

CRW1101: Beginning Fiction Writing

Instructor: Albertine Clarke

Class time: T6-8 (Tuesday, 12:50-3:50)

Room: Turlington 2353

Email: albertineclarke@ufl.edu

Tel: 3527090642

Office hours: TUR 4349, Thursdays 11am-12pm

Required texts: A course packet with the weekly readings will be distributed prior to class. We are reading one full novella, *Goodbye, Columbus* by Philip Roth, so please have a copy of that for our third class. You can find it in the library, or the website [World of Books](#) is great for cheap second hand editions, but make sure you order a few weeks in advance as it can take a while for things to arrive.

Course Objective

Over the course of our fifteen weeks together, we will read, discuss, and craft short fiction. Close readings with critical eyes and careful observation as well as precise writing will be our main focus. We will study the structure and fundamental tools of writing, and attempt to penetrate the meaning or significance of the story by examining how and why it works the way it works. This does not require you to like a story. The course discourages you from passing judgment on a story—whether written by an established author or one of your own peers—based on your initial sentiments, particular styles, likes, and dislikes. Please do the assigned readings beforehand and be prepared to engage in a lively discussion.

CRW 1101 has multiple, complimentary parts. The first half we'll discuss setting, tone, point of view, character, narrative arc, etc.—the crucial elements of fiction. Our exploration of these stories will in turn serve as a model as we attempt our own fictions. We will then workshop each other's stories. This means giving specific, insightful, and constructive criticism that will benefit the writer and the rest of the class.

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 will include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes, and contexts. Students will 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 the minimum word requirements totalling 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.

Assignment Requirements

The major written assignments in this class are weekly reading responses, in-class writing exercises, one text analysis, and a reflection essay. As well as this you will complete at least one short story to be workshopped. **A (digital) copy of all major assignments and in-class exercises, including instructor comments, should be retained and handed in at the end of the semester.**

Coursework

Graded work has a word count and point percentage included. 1000 points are available overall.

Workshop Critiques You will be expected to make careful line edits to your peers' stories as well as commenting constructively in class discussions. In addition, you must provide two typed copies (250 words min.) of critiques for each story submitted to workshop (except your own). One copy is for me, the other for the story's author. Providing responses to your fellow writers is a fundamental element of the workshop; accordingly, you are expected to offer your peers the same high level of useful criticism you hope to receive.

Reading Responses (1800 words total/ 30%) For those class meetings that have published stories assigned as reading, you will write responses and post them to a weekly discussion board by 9am on the day of class. They should be at least 300 words each. If we are reading multiple stories, you can choose to write on any one or all of them. The response should address one or more of the aspects of fiction we will study during our course time (i.e., plot, structure, character, point of view, style, setting, theme, etc.). This exercise is to make sure everybody has something to contribute to the discussion.

Close Textual Analysis (1800 words/ 30%) During the first half of the course you will choose two short stories from the syllabus to write a close textual analysis. You can choose to either write one comparative essay of 1800 words, or two smaller essays on each story adding up to a total of 1800 words. These should build off your weekly written responses. Details will be discussed in the first class.

Writing Exercises In this class we will be doing regular writing exercises (<500 words). They will either be based on the texts we read, or on a particular technique or form of writing. They are designed to help you experiment with language, and encourage you to practise writing outside of your preferred style in a low-stakes environment.

First Short Story (2000 words minimum/ 20%) You will produce your first short story while engaged in the study of craft. I will not limit the subject matter or which you choose to write about. Genre writing is allowed, but there are aspects of this I will ask you to limit – if writing fantasy or science fiction, world building should be extremely limited. If writing crime/ romance/ horror, please avoid cliché. If you are tackling a subject that might be considered especially sensitive, or intend to include depictions of violence in your story, please show it to me before circulating it to your classmates. If I have one piece of advice here it's to keep things simple: clear writing is always preferable to a laboured concept or an overburdened plot.

Do not go over 6000 words; excerpts from longer works are acceptable.

