

San José State University  
English Department  
English 130, Fiction Writing, Section 2, Fall 2008

<b>Instructor:</b>	Kelly A. Harrison
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	T/Th 12-1, 9:30-10:30, by appointment
<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	T/Th 10:30AM - 11:45AM
<b>Classroom:</b>	Clark Building 316
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	English 71, Creative Writing
<b>Final Exam:</b>	Friday, December 12, 0945-1200

### Course description

This class offers a workshop setting where you'll explore the art of fiction. You'll learn to analyze what works in a story and what doesn't, and you'll learn techniques to help fix the common problems in short fiction. You'll write two stories and one significant revision, plus you'll participate in workshop and write reviews of your peers' work.

Our class is a safe environment for learning. As such, workshop critique will be positive, encouraging, and constructive. We will not tolerate anything less.

### Required texts/readings

*The Making of a Story*, Alice LaPlante. ISBN: 978-0-393-06164-2 \$29.95 (cheaper online)

You are also required to photocopy your stories for the class and instructor (21 copies). This will be approximately \$30. You will also be required to print one- to two-page responses for each story we read for workshop. Other materials you need:

- College-level dictionary
- Lined binder paper, 8.5x11, for in-class writing.
- Blue or black pens for in-class writing, colored pen (green, purple) for workshops
- Internet access and email

### Classroom protocol and policies

**No cellphones. No texting. No laptops.** Students in class deserve respect. Please honor the fact that this is an elective class and classmates are here to learn without disruption.

**No late work. No exceptions.** I do not accept late work. Late assignments are disruptive to the entire class.

**Your responsibility when absent.** If you need to miss a class session, ask a classmate to turn in your work and to collect handouts and assignments for you. It is your responsibility to figure out what's going on and to show up prepared for the next class session. Please honor the fact that I have a fulltime job plus responsibilities outside of school by not asking me to do extra things for you if you don't come to class. Do not email me asking me what we discussed or if you missed "anything important". (You did.) Instead, contact a classmate for that material. It's OK to email me if you need clarification on an assignment or need to arrange an appointment to meet in person. Please use standard English (including capitals and punctuation) in all emails to me. Please do not use text messaging or chat abbreviations (like cul8r, ur, i'm, etc). Treat your communications with me as you would with an employer. Yes, I'm an English teacher, and yes, I expect professional language skills from college students! *It is very difficult to pass the class if you miss more than 3 class sessions.*

**Contact me.** Please see me after class or make an appointment. Send me an email. I'm here to support your work and learning experience. If you're struggling with a piece, let's chat about it. My goal is to help you along the writing road.

## Dropping and adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html). [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/). Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism means passing someone else's work off as your own, such as:

- using text from a book and not citing it as such
- using web page text directly in your papers without citing
- having someone else write all or part of your paper
- using someone's story from a previous class (or another university)

Any assignment containing plagiarized passages will receive an F grade automatically.

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarism or cheating on any portion of any assignment, including copying more than seven consecutive words from another source, will result in a failing grade for assignment and possibly the course. All student work is subject to review at <http://www.turnitin.com> to identify possible sources of plagiarism. Students found guilty of academic dishonesty will be reported to the proper authorities and may result in a grade of F.

**Turnitin.com:**

**Class ID: 2355872 password: sjsu**

## University policies

### Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial\\_affairs/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy\\_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

### Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

## Student Technology Resources

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Clark Hall and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library. A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include digital and VHS camcorders, VHS and Beta video players, 16 mm, slide,

overhead, DVD, CD, and audiotape players, sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

## **SJSU Writing Center**

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall. It is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. Website: <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>

## **Assignments and grading policy**

I have no problems submitting a grade roster of all As provided the class works honestly to earn it. Your grade is based largely on your effort. Do you attend workshop? Participate in discussion? Come prepared? Provide honest and supported criticism?

In addition to in-class writing exercises, you will write two short stories for workshop. I will not assign letter grades to your stories. You will revise one story due at the final exam (or earlier). So how do I determine grades?

- For each workshop story, you must write a one-page response, typed and handed in to me as well as to the author. These will receive letter grades. The total for these responses will be 25% of your grade.
- In-class writing exercises, quizzes, lit mag submission, and participation account for 25% of your grade. These may be given letter grades or points (eg 9/10 on a quiz).
- The final exam consists of a class reading. You will choose a 5-minute excerpt to perform for the class for 5% of your grade.
- The remainder of your grade (45%) comes from the stories you submit (2 “drafts” for workshop and 1 revision). For these, you will receive credit for doing the work in an appropriately professional manner. If your story doesn’t meet length requirements, contains many simple errors and typos and appears rushed, your grade will reflect this.

