

CRW1101—BEGINNING FICTION WRITING (Spring 2022)

Instructor: Jake Bartman

Course Meeting Time and Location: T 9-11 (4:05 p.m.-7:05 p.m.), Little Hall 207

Office Hours and Location: Mondays 1:30-3:30 p.m., Turlington 4325; and by appointment.

Class section and number: 6754/12323

Instructor email: jbartman@ufl.edu

Required texts:

Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, 10th edition. Chicago Guides, 2019.

(I'll provide you with all other readings for the course.)

Course description:

“A writer needs three things, experience, observation, and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others.”—William Faulkner

“A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them.”—William Stafford

This is a course about writing literary fiction. To what exactly the term “literary fiction” refers will be a matter of discussion in the course, but as a provisional definition we might say that literary fiction—as opposed to so-called “genre” fiction—privileges formal elements like character and voice over plot and world-building. For the purposes of this course, when we talk about “fiction” in broad terms, we’ll be talking about literary fiction in particular. (Although you’ll be expected to write literary short stories for this course, many of the elements that work well in literary fiction also work in genre fiction [and vice versa], meaning that ideally the things we discuss in class will serve you in whatever kind of fiction you choose to write in the future.)

This course is structured around different craft elements: we’ll read essays about craft, and then see how these elements are used in actual works of fiction. But it is important to note that a major part of what makes good art lies in one’s willingness to break rules and experiment with technique. Fiction doesn’t have rules per se, any more than painting or sculpture or experimental dance have rules. By reading and talking about a breadth of different works of fiction, in different styles, and by a range of different authors, we’ll explore the many ways in which it is possible to tell a story well. We’ll also begin applying some of these lessons to our own work both in exercises and, in the latter half of the semester, to our own stories.

Note that this course will not be a total walk in the park, workload-wise. While I’m cognizant of the fact that everyone has other courses that they’re taking, and while I won’t overburden you with a crazy amount of reading, your weekly workload generally will involve reading two or three short stories and an essay about craft. You’ll also have either a craft assignment or a reading response to complete each week.

Because reading, and especially reading like a writer (another thing we'll talk about this semester) are so crucial to this course, I reserve the right to stage pop quizzes if I suspect that people aren't reading things as closely as they should be.

A few points of order:

1. While I've been writing and studying fiction for a while, I'm not an authority on the subject, and I encourage you to take everything I say with a proverbial grain of salt. Alert readers will notice the irony in my insistence on art's resistance to rules at the same time as I set forth in this syllabus somewhat rigid expectations for how this course will go. My expectation is that you'll indulge these structures and work within them to the best of your ability, and that at the end of the course, if you choose to keep writing fiction (hopefully you will), you'll be able to take what works for you and dispense with the rest.
2. Some of the stories we'll be reading this semester involve things like drug use, suicide, abuse, etc. I am alert to the ways in which such subject matter can be difficult for some folks. Accordingly, I'll do my best to give everyone a heads-up about the content of each week's reading. Please talk to me after class, in office hours, or via email if you anticipate that the reading will cause you hardship, and we'll make arrangements.

If you have concerns about anything in this syllabus, please talk to me. My metaphorical door is open!

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.

Grading:

Class participation: 35% (350 points)

No surprises here: this is a discussion-based course, so you've got to participate in class. Before each class, you must read all craft essays once; all works of fiction at least once, but preferably twice; and your peers' stories at least twice.

"Class participation" also includes in-class assignments—writing exercises and pop quizzes both: there will be in-class assignment every week. You'll also need to be present and to participate when we workshop your peers' stories.

Homework assignments: 35% (350 points)

These will include creative writing-type assignments and weekly discussion questions about assigned readings, and also feedback on your peers' stories (you'll be expected to write a workshop letter and to provide useful annotations on story drafts—I'll offer more information on these letters in class).

Workshop stories: 30% (300 points)

You'll write one short story to be workshopped in class in the latter third of the semester. This story will be a maximum of 5000 words, and is due *one week before the date that you're scheduled for workshop* (so that everyone has time to read it). These are due *in hard copy*, with one copy printed for each member of the class.

You'll also be responsible for turning in a revision of your story at the very end of the semester. This revision is expected to take into account feedback from your peers and your instructor. For your final project, you'll submit your earlier draft of the story, the revision, plus a cover letter that points up some of the changes you did or did not make, and that justifies your decisions.

Course policies:

1. Masks are expected in class, even if you are vaccinated.
2. You have to complete all assignments in order to get credit for the course. This is a part of the university's 6,000-word Writing Requirement.