Second Short Story OR Revision of First Story (2000 words minimum/ 20%) For your final assignment, choose ONE of the following options:

(1) Write a new story, following the same guidelines as above. Having already written and given feedback on one story, you should have a better sense of your craft and voice; therefore this story may weigh more heavily on your final grade.

(2) Write a revision of your first story (submit with a copy of the original draft). This must be a significant revision, considering the feedback you have received from your peers and me during your workshop. Your grade will suffer if you only make grammatical or technical fixes—your story must develop and grow.

Participation You are expected to attend class regularly, participate actively in class discussions and critique the work of your peers on hard copy and with diligence and respect. Failure to do any of these things will lower this portion of your grade. I also reserve the right, in cases of disrespectful workshop behaviour or lack of adequate peer critique, to lower your individual story or paper grades accordingly.

Course Policies:

- *Assignments:* You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course.
- *Attendance:* Given that we meet only once a week, you are allowed **one** absence without explanation or excuse (though prior notice would be greatly appreciated given the nature of the course). Subsequent unexplained or unexcused absences will affect your grade. **If you have more than 2 absences, you cannot pass the course.**

Excused absences, such as athletic events, theater commitments, illnesses, family emergencies, etc. **require appropriate documentation AND advance notice given to me.** You will be responsible for meeting with me outside of class to make a plan for completing work missed due to absences. You will also be responsible for turning in any assignments regardless of whether you are in class or not. For UF's official attendance policy, you can visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

- *Tardiness:* Be on time to show respect to your colleagues and me. Should lateness be unavoidable, understand that **3 late arrivals without advance notice = 1 absence.**
- *Classroom Behavior:* Please be respectful and attentive to your colleagues and to me when we are talking, whether during discussion of published poets or during workshop of our own work. In particular, be respectful of your colleagues' diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs. Critique others as you would like to be critiqued—for me, that means substantive, actionable feedback that respects the intention and inherent validity of the submitted work.

You are also responsible for keeping up with your UF email, as this is how I will contact you outside of class. Feel free to reach out to me via Canvas messaging anytime—I'll try to respond within 24 hours on business days.

No use of phones or laptops during class unless I specifically instruct you to use your laptops for in-class work.

- *Sexual Harassment:* The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community: <https://titleix.ufl.edu/about/title-ix-rights/>
- *Paper Format & Submission:* All assignments should be typed in a readable, 12 pt. font with standard 1 in. margins. All assignments except poems should be double-spaced. (Poems should be single-spaced.) **Submit all stories**, whether to me or for workshop, **via email in class AND on Canvas. If you would like to submit via paper, you are responsible for bringing enough copies of your story to class, the week prior to your workshop date.**
- *Late Papers/Assignments:* Acceptance of late papers/assignments will be at my discretion and dependent on circumstances. **Here, as with absences, advance notice is key.**
- *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities.* Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
- *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism.* UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold

ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: 'On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.'" The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.

As specified by the current UF Student Honor Code: A Student must not represent as the Student's own work all or any portion of the work of another.

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

- a. Stealing, misquoting, insufficiently paraphrasing, or patch-writing.
- b. Self-plagiarism, which is the reuse of the Student's own submitted work, or the simultaneous submission of the Student's own work, without the full and clear acknowledgment and permission of the Faculty to whom it is submitted.
- c. Submitting materials from any source without proper attribution.
- d. Submitting a document, assignment, or material that, in whole or in part, is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment the Student did not author.

In short, show respect to yourself, your colleagues, and me by submitting original work earnestly and honestly produced by you for all assignments.

- Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu/>), which will provide appropriate documentation to give your instructor early in the semester.
- *Students who are in distress* or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact <https://umatter.ufl.edu/> or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you.

UF's Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support at (352) 392-1575. You can also contact them online at <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

If you are experiencing unmanageable stress or other emotional or physical distress during the semester, please **ask me for help finding resources**. In addition to teaching you to read and write fiction, I am committed to helping you succeed in a rigorous academic environment and to introducing you to the myriad resources for mental, physical, and emotional help and for time- and stress-management available on campus.