## **Story and response formats and content**

All stories will follow standard manuscript format (NOT MLA FORMAT!), which will be discussed in class. You will format your work as you would when submitting it to literary magazines.

Generally, format includes:

- Typed, double-spaced, 11- or 12-point Times New Roman or Courier only. No other fonts!
- Name, short title, and page number at the top of each page except the first page.
- Margins of 1” minimum to 1.5” maximum.
- Staple your papers before class.
- Title page will include your contact info at the top left, single spaced, and the title of the story centered and half-way down the page.

## **Response papers**

Your typed responses to student work can be single or double spaced. List your name at the top. Title should be something like: Response to Kelly Harrison’s story.

- Begin with what you see as the main plot points. What is the story about?
- What are the story’s strengths?
- Touch on: significance, structure, style, sincerity, and originality. Consider conflict, crisis, resolution.
- How does the story make you feel? What does the writer do to elicit those feelings?
- Reflect on at least one craft element: POV, dialog, voice, details, themes, symbols, character development, pacing, setting, beginnings, endings.
- What’s left out of the story and how does that help or hurt the piece?

Your response can reference the work: “On page 3, I don’t believe that John would shoot the duck because...” Be sure you support your claims.

Mark up the manuscript. Highlight sections, make notes in the margin. Make sure you note “Good!” and “I like this” and other positive reactions just as much as you mark things like “I’m confused” or “I don’t think John would do this.”

Other questions to prod a response paper:

- Does the title give readers a good idea of what's to come? If it isn't related to the significance, what would be a better title?
- Is there a key line? What is it? Underline it or restate it here.
- How are the characters developed? List some of the objects or actions connected with the main character(s).
- What words are the strongest in describing the setting? Which ones are weaker?
- Mark the paper where Acts 2 and 3 begin.
- Mark the inciting event (the event that starts the plot moving) and any turning points.
- Mark the climactic scene. Comment on the structure. How could it be improved?
- Are there transitions between all sections and paragraphs to create flow and unity? If not, mark the trouble spots.
- Does the plot connect logically with the significance (the lesson learned)? How?
- Are the paragraphs consistently too short (say, fewer than 3 sentences) or too long (longer than about 8)? Does the author need to generate more content or delete any irrelevant material?
- Has anything that goes off topic or is not essential been cut? (TIP: whenever you know you have to cut something but you're finding it hard to do, cut and paste it in a separate file so that you feel it hasn't been obliterated. In a couple of weeks, you'll probably go back and wonder why you were so attached to the passage in the first place!)
- Is the voice active throughout? Look for forms of “to be” and either a stated or implied “by whom” to find passive voice. Remember: “the tables were placed by the students” vs “the students placed the tables”.
- Circle expletives and unclear pronouns: It is/was, there is/are/were. It, they, them...
- Check the paragraphs for subject and verb. Circle overused constructions. Eg. If every sentence in a paragraph begins with “He [verb]”, circle He.
- Choose two or three paragraphs to analyze:
  - Simple sentences \_\_\_\_\_ Compound (FANBOYS) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Complex \_\_\_\_\_ Compound/Complex \_\_\_\_\_
  - Fragments \_\_\_\_\_
- Highlight any words that really sing, really work where placed, and mark with “Good WC” etc.
- Does the piece seem contrived? If so, how could it be improved to appear more naturally?
- Has this story been told before? If the story isn't original, suggest one or two ways to improve it.
- What is the strongest element in the story (e.g. characters, description, word choices, etc)?

