

CRW 1101 Class # 12867
Beginning Fiction Writing, Spring 2020

Instructor Michelle Neuffer

Fridays, Period 6-8 (12:50-2:30 PM), MAT 0103

Office and Hours: TBA

Course website: Canvas

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Course Description:

This course provides introductory instruction in fiction writing and, since careful and reflective reading is the best teacher of writing, an introduction to the study of literature. We will pay special attention to how stories *work*: stylistically, thematically, structurally. We will also give due consideration to the *process* of writing: as stories work, so must their authors. Roughly the first half of the semester will be devoted to a discussion of the elements of fiction. The second half will be a traditional fiction workshop, wherein a writer will provide a story they have written for the class to read and comment upon. We will discuss the story as a group, with the ultimate goal of helping the writer get to the next draft. You will be required to be honest, constructive, and respectful—critique others as you would hope to be critiqued. The goal for this course is for you to leave a better and more confident writer and reader than when you began. But mostly: have fun. Work hard. Make art.

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:

Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*

Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*

Course Packet (available on Canvas)

Assignments (see below for Grading Rubric):

Participation: 200 points

Doing the reading is half of the assignment. Discussing it is the other half. Come prepared. Bring the textbook and assigned reading to class. Speak! You have things to say. I want to hear them.

Critical Reading Responses (RR): 200 points

You will write three (500-word, 1000-word, and 1500-word) critical responses to the stories we read, due to Canvas *before* class on Fridays. Choose one literary term listed at the end of this syllabus and apply an analysis of that concept to the reading for the week. If we have more than one reading that week, you are only required to write a response for one of them, but you can also compare and contrast in your reading responses. These responses should make a claim about the reading and support it with evidence from the texts. This claim should say something about the function or effect of the story through a discussion of craft (ie., choices made by the author in the telling of the story). The analyses will be evaluated based on the following criteria: demonstrated reading of the stories/chapters; critical thinking; depth of analysis; engagement with the discussion of craft.

Critical Film or TV Responses (FR): 200 points

You should begin noticing the way other art forms inform your work and seize your attention. To that end, in addition to critical responses about the readings, you will write three (one 500-word and two 1000-word) responses to a film or television scene of your choice. Much like the reading responses, 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. You are welcome to choose a keyword at the end of the syllabus for this exercise as well, but you can also apply film-specific elements and terminology to this assignment., ie., music, cinematography, lighting, etc. 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—we will look at an example of this in class. 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. Like the Reading Responses, these papers should make a claim and support it with evidence.

Story: 200 points

Students are required to hand in one story to be workshopped. This story must be no less than 5 pages and no more than 15, and **must be printed out and delivered to class the week before the workshop date.** Late stories will not be workshopped and will not receive credit. Stories will be evaluated based on clarity, attention to language, and a development of the techniques of fiction writing that we discuss in class.

On workshop days, I expect you to come to class having read each piece carefully *at least* once. You should make notes on the story itself and also formulate a response to it wherein you note the piece’s strengths and also its weaknesses--this could be written neatly and clearly at the end of the story, or typed on a separate page. You should be honest, constructive, and engaged. “I like this” is a

valid first response, but it doesn't help the writer push to the next draft. You should also be thoughtful: complete this response *before* class begins.

Revision and Editorial Assessment: 200 points

For your final project, your story will be revised and the revision is due on the date listed below. Revisions **must be significant**. Fixing typos and sprinkling in punctuation changes does not constitute revision. Push. Make your revision the best version of your story it can possibly be. Don't be afraid to change things dramatically, if that's what the story calls for. It's fine if your second draft only barely resembles your first. It's probably ideal, actually.

The editorial assessment will be a 500-word critical companion to your revision. Like the reading responses, the editorial assessment will focus on craft. What led you to make these choices? How do your changes help your story work better? This can be a first-person analysis, but your editorial assessment should include a claim about your revision, include support from the text, and deal with the same criteria that we will use to discuss stories in class: structure, style, themes, character, plot, etc.

