Nine – Reckoning – Oct. 28

Critical essay due.

2 novellas: Miss Lonelyhearts and Day of the Locust (2 novellas) / West, Nathanael.

10 – Nov. 4

Workshop begins! 4 stories TBA.

11 – Nov. 18

Workshop. 4 stories TBA.

12 – Nov. 25

Workshop. 4 stories TBA.

13 – Dec. 2 – Last Class

Workshop. 4 stories TBA.

14 – Dec. 9 – Optional individual conferences.

Wed. Dec. 11, 3pm. Your second short story OR a revision of your first short story is due.