

CRW 2100: Fiction Writing

Section 1656, Fall 2016; TUR 2346, Wednesday 9–11 (4:05 –7:05PM)

Instructor: Chloe Lane

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Office hours: Tuesday 10.30–12.30pm & by appointment

Office location: TUR 4339

Required Texts

- *Object Lessons* ed. Lorin Stein, Sadie Stein (ISBN: 9781250005984)
- *How Fiction Works* by James Wood (ISBN: 9780312428471)
- Handouts: readings to be provided throughout the semester
- Recommended: *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern (ISBN: 9780393321241)

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

This course provides instruction in fiction writing and, since careful and reflective reading is the best way to learn how to write, an introductory approach to the study of literature. We will write and read with attention to how stories work—structurally, stylistically, and thematically.

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, the requirements of which will be discussed in detail later on, but which can be described in general as a format in which we apply the same critical skills to our own work that we've learned to apply to the assigned readings. We are here to study and create good writing, which requires serious work.

Course Format

1. Writing: short writing exercises, short critical reading responses, two long critical reading responses, two short stories, and one story revision
2. Reading: short stories from the textbook and handouts, chapters from the textbook, and essays addressing various aspects of craft
3. Critiquing: of both the published stories and the work of your peers, knowing that close reading of another's prose should, in fact, help your own

Graded Assignments and Other Course Components

Creative exercises (8):	80 points (10 points each)
Short reading responses (8):	80 points (10 points each)
Longer reading responses (2):	220 points (110 points each)
Workshop stories (2)	220 points (110 points each)
Final story revision	200 points
Class participation:	200 points

1000 points total

Creative Exercises 8% (80 points)

Over the course of the semester you will write 8 short creative pieces for homework. I will expect you to upload your piece to a discussion post on Canvas before the beginning of class. The exercise will be in response to the elements of craft we are discussing and the authors whose work we are reading that week. I will ask you to include certain elements, eg. a specific object, a specific point of view, a specific tense, dialogue, etc.

Short Reading Responses: 8% (80 points)

Each week, you will have 2-3 stories to read. You will write 8 critical responses to these readings. Each critical response must be a minimum of 500 words. 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, as well as the handouts I will give you. You will analyze the stories from a writerly perspective.

You will upload your responses to Canvas before the class it is due. As well you will bring a copy (printed out or on a device) to class with you. Late papers will receive a maximum of 50%.

These papers require no library or Internet research. Your ideas should be original and fresh. You will be asked to think about a specific element of writing that is exemplified by these stories. You will also be asked to consider the common threads you see among these stories—what does this author do that is different to writing by other authors? The responses 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. Your analytical and critical skills are expected to improve over the course of the semester.

On the schedule, the “Readings” section tells you what you should have read and responded to before that class. My goal is that your reading responses achieve the following:

1. Make a claim about the stories based on Wood's ideas or those we discussed in class. If ideas are taken from Wood, those ideas, whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, should be cited using MLA style.

2. Provide textual support for your claim from the story being discussed. Point to the specific words in the text of the stories that made you think what you thought and that support and prove your point.
3. Provide analysis of your claim and the text. Answer the question “so what?” What does this mean within the context of the work as a whole? How does this section contribute to the author’s overall intent?
4. Cite all quotations in-text in MLA style.

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 about fiction, but please keep in mind that these published, professional writers, whether you enjoyed their writing or not, have something to teach you about the practice and art of the written word. Which is not to say they are gods! Or infallible! Or that you must worship at the altar of their prose or their ideas!

Rubric of Evaluation for Reading Responses

- 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

Longer Reading Responses: 22% (220 points)

You will read two short story collections from a list. You will then write two 1,200-word critical responses—one for each collection. The first will be due near the middle of the semester, and the second will be due at the end of the semester. 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.

Workshop Stories: 22% (220 points)

Twice during the semester, you will write a story to be workshopped by your peers. Your stories should be character-driven and written for an adult audience.

