

CRW2100 – Fiction Writing, Section 37B0 (Class # 12827), Fall 2019

Instructor Name: Timothy Schirmer

Course meeting times & locations: Fridays, 9:35am – 12:35pm

Office Location and Hours: Tuesdays & Wednesdays 10:30am – 12:30pm, and by appointment, Turlington 4108

Course website: Email based

Instructor Email: timothy.kyle85@ufl.edu

Required Texts:

-Bird by Bird, Some Instructions on Writing and Life, Anne Lamott

Course Description:

This course will primarily run as a writing workshop, specifically focused on what is called flash fiction or short short fiction. Over the term each of you will workshop 3 short pieces (400 – 750 words maximum). Ideally you'll be trying to write a story with characters, setting, and situation, all in under 750 words. Trying to open up a big believable world with only one page to do it. However, I call them "pieces" because they don't necessarily have to be fiction if that proves too challenging at first. You can also write about your dog chewing up your underwear, or your imaginary dog, or the dream you had last night, or a food you're obsessed with, etc... The main goal of these "pieces" (if they shy away from conventional fiction) is that they should at least be interesting bits of life that you believe others might also find interesting because you've taken some time to explain something weird, insightful, beautiful etc... in the world. **Please do not turn in excerpts from longer pieces of work you may be working on.** This class is meant to help you generate new, fresh material. Stories are made of moments, interesting little parts, and if you keep writing down the parts, you can learn to build a narrative by linking them. Remember that story is powerful, it is a way of saying—through fiction—what is difficult to say in reality. A big world can be opened up with very few words.

ie: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." –Ernest Hemingway

In this class we will read one book on writing by Anne Lamott. This book will help clarify some of the big challenges that writers face in their work, and in their lives. Then we will move on to assigned short stories via email and the Internet. Many of these stories will be under 1,000 words in length, and have been thoughtfully selected to aid you in the process of learning the very short form. At the beginning of each class there will be a quick easy quiz to make sure you're keeping on top of the reading. The quizzes are worth 10% of your grade, so make sure you're reading the assigned material. Furthermore, remember that daily reading is one of the most important activities for nourishing your writer mind.

To satisfy the Composition (C) and (WR) requirement (in weeks 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the class) you will turn in a 1,500 word critical response. Each student will complete four of these responses over the semester. The first portion of your critical response will be a writing assignment related to the themes and topics covered in the previous week's lectures and readings. These analytical assignments will change from week to week. Each assignment will come with detailed instructions.

For the second portion of each Critical Response you will turn in two story ideas inspired by events or things you observe in the world around you. Please state the thing that caused the idea, and then explain your idea. For example: This week I saw or experienced _____, and it gave me the idea to write a story about _____. The point of this exercise is to connect you with the idea that story is all around us when we're paying close attention, even in the simplest of subjects and details.

Lastly, each of you will participate in a weekly game called *ACROPHOBIA*. This activity is modeled on an old computer game that was popular at the advent of the Internet. *ACROPHOBIA* is game designed to help us look more closely at what makes an interesting sentence; the more granular, poetic aspects of writing. Each week I will present you with an acronym (For example, S. Y. W. T. B. A. M.) and you will have one minute to come up with a sentence that corresponds to that acronym. (So You Want To Be A Mailman?). I will collect the sentences, type them up, and email all of them to the class that afternoon. Each of you will be responsible for voting for the sentence you like best.

Every week we will do some kind of free write inspired by the *ACRAPHOBIA* sentences. Strong writing begins at the sentence level, each sentence opening the door to the next sentence. You will pick an *ACRAPHOBIA* sentence, and then you will do a free write inspired by that sentence. Afterward I expect at least a few of you to wow us with your bravery and share what you've written. Surprisingly, some of the best work I've encountered has come out of this free writing process. It's like stepping up to the edge of the diving board, that's where you can do your best thinking—and writing—on the spot!

In this class we will also read together, watch clips from films, TV, and 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.

Writing Assignments:

STORIES:

As mentioned above, each of you will be responsible for turning in 3 pieces of flash fiction (400-750 words) over the semester. The piece will be submitted to the class on your assigned due date in (**printed**) copies. Printed copies are **mandatory** for every workshop. I will not accept emailed workshop pieces under any circumstance. Turning in your piece late, or via email, runs the risk of excluding classmates who won't see it in time. You must print your work and attend class, especially on days when you're turning in or workshoping. If you're trying to conserve resources, feel free to print your story single-spaced and in a smaller font. You are expected to respectfully critique your fellow students' work, which means speaking about a piece of writing's strengths, while also pointing out where there's room for improvement.

CRITICAL RESPONSES:

In weeks 3, 4, 5, and 6 you will be responsible for **printing** and handing in a 1,500 word critical response, as detailed above. Remember that there are two parts to the critical responses. Firstly, a character analysis, and secondly, a short list of story ideas generated from your everyday life.

ACRAPHOBIA INSPIRED FREE WRITES:

These writing assignments will be done exclusively in class, and are designed to show you that writing in the very short form is easier than it looks if you stay focused on the sentence at hand, letting each sentence carry you into the next like falling dominoes. You are more than welcome to turn in for workshop a revision of something you wrote during one of these writes. Furthermore, the free writes give each student an additional opportunity to share their writing on a weekly basis.