- For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
- *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount (cblount@ufl.edu), Program

Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

- *Course Evaluations.* Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages requesting that you do this online: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

Grading Scale and General Rubric:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C+ | C | C- | D+ | D | D- | E |
| 93-100 | 90-92 | 87-89 | 83-86 | 80-82 | 77-79 | 73-76 | 70-72 | 67-69 | 63-66 | 60-62 | 0-59 |
| 4.0 | 3.67 | 3.33 | 3.0 | 2.67 | 2.33 | 2.0 | 1.67 | 1.33 | 1.0 | 0.67 | 0.00 |

"A"- A paper at this level is truly high quality. It demonstrates a clear understanding of critical concepts, creatively addresses the subject matter, and exceeds the expectations of critical analysis. A paper with this grade will be free of grammatical errors.

"B"- A paper with this grade has met the standards of the assignment at a high level. This assignment may need revision but is organized in a logical way and avoids fallacies or mistakes in critical analysis. A paper with this grade may contain grammatical errors but will be readable.

"C"- A paper that earns a "C" has done everything that was required, but no more. This assignment may require significant revision to more thoroughly examine critical elements or may need reorganization. A paper with this grade will generally contain a few grammatical errors but will still be readable.

"D"- This paper does not adequately fulfill the assignment to a satisfactory degree. One portion of an assignment may be missing or there may be a misused critical element. Papers with this grade tend to be disorganized and contain many grammatical errors.

"E"- This paper does not address the assignment prompt or is unreadable/incomplete.

Semester class schedule

Please complete ALL readings before each class, and come prepared to participate in discussion. I will circulate a course packet online before the start of class. If you would like to print hard copies of stories/ buy hard copies to bring with you that's great (and can be very helpful for notetaking), but not necessary. If you'd like me to print you a copy for accessibility reasons, contact me with plenty of time before class and I'm happy to do so.

Please keep in mind that that this schedule is always subject to change: I may make adjustments via e-mail and it is your responsibility to read through each with attention.

Week 1 – Welcome and overview of class

Introduction to the course and syllabus. Discussion of writing exercises. Discussion of the workshop method. Meet your fellow writers.

In class writing exercise

Week 2 – Reading as a writer

Generating story ideas. Reading as a writer. Structuring the plot of a story. Discussion of first story assignment and close textual analysis.

Barry Hannah – Love Too Long

Katherine Mansfield – The Garden Party

Zadie Smith – Fail Better (essay)

Writing exercise

Week 3 – Setting, tone, style

Beginning a story. How do we establish meaning? How do we create a sense of place and develop a style that fits the setting, or a setting that fits our style? How do we sustain that over the course of a narrative arc?

Philip Roth – Goodbye, Columbus

Week 4 – Character and Voice

Building characters and giving them individual identities. Unreliable narrators. Dialogue.

How do we develop our own voice?

Natalia Ginzburg – Family Lexicon (extract)

George Saunders – Victory Lap

Romaine Gary (Emile Ajar) – The Life Before Us (extract)

Week 5 – Genre

What is the point of genre? What can it be used for? What are the rules, and how important are they?

Philip K Dick – I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon

Octavia Butler – Speech Sounds/ attached essay

Writing exercise

Week 6 – (Non)fiction/ Autofiction

How much inspiration should we take from our own lives? Essays and autofiction.

J. D. Daniels – Letter from Cambridge

Amy Hempel – The Harvest

Writing exercise

Week 7 – Metaphor and image

Allegorical writing. How far can you stretch a metaphor? Magical realism. Symbolic and literal meanings.

Jorge Luis Borges – The Aleph and The Library of Babel

Clarice Lispector – The Fifth Story

Writing exercise

Week 8 – First workshop

Text analysis due

All subsequent classes will be workshops.