Do not write these stories the night before they are due. I will be able to tell if this is the case, and your grade will be lowered accordingly. Manuscripts must be delivered to the class *the week before* they are to be workshopped. There is no late delivery. There is no switching. No last-minute writing. If you are unable to turn in the story on time, an entire letter grade will be deducted from your final grade. Please bring enough copies for everyone. 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.

Final Story Revision: 20% (200 points)

You will rewrite/revise one of your workshop stories, based on my comments and those of your peers. Your revision will be turned in as your final project. This story should be polished and thoroughly proofread. You will also turn in a 500 words summary of the major revisions you’ve made and why you think these are successful revisions. You will point to specifics in your workshop story, and the comments you receive from me and your peers.

Class Participation 20% (200 points)

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. If I have to give quizzes, your performance on these will factor into your participation grade.

Each week we will generally discuss something from *How Fiction Works* and two published stories. Doing the reading is only half the assignment. In-class discussion of the material is the other half. Not having your books in class will result in a participation grade of zero for the day.

On workshop days it is expected that you will come to class having read each piece carefully *at least once*, and that you have spent time formulating a typed response to it. In addition to your marginal comments in ink or pencil, attach your typed response to the author’s piece with a staple. These typed responses will form part of your participation grade. (In-class discussion, preparedness (including timely response to all class emails), and (especially) engagement/attitude are all parts of participation. A writing workshop should be a safe place where everyone should feel encouraged and welcome to share their thoughts/feelings—the participation of those who fail to respect their peers’ thoughts/feelings will be graded accordingly.)

Formatting

Each assignment will be submitted at the beginning of class in double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman (or Garamond or Baskerville) typeface. Pages must be numbered. One staple goes in the upper-left-hand corner if you’re submitting a hardcopy. There must be a title, something beyond “First Reading Response” (for reading responses the title must be interesting and informative; for stories, well, do your best). You are responsible for photocopying your workshopped stories. Each formatting failure will result in a 5% deduction on the grade of that assignment.

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. An absence after the first will lower your final grade by a full letter (A to B, B to C etc.). A third absence will result in a failing grade for this class. Reserve the day you don't attend class for a day you really need it. Doctor's notes will not be accepted. Only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, are exempted from this policy. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed. Two tardies (arriving more than five minutes late, or leaving class early) equals one absence.

Notes

- 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.
- I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.
- Genre note: this is a literary fiction class, and we will not have time to study genre writing seriously here. Therefore, I will not accept any stories that include the following: vampires, zombies, werewolves, dragons, kings, queens, princes, princesses, elves, nymphs, wizards/witches, time travel, space travel, or a character who wakes up and realises it was all a dream. I will be very strict about this, especially when it comes to your workshop stories. If you have any concerns, come and see me before you submit your story; don't wait till you get a failing grade.

Beware: This course is reading intensive and writing intensive. It is required that you come to class each week fully prepared. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy. If you're hoping for an easy A, this class is not for you.

Final grade appeals: Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

UF Reading and Writing Center: The Reading and Writing Center at the University of Florida is an excellent resource for improving reading comprehension and writing skills. For more information, see: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

Statement of Composition (C) credit: This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-educationrequirement.aspx>

Statement of Writing Requirement (WR): This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of 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 must 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/sccr/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>

Grading:

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

Class Schedule

Note: All assigned readings are in *How Fiction Works* (marked *HFW*), *Object Lessons* (marked *OL*), or will be provided on Canvas as pdfs or online links

Week 1: August 24 | Introduction

Readings: “Letter to a Frozen Peas Manufacturer” by Lydia Davis

In class: Introductions; Syllabus; Contract; In-class writing exercise

Week 2: August 31 | Write what you know

Readings: “The Most Girl Part of You” by Amy Hempel, “Write What You Know” by Jerome Stern, “Don’t Write What You Know” (article) by Bret Anthony Johnston, “Critical Responses Handout,” and “The Guide to Reading Well”

