

CRW1101 – Beginning Fiction Writing (Class # 12012), Fall 2018**Instructor Name:** Timothy Schirmer**Course meeting times & locations:** Wednesdays: 9:35 AM – 12:35 PM, MAT 0251**Office Location and Hours:** Mondays 2-4 PM, Turlington 4413**Course website:** Canvas**Instructor Email:** timothy.kyle85@ufl.edu**Course Description:**

This course will primarily run as a writing workshop, specifically focused on what is called ‘flash fiction’ or ‘short short fiction’. Over the semester each of you will workshop 6 short pieces of writing. (300 words minimum – 700 words maximum per piece) I call them ‘pieces’ because they don’t necessarily have to be fictional stories. You can write about something strange in your neighborhood, or a dream you had, or something you’re obsessed with, etc... The main goal of these ‘pieces’ is that they’re interesting (NOT AS PRIVATE JOURNAL ENTRIES) but as unique, crystalized bits of life that you believe others might also find interesting, as you have taken the time to slow down and make record of something that strikes you. Stories are made of lots of little pieces—interesting moments and details siphoned from your imagination and the world—if you keep writing these things down, then you can learn how construct them into stories. Story is an ancient and powerful way of saying—through the veil of fiction—what cannot be always be easily said in reality. Remember, a big and powerful world can be opened up with very few words.

ie: *“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”* ← A six-word story by Ernest Hemingway

We will be reading 3 books this semester. Two are listed above. One is a book about writing, one is a collection of stories, and the other you will choose from a list of books currently on *the future of fiction* table at the Strand Bookstore in NYC. You’ll be responsible for obtaining your chosen book in **HARDCOPY**. You will have the semester to read your novel or collection of stories, and sometime in the last month of class you’ll present your book by reading some of your favorite passages; discussing character development, setting, and plot; as well as sharing your favorite metaphor with the group. These presentations will be informal, more of a discussion. Make sure though that you do read to completion your chosen book. If you don’t read your book I’ll probably know it, and so too will your classmates.

Think of the assigned reading as nutrition for your writer mind. Reading is the purest and most essential way of becoming a better writer. Please come to each class with something insightful to say about what you’ve read that week (something interesting or enjoyable that you noticed in the work). At the beginning of each class there will be a short and easy reading quiz. These quizzes are worth 10% of your total grade, so make sure to do the reading!

To satisfy the Composition (C) and (WR) requirements, each week you will choose a scene from a film or television show that you’re curious about, and your assignment will be to watch that scene 5 to 10 times (ideally over the span of a few days), and to take notes on what you notice with each additional viewing. I’m concerned with what you notice on the tenth viewing of the scene, not the first. Writing starts with noticing, with curiosity; that’s where the ideas begin to percolate. Each week you’ll be responsible for **PRINTING** and handing in a 500-600 word observation / analysis of

what you noticed in the scene you have chosen to look so carefully at. You should describe the details you've noticed, and then go further in depth by analyzing how those details are relevant, meaningful, important, or useful within that specific fictional world. For instance, if you notice that the story is jumping quickly from scene to scene, you might choose to write about how that 'jumpiness' contributes to the frenetic mood and theme of the story. The goal is for you to slow down by watching these scenes multiple times, and to take notice of details that might have escaped you had you not looked so closely. We are steering away from the obvious, clichéd details, and looking more at those which are considered subtle and nuanced. Don't worry! We will do an in class exercise to demonstrate how to approach these assignments.

Lastly, each class there will be a short lecture or activity designed to enhance your powers of story telling and descriptive writing. We will read together, watch clips from documentaries, study famous thinkers and artists, listen to podcasts, have discussions, and practice free writing through various exercises.

General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for Composition (C), and also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Required Texts:

-*Bird by Bird, Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anne Lamott

-*Can't and Won't*, Lydia Davis

-Each member of the class will choose a third text to read on their own and discuss with the group. This text will be chosen from a list curated by The Strand Bookstore in New York City. All of these books are currently on a table titled: *The Future of Fiction*.

Writing Assignments:

As mentioned above, every other week each of you will be responsible for turning in a piece of flash fiction (300-700 words). The piece will be submitted to me via email on the day prior to class; this way I can make notes on your writing ahead of time. Then, you must (PRINT) copies of your story to pass out to the class. Printed copies are **MANDATORY** for every workshop. Feel free to print them single-spaced, in very small font, on quarter sheets of paper if you're trying to save resources. You will read this story out loud to the class on the same day you bring it in, and we will immediately workshop the piece after you've read it. If you're nervous to read in front of the group, I'd be happy to read your story aloud, or you can bring in a recording, however, I urge you to give it a try. Reading to the group can be really thrilling for the audience and the reader. We have time to do this because the pieces will be short, and it's an amazing opportunity to connect with each other as writers. I've done many workshops, and in my experience this is usually the best (most alive) way of sharing your work! You are expected to respectfully critique your fellow students' work, which means speaking about a piece of writing's strengths, while also pointing out where there's room for improvement.

