

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 241, Fiction Workshop for MFA Students
Fall 2015

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Mon/Weds 3:00PM – 4:00PM and by appointment.
Class Days/Time:	Mon 7:00pm – 9:45pm
Classroom:	FO 104

Course Description

This is the most advanced fiction workshop offered at SJSU. It is designed for students pursuing writing as a vocation. Students enrolled in the MFA Program in Creative Writing have registration priority. If there is extra space, graduate students in other disciplines may enroll.

The majority of our class time will be spent discussing student work ("workshopping"). We will also read published pieces of fiction selected by members of the workshop. Students will lead these discussions.

Additionally, we will discuss aspects of the writing profession. Topics include finding time to write, managing "free" time, finding an agent or publisher, and networking with other writers and publishing-industry people.

Student Learning Goals

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the MFA in Creative Writing:

SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.

SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.

SLO 5: Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend

original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline: d) write under time constraints.

The list of all approved SLOs are listed on the English Department's website:
<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/undergraduate/studentlearninggoals.html>

Course Requirements

Attendance at all class meetings is essential. Because the real value of this course is the class discussions, you are only hurting yourself if you miss class. You are graduate students and serious writers, and I will treat you as colleagues.

You will submit at least **two new pieces of work** for discussion over the course of the semester. There may be time to turn in additional pieces if you choose. In place of a final exam, you will turn in a **significant revision** of one of the pieces you workshopped.
[SLO #5]

You will be graded on your effort in this course. This includes not only the attention you give your own stories, but also **your comments on your classmates' work and your participation in class discussions**. [SLO #4]

In addition to your own submissions and regular and timely responses to your classmates' work, you will be required to **lead one class discussion** on a published story of your choice. [SLO #3]

Finally, you will be required to **attend at least two literary readings** over the course of the semester, and to turn in 1-2pp responses [SLO #3, #4, #5]. Your response papers can cover the substance of the reading, the author's presentation style, the author's wardrobe—anything. But you must attend these readings.

Campus Literary Readings

This semester the University will host fiction writers Chang-Rae Lee (9/30-10/1) and Mark Slouka (10/28-29) and poet Claudia Rankine (12/2). I will announce the times and locations of these readings in class. You may also wish to attend the 2015-2016 Steinbeck Fellows Reading on Tuesday, Nov 17, in MLK Library 225/229.

Grading

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

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| • Your Fiction (2 stories and a revision) | 60% |
| • Class Participation and Peer Commentaries | 20% |
| • Leading the Discussion on a Published Story | 10% |
| • Responses to two literary readings | 10% |

Workshop Procedure

At the first class meeting, I will pass around a sign-up sheet for workshops. Each of you will choose at least two dates when you want to hand in your stories. On those dates, you will pass out photocopies of your story to everyone in the class. Your story must be **double-spaced, single-sided**, and it must include **page numbers**. Your classmates will read your story, make comments in the margins, and type a one-page commentary. At the next class meeting, we will discuss your story. We will discuss up to three stories per class. At the end of the discussion, everyone will hand the author their marked-up manuscripts and commentaries.

Peer Commentaries

Your typed commentary on each student story will address (a) your interpretation of the story (eg, what the story is about) and (b) suggestions for improvement. Please print two copies of your commentary – one for the author and one for the instructor. A portion of your final grade will be determined by the quality of your peer commentaries.

Workshop Etiquette

Workshop is a forum for respectful and constructive criticism. Spoken and written commentary must always be directed at the work, not the writer. Personal attacks and offensive or inappropriate language will not be tolerated. Students who cannot follow these guidelines will be dismissed from the course. If you receive any offensive comments on your work, please let me know as soon as possible so I can address the problem.

Procedure for Discussing Published Fiction

One of the most useful skills you can learn in graduate school is how to lead a discussion. I will ask each of you to lead a class discussion this semester on a published story of your choice. Please bring a clean photocopy of your chosen story to the second class meeting. I will take the stories to the print shop. Copies will be available for sale in class. Expect the book to cost around \$15.00.

When it is your turn to lead discussion, please come prepared with enough questions to keep the class going for approximately twenty minutes. I would like to approach these stories from a writer's perspective, so questions should lean more toward craft issues than thematic ones. I will talk more about what I have in mind during the first couple of weeks of class.

Late Assignment Policy

It is important that you turn in your stories when you say you're going to. This is your most important responsibility. **Late or emailed stories will not be accepted.** If you need to change your workshop date, it is your responsibility to find someone willing to trade dates with you, and to tell me that you've switched.

Required Texts

- Egan, Jennifer and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *Best American Short Stories 2014*.

- Photocopy packet of published short stories selected by your classmates (available at the third class meeting).

Schedule

Class meetings will be held every Monday evening from August 24 through December 7 with the exception of September 7 (Labor Day).

When the workshop and story-discussion schedules are set, I will pass out copies of both so you will know who's up each week.

You will turn in your final revisions on the last day of class, December 7. We will not meet for a final exam.

Academic Honesty

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires 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 Policy on academic integrity can be found at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else's words or ideas and is considered an instance of academic dishonesty that instructors must report. You commit plagiarism by:

- buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper (or story);
- hiring someone to write a paper (or story);
- building on someone's ideas without providing a citation;
- or copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing.

In other words, submit only your own work.

Disabilities Policy

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need 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 register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.