

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (F.A.Q.) ABOUT THIS COURSE, AND THE ANSWERS TO THOSE QUESTIONS

## 1.1 WHAT *IS* THIS COURSE, AND WHEN/WHERE DOES IT TAKE PLACE?

CRW 1101: Fiction Writing, section 1633

Wednesdays 10-El

Turlington Hall B 310

Spring 2016

## 1.2 WHO IS THE TEACHER?

Name: Crown, Trevor Edward (preferred title in class: Trevor)

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Office: IN FLUX (Pascal's until further notice)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00pm-3:00pm, or by appointment

## 1.3 WHAT IS THIS COURSE ALL ABOUT?

Since it is impossible to improve your writing skills without improving your reading skills, this class will give you the tools to do both. You will finish the course with an understanding of how the short story functions as a medium of art and entertainment, knowing not only how to talk about short stories at cocktail parties, but also how to make your very own (short stories, not cocktail parties). You will learn various styles and systems and methods and maneuvers available to the short-story writer, and will concoct combinations of said styles, systems, methods, and maneuvers to create good fiction: fiction that stirs and moves its reader, and communicates some truth about what it's like to be a human being alive on earth. It'll be fun and valuable.

## 1.4 HOW DOES THIS COURSE WORK?

This course will have weekly assigned readings and writings. If you are here under the impression that creative writing courses bear a lighter workload than other writing courses, I advise that you get out from under that impression immediately. This course requires its students to write **6,000 critical words**—approximately **25 double-spaced pages**—during the semester.

You will meet this requirement of 6,000 words by writing weekly papers that respond to the assigned reading. In addition to critical papers, you will write weekly one-to-two-page creative assignments, and several creative pieces of greater lengths.

The two primary texts for this course will be *Cathedral* by Raymond Carver and *Tenth of December* by George Saunders, both collections of short stories.

Additional reading will be assigned from the class Dropbox folder. **You must print all online readings and bring them to class**, or else face swift penalization. If I suspect neglect of assignments, or reading-related malfeasance of any kind, I will have no choice but to quiz you on the material.

In short, this course will involve more work than many other courses, and though we will have a raucously grand time together during the semester, I expect you to take it seriously and make an earnest effort at improving.

## 2.1 HOW ABOUT A QUOTE OR TWO?

Have two! Here's one from Shakespeare (A) partnered with one from George Saunders (B):

A. "Brevity is the soul of wit."

B. "Humor is what happens when we're told the truth faster and more directly than we're used to."

## 2.2 THANK YOU FOR THOSE YUMMY QUOTES. WHAT ARE THE *REQUIRED* TEXTS FOR THIS COURSE?

You're very welcome.

*Cathedral* by Raymond Carver

*Tenth of December* by George Saunders

## 2.3 ALRIGHT, YES, DELIGHTFUL, AND WHAT ARE THE ASSIGNMENTS?

The assignments are Critical Essays, Stories, Workshop Letters, and Exercises.

### 2.3a BUT WHAT DO THOSE ASSIGNMENTS ENTAIL?

Good question.

**Critical Essays:** You will complete weekly 600-word critical essays over the course of the semester. These essays will examine the assigned readings and discuss various aspects of content, style, craft, and form. These essays will be held to the conventions of general academic writing—if you make a claim, it must be supported by evidence (i.e., a

quoted passage from the reading in question). These are not opinion pieces that discuss whether or not you “hated” or “really dug” a story, but serious critical analyses. You can discuss perceived strengths and weaknesses of stories as long as you are addressing a specific element (character, structure, prose style, etc.) of the story and you support your claims with evidence. These essays will be discussed in greater detail as they are assigned. A rubric for these essays can be found in subsequent pages of the syllabus.