Rubric:

1. Class Participation (includes workshop comments, in-class discussion, and in class writing, etc.) — 100 points
2. Critical Responses — 300 points
3. Stories — 400 points
4. Quizzes — 100 points
5. ACRAPHOBIA — 100 points

Critical Responses — These will be graded according to clarity, concision, and use of convincing evidence to support your argument.

Stories — These will be graded based on word count and the originality and creativity of the work. There is no such thing as a right or wrong story.

Quizzes — These will be graded based on whether you've read the material. They will total 10% of your grade.

ACRAPHOBIA — These will be graded based on your participation, both in class, and voting for your favorite sentences via email.

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 percentage grade reduction. For instance, if you miss more than two classes without a documented excuse, and your grade in the course is an A, then the grade would fall to a B. Four absences

- earns 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. *Classroom etiquette*. You are expected to treat each other with patience and courtesy. We will be sharing material that is of a sensitive nature in this class, and it's important to be mindful of one another's feelings. Use of personal electronics should be suspended during class unless otherwise instructed.
 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 – August 23

TO READ: *Fifty-Year-Old-Face*, by Kurt Newton; *The Girl*, by Joe HSSERT; *Happy Endings*, by Margaret Atwood; *I Walk Between the Raindrops*, by T.C. Boyle (quiz on August 30th)

IN CLASS: *Review the syllabus, Introductions, Storytelling and Life, Practice Noticing, Keeping Loose, Having Fun, and Staying Curious*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 2 – August 30

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 1-80 (quiz on September 6th)

IN CLASS: *Character, Plot, and The Interesting Situation*

IN CLASS: *Debate on Astrology*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 3 – September 6

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 81-160 (quiz on September 13th)

DUE: 1st critical response (**Printed**)

IN CLASS: *Setting, the Six Senses, Descriptive Language, Painting with Words*

IN CLASS: *Debate on Astrology*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 4 – September 13

TO READ: *Bird by Bird*, pgs 161 – 237 (quiz on September 20th)

DUE: 2nd critical response (**Printed**)

IN CLASS: *Philosophy, Deeper Themes, subtlety, complexity, and nuance*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 5 – September 20

TO READ: *Detachment*, by Hugh Fulham-McQuillan; *Fridge*, by Elizabeth Burton; *A woman of Appetites*, by Yasmina Din Madden; *War of the Clowns*, by Mia Couto (quiz on September 27th)

DUE: 3rd critical response (**Printed**)

DUE: Group A's stories (**Printed**)

IN CLASS: *Scope, Zooming in, Dialogue, How to Write in Scene, and How Flash Fiction Can Grow into Long-Form Fiction*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 6 – September 27

TO READ: *Travel Tips to Kiev, Ukraine*, by Kalani Pickhart; *The Wife on Ambien*, by Ed Park; *The Lazy River* by Zadie Smith (quiz on October 4th)

DUE: 4th critical response (**Printed**)

DUE: Group B's stories (**Printed**)

IN CLASS: *Metaphors, Comparisons, and Mirroring*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

WORKSHOP: Group A's stories

Week 7 - October 4 – NO CLASS FOR HOMECOMING

DUE: Group C's stories (**Emailed**)

Week 8 – October 11

TO READ: *Last Long Night*, by Lina Rather; *Oxalis*, by Robert Scotellaro; *An Honest Woman*, by Ottessa Moshfegh (quiz on October 18th)

DUE: Group A's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group B and Group C's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 9 – October 18

TO READ: *Being the Murdered Babysitter*, by Cathy Ulrich; *Sorry Dan, but it's no longer necessary for a human to serve as CEO of this company*, by Erik Cofer; *Elevator Pitches*, by Jonathan Lethem; *My Life is a Joke*, by Sheila Heti (quiz on October 25th)

DUE: Group B's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group A's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 10 – October 25

TO READ: *So Pretty When She Smiled*, by Lavanya Vasudevan; *(Un)foreseeable Future*, by Bari Lynn Hein; *Uncle Jim Called*, by David Rabe (quiz on November 1st)

DUE: Group C's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group B's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 11 – November 1

TO READ: *My Dead*, by Peter Orner; *A Little Like Hope*, by Jason Jackson; *Clean Cleaner, Cleanest*, by Sherman Alexie (quiz on November 8th)

DUE: Group A's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group C's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 12 – November 8

TO READ: TO READ: *The Metal Bowl*, by Miranda July (quiz on November 15th)

DUE: Group B's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group A's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 13 – November 15

TO READ: TO READ: *The Presentation on Egypt*, by Camille Bordas (quiz on November 22nd)

DUE: Group C's stories (**Printed**)

WORKSHOP: Group B's stories

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 14 – November 22

WORKSHOP: Group C's stories

IN CLASS: *Reading, Discussion, and Film Screening*

IN CLASS: *ACRAPHOBIA*

Week 15 – November 29 – NO CLASS FOR THANKSGIVING