

CRW2100 – Fiction Writing (Class # 13126), Spring 2019**Instructor Name:** Timothy Schirmer**Course meeting times & locations:** Fridays: 12:50 PM – 3:50 PM, FLI 0113**Office Location and Hours:** Mondays 12-2 PM and Wednesdays 5-7 PM, Turlington 4108**Course website:** Canvas**Instructor Email:** timothy.kyle85@ufl.edu**Course Description:**

This course will primarily be run as a writing workshop, specifically focused on advancing your skillset in writing short fiction. Over the semester each of you will print and turn in 3 short stories for critique. The stories should be no less than 750 words – and no more than 1,500 words (per story). You might be wondering why the word limit is capped at 1,500. There are several reasons for this, the first being that it's beneficial for each of you to workshop three shorter stories over the semester, rather than two longer stories. The more you workshop, the more your work will improve. Secondly, if you can't introduce the reader to a fictional world with 1,500 words, it's doubtful that another 5,000 words will help. Moreover, I truly believe that the best way to learn fiction writing is to start small. In cooking, you wouldn't try to cook a three-course meal if you've never melted butter in a pan. And even if you have melted butter in a pan, you'll do it again. The same is true with writing.

The main goal of this course is for us to explore the various methods by which fiction writers open up vivid and believable worlds for their readers to inhabit. Think about a time when you were totally immersed in a book. Inside your mind the world of that book (the characters, the settings, the plot lines, the various narrative tensions) were all alive and kicking. The writer created a world for you to enter via your imagination. The extent to which you enter that world is dependent on the writer's skill and the willingness of your own mind. In this class we will discuss elements of fiction such as character development (behavioral, psychological, physical traits, desires), plot, narrative tension, philosophy, figurative language, descriptive language, dialogue, world building, and in general how to write a seductive sentence. Stories are built of sentences. Each sentence should be useful to the narrative.

While taking this course you should start considering story telling as an element of life, an integral part of our humanity. Even when stories go unrecorded, we live them out in our minds in order to make sense of the world around us. Think, for example, of a time when you were stressed out over something you had very little control over. Your mind likely created stories (various scenarios) so that you could better prepare yourself for whatever outcome. That is story. When we choose to write it down, then we must shape it into something interesting for the reader. We need stories to better understand our lives, whether it be through film, books,

television, etc... Story telling is an ancient and powerful way of saying—through the veil of fiction—what cannot so easily be said in reality.

We will be reading 2 books this semester. They are listed below. One is a book about writing and the other is a novel. You will read both books on your own, and 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! Together, we will be carefully explicating the novel. This means you'll come to class having done the assigned reading, take the quiz, and then together we will re-read passages of the novel to better understand how the writer creates the fictional world, and furthermore, how she keeps us interested in staying there? 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 prepared to contribute to a conversation about what you've read that week (something interesting or enjoyable that you noticed in the work).

Each of you will participate in a weekly game called *ACROPHOBIA*, modeled off an old computer game that was popular at the advent of the Internet. *ACROPHOBIA* is a game designed to help us look more closely at what makes an interesting sentence; in other words, the poetic, granular aspect of writing. Each week I will present the class with an acronym, for example: (S. Y. W. T. B. A. M.) and you will have one minute to scribble out a sentence that corresponds to that acronym: (So You Want To Be A Mailman?) I will collect the sentences, type them up, and email the sentences to the class that afternoon. Before the next class, each of you will be responsible for voting (via email, timothy.kyle85@ufl.edu) for the sentence you like best. You should not vote for your own sentence. We will discuss the most appealing sentences in class the following week. Are they strong enough to be the first line of story? The last line of a story? A sharp bit of dialogue? What makes them interesting? Don't worry! We will do an in class exercise to demonstrate how to approach these assignments.

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 class (for the first 11 weeks of the semester) you'll be responsible for **PRINTING** and handing in a 600 word observation and 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 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 for those details that are considered subtle and nuanced. Don't worry! We will do an in class exercise to demonstrate how to approach these assignments.