<b>Course schedule</b>	
<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>THURSDAY</b>
<b>THINKING LIKE A WRITER</b>	
8/26 Class Introduction and Syllabus Review Buy course text book	8/28 “Shitty first drafts” pg 574 Set up Turnitin.com account HW: Ch 1, part 1, plus “Emergency” pg 47
9/2 Improv for writers 20-min writing Discuss “Emergency” HW: Ch 11, part 1; Ch 2, part 1 Type up writing, include word count, and 1-2para evaluation of the work	9/4 Discuss word count exercise Writing time vs planning time vs revision Discuss Ch 11 & 2 HW: Ch 4 & 9, part 1.
<b>WEDNESDAY 9/3 SUPER Fall Student Organization Faire</b> <b>Time:</b> 10:00am - 2:00pm <b>Location:</b> 7th Street Plaza <b>Hosted By:</b> Student Involvement <b>Description:</b> Meet the student organizations that make up SJSU.	
9/9 Significance, structure, style, sincerity, originality CCR, Vogler’s 13 points, 3-act HW: Ch 6 & 7, part 1	9/11 POV exercises HW: Ch 8 & 10, part 1 “Hills Like White Elephants” pg 356
<b>FIRST STORY: 6-10 pages</b>	
9/16 Workshop protocol Practice feedback, written response HW: “The Swimmer” pg 330	9/19 Discussion Group 1 stories due
9/23 Group 1 stories workshop Group 2 stories due	9/25 Group 2 stories workshop Group 3 stories due
9/30 Group 3 stories workshop Group 4 stories due	10/2 Group 4 stories workshop Group 5 stories due
10/7 Group 5 stories workshop Group 6 stories due	10/9 Group 6 stories workshop Group 7 stories due
10/14 Group 7 stories workshop HW: Ch 13, part 1 and Revision Ex: pg 556	10/16 Revision HW: Ch 12, “Ralph the Duck”
10/21 HW: Ch 3, 5	10/23 HW: Ch 13 Carver Chronicles pg 574+
<b>SECOND STORY: 10-15 pages</b>	
10/28 Group 1 stories due	10/30 Group 1 stories workshop Group 2 stories due
11/4 VOTE! Group 2 stories workshop Group 3 stories due	11/6 Group 3 stories workshop Group 4 stories due
11/11 NO SCHOOL VETERAN’S DAY	11/13 Group 4 stories workshop Group 5 stories due
11/18 Group 5 stories workshop Group 6 stories due	11/20 Group 6 stories workshop Group 7 stories due
11/25 Group 7 stories workshop	11/27 THANKSGIVING: Think of the turkey!
12/2 Revision strategies	12/4 Course recap. Public readings.
12/9 LAST DAY: Performance practice	
<b>FINAL EXAM: Friday, December 12, 0945-1200</b> <b>5-min performance reading from your own work</b>	

## Workshop Guidelines

The following items will guide our workshop.

1. Read each piece at least once. Attempt to understand the story (despite its flaws). Approach with an open heart and mind. Respect the writer just as you would like to be respected.
2. Before we discuss a story, the writer will read aloud the first two pages. The writer will not explain anything related to the piece.
3. When we discuss a story, the writer will quietly listen to the discussion and take notes. Try to absorb what you can. If you have questions, write them and ask later.
4. The class will discuss the story as if the writer were not there. This means we don't ask the author questions. We can, however, ask each other questions.
5. We'll begin with positive responses and end with positive comments.
6. Further discussion should come as questions and speculation. "When Sara takes her sister to the store, I was confused. Did she see someone in the bushes?" The class can then look at the passage for evidence to answer the question.
7. Don't focus on grammar. Simply note it on the mss. We don't want to hear, "there's a typo on page 2."
8. Keep in mind as we discuss that there are no definitive rules in creative writing. There are guidelines, suggestions, general rules of thumb—however, all of those are broken often, and well.
9. If you are a person who tends to dominate conversation, pull back the reins so others can speak; if you are a person who tends not to talk in groups, challenge yourself to say something because we benefit from hearing all perspectives.
10. When the critique is finished, the writer may ask a clarifying question, or may ask the class to comment on something that was not addressed.

Group 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Group 7: \_\_\_\_\_

### Important SJSU dates Fall 2008

Thursday, August 21	Academic Year Begins
Monday, August 25	First Day of Instruction
<b>Monday, September 1</b>	<b>Labor Day - Campus Closed</b>
Friday, September 5	Last Day to Drop Courses w/o Entry on Permanent Record
Friday, September 12	Last Day to Add Courses & Register Late
Monday, September 22	Enrollment Census Date
<b>Tuesday, November 11</b>	<b>Veteran's Day - Campus Closed</b>
Wednesday, November 26	Classes that start at 5:00 PM or later will not meet.
Thurs – Fri, Nov 27-28	Thanksgiving Holiday - Campus Closed
Wednesday, December 10	Last Day of Instruction
Thursday, December 11	Study/Conference Day (no classes or exams)
Friday-Thur Dec 12-18	Final Examinations
Friday, December 19	Final Examinations Make-Up Day
Monday, December 22	Grade Evaluation Day
Tuesday, December 23	Grades Due From Faculty
December 24-Jan 21	WINTER RECESS

## Understanding the THREE-ACT structure

Syd Field, author of *Screenplay* and *The Screen Writer's Workbook*, outlined a structure that most screenplays follow, meaning the standard screenplay can be divided into three parts: Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution.

