

CRW 1101 – Beginning Fiction Writing, Class # 12015
Spring 2018

Instructor Name: John Bolen (preferred title in class: John)

Course meeting times & locations: Ustler 0108, Thursdays periods 9-11 (4:05pm to 7:05pm)

Office Location and Hours: Thursdays 2:00pm – 4:00pm or by an appointment made at least 24 hours in advance, Turlington 4108

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu (UF Canvas website)

Instructor Email: johnbolen@ufl.edu

Course Description

This course will focus on why good short fiction works and why bad short fiction does not, with the hope that, by the end of the course, you will be one iota closer to writing good short fiction, or you will at least have a slightly better ear for good short fiction, *or* you will be able to determine for yourselves what *you* deem to be good short fiction and what you deem bad short fiction. We will read both classic and contemporary short stories, paying close attention to the “how” rather than the “why,” while also interrogating the intrinsic entanglement of the two. By the end of the course, you will have learned a portion of the various styles, methods, techniques, and maneuvers available to the short story writer, and you will have employed some of them in your own writing.

About short stories, Truman Capote said

Since each story presents its own technical problems, obviously one can't generalize about them on a two-times-two-equals-four basis. Finding the right form for your story is simply to realize the most *natural* way of telling the story. The test of whether or not a writer has divined the natural shape of his story is just this: after reading it, can you imagine it differently, or does it silence your imagination and seem to you absolute and final? As an orange is final. As an orange is something nature has made just right.

About short stories, Joy Williams said

I do believe there is, in fact, a mystery to the whole enterprise that one dares to investigate at peril. The story knows itself better than the writer does at some point, knows what's being said before the writer figures out how to say it.

The goal for this course is to help you discover the most natural way of telling a story.

This course will have weekly reading and writing assignments. If you're taking this class because you think that creative writing courses bear a lighter workload than other writing courses, then this is not the class for you.

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 6,000 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: *The Death of Ivan Illyich*, by Leo Tolstoy. All of the other reading will be provided on Canvas. You must print all online readings and bring them to class. If I see that you are not doing this, you will get a 0% participation grade for that day.

Recommended Texts: Key word here is “Recommended.” I do not want anyone spending money on something that they will not see the point in owning after the class is finished. These are texts that have helped me understand the short story form, and texts that I believe contain a plethora of examples of good writing: *Tunneling to the Center of the Earth*, Kevin Wilson. *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Nine Stories*, J.D. Salinger. *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, Richard Yates. *The Old Forest*, Peter Taylor. *The New Yorker Stories*, Ann Beattie. *Dusk*, James Salter.

Assignments/Grading:

Reading:

- Short stories every week, occasional interviews, your classmates’ stories.

Writing:

- Creative exercises
- Short Essays on the assigned short stories (600 words, 9 total)
- Workshop letters (one typed page minimum)
- One story (minimum 1 pages, maximum 10 pages)
- Artistic Statement (600 words)
- Story revision

Participation: 200 Points (See Course Policies)

- You are expected to be awake, prepared, and present in class each week. This class only meets once a week, so if you miss a class, you’ve missed an entire week. What’s more, you also will have fleeced your classmates of the opportunity to hear your thoughts on their stories.

- Preparation is part of participation. Being prepared for class means that you will have *thoroughly* read what was assigned. This means taking notes, writing in the margins, highlighting, or whatever it is you need to do to feel comfortable talking about a piece from beginning to end. If I feel like you are not holding up your end of the bargain on this, I will begin quizzing you.
- This *especially* goes for the workshop portion of the class. You should be reading your peers' work **twice**, both without and with a pen. I will talk more about this in class.
- Cell phones, texting, and laptops are not allowed. I will ask you to put it away the first time, then I will ask you to leave and you will receive an unexcused absence for that day.

Creative Exercises: 150 points

- I will often assign page-long creative exercises either in class or out, which you will hand in. These will be graded only for completion. If you do them to the best of your ability, then this should be an easy 150 points.