**Stories:** You will each turn in two stories during the semester. These stories shall be no shorter than four pages, and no longer than twelve. You will be scheduled to have each story workshopped during the second half of the semester, and will have to bring in hard copies of your story (one copy for everybody) a week in advance. Consider the Schedule written in stone. Missing the day of class on which you are scheduled to be workshopped will gravely damage your grade in this class. Following workshop, you will revise your final story and turn this in as the course’s terminal assignment. Stories must avoid college tropes (partying [alcohol/drug abuse], break-ups, dorm/greek life), genre (sci-fi, fantasy, horror, zombie, vampire, fan-fic), and last-page twists or other things intended to unfairly trick the reader. These genres are specialized forms that require specialized knowledge to do well: you must learn to walk before you can run, and so on and so forth. There is a slight amount of wiggle room here that will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

**Workshop Letters:** You will compose workshop letters (around one page, double-spaced) that offer thoughtful criticism of your peers’ work. You should be prepared to read these letters aloud if called upon to do so. The general form of the workshop letter will be discussed in greater detail as the second half of the semester approaches. Bring a printed copy to class for the student in question and e-mail me a copy.

**Exercises:** Short (around one page) in-class and at-home assignments in the fictive mode will be assigned most weeks. Bring printed copies of these assignments to class.

**All Written Work:** All written work is expected to comply with basic rules of grammar and appropriate usage. These things are just as important to learn as the meaning of “plot.” Assignments will be marked off for faults in the grammatical realm.

## 4.1 HOW EXACTLY WILL THE GRADING OF THIS COURSE PLAY OUT?

The grading of this course will play out as follows, though this breakdown is subject to change during the semester:

1. Class Participation (peer reviews, in-class assignments, and discussion): 200 points
  2. Creative Exercises: 150 points
  3. Critical Responses: 250 points
  4. Story Draft: 50 points
  5. Final Story: 100 points
  6. Final Story Revision: 250 points
- Total: 1000 points**

Here is a rubric for **Critical Essays**:

**Content:** Ideas and analysis should be intellectually creative, complex, and critical. Papers offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Avoid summary. Go beyond the surface.

**Organization:** Use an orderly structure that facilitates reading and sustains reader interest. Paragraphs have meaningful topic sentences and cohere. Sentences should be written with an eye for clarity. Transitions between paragraphs create a logical progression of ideas.

**Evidence:** Support claims with examples from the text. Use relevant details to support your main ideas. Quotations should be properly integrated into the body of the paper. Excessively long quotations should not be necessary.

**Development:** Analyze your evidence in a way that supports your main points. Papers should build off each other and become more and more rich as the course progresses.

**Mechanics:** Spelling, grammar, and punctuation should show careful attention and proofreading (subject-verb agreement, run-ons, fragments, comma errors, unclear pronouns).

## 5.1 WHAT ARE THIS COURSE'S POLICIES/PROCEDURES?

**Cell phones, Texting, & Laptops:** These devices are neither necessary nor tolerated. You will be asked to leave and be given an absence if you fail to comply with this policy.

**Attendance:** Attendance *is* necessary. Given that this is a three-hour class, you are allowed one unexcused absence. For each unexcused absence in excess of one, 5% will be deducted from the your final grade. Absences due to illness or family crisis will be excused if documented to my satisfaction. Students participating in a university-sponsored event (athletics, theater, music, field trip) will be excused if there is documentation from an appropriate authority. Students excused from an absence are not excused from the work assigned for a class session; each student must arrange with the instructor for make-ups. Missing the class on which you are scheduled for workshop will result in a failing grade for the story. Tardiness will be excused if the reasons are acceptable to the instructor (e.g., a long exam in the previous class; a bus breakdown) and if there is valid documentation. Otherwise, tardiness is unacceptable because it is disruptive; both the over-all grade and the grade for class participation will suffer in the wake of tardiness.

**Submitting Assignments:** Assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the day assigned and in the assigned format. Each assignment will have specific features, but in general, writing assignments are on 8-1/2" x 11" white, smooth-edged paper, double-spaced with 1" margins on all sides, and on one side. If hand-written, the hand-writing must be legible and in either a No. 2 pencil or ink that is blue or black.