Due: Reading Response #1 & Creative Exercise #1

In class: Discuss readings and complete Creative Exercise #1

Week 3: September 7 | Point of view

Readings: “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Denis Johnson (*OL*), “Access to the Children” by William Trevor, “Victory Lap” by George Saunders, and Writing Basics Handout #1: Point of view

HFW: “Narrating” (pg 1–38)

Due: Reading Response #2 & Creative Exercise #2

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 4: September 14 | Characterization I

Readings: “Bangkok” by James Salter, “Old Birds” by Bernard Cooper (both *OL*), and Writing Basics Handout #2: Dialogue

HFW: “Dialogue” (213–221)

Due: Reading Response #3 & Creative Exercise #3

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 5: September 21 | Characterization II

Readings: “Congress” by Joy Williams, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor, and Writing Basics Handout #3: Characterization

HFW: “Character” (pg 95–137)

Due: Reading Response #4 & Creative Exercise #4

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 6: September 28 | Detail

Readings: “Pelican Song” by Mary-Beth Hughes, “Likely Lake” by Mary Robison (both *OL*), and Writing Basics Handout #4: Detail

HFW: “Flaubert and Modern Narratives” (pg 39–46) & “Detail” (pg 59–94)

Due: Reading Response #5 & Creative Exercise #5

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 7: October 5 | Form, Plot & Structure

Readings: “Why Don’t You Dance” by Raymond Carver (*OL*), “The Lady with the Dog” by Anton Chekhov, and Writing Basics Handout #5: Form, Plot & Structure

Due: Longer Critical Response #1; Workshop #1 stories (critique for October 12)

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises; Creative Exercise #6 (to complete in class)

Week 8: October 12 | Fictional Place

Readings: “Flying Carpet” by Steven Millhauser (*OL*), “The Flowers” by Alice Walker, “Man-O-War” by Claire Vaye Watkins, and Writing Basics Handout #6: Fictional Place

Due: Creative Exercise #7; Workshop #2 stories (critique for October 19)

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises; Workshop #1

Week 9: October 19 | Fictional Time

Readings: “Lying Presences” by Norman Rush” (*OL*), “Our Lady of Peace” by ZZ Packer (pdf), “Alyosha the Pot” by Leo Tolstoy (online link), and Writing Basics Handout #7: Fictional Time

Due: Reading Response #6 & Creative Exercise #8; Workshop #3 stories (critique for October 26)

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises; Workshop #2

Week 10: October 26

Readings: “Wants” by Grace Paley, “Love Too Long” by Barry Hannah, “I Bought A Little City” by Donald Barthelme

Due: Reading Response #7; Workshop #4 stories (critique for November 2)

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #3

Week 11: November 2

Readings: “Drown” by Junot Diaz and “Holding Pattern” by Juan Villoro
HFW: “Language” (181–212)

Due: Workshop #5 stories (critique for November 9)

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #4

Week 12: November 9

Readings: “City Boy” by Leonard Michaels (*OL*) and “Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned” by Wells Tower

HFW: “Truth, Convention, Realism” (pg 223–end)

Due: Workshop #6 stories (critique for November 16)

In class: Revision; Discuss readings; Workshop #5

Week 13: November 16

Readings: “Ten Stories from Flaubert” by Lydia Davis (*OL*), Two Stories by Padgett Powell, and “I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone” by Richard Brautigan

Due: Workshop #7 stories (critique for November 30)

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #6

Week 14: November 23

No class: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: November 30

Readings: week off to focus on critical response

Due: Longer Critical Response #2

In class: Workshop #7

Week 16: December 7

Readings: “Uncanny the Singing that Comes from Certain Husks” (essay) by Joy Williams

Due: Final Story Revision; Reading Response #8 (due December 8)

In class: TBD