Each week you will be responsible for printing and bringing to class a 600 word critical response to a scene of your choice from film or television. ***I want to make it very clear that these assignments are not meant to be summaries of what is happening in a scene, but rather, details you notice in the scene, and then critical analysis of those details in relation to the story.*** For example, if you were to describe the dank gloominess of a scene set in a rainy forest full of pines, where twigs snap under someone's boots like logs popping in a fire, and owls hoot back and forth in the branches above, then you should continue on to analyze the significance of that setting. Why the drizzling forest? Why not a desert valley? Why not a sugar-white beach with a turquoise ocean? Keep in mind that choosing a film or TV show that is 'literary' in nature will make your life a lot easier than trying to critique something flat and poorly written. After the first few weeks of class I am open to people branching out of TV and film, and doing critical responses inspired by other mediums, artistic and otherwise. We will discuss this in class. You will turn in a total of ten critical responses over the course of the semester, each at least 600 words in length, totaling 6,000 words.

After the eleventh week of class we will move on from the critical responses and focus our attention on *The Future of Fiction* presentations.

Reading quizzes will be given spanning the two assigned texts: *Bird by Bird*, and *Can't and Won't*. Once we are finished reading those texts you will not be quizzed, however, you'll be responsible for reading your chosen book of fiction while taking careful notes pertaining to the author's method and style of story telling. You should be concerned with analyzing the structure of the plot, devices of character development, setting, descriptive and figurative language in general. Over the semester we will explore these components of storytelling, so that by the end of the class you should have a clearer understanding of how they coalesce to create a successful piece of fiction.

Rubric:

1. Class Participation (includes workshop comments, in-class writing, etc.) —100 points
2. Critical Responses — 300 points
3. Stories — 400 points
4. *Future of fiction* Presentation — 100 points
5. Reading quizzes — 100 points

Critical Responses — These will be graded according to clarity, concision, and use of evidence to support your argument.

Stories — These will be graded by satisfying the word count, and turning in original, creative work. There is no such thing as a right or wrong story.

Quizzes — These are graded based on your knowledge of the assigned reading.

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance*: Students are allowed one unexcused absence. Each additional unexcused absence will result in a letter grade reduction. For instance, if you miss two classes without a documented excuse, and your grade in the course is an A, then the grade would fall to a B. Three absences earn a failing grade unless there is proof of an emergency, medical or otherwise. And remember, please try not to miss class on your scheduled workshop day. If your absence is unavoidable, then we will workshop your piece the following week. Please show up to class on time. If you know you're going to be tardy, please let me know in advance. Extreme or chronic tardiness will count as an absence. You can read more about UF's attendance police here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
3. *Paper Format & Submission*: Again, all assignments must be submitted in printed hardcopies as stated above.
4. *Late Papers/Assignments*: If you're late on an assignment, let me know, and we can work out a schedule for you to get the work turned in for full credit. Points will be docked from assignments if it occurs more than twice. Keep in mind that it's important you turn your stories in on your assigned days, otherwise you're disrupting the schedule of the workshop.
5. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
6. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
7. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
8. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
9. *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

10. *Course Evaluations.* Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
11. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
12. Your policy on *classroom behavior and netiquette*:
13. *UF's policy on Harassment:* UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>
14. *Policy on environmental sustainability.* Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) annual book sale.)

Schedule:

(subject to change - you will be notified)

Week 1 – August 22

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs. 1-53 (quiz on August 29th)

Week 2 – August 29

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 54 – 109 (quiz on September 5th)

DUE: 1st critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

Week 3 – September 5

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 110 – 161 (quiz on September 12th)

DUE: 2nd critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

Week 4 – September 12

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 162 – 237 (quiz on September 19th)

DUE: 3rd critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

DUE: Bring your book from The Strand's *the future of fiction* list

Week 5 – September 19

TO READ: *Can't and Won't*, pgs 1- 70 (quiz on September 26th)

DUE: 4th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

Week 6 – September 26

TO READ: *Can't and Won't*, pgs 71 – 142 (quiz on October 3rd)

DUE: 5th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

Week 7 - October 3

TO READ: *Can't and Won't*, pgs 143 – 211 (quiz on October 10th)

DUE: 6th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

Week 8 - October 10

TO READ: *Can't and Won't*, pgs 212 - 283 (quiz on October 17th)

DUE: 7th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

Week 9 - October 17

TO READ: *student's selected text*

Due: 8th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

Week 10 - October 24

TO READ: *student's selected text*

DUE: 9th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

Week 11 - October 31

TO READ: *student's selected text*

DUE: 10th critical response (Printed)

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

Week 12 - November 7

TO READ: *student's selected text*

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

DUE: Group 1, *the future of fiction* presentations

Week 13 - November 14

TO READ: *student's selected text*

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

DUE: Group 2, *the future of fiction* presentations

Week 14 - No class for Thanksgiving

Week 15 - November 28

TO READ: *student's selected text*

DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)

DUE: Group 3, *the future of fiction* presentations.

Week 16 - December 5

DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)

DUE: Group 4, *the future of fiction* presentations.