3. Attendance: We meet once a week for three hours. Each class counts for two attendance credits. You may not lose more than three attendance credits per semester and still pass the course. Exempt from this policy are those absences due to university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, religious holidays, quarantine, illness, or serious family emergencies. For absences due to quarantine or illness, I may require a signed doctor's note or confirmation from UF Screen, Test, & Protect. Students are responsible for updating their UF-required Screen, Test, & Protect status.
4. Three instances of tardiness = one lost attendance credit.
 1. This is all to say that at most, you may miss one class period *and* be tardy three times, and still pass.
 2. If you miss class, it is up to you to contact me about making up the work that you missed.
5. UF's policy on 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>.
6. Submission format: everything via Canvas except in-class assignments and your workshop story, which must be in hard copy (with one copy made for every member of the class).
7. Late assignments: late assignments won't be accepted *unless you contact me to ask for an extension at least 24 hours in advance of the due date*.
 1. You're allowed *one* late assignment per semester, no questions asked. Workshop stories must be submitted on time in order for the class to function smoothly, so you can't apply your late assignment-credit to those, however.
8. Assignment maintenance: hang onto everything you get from me until the end of the semester, please.
9. You are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. Any violation of the academic integrity expected of you will result in a minimum academic sanction of a failing grade on the assignment. Any alleged violations of the Student Honor Code will result in a referral to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. Please review the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code at <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code>.
10. 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 me early in the semester.
11. Students who are in distress or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact 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 find them online at <https://counseling.ufl.edu>.
12. For information on UF Grading policies, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.
13. 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 English Department office (4008 TUR or cblount@ufl.edu). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

14. Course evaluations AKA GatorEvals: 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 at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>. Thank you for taking the time to fill these out!
15. Cell phones are not allowed in class. You may not have your phone on your desk during class, either. If I see you texting, I will confiscate your phone and send haiku to all your friends and loved ones.
16. Required texts: Aside from the Burroway book, everything will be available on Canvas.

Grading scale:

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

Grading rubric:

Note that because this course will involve a breadth of assignment types, an exhaustive rubric isn't possible. This rubric describes a few general features common to assignments that earn a particular score.

A: Extremely well-crafted paragraphs that include topic sentences, and that demonstrate unity and coherence. Thoughtful organization—an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Deploys original ideas and/or stylistic devices. Appropriate in tone; sophisticated development of pertinent ideas, images, etc. Zero grammatical mistakes or typos.

B: Generally well-crafted paragraphs that demonstrate a degree of unity and coherence. Thoughtful organization, including an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, although there may be some flaws in the overall presentation of ideas. Contains a few original ideas or stylistic devices. Largely appropriate in tone; strong development of pertinent ideas, images, etc. One to three grammatical mistakes or typos.

C: Some errors at the level of paragraphing. Organization is still present, but less clear; paragraphs demonstrate a minimal amount of unity and coherence. Ideas and stylistic devices may be well used, but tend toward the commonplace. Largely appropriate in tone; adequate development of pertinent ideas, images, etc. Four to five grammatical mistakes or typos.

D: Inexplicable paragraphing; near-total lack of organization. Sentences are poorly written and/or inappropriate in tone. Ideas and stylistic devices are inadequately developed. More than five grammatical mistakes or typos.

E: Self-explanatory.

Tentative schedule:

Week 1, Jan. 11: Introduction

Intro to course; syllabus

Read: Mary Robison, “Pretty Ice” (in class)

Week 2, Jan. 18: The fictional dream and detail

Read: Syllabus

John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* excerpt

Tommy Orange, excerpt from *There There* (Tony Loneman I)

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World”

Due: Exercise on p. 13 of Gardner reading; discussion questions

Week 3, Jan. 25: Conflict and structure

Read: *Writing Fiction* pp. 124-152

Alejandro Zambra, “Thank You”

James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”

Due: Observation exercise; discussion questions

Week 4, Feb. 1: Point of view

Read: *Writing Fiction* pp. 153-179

David Foster Wallace, “Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR”

George Saunders, “Victory Lap”

Assign workshop schedule

Due: Structure exercise; discussion questions

Week 5, Feb. 8: Character

Read: *Writing Fiction* pp. 44-74

Kristin Valdez Quade, "Night at the Fiestas"

Amy Hempel, "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried"

Due: Point of view exercise; discussion questions

Week 6, Feb. 15: Dialogue

Read: Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts"

Bret Anthony Johnston, "On Dialogue"

Shirley Jackson, "Trial by Combat"

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"

Due: Characterization exercise; discussion questions

Week 7, Feb. 22: Narrative time

Read: *Writing Fiction* pp. 1-21

Anthony Doerr, "The Deep"

Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"

Due: Dialogue exercise; discussion questions

Week 8, March 1: Formal experimentation; workshop

Read: Robert Coover, "Going for a Beer"

Patricia Lockwood, "The Winged Thing"

Due: Letters to your colleagues (2); discussion questions

Week 9, March 8: NO CLASS (spring break)

Week 10, March 15: Workshop

Read: Workshop stories

Due: Letters to your colleagues (3)

Week 11, March 22: Workshop

Read: Workshop stories

Due: Letters to your colleagues (3)

Week 12, March 29: Workshop

Read: Workshop stories

Due: Letters to your colleagues (3)

Week 13, April 5: Workshop

Read: Workshop stories

Due: Letters to your colleagues (3)

Week 14, April 12: Revision

Read: Workshop stories

Raymond Carver, "A Small, Good Thing"

Raymond Carver, "The Bath"

Due: Letters to your colleagues (2); discussion questions

Week 15, April 19: Flash fiction; course wrap-up

Read: Deb Olin Unferth, "Likeable"

Donald Barthelme, "The School"

Julio Cortazar, "A Continuity of Parks"

Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"

Franz Kafka, "An Imperial Message"

Due: Revision outline; discussion questions

Story revision with cover letter (THESE DUE 4/26)