Weekly Essays: 270 points

- You will complete nine 600-word essays on the assigned readings, which you will submit on Canvas before each class. They should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, and in 12-point font. These essays will examine certain aspects of style, craft, and form—and their effects on the reader and on the story. If you make a claim, it must be supported by evidence, such as a quoted passage from the reading. These should not be platforms for political arguments and should not be arguments for why you did or did not like a story—although, if you can make a coherent and convincing case for why you found an assigned story to be lacking in a specific area, I will happily accept that. If you want to write a 600-word essay on the absence of quotation marks in a story, then by all means, go for it. If you find yourself moved to write about the use of a symbol in a story—say, the bottles of beer in Ann Beattie's "A Platonic Relationship"—try to investigate not only what the symbol means contextually, but also *how* the writer implements the symbol's use within the story. You should be discussing the practical ways writers accomplish whatever it is they are trying to accomplish. I will provide examples, and we will discuss these essays in more detail as they are assigned.

Workshop letters: Part of your participation grade

- You will write a one-page letter (12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced) to each person whose story is being workshopped. Bring one copy to class for your classmate and submit one copy on Canvas. You should be prepared to read these letters aloud if called upon to do so.

Stories (Short Story, 150 points, Final revision, 180 points, Artistic Statement (600 words, 50 points))

- You will produce one short story and one revision in this class. You should obey rules of grammar and appropriate usage. I understand that great writers often abandon these rules, but I believe that, starting out, you should first have a good grasp on formal storytelling. Should you feel compelled, for the sake of your story, to intentionally disobey these rules of grammar and syntax, then we can discuss that one-on-one. Your story should be fictional. You should *not* write a memoir or a personal essay—more on this in class. You should *not* write your story the night before. I am looking for clarity, attention to detail, thoughtfulness, attention to language, and an understanding of the styles and techniques we discuss in class.

Grading Rubric for Weekly Essays:

Content: Ideas should be intellectually creative, complex, and critical. Papers offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Avoid summary. Go beneath 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 should 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.)

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Your second unexcused absence will cost you a letter grade. If you have three unexcused absences you will fail the course. A justified excuse (medical emergency, family emergency, religious holiday, etc.) will be excepted from this rule.
3. If you are late 3 times you will be marked absent.
4. Assignments should be submitted at the beginning of class on the day assigned and in the assigned format. Stories should be submitted the class before they will be workshopped.
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. *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/>

Weekly Schedule

Reading assignments, scheduling, and weekly themes are subject to change. You will be notified by email. The themes are merely meant to get you thinking about the critical essays; they are not *completely* arbitrary, but close. Workshop order, however, is completely arbitrary.

Your story is *always* due the class period before your workshop.

Your name
Times New Roman
12-point font
Page numbers
Stapled

January 10th: Introduction/orientation

January 17th: Character

“Builders,” Richard Yates
“For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” J.D. Salinger

January 24th: Plot

“Greenleaf,” Flannery O’Connor
“Bartleby, The Scrivener,” Herman Melville

Essay # 1 Due

January 31st: Time

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” Leo Tolstoy

Essay # 2 Due

Workshop 1

February 7th: Theme TBA

“Danny in Transit,” David Leavitt
“A Platonic Relationship,” Ann Beattie

Essay # 3 Due

Workshop 2

February 14th: Dialogue

“Silver Water,” Amy Bloom
“Just Before the War with the Eskimos,” J.D. Salinger

Essay # 4 Due

Workshop 3

February 21st: Memory

“The Old Forest,” Peter Taylor

Essay # 5 Due

Workshop 4

February 28th

“Apollo,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Gold Coast,” James Alan McPherson

Essay # 6 Due

Workshop 5

March 7th

No class. Spring Break

March 14th: Point of View

“Leopard,” Wells Tower

“The Dead Sister Handbook: A Guide for Sensitive Boys,” Kevin Wilson

Essay # 7 Due

Workshop 6

March 21st: Couldn't Be True, but Should Be

“The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Wildfire Johnny,” Kevin Wilson

Essay # 8 Due

Workshop 7

March 28th: Theme TBA

“What Is Remembered,” Alice Munro

“An Ex-Mas Feast,” Uwem Akpan

Essay # 9 Due

Workshop 8

April 4th: Voice

“Most Die Young,” Camille Bordas

“Goodbye and Good Luck,” Grace Paley

Workshop 9

April 11th: Theme TBA

“Treasure State,” Smith Henderson

“Emergency,” Denis Johnson

Workshop 10

April 18th: Ending

“Chicxulub,” T.C. Boyle

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

Revision and artistic statement due April 25th