**Act I** comprises the first quarter of the screenplay. (For a normal movie, Act I is 15-30 minutes.)

**Act II** comprises the next two quarters of the film. (Act II is roughly 60 minutes.)

**Act III** comprises the final quarter of the film. (Act III is 15-30 minutes.)

**"Plot Point"**--The three acts are separated by plot points, a reversal/event that thrusts the plot in a new direction. Later screenplay gurus have built on Field's theory by stating that Plot Point #1, which leads into Act II, is the moment when the hero takes on the problem.

### The Three-act Paradigm:



**Act I** (Setup) comprises the first quarter of the screenplay.

**Exposition**--The part of a story that introduces the characters, shows some of their interrelationships, and places them within a time and place. This part of the story introduces the main character, the dramatic premise, and the dramatic situation.

**Main character**--the person in the story who has a need/objective to fulfill and whose actions drive the story

**Dramatic premise**--what the story's about

**Dramatic situation**--the circumstances surrounding the action

**Inciting Incident**--an event that sets the plot of the film in motion. It occurs approximately halfway through the first act.

**Act II** (Confrontation) comprises the next two quarters of the film.

**Obstacles**--In the second act, the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle that prevent him from achieving his dramatic need.

**First Culmination**--a point just before halfway where the main character seems close to achieving his or her goal/objective. Then, everything falls apart, leading to the midpoint.

**Midpoint**--a point approximately halfway through the film where the main character reaches his/her lowest point and seems farthest from fulfilling the dramatic need or objective.

**Act III** (Resolution) comprises the final quarter of the film. (For a two hour movie, Act III would be the final 30 minutes.)

**Climax (Second Culmination)**--The point at which the plot reaches its maximum tension and the forces in opposition confront each other at a peak of physical or emotional action.

**Denouement**--The brief period of calm at the end of a film where a state of equilibrium returns.

Episode of HOUSE

#### Act 1 (10min)

Scene 1: Soldiers in a tank, IED, crash. House wakes up from this dream  
Scene 2: Cutty makes House take soldier as a client. House is freaked out about "dreaming" about patient.

Inciting Incident: Soldier has tons of symptoms, Q=gulf-war syndrome or something else?

#### Act 2 (20min)

Scene 1: Patient history, obstacles = symptoms that don't add up to specific diseases.  
Scene 2: Sleep study, Chase & Cameron have sex in sleep room. Foreman enters, discovers patient alone and suffering from bad breath due to vaginosis bacteria in mouth.  
Scene 3: Possible cancer. House asks Wilson to biopsy salivary glands. Wilson does scan on head.

First Culmination: Diagnosis of cancerous brain tumors

Scene 4: Decision to operate on brain. During surgery, tumors have disappeared.

#### Act 3 (10min)

Scene 1: Review of symptoms, including new "paralysis". Chase discovers DU in urine. MDs argue over diagnosis. House leaves to get some sleep.  
Scene 2: MDs ask patient Qs in writing b/c patient is deaf. MDs get idea. House can't sleep.  
Climax: Paralysis is ascending to respiratory system. MDs stuck. Need more info. Cutty pages staff b/c patient is dying. House is bleeding. House is dreaming again.  
Scene 3: Answer = genetic disease that can be corrected by surgery. Patient lives.

**THE BLAKE SNYDER BEAT SHEET (available online at <http://www.blakesnyder.com/tools/>)**

PROJECT TITLE:

GENRE:

DATE:

1. Opening Image (1): Opposite of final image. Shows character change.
2. Theme Stated (5): What is the movie/story about?
3. Set-Up (1-10): We meet all the A-list characters
4. Catalyst (12): Call to Adventure. Something is done TO the character to motivate them.
5. Debate (12-25): No one wants to change. The character would rather not accept the Call/Catalyst
6. Break into Two (25): Protagonist decides to act, plot point. (Act 2 begins).
7. B Story (30): Help the protagonist “get” the story
8. Fun and Games (30-55): Promise of the premise. This is the pitch, best part of film.
9. Midpoint (55): False victory or false defeat. Stakes are raised. Usually a public party/celebration. Clock ticks.
10. Bad Guys Close In (55-75): We see the danger approaching. Characters usually don’t see it.
11. All Is Lost (75): Death. Protagonist is worse off than in the beginning.
12. Dark Night of the Soul (75-85): Hero can’t go back, doesn’t want to move forward but does anyway.
13. Break into Three (85): Main story and subplots merge. (Act 3 begins)
14. Finale (85-110): Protagonist prevails. World is changed.
15. Final Image (110): Opposite of opening image, must show the change.