

Introduction to Creative Writing English 71, Section 5 – Spring 2015

**Planning to write is not writing.
Outlining, researching, talking to people about
what you're doing, none of that is writing.
Writing is writing.
— E. L. Doctorow**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course designed, adopted, implemented, and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San José State University in accordance with the University's General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities and the Arts.

In this course, we will read, discuss and write creative nonfiction, short fiction and poetry. The course will be taught using a combination of discussion and writing workshops. In the discussion, contemporary published works will be closely read and analyzed. In the writing workshops, creative work by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision.

REQUIRED TEXTS

An Anthology for Creative Writers: A Garden of Forking Paths
Reed, Issue 67

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Write works of creative nonfiction, short fiction and poetry that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience.
- ❖ Develop the skills of a thoughtful editor in all genres.
- ❖ Become an active part of a literary community, through writing, editing, discussion, attending events and becoming a participant in our class dialogue.

GUIDELINES

In order to be successful in this course you should follow some simple guidelines. First among these is to come to class prepared to participate. This means having done the assignments, read the material, and arrive equipped with questions, comments, and observations. In this class we will learn a great deal from each other, so discussion and creating a community of writers/critics is an integral part of the process. We will be looking at the creative process from many perspectives, so your ideas count.

The second guideline is to think and plan well ahead of assignments. Begin to look everywhere for inspiration and keep notes in a journal. Keep a list of essay/story/poem ideas. Record your dreams, observations and conversations. Describe an exotic woman you see on the bus. Eavesdrop.

And third, if you have any questions with which you need further assistance, please feel free to consult me during my office hours; that's what they're for. Think of my office as an extension of the classroom where we can discuss any aspect of the course: material you don't understand, topics, problems, pieces you're working on, ideas you wish to develop, strategies you'd like to try. I give priority to students who have made appointments; otherwise meetings are on a first-come, first-served basis. I am available via email, but only for brief questions; this medium should not be considered a substitute for an in-person conversation.

WRITING

For this course you will be writing on three levels of increasing refinement. The first, completely informal level, consists of in-class writing exercises. The second category is the drafts you will bring to workshop to be critiqued. The last stage will be your revised self portrait and final portfolio which should demonstrate the level of improvement in your writing. The final portfolio will contain five poems, one nonfiction piece, and one short story; this should be the best possible work you can produce, displaying the skills you've acquired during the course of the semester. All material should be written specifically for this class.

LITERARY EVENT REVIEWS

Students will be asked to attend two events hosted by the Center for Literary Arts (CLA) during the course of the semester and write a two-page review of the experience, to be included in your final portfolio. (Event details are available at www.litart.org.) You may also choose to substitute a reading by one of our English department faculty or the Steinbeck Fellows to fulfill this requirement. Please plan accordingly to suit your schedule.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Your class participation grade is based on the contributions you bring to class discussion. Reading the assigned material and giving it some thought will aid greatly in this endeavor. Class participation is graded highly for several reasons: 1) you will learn more if you do the preparation necessary to discuss a topic intelligently 2) we will all learn more from discussing issues, rather than staying bottled up with our own separate little thoughts 3) it makes class more fun. If you are worried about your writing ability, class participation offers you an alternative way to enhance your grade. If you are shy, this is the perfect time to come out of your shell.

ATTENDANCE

Required, because English 71 depends on your participation each day. You are allowed two unexcused absences. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than three classes, please contact me as soon as possible.

CLASS ETTIQUETTE

Please observe the following: no eating during class, no laptop use, and of course, no cell phone use.

WORKSHOP

In order to provide students with ample opportunities to receive feedback on their work, we will conduct a writing workshop in class everyday. On Tuesdays we will have small group workshop. You will be divided into groups of five and meet separately. On Thursdays we will hold a large workshop that involves the whole class; each student will have the opportunity to have his or her work critiqued in this fashion.

During the workshop process students will learn to critique each other's work, which is a very different skill than being a good writer. The trick is to 1) praise what's good 2) ascertain what's wrong with a piece 3) offer positive criticism and suggestions on how to fix it—while realizing the individual style and goals of the author may differ from one's own. Students will bring copies of their writing projects to class; the work will then be distributed, critiqued at home with written comments, and brought to the following class for discussion. It is very important to distribute your work according to schedule, and of course to be present on the day you are to be critiqued.

