

San José State University Dept. of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 71, Section 8: Introduction to Creative Writing
Fall, 2014

Professor:	Andrew Altschul
Office Location:	Faculty Offices 214
Telephone:	(408) 924-4489
Email:	andrew.altschul@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	T/Th, 4:30-5:30pm
Class Days/Time:	Tues./Thurs., 1:30-2:45
Classroom:	BBC 128

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the craft of creative writing in three genres: creative nonfiction, poetry, and fiction. We will study the works of published authors and discuss how they do what they do. Students will learn the fundamentals of craft, gaining practice with various techniques through exercises, in-class writings, and an original creative project in each genre. Writing workshops will introduce students to the process of reading and critiquing the work of their peers, and provide feedback that helps students to revise their own writing. Major revisions of creative projects will be included in a final portfolio turned in at the end of the semester.

Class meetings will involve discussion of assigned readings (poems, stories, and essays, as well as selections from the textbook on craft), sharing of short creative assignments, and scheduled workshops. Participation in these workshops, as in all aspects of the class, is crucial to building a supportive and productive writing community. The class will be demanding, but my hope is that it will also be fun, and that you'll be inspired to rise to the challenge.

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/Materials

- Burroway, Janet. *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft* (4th Ed.). ISBN: 9780321923172
- Other readings, to be distributed as pdf's by the instructor (*)
- Notebook (preferably with perforated pages) that you will use for this class only
- Double-pocket folder that you will use for this class only

A Note about Personal Writing

This class is meant to be a safe and supportive environment in which students can share writing of a personal nature without fear of judgment or that what they reveal will be repeated outside the class. All discussions will be conducted respectfully. When reading poetry or personal essays, you are welcome to criticize the technique, but not the actions or emotions described; your own emotional response is important and valid, as long as it is a response to the story, not the storyteller. When reading fiction, on the other hand, you must not make the assumption that a story is based on the writer's life. If I learn that you have repeated personal information learned (or assumed) from a classmate's writing, you will fail Participation for this class. Don't do it.

A Note about Workshops

The goal of a workshop is to allow you to see and experience your work through the eyes of a reader. By understanding how readers have responded to what you've written, you will have a better sense of how well you have accomplished your goals and what aspects of the work you need to rethink, clarify, enhance, or eliminate. Workshops are *not* an occasion either for flattery or ridicule – our job as readers is to describe our experience of reading the work, and to point to specific aspects of the writing which have created that experience. In other words, we're not here to say whether we "liked" a piece or not, whether it's "good" or "bad" – only to help the writer see it more clearly.

You are expected to read all the work turned in to your group – to read it carefully, ideally twice, and to make notes on the manuscript that will help the writer understand your experience. You are expected to come to class prepared to articulate that experience in specific terms, to answer the writer's questions, and to contribute to the improvement of your classmates' writing.

Submitting work to a group of your peers can be scary. My hope is that we will form a community in which we are all supporting each other in our goals to improve our writing, and that supportiveness will make the workshops less scary, even when hearing constructive criticisms of what you've written. Be open minded. Don't take it personally. Think of the workshop as a gift: an opportunity to read what you've written through someone else's eyes.

What Is "Literary Fiction"?

The focus of the fiction module is fiction written about real people in believable situations, and about the emotions, desires, and conflicts which drive those people and create those situations. To that end we will *not* be writing about: zombies, vampires, wizards, witches, werewolves, mutants, space colonists, time travelers, dimension-hoppers, ghosts, demons, monsters, talking animals, conscious-but-inanimate objects (e.g. toasters or shoes that think), artificial intelligences, psychics, ninja turtles, angry birds, or zombies. Ask yourself: Would these characters and situations fit well in a comic book or sci-fi movie? If so, they will not fit well in this class and will not be accepted for credit. "Fan fiction" or other work that incorporates characters or situations from previous works of fiction will not be accepted.

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 (20%) 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 prepared to discuss it. 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 three minutes late for class, you will receive half-credit for the day. Participation also includes reading quizzes and comments on your classmates’ writing.

Literary Events (5%) Please attend two literary events during the semester. See Readings Calendar below.

Journals, etc. (10%) At the end of each module, you will hand in your double-pocket folder, which will include daily journal writings, in-class writings, and exercises, as well as the Creative Project for that module. Turn-in dates: Sept. 30, Nov. 6, Dec. 15.

Creative Projects (45%) Each module culminates in a creative project, to be included with the journals you hand in on the date your project is due. (The fiction project will be handed in during the fiction workshops.) The creative projects are as follows:

- Nonfiction – a personal essay of 6-8 pages
- Poetry – four (4) poems, one of which must be formal (length requirements TBA)
- Fiction – a complete short story of 6-8 pages

Revision Portfolio (20%) By Monday, Dec. 15, you will turn in revisions of two (2) of the Creative Projects. Revisions must demonstrate a rethinking of the project and substantial rewriting – *not just proofreading and thesaurus-checking!* For nonfiction and/or fiction, the same length requirements apply; for poetry, please choose your three (3) strongest poems, including at least one formal (sonnet, villanelle, or ghazal) poem.

