

SJSU Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 130: Writing Fiction
Spring, 2011

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Office Hours: Monday, 3:00-4:00pm, or by appointment
Class Days/Time: Mondays, 4:30-7:15pm
Classroom: Sweeney Hall 410

Course Description

Every good writer is first a good *reader*. This class aims to help you become both – by studying the work of published writers and figuring out how they do what they do, by practicing the skills elemental to writing fiction, and by writing a short story which utilizes these skills and which will be read and discussed by your peers. We'll spend the first half of the semester reading stories and talking about fundamentals like *characterization*, *point of view*, *dialog*, *setting*, etc., and practicing these concepts in short assignments; the second half will be largely devoted to discussions of the stories you and your classmates have written. But this division is only superficial: In fact, we'll spend the whole semester both reading and writing, in an ongoing, fluid discussion of what it takes to tell a good story. The class will be demanding – but my hope is that it will be fun, too, and that you'll be inspired to rise to the challenge. *Prerequisite: English 71.*

English Department Student Learning Objectives [SLO]

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric;
- 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature;
- 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject;
- 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; and
- 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Required Texts/Readings

Course Reader – Available for purchase at Maple Press, 481 E. San Carlos St., San Jose.

Requirements and Grading

Written assignments must be typed, double-spaced, single-sided, and stapled or clipped. (Story responses may be single-spaced). *Note: I do not accept assignments by email.*

Participation (25%). A creative writing class is a community which depends upon the input, effort, and candor of all members. Please come to class on time, having done all assigned reading and exercises and prepared to discuss them. Your opinions are welcome here, as is your dissent – provided both are offered in a spirit of respect and support for the hard work of your classmates. If you are more than five minutes late for class, you will receive half credit for participation that day. [SLO 1, 2, 5] Additionally:

- Please attend two literary events during the semester. Calendar below.

Exercises (15%). Throughout the semester, you will be asked to write short exercises, either at home or in-class. Exercises are designed to give practice with fundamental elements of fiction writing including characterization, point of view, description, narration, and dialogue, drawing on class discussions. [SLO 1, 3, 4]

First Scene (10%). In Week 7, you will submit a scene of approx. 3-4 pages which introduces at least two characters, a discernable setting, and dramatic tension or conflict. Please bring 20 copies to class. The following week, we will discuss this scene and the effectiveness with which it establishes the basis for a story. [SLO 3, 4]

Short Story and Revision (35%). In the second half of the semester, you will submit a complete short story of 10-20 pages. Please bring 20 copies to class. Stories are due the week before your scheduled workshop. The following week, we will devote one hour to discussing your story on both a “macro” level (its themes, its style, its effect on readers) and a “micro” level (characters, point of view and voice, scene selection and structure, etc.). Following your workshop, you will write a new draft which addresses suggestions made by the workshop and reflects your evolving ideas for the story. Remember: Revisions are not “edits” – they are a re-imagining of a story from the ground up, and should demonstrate substantial progress from the first draft. [SLO 1, 2, 3, 4]

- We will not be able to consider novel excerpts in this course.
- Stories **must** be turned in on time, in class. Emailed submissions are unacceptable.
- You cannot pass the class without turning in a story and a revision.

Responses (15%). For each story turned in by your classmates, you will write a 1-2pp. response in the form of a letter to the author. These letters should describe your encounter with the story – what you believe it sets out to do, what it makes you feel or think about – and your analysis of the writer’s use of the fundamentals we’ve discussed in class. [SLO 1, 3, 5]

Readings Calendar

Sept. 12 – Karen Tei Yamashita. ENGR 189. 7pm.

Oct. 3 – Nick Flynn. ENGR 189. 7pm.

Oct. 4 – Nick Flynn in Conversation with Tom Barbash. MLK 225/229. 1pm.

Oct. 5-13 – Litquake. Various venues in San Francisco. www.litquake.org.

Oct. 24 – Michael Ryan. MLK 225/229. 7pm.

Nov. 5 – Natasha Tretheway. Stanford University, venue TBA. 8pm.

Nov. 13 – Stephen Elliott. MLK 225/229. 7pm.

Dec. 5 – L. Rebecca Harris and Marian Palaia. MLK 225/229. 7pm.

Schedule

Aug. 27	Introduction: <i>What do we mean when we say, “story”?</i> Discuss: Bausch, “Character” (handout).
Sept. 3	LABOR DAY – NO CLASS.
Sept. 10	<i>How do we create memorable characters?</i> Discuss: Bloom, “Silver Water,” Braverman, “Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta,” and Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.”
Sept. 17	<i>Who is telling the story, and why?</i> Discuss: Updike, “A&P,” Jones, “Old Boys, Old Girls.”
Sept. 24	<i>What is a scene?</i> Discuss: Erdrich, “The Red Convertible,” and Bass, “Fires.”
Oct. 1	<i>Show, tell, or some combination of the two?</i> Discuss: García Marquez, “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” Steinberg, “Isla,” and Walker, “Everyday Use.”
Oct. 8	<i>How do we find the right structure for a story? or, How can we know what the story is “about”?</i> Discuss: Fitzgerald, “Babylon, Revisited” and Hempel, “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried.” First scenes due.
Oct. 15	Scene workshops I.
Oct. 22	Scene workshops II.
Oct. 29	Discussion of student stories.
Nov. 5	Discussion of student stories.
Nov. 12	Discussion of student stories.
Nov. 19	Discussion of student stories.
Nov. 26	Discussion of student stories.
Dec. 3	Discussion of student stories. Class conclusion.
Dec. 10	Final revisions due. 3pm. FO 214.

Course Policies

- Use of cell phones in class for any reason is not allowed. If you use your cell phone in class you will receive a failing grade for the day.
- Use of email, IM, web-surfing, etc. in class are not allowed and will result in a failing grade for the day.
- If you miss a class, *you* are responsible for acquiring notes, handouts, etc. I will have extra copies of handouts in my office, but I will not be available to go over what you missed in the discussion. It is your responsibility – not the writer submitting work – to make sure you get the manuscripts, and to deliver your comments/responses to him/her.
- Please see below for the university policy on academic integrity, and rest assured that all cases of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be pursued. If you submit work that is not your own, you will fail this class.
- You are welcome to email me with questions about the class – however, you should not expect a reply for *at least* 24 hours.
- I do not accept assignments by email under any circumstances. If you are not present in class on the day your work is due, you must bring it to my office during office hours. If it is an assignment that is to be distributed to your classmates, you – not I – will have to arrange for this to happen outside of class.

University Policies

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-298.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-298.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.

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. 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. Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. 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.

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.