This semester we will study three genres, in this order: nonfiction, fiction, poetry. When we are working on a genre, all readings, assignments and workshop submissions will be of that genre. We will begin each segment with lectures on technique, in-class writing exercises, and discussion of examples from our texts. Next we'll put those techniques into practice, creating our own work, and submitting it to the class for critique.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

- ❖ Students' work should be distributed at the beginning of the class prior to their workshop date.
- ❖ When it is your turn for large workshop, bring in 27 copies; no email submissions are permitted.
- ❖ Editors: take home drafts, read and critique by writing comments on the paper; please sign your name.
- ❖ During the workshop, the author must sit silently and listen to comments.
- ❖ After the workshop discussion, editors will return drafts to the author.
- ❖ I will randomly take up student critiques to check for quality.

NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED UNLESS PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Creative Nonfiction

You are required to complete one nonfiction essay, 1,000 - 2,500 words. The general topic for this piece must concern some aspect of your personal history: your family, your life experiences, or the place where you grew up. You will prepare for this assignment by doing preliminary research by either going to the library or using the Internet to gather source material. Or you may interview family members, friends or neighbors. You must acknowledge in the body of your text the source(s) of the material you found while doing your research.

Nonfiction Learning Objectives

- ❖ To learn the techniques of writing creative nonfiction.
- ❖ To experiment with narrative, voice, and universal themes.
- ❖ To learn the methods of gathering accurate material to write nonfiction.
- ❖ To do research in the library, on the Internet, or to interview an individual regarding your personal history.
- ❖ To analyze the works of authors from class readings and use them as models for your own work.

Fiction

You are required to workshop one short story, 1,000 - 2,500 words. Stories should emphasize character development over plot. No genre fantasy, romance or science fiction. No sensationalized violence. All stories should grow organically out of the student's personal experiences.

Fiction Learning Objectives

- ❖ To learn the techniques of writing fiction.
- ❖ To experiment with different points of view, methods of character development, creating dialogue and setting.
- ❖ To analyze the works of authors from class readings and use them as models for your own work.

Poetry

You are required to write five poems during the semester. We will be creating open form poems written in unrhymed free verse, as well as metrical poems written in traditional patterned verse. Students will have the chance to workshop two poems of any style.

Poetry Learning Objectives

- ❖ To learn the techniques of writing poetry, both in free-verse and in traditional forms and meters.
- ❖ To experiment with different points of view and styles of expression.
- ❖ To analyze the works of authors from class readings and use them as models for your own work.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

At the end of the semester you should compile a portfolio of your best work. Everything we do throughout the term will be working towards this goal—from writing exercises to the drafts you bring in for workshop.

This portfolio will demonstrate all you have learned over the course of the semester. It should include:

1 nonfiction essay 1000-2500 words

1 fictional short story 1000-2500 words

5 poems: with at least one example each of free verse and formal poetry

2 reviews of literary events

Please remember to label all assignments, particularly designating genres and poetry forms.

The final portfolio is due on May 12. If you do not turn it in at that time you will fail the course.

GRADES

Your final grade will be comprised of the following:

Nonfiction	25%
Fiction	25%
Poetry	25%
Class Participation & Short Assignments	25%

Your revised self portrait will be judged on the level of improvement from the original version. Your final portfolio will be judged on its creativity, clarity, content, and the quality of the prose. When I finish reading a piece I should feel that you, as a writer, had something important to say—not that it was a waste of my time.

It's easy to get a passing grade in English 71; simply do the assignments, come to class and talk. Getting an A, however, requires serious devotion to craft.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure. In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

WRITING CENTER

SJSU has a great free resource for students seeking help with their poetry or prose: our Writing Center. Whether you are struggling with your grammar, or are a top student just seeking another opinion on your sonnet, the Center has tutors to help you. They are located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. To make an appointment, book online at <https://sjsu.mywconline.com/>.

PAPER FORMAT

All material handed in should follow the same guidelines as those for the professional submission of manuscripts:

- ❖ typewritten, double spaced, with copy dark enough to be easily read
- ❖ do *not* double space between each paragraph
- ❖ use one-inch margins on all sides
- ❖ text on one side of the paper only
- ❖ twelve-point type in a