Schedule

Aug. 26	Course introduction.
Aug. 28	Read: Ariel Levy, “Thanksgiving in Mongolia.”*
Sept. 2	Read: Burroway 15-27; Albert Goldbarth, “Columbine High School/Littleton, CO” (B188); Sylvia Plath, “Morning Song”*; Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain” (B34).
Sept. 4	Creative Nonfiction Module Begins. Read: Burroway 47-62.
Sept. 9	Read: David Sedaris, “Standing By” (B29); Alice Walker, “Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self” (B62).
Sept. 11	Read: Burroway 225-237.
Sept. 16	Read: James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”*; David Foster Wallace, “Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley.”*

Sept. 18	Read: Gayle Pemberton, "Do He Have Your Number, Mr. Jeffrey?" (B237). <i>Personal Essays due from Groups A, B, & C.</i>
Sept. 23	Creative nonfiction workshops. <i>Personal Essays due from Groups D, E, & F.</i>
Sept. 25	***NO CLASS***
Sept. 30	Creative nonfiction workshops. <i>Journals Due.</i>
Oct. 2	Poetry Module Begins. Read: Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" (B213); Mark Doty, "Brilliance"*; William Carlos Williams, "This Is Just to Say."*
Oct. 7	Read: Burroway 298-305; Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus"*; Barbara Hamby, "Ode to American English" (B86); Sharon Olds, "Sex without Love"*; Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress."* <i>Poem #1 Due.</i>
Oct. 9	Poetry workshops.
Oct. 14	Read: Burroway 305-315; Tony Hoagland, "There Is No Word" (B320); Robert Hass, "A Story about the Body" (B187); Sharon Olds, "The Race"*; Maggie Nelson, "Something Bright, Then Holes" and "Father's Day."* <i>Poem #2 Due.</i>
Oct. 16	***NO CLASS***
Oct. 21	Poetry workshops.
Oct. 23	Read: Edna St. Vincent Millay, "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed"*; Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"*; Justin Chin, "Tonight, Again."* <i>Poem #3 Due.</i>
Oct. 28	Read: Tracy K. Smith, "The Museum of Obsolescence," "Don't You Wonder, Sometimes?" and "The Universe: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack."* Poetry workshops.
Oct. 30	Read: Carole Simmons Oles, "Stonecarver" (B128); Li-Young Lee, "The Hammock" (B189); Erin Belieu, "Love Is Not an Emergency" (B323). <i>Poem #4 Due.</i>
Nov. 4	Read: Burroway 315-317. Poetry workshops.
Nov. 6	Fiction Module Begins. Read: Amy Bloom, "Silver Water"*; Burroway 94-109. <i>Journals Due.</i>
Nov. 11	***VETERANS DAY – NO CLASS***
Nov. 13	Read: Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been"*; Burroway 259-270.

Nov. 18	Read: Rick Bass, “Fires”*; Burroway 135-148.
Nov. 20	Read: Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.”*
Nov. 25	<i>Stories due from Groups E & F.</i> (Remember to bring an extra copy for the professor!)
Nov. 27	***THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS***
Dec. 2	Fiction workshops. <i>Stories due from Groups C & D.</i>
Dec. 4	Fiction workshops. <i>Stories due from Groups A & B.</i>
Dec. 9	Fiction workshops. Course wrap-up.

*****JOURNALS & REVISION PORTFOLIOS DUE MONDAY 12/15 BY 1PM*****

Readings Calendar

The Center for Literary Arts offers on-campus readings and conversations with writers of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. SJSU events are held in MLK Library, Room 225/229 – most events are free; all are open to the public and wheelchair accessible. See www.litart.org for more information. For Stanford events, see creativewriting.stanford.edu/event-list.

September 10 – Khaled Hosseini, 7:30pm, New Student Union (\$10)

September 24 – David Shields (nonfiction), 7pm

September 25 – David Shields in Conversation with Ethan Nosowsky, 1pm

October 1 – Julia Reynolds, 7pm, MLK 5th Floor

October 2 – Dave Eggers (nonfiction/fiction) in Conversation w/ Tobias Wolff, 5:30pm @ Stanford University

October 13 – Allan Gurganus (fiction), 8pm @ Stanford

October 16 – Maggie Nelson (poetry/nonfiction), 7pm

October 28 – Tracy K. Smith: “Imagining the Universe,” 6pm @ Stanford Pigott Hall 113

October 29 – Tracy K. Smith (poetry), 7pm

November 12 – Ru Freeman (fiction), 7pm

December 3 – Steinbeck Fellows Cara Bayles, Yalitza Ferreras, and Reese Okyong Kwon, 7pm

Instructor 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, texting, web-surfing, etc. in class are not allowed and will result in a failing grade for the day.
- Creative Projects must be turned in on time.
- Other assignments turned in up to one week late will receive half-credit. I do not accept assignments more than one week after the due date.
- 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. I strongly recommend finding a partner in the class with whom to share notes in the event of an absence.
- Please see below for the university policy on academic integrity. All cases of suspected 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 same-day reply. The best way to contact me is by attending my office 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 make arrangements to have it brought to class, or to my office during office hours.

University Policies

• Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on adds/drops: 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 drops: 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.