In this class we will also 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:

-*On Writing, A Memoir of the Craft*, Stephen King (PURCHASE THIS TEXT)

-*My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Ottessa Moshfegh (PURCHASE THIS TEXT)

-*Last Night*, James Salter (Text will be provided)

-*Bonobo Mama*, Joyce Carol Oates (Text will be provided)

-In class reading will include stories from T.C. Boyle, Raymond Carver, Margaret Atwood, Zadie Smith, and others. These texts will be provided in class.

Writing Assignments:

As mentioned above, this class will be run primarily as a writing workshop. You will be split into four groups (A, B, C or D). We will workshop Group A one week, then Group B the next, so on and so forth. Each of you will workshop 3 stories over the course of the semester (750-1,500 words per story). You are responsible for **PRINTING** 20 copies of your story, one for each member of the class, including me. You will pass your stories out, and the following week we will workshop them. **Please format the stories in Times New Roman, double-spaced, size 12 font, with numbered pages and 1 inch margins. Please use your last name as a header on each page.** Each story should aim to have a beginning, a middle, an end, and should be independent of a longer work. This means no excerpts from longer stories or novels, unless the excerpt can also be understood as a free standing short story. Each story should be new work that we haven't seen. Revisions will not be accepted. Remember, **PRINTED** copies are **MANDATORY**. Most importantly, Please come to class having read your classmate's stories. By being a part of this class you're agreeing to show up for each other and honestly share your opinions on each other's work. You are expected to respectfully critique, which means speaking about a piece of writing's strengths, while also pointing out where there's room for improvement. Since we will sometimes touch on sensitive subject matter, it's important that you're especially kind and considerate of each other's feelings.

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. On the 11th week of class you will turn in your final critical response. I would prefer you to format each response onto one page, which means you're free to single-space the content and make the font smaller than size 12.

Rubric:

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

Critical Responses — **T**hese 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.

ACRAPHOBIA – This will be graded based on your weekly participation

Class Participation – You are absolutely 100% required to be part of the conversation in this class. If I notice you're not joining in I will work to include you in the discussion.

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 – January 11**

TO READ: *Purchase both of the assigned texts for the course.*
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by January 17
 IN CLASS READING: *Last Night*, James Salter

Week 2 – January 18

TO READ: *On Writing*, part 1 of 3 (quiz on January 25)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by January 24
 DUE: 1st critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)
 IN CLASS READING: *I Walk Between the Raindrops*, T.C. Boyle

Week 3 – January 25

TO READ: *On Writing*, part 2 of 3 (quiz on February 1)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by January 31
 DUE: 2nd critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group A

Week 4 – February 1

TO READ: *On Writing*, part 3 of 3 (quiz on February 8)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by February 7
 DUE: 3rd critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group C's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group B

Week 5 – February 8

TO READ: *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 1- 41 (quiz February 15)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by February 14
 DUE: 4th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group D's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group C

Week 6 – February 15

TO READ: *...Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 42 - 82 (quiz on February 22)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by February 21
 DUE: 5th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group D

Week 7 - February 22

TO READ: *...Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 83 – 123 (quiz on March 1)

HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by February 28
 DUE: 6th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group A

Week 8 – March 1

TO READ: ...*Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 124 - 164 (quiz on March 15)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by March 14
 DUE: 7th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group C's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group B

Week 9 – March 8

NO CLASS FOR SPRING BREAK

Week 10 – March 15

TO READ: ...*Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 165 – 205 (quiz on March 22)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by March 21
 DUE: 9th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group D's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group C

Week 11 – March 22

TO READ: ...*Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 206 - 246 (quiz on March 29)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by March 28
 DUE: 10th critical response (Printed)
 DUE: Group A's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group D

Week 12 – March 29

TO READ: ...*Rest and Relaxation*, pgs. 247 - 288 (quiz on April 5)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by April 4
 DUE: Group B's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group A

Week 13 – April 5

TO READ: *Bonobo Mama*, Joyce Carol Oates (quiz on April 12)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by April 11
 DUE: Group C's stories (Printed)
 WORKSHOP: Group B

Week 14 – April 12

TO READ: *Last Night*, by James Salter (quiz on April 19)
 HOMEWORK: Email me your *ACROPHOBIA* vote by April 18

DUE: Group D's stories (Printed)
WORKSHOP: Group C

Week 15 - April 19
WORKSHOP: Group D