

CRW1101: Beginning Fiction Writing

Fall 2014
Section 0218
Tuesday, Periods 10-E1
CBD 212

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Office Hours: Thursday, 3:00-4:00 or by appt.

Frame-Tale

Cut on dotted line.
Twist end once and fasten.
AB to ab, CD to cd.

John Barth
Lost in the Funhouse

Course Description & Goals:

You will leave this course writing better than you did upon entry.
You will leave this course reading better than you did upon entry.
You will leave this course with an understanding of the wide variety of styles, forms, modes, methods, tricks, traps, and tropes available to the short-story writer.
You will leave this course with some semblance of an appreciation for the historical progression of the short story as a fictional form.

Course Structure & Expectations:

This course will have weekly assigned readings and writings.

Do not fall prey to the notion that creative writing courses have a lighter workload than other courses that satisfy the university's writing requirement. This course requires students to write **6,000 critical words**—approximately **25 double-spaced pages**—during the semester.

These 6,000 words will be written *in addition to* an eight- to twelve-page final story and other weekly writing assignments.

In short: this class will require just as much (if not more) effort than your other classes. I expect you to take it seriously and to make earnest and visible efforts at improvement.

You must complete the readings and contribute to class discussions in order to succeed. Pop quizzes may be administered as I see fit.

Anyone is fair game to be called on; do the reading; come to class prepared.

“‘The aim of literature,’ Baskerville replied grandly, ‘is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart.’”

—Donald Barthelme, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*

A ONCE UPON A TIME B

“A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”
—Thomas Mann, *Essays of Three Decades*

Required Texts:

Jerome Stern, *Making Shapely Fiction*
Online Course pack (Pending)

Assignments:

Critical essays

You will complete ten 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 “loved” 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

One five-page draft of your final story will be due midway through the semester.

You will bring an eight- to twelve-page copy of your final story to class **the week before** you are scheduled for workshop. The Schedule is law. Do not upset the Scheduling Gods. Do not miss the class on which you are scheduled for workshop—consequences will be disastrous, grade-wise.

Following workshop **you will revise your final story** and turn this in as the course’s terminal (and most heavily weighted) assignment.

Stories should avoid college tropes (parties, break-ups, dorm/greek life, drug/“trip” narratives) and genre (sci-fi, fantasy, zombie, vampire, My Little Pony fan-fic). These genres are specialized forms that require specialized knowledge to do well: you must learn to walk before you can run, and other such platitudes. There is a *very slight* amount of wiggle room here that will be addressed on a case-by-case, ad hoc basis.

Workshop Letters

You will compose workshop letters (~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.

“The longer and more carefully we look at a funny story, the sadder it becomes.”
—Nikolai Gogol

“All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”
 —Samuel Beckett, “Worstward Ho”

Exercises

Short (~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.

N.B.

All written work is expected to comply with basic rules of grammar and appropriate usage. These things are just as important to learn as plot structure. Assignments will be marked off for faults in the grammatical realm. Consult Strunk & White’s *Elements of Style* for basic guidance here. For heavy-duty help, consult the tome *Garner’s Modern American Usage*, available in Library West.

Grading:

Tentative Grade Breakdown

1. Class Participation (Includes peer reviews, in-class assignments, and contributions to class discussion)	200 points
2. Creative Exercises	150 points (25 points each)
3. Critical Responses	250 points (25 points each)
4. Story Draft	50 points
5. Final Story	100 points
6. Final Story Revision	250 points
Final	1000 points

Assessment 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

“At the door of every happy person there should be a man with a hammer whose knock would serve as a constant reminder of the existence of unfortunate people.”
 —Anton Chekhov, “Gooseberries”

“Don't, *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense.”
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture & Value*

	your main points. Papers should build off each other and become more and more rich as the course progresses.
Mechanics	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation must be pristine. Paper should show careful proofreading (subject-verb agreement, run-ons, fragments, comma errors, unclear pronouns).

Class 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.

Attendance

Attendance is required.

For each unexcused absence in excess of three, 5% will be deducted from the your final grade. A few absences due to illness or family crisis will be excused if documented to the instructor's satisfaction. Even documented absences will not be excused if many or prolonged. 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 disruptive; both the over-all grade and the grade for class participation will be lowered by tardiness.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the day assigned and in the 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. All out-of-class essays must have rough drafts that show individual revisions.

Composition Requirement

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you odd.”
—Flannery O'Connor

“The writer doesn’t write for the reader. He doesn’t write for himself, either. He writes to serve...something. Somethingness.”

–Joy Williams, *Why I Write*

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/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

Tentative Schedule & Reading List:

Readings should be completed by the date listed

Date	Reading	Workshop
-Aug hat is a ory?	N/A	
Sep ow to egin	Chekhov, “After the Theater” Saunders, “Victory Lap” Hugo, “The Triggering Town” (Essay)	

you

“The wrong word is like a lie jammed inside the story.”

—Grace Paley, *Why I Write*

16-Sep Not knowing	Barthelme, “Not-knowing” (Essay) O’Connor “Greenleaf” Dybek “Paper Lantern”	
23-Sep Detail	Gass, “I’ve got a Little List” (Essay) Gass, Excerpt TBA O’Brien, “The Things they Carried”	
30-Sep Dialogue	Cheever, “Reunion” Trevor, “The Day we got Drunk on Cake” Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-lighted Place”	
7-Oct Character	Paley, “Wants” Carver, “Chef’s House” Robison, “Yours”	
14-Oct Place	Barthelme, “I Bought a Little City” Hempel, TBA 5-PAGER DUE	
21-Oct TBA	Munro Davis TBA	
28-Oct “Style”	Hemingway Vonnegut Saunders, “Mr. Vonnegut in Sumatra” (Essay)	
4-Nov Voice	Elkin, “A Poetics for Bullies” Johnson, “Emergency” TBA	
11-Nov	No Class	
18-Nov The Irreal	Marquez Borges Calvino	
25-Nov Games	DeLillo Wallace Barth	
2-Dec The Friskily Bogus	Tower Powell Saunders	
4-Dec TBA	TBA 8- TO 12-PAGER DUE	

“What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Why? Where? When? Why?”

—Georges Perec, “The Infra-Ordinary”