

Required texts:

-*How Fiction Works* by James Wood

-Course Pack (available at Book It on NW 13th St. & University Ave., bottom floor of Holiday Inn, or at <http://book-it.myshopify.com/>)

-Either *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan or *And Then We Came to the End* by Joshua Ferris

Recommended text:

-*Writing Fiction*, 8th edition, by Janet Burroway

Course objectives:

1. To leave this course writing better than you did when you entered.
2. To leave this course reading better than you did when you entered.
3. To write fiction with more precision, force, and surprise than before.

Course format:

1. **Reading** - to be a great writer you must read.
2. **Writing** - to be a great writer you must write.
3. **Critiquing** - to be a great writer, you must critique thoughtfully and frequently, knowing that this close reading of another's prose should, in fact, help your own.

Beware: this course is reading intensive and writing intensive. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy.

Reading

Read. Class time is wasted if no one has anything to say about the reading. If I feel people are not reading, I will give quizzes. On the schedule, the "Readings" section tells you what you should read before the class on that date.

Writing

1. **Short creative exercises:** You will write short exercises, which will be assigned in class throughout the semester. Please always bring the completed exercise to class.
2. **Shorter critical response papers:** You will be required to write ten shorter critical response papers (see below).
3. **Longer critical response papers:** You will be required to write two longer critical response papers (see below).
4. **Story:** Twenty copies of your manuscript must be delivered one class before it is to be discussed. Your final story should be character-driven and written for an adult audience. Length: ten – fifteen pages.

Warning: *There is no late delivery.* There is no switching. No last-minute writing. Get the work done. And remember: You are responsible for knowing the basic conventions of style and usage—see Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*, or me, for guidance.

Critiquing in workshop

You will write comments on each workshop story: marginal notes in ink or pencil *and* a typed letter to the author. **Attach this letter to the piece and return it to the author at the end of class. You will also deliver one copy of this letter to me.** In order for the critique to be valuable, it needs to be balanced and SPECIFIC. There will be one story to which you will be the First Responder. This means I will expect you to begin the discussion. You should come in prepared to ask questions of the class, to give suggestions, and to point out what’s working in the story.

Shorter critical response papers

You must write **ten critical responses to the assigned readings.** I will give you more detailed suggestions for approaching and structuring these responses in class. You will be expected to apply James Wood’s *How Fiction Works* to the stories we’ve read. You will analyze the stories from a writerly perspective, regarding authorial choice. Each critical response must be a minimum of **500 words.** No late papers will be accepted. (Note that you will be required to turn in **ten responses**, though we have thirteen weeks with assigned readings. This means you may choose three weeks when you don’t respond, *though you should still read the stories.*)

Please avoid “rating” the stories with remarks of taste, such as “I hated this” or “I liked this.” We will work during the semester to develop your ability to talk and write about fiction, but please keep in mind that these are published, professional writers, meaning whether you enjoyed their writing or not, they have something to teach you about the practice and art of the written word.

These papers require no library or Internet research. Your ideas should be original and fresh. Just give me *your* take on the material. Do feel free, however, to research the lives of the writers. Sometimes it can be useful to know when a story was written and a little bit about the author’s biography.

It is required that you come to class each day fully prepared. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. **If you’re hoping for an easy A, this class is not for you.**

Longer critical response papers

1. **Midterm paper:** Near the middle of the semester, I will ask you to choose an author from a list. You will find a collection of their stories and write a 1,000-word critical response to the work. I will give you more details in class regarding the response, but it will involve a longer view of one author's work, taking into consideration style, voice, and content, as well as more specific reactions to individual stories.
2. **Final paper:** Near the end of the semester, I will ask you to choose a short novel from a list. You will read the novel and write a 1,000-word critical response to it. I will give you more details in class regarding this response, but it will require applying the critiquing skills you've developed over the course of the semester to a longer work.

Graded Assignments and Other Course Components

1. Class Participation*:	200 points
2. Creative exercises:	100 points (10 each)
3. Short response papers:	100 points (10 each)
4. Long response papers:	200 points (100 each)
5. First draft of story:	100 points
6. Final Story Revision:	300 points

1000 points total

**Class participation includes written and oral peer critiques as well as your presence and regular contributions in class. If I feel that I need to give reading quizzes, your performance on them will affect your participation grade.*

Attendance

You are allowed two absences *without explanation*, but **do not miss the day your story is workshopped**. Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story. Each absence after the second will lower your final grade by **one full letter**.