**Composition Requirement:** This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition. For more information, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-educationrequirement.aspx>

**Writing Requirement:** This course can provide 6,000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see:

<http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/writing-requirement.aspx>

**Student Disability Services:** The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

**Harassment:** UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.hr.ufl.edu/eo/sexharassment.htm>

**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:

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/scer/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

## **6.1 HOW ABOUT ANOTHER QUOTE?**

Sure thing. Try this one from Mark Twain on for size: “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

## **6.2 THAT IS A POTENT QUOTE! NOW, WHAT DOES THE SCHEDULE FOR THIS COURSE LOOK LIKE?**

It looks like this, but I intend to add further readings to several of our meetings. If I change the syllabus in any way, I will notify you, likely via email, which reminds me: you are responsible for checking your university emails. I may alter assignments or announce entirely new ones via email; I will try to avoid doing so on short notice, but it is up to you to know the contents of your inbox. But I digress:

### **1-6: Introduction/Orientation**

#### **1-13: Plot**

“Greenleaf” by Flannery O’Connor

“Victory Lap” by George Saunders

#### **1-20: Beginning**

“A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor

“Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Denis Johnson

#### **1-27: Place**

“The House Behind” by Lydia Davis

“Trilobites” by Breece D’J Pancake

**2-3: Time**

“The Death of Ivan Ilych” by Leo Tolstoy

**2-10: Character**

“For Esme—With Love and Squalor” by J.D. Salinger

“Good Old Neon” by David Foster Wallace

**2-17: Dialogue**

“The Mission” by Joy Williams

“Emergency” by Denis Johnson

“Home” by George Saunders

Workshop Stories:

Alysha Cunningham

Emily Dwyer

**2-24: Voice**

“Escape from Spiderhead” by George Saunders

“Invierno” by Junot Diaz

“Cathedral” by Raymond Carver

Workshop Stories:

Aariha Ali

Kacie Frost

**SPRING BREAK**

**3-9: Ending**

“A Small, Good Thing” by Raymond Carver

“Tenth of December” by George Saunders

“A Perfect Day for Bananafish” by J.D. Salinger

Workshop Stories:

Meyi Li

RJ Murphree

**3-16: Spectrum of Credulity**

“The Scrapper” by Breece D’J Pancake

“My Chivalric Fiasco” by George Saunders

“The School” by Donald Barthelme

Workshop Stories:

Natalia Velasquez

Skylar Baumann

**3-23: Wacky Modes**

“Shower of Gold” by Donald Barthelme

“The Imperative Mood” by Padgett Powell

Workshop Stories:

Amanda Price

Ronnie Finley

**3-30: Humor**

“Thang Pong and the Son of the Chief of Police” by Padgett Powell

“On the Deck” by Donald Barthelme

Workshop Stories:

Maddi Hills

Caillin Heron

**4-6: Theme TBA**

“In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” by Amy Hempel

“The Day We Got Drunk on Cake” by William Trevor

Workshop Stories:

Ryan Harke

Rachel Walker

**4-13: Theme TBA**

“Dubliners” by James Joyce

“Incarnations of Burned Children” by David Foster Wallace

Workshop Stories:

Madison Page

Alyssa Ashworth

**4-20: Theme TBA**

“Chefs House” by Raymond Carver

“This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” by Sherman Alexie

**Due: Revisions**

## **6.3 THAT LOOKS LIKE A ROCK-SOLID SCHEDULE. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE OUGHT TO KNOW?**

Yes. In this course, there are rules, and then there are laws. The rules are listed above. The laws here are compassion and respect: compassion for your fellow writer as a human being with daily trials not unlike your own, and respect for your fellow writer’s work. Recognize, always, the difficult vulnerability involved in bringing an original creation in front of peers and asking them to speak honestly about it. Allowing someone to read your writing is as sensitive and intimate of a thing as letting them hear you sing, *really* sing, as you would in your car. We’ll talk more about workshop etiquette before we begin actually workshopping each other’s pieces, but in the meantime, remember, two laws: compassion and respect.