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance*: You are allowed one absence 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 additional absence will lower your final grade by half a letter grade. Only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, religious holidays, and documented major illnesses are exempted from this policy. University-sponsored events should be brought to my attention before the date of the absence. Arriving to class late twice will count as an absence. Six absences will constitute an automatic failing grade in the class. <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
3. *Paper Format & Submission*: Each assignment must be submitted in double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman typeface. Pages must be numbered. One staple goes in the left-hand corner if you are submitting a hard copy. Include the relevant information (name, date, assignment, title) at the top. All assignments should be submitted electronically on Canvas.
4. *Late Papers/Assignments*: Late stories disrupt the class schedule, hold everyone up, and will not be accepted. All other assignments will be reduced by one letter grade for each day they are late unless prior arrangements have been made with me first.
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. *Classroom behavior*: Classroom behavior must be appropriate and respectful, or you will be asked to leave and marked as absent. **Cell phones are not allowed in class.** You cannot text in class. You cannot have your phone on the desk in class. Put it away. Be free. Laptops, iPads, etc. are allowed in class if they are being used to refer to the course packet or other class materials.

Other notes: The syllabus is subject to change at any time, but you won't be caught off-guard. Please regularly check your UF email—it's how I will communicate any changes. Note that I typically try to shut down my email by 8 PM on weekdays. Please use appropriate greetings and signatures in your emails.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

| W | Day | Reading/Viewing Material | Due |
|---|------|--|------|
| 1 | 1/10 | Introduction Syllabus Creative exercise Margaret Atwood — “Happy Endings” | |
| 2 | 1/17 | <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 3-22 Assign Workshop Dates In class reading: <i>Alexander Chee</i> — “100 Things About Writing a Novel” | |
| 3 | 1/24 | <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 22-37 Ernest Hemingway — “Hills Like White Elephants” & “The Killers” | RR 1 |
| 4 | 1/31 | <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 38-47 Jenny Offill — excerpt from <i>Dept. of Speculation</i> In-class example: “literary” film and television scenes | |
| 5 | 2/7 | <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 48-64 Flannery O'Connor — “A Good Man is Hard to Find” & “Good Country People” | FR 1 |
| 6 | 2/14 | <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 64-75 <i>Writing Without Teachers</i> pp. 85-92 Lauren Groff — “Delicate Edible Birds” & “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners” | |
| 7 | 2/21 | WORKSHOP 1 Camille Bordas — “Most Die Young” & “State of Nature” | RR 2 |

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|----|------|---|------|
| 8 | 2/28 | WORKSHOP 2 <i>On Writing</i> Part 1 of 3 In class reading: Lydia Davis, excerpt from <i>Essays One</i> | |
| 9 | 3/6 | No class — Spring Break | |
| 10 | 3/13 | WORKSHOP 3 Amy Hempel — “Tumble Home” | FR 2 |
| 11 | 3/20 | WORKSHOP 4 <i>On Writing</i> Part 2 of 3 Rebecca Curtis — “The Christmas Miracle” | |
| 12 | 3/27 | WORKSHOP 5 <i>On Writing</i> Part 3 of 3 Denis Johnson — “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” & “Emergency” | FR 3 |
| 13 | 4/3 | WORKSHOP 6 Carmen Maria Machado — “Especially Heinous” & “Difficult at Parties” | |
| 14 | 4/10 | WORKSHOP 7 Ted Chiang — “The Story of Your Life” | RR 3 |
| 15 | 4/17 | Last class! WORKSHOP 8 | |
| 16 | 4/24 | No class — Reading Day Revision and Editorial Assessment Due | |

Rubric of Evaluation for Critical Response:

A: Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has exceptionally well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.

B: Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.

C: Contains some analysis of the texts and develops some original ideas about them. Has adequately well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), adequately-supported claims, and some appropriate stylistic elements.

D: Contains minimal analysis of the texts. May lack well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, and/or a persuasive organizational structure. Fails to adequately support its claims and/or use appropriate stylistic elements.

E: Lacks analysis of the text, and therefore fails to demonstrate reading and/or comprehension.

A: 94-100 A-: 90-93

B+: 87-89 B: 84-86 B-: 80-83

C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69 D: 63-66 D-: 60-62 E: 0-59

List of Possible Terms for Critical Responses:

Accuracy

Ambiguity

Anti-Hero

Atmosphere

Beginnings

Character

Cliche

Convention

Crisis

Description

Dialogue

Diction

Endings

Epiphany

Exposition

Flashback

Frame Story

Hero Imagery

Imagination

Immediacy

Interior Monologue

Intrigant

Irony

Metaphor and Simile

Mise-En-Scene

Motif

Names

Narrative

Narrator

Negative Positive Knowledge

Objective Correlative

Plot Point of View

Position

Premise

Psychic Distance

Realism

Resolution

Revision
Scene
Sentimentality
Short Story
Showing and Telling
Stereotype
Style
Subtlety
Suspense
Suspension of Disbelief
Symbolism
Tension
Texture
Transitions Trust Your Material
Voice
Zigzag