There is **no distinction** between excused and unexcused absences. Arriving late to class is considered an absence. **Leaving class early is considered an absence**.

Meeting Outside of Class

You must meet with me outside of class at least once during the semester. **Making an appointment with me is YOUR responsibility, not mine.**

Final Notes

1. You are responsible for checking your university emails. I will sometimes give or change assignments via email, as well as make any necessary changes to the schedule. *You are responsible for checking your email and approaching me with any questions.* If I have sent an email to you, I will assume you have read and understood it.
2. I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.
3. *Use of cell phones (with hands or ears) is NOT permitted in class.* (That is rude.)

The following is useful information on university policies you should know. Please read over the links provided.

Statement of Writing Requirement (WR).

This course can satisfy the UF requirement for Writing. For more information, see: <http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/writing-math.aspx#Writing>

Statement of student disability services.

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

Statement on harassment.

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://regulations.ufl.edu/chapter1/1006.pdf>

Statement on academic honesty.

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Statement on grades and grading policies.

Note: UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Assessment Rubric for critical papers

Below are the criteria by which I will grade your critical response papers.

CONTENT	Ideas and analyses should be complex and critical. Papers should offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Go beyond surface matter!
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Use an orderly structure that facilitates reading, sustaining the reader's interest through effective paragraph development and use of proper transitions, presenting a logical flow of ideas.
RISK-TAKING	You must deal with the material in creative and challenging ways, developing main points based on self-initiated criteria independent of my class discussion comments, and avoiding summary unless necessary.
EVIDENCE	You must support your ideas with actual examples from the text, and use relevant details from stories that explain and support your main ideas. Try to use quotations from stories that support your points (one or two lines will do—you will be marked down for excessive use of quotations).
DEVELOPMENT	Analyze evidence in a way that supports your claims and overall thesis, including identifying literary devices/figures of speech and explaining how they contribute to the meaning of the text. AVOID SUMMARY.
MECHANICS	Spelling, grammar, punctuation must be correct. Papers must show careful proofreading, subject-verb agreement, no run-on sentences or sentence fragments, clear pronoun usage.

Schedule

N.B.: The assignments listed for each week are due *that week*. So, for example, the reading/writing listed for Week 2 are due the second week of class.

Week 1

In Class: First day → Introductions/getting to know you, syllabus stuff, in-class exercises.

Week 2

Readings: Pages 1-46 of *How Fiction Works*, handout on critical responses, “Cathedral” by Raymond Carver and “Forever Overhead” by David Foster Wallace (in course pack).

Creative Writing: List 5-10 things that you bring to writing—think about unique experiences you might have, specifics of your personality, individual interests, etc.

Critical Response: 1) Write down three questions you have about *How Fiction Works*. 2) Write down 5-10 things you learned from reading this section of the book.

In Class: Discuss readings, talk about the writing process, read Bret Anthony Johnston’s article, in-class exercises.

Week 3

Readings: Read “Writing Basics” handout #1, “Sex Lives of African Girls” by Taiye Selasi and “Axis” by Alice Munro (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Write a scene in the first person. Now, write the same scene in the third person. Do not simply change the pronouns, but write a whole new piece—take advantage of the freedoms/limitations offered by each point of view. (Each scene should be a minimum of 250 words.)

Critical Response: Discuss the use of point of view in the three stories. Apply what you’ve learned from *HWF* as well as the handout on point of view.

In Class: Discuss readings, talk about point of view, in-class exercises.

Week 4

Readings: “Writing Basics” handout #2, dialogue worksheet, Dialogue section in *HWF* (pp. 213-223), “Terrific Mother” by Lorrie Moore, “The Dungeon Master” by Sam Lipsyte (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Eavesdrop on a conversation between two or more people. Transcribe the conversation word for word. Then, write a scene in which you put that dialogue into a new context. Don’t change what is said, but feel free to fictionalize the characters, setting, etc. (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Look at the use of dialogue in the two stories. How does dialogue serve to characterize? How does it serve to move the story forward? Bring *HFW* into the response.

In Class: Discuss readings, talk about dialogue, in-class exercises.

Week 5

Readings: *Detail* section in *How Fiction Works* (pp. 59-94), “Writing Basics” handout #3, “Diem Perdidi” by Julie Otsuka, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor (in coursepack).

Creative Writing: Read “13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” by Wallace Stevens and “Oh My Pa-Pa” by Bob Hicok. Then either: 1) Emulating Stevens, pick an object or animal and use significant detail to look at it in 13 ways; or 2) Emulating Hicok, make a list of significant details about a parental figure in your life (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Write about the use of significant detail “Diem Perdidi” and one or two of the other stories we’ve read thus far. Concentrate on specific descriptions—find an example or two in each story and do a close reading of its significance regarding characterization, plot, etc. Apply *HFW* when appropriate.

In Class: Discuss readings, talk about detail, in-class exercises.

****Due Week 6: Long critical response paper #1****

--You should pick **one** of these collections of stories:

A Guide to Being Born by Ramona Ausubel

Brief Interviews With Hideous Men by David Foster Wallace

Enormous Changes At the Last Minute by Grace Paley

Nine Stories by J.D. Salinger

Everything That Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor

Jesus' Son by Denis Johnson

Family Dancing by David Leavitt

Tell Me by Mary Robison

Reasons to Live by Amy Hempel

--You should read the entire collection of stories.

--You should pick one of the following aspects of writing: dialogue, point of view, or significant detail. You should formulate an argument regarding your author's use of this aspect in his/her stories. You should use examples from the writing to back up your argument. Concentrate on what this writer can teach you about this aspect of writing. Bring in *HFW*.

--This paper should be 1,000 words minimum, double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman.

Week 6

Readings: "Writing Basics" handout #4, "A Conversation With My Father" by Grace Paley, "The School" by Donald Barthelme, "Some of Us Had Been Threatening Our Friend Colby" by Donald Barthelme, "The Orphan Lamb" by Amy Hempel, "Losing the Wax" by Padgett Powell (in coursepack).

Creative Writing: Either, 1) write a scene mimicking the style/voice of one of the short-shorts (300-500 words); or, 2) write a complete story in 300-500 words, using the short-shorts as a model for what it means for a story to be "complete."

In Class: Discuss readings, plot/form/structure.

Also Due: First long critical response paper.

Week 7

Readings: *Character* section in *HFW* (pp.95-137), “Writing Basics” handout #5, “Access to the Children” by William Trevor, “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Find a photograph online. It should have at least one person in it. Answer these questions about them:
What do they do for a living? How old are they? Where are they from? Where do they live? Are they in a relationship? With whom? Are they happy? Do they smoke? What do they wear when they sleep? What is their favorite food? How is their relationship with their mother and/or father? How do they shake hands? What does their house/apartment/room look like? What do they feel guilty about? What are they proud of? When they were five years old, what did they want to be when they grew up?
Then answer two or three questions of your own. Bring in the questions & answers (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Write about characterization in the Trevor & O’Connor stories. Concentrate on the significance of actions/details regarding the characters, as well as dialogue & their reactions to conflict. Think about the treatment of minor & major characters. Bring in *HFW* where appropriate.

In Class: Discuss readings, talk about characterization.

Also Due: Workshop #1 stories. Critique them for Week 8.

Week 8

Readings: “Writing Basics” handout #6, “Welcome to Your Life and Congratulations” by Ramona Ausubel and “Above and Below” by Lauren Groff (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Write a scene in the present or future tense (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Discuss the use of tense in the Millhauser & Groff stories as well as one of the other stories we’ve read so far.

In Class: Discuss tense & readings. First Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #2 stories. Critique them for Week 9.

Week 9

Readings: *Language* section in *HFW* (pp. 181-212), excerpt from *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov and “Victory Lap” by George Saunders (both in course pack).

Creative Writing: Pick a specific, concrete object. Write about the object in rhapsodic, poetic language in a way similar to Nabokov (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Discuss the use of language in *Lolita*, “Victory Lap,” and one of the other stories we’ve read. Use *HFW* as a framework for your analysis.

In Class: Discuss language & readings. Second Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #3 stories. Critique them for Week 10.

Week 10

Readings: Writing Basics handout #7, “Yours” by Mary Robison, “A Bridge Under Water” by Tom Bissell (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Observe someone in public. First, write down every objective detail you can notice about them. Be as specific as possible. Do not try to guess their thoughts or motivations—just observe them (200 words). Then, inhabit their mind. Imagine what their internal monologue could have been while you were observing them. Think about voice (300 words).

Critical Response: Write about consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “Alive,” and one other story we’ve read so far. Use *HFW* as a framework for your analysis.

In Class: Discuss consciousness, readings. Third Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #4 stories. Critique them for Week 11.

Week 11

Readings: “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood, “The Dead Sister Handbook” by Kevin Wilson (in course pack).

Creative Writing: Using the format/language of an instruction manual, write a scene w/characters, plot, etc. (300-500 words).

Critical Response: Discuss the choices made by Atwood & Wilson regarding form and structure in these stories. How do these unconventional forms help to reflect the meaning of these stories & strengthen its impact?

In Class: Discuss unconventional form, readings. Fourth Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #5 stories. Critique them for Week 12.

Week 12

Readings: “CommComm” and “The Semplica Girl Diaries” by George Saunders.

Creative Writing: Find a work of surrealist art online. Use the work to inspire 300-500 words of creative writing.

Critical Response: What is surreal about these two stories? How does Saunders use an alternate reality, with different rules, to reflect the meaning of these stories, strengthen their impact, and make a commentary on realities of society?

In Class: Discuss surrealism, readings. Fifth Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #6 stories. Critique them for Week 13.

Week 13

Readings: *Truth, Convention, Realism* in *HFW* (pp. 223-end), “Love Song for John Wayne” by Joan Didion (in course pack). Start either *Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan or *And Then We Came to the End* by Joshua Ferris.

Critical Response: Discuss the literary elements of Didion’s essay. Apply *HFW* where appropriate, including other sections of it.

In Class: Discuss realism & creative nonfiction, readings. Sixth Workshop.

Also Due: Workshop #7 stories. Critique them for Week 14.

Week 14

Readings: Keep reading your novel. Work on finishing *HFW*.

Critical Response: Apply one of the sections we haven't yet read/discussed from *HFW* to what you've read in the novel so far.

In Class: Seventh Workshop.

Week 15

Readings: Finish your novel & *HFW*.

Longer Critical Response due: Write 1,000 words on the novel you've chosen to read. Discuss the use of at least two of the following in the novel: point of view, characterization, significant detail, form/structure, or dialogue.

Final Drafts of Stories due.

Extra Credit Opportunities:

1. For Week 15, apply one of the sections we haven't discussed from *HFW* to the novel you've chosen to read in a 500-word critical response. (I will add a 10/10 grade to your short critical response average).
2. Read one of the following novels at some point during semester and set up a time to meet with me and discuss it, plus write a 500-word critical response:

Train Dreams by Denis Johnson

Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

Seating Arrangements by Maggie Shipstead

Don't Let Me Be Lonely by Claudia Rankine

Tinkers by Paul Harding

(I will add 5 points to one of your longer critical response grades.)

3. Attend one of the readings at Volta and write a 250-word response. (I will add two points to your lowest critical response grade.)
4. Attend one of the readings at the Florida Writers Festival and write a 250-word response. (I will add two points to your lowest critical response grade.)

Recommended Reading: In choosing the readings for this course, I tried very hard to mix more established stories with newer stories. I did this because I think college-level courses should give you a good foundation in the tradition of literature while also introducing you to writing you might not see otherwise. Here is a list of very, very recommended reading that did not make it onto the schedule: “A&P” by John Updike, “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor, “Hills Like White Elephants” and “The Killers” by Ernest Hemingway, “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien, “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner, “A Small, Good Thing” by Raymond Carver, “Hands” by Sherwood Anderson, “Babylon Revisited” by F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Mrs. Silly” by William Trevor, “Hunters in the Snow” by Tobias Wolff, “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, *Jesus’ Son* by Denis Johnson, “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” by J.D. Salinger, “Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry, “You’re Ugly, Too” by Lorrie Moore, “Woman With the Little Dog” by Anton Chekhov, “Gusev” by Anton Chekhov.

Please feel free to ask me for specific recommendations. I also seriously urge you to take a look at the “Art of Fiction” interviews on *The Paris Review*, specifically those of the authors recommended above and whose work we’re reading in this course. (www.theparisreview.org/interviews)

Faculty Reading List: The collected stories of David Leavitt, *Half a Life*, a memoir by Jill Ciment, *The Interrogative Mood* by Padgett Powell, *Why Did I Ever* by Mary Robison. You should also take a look at *Subtropics*, the MFA@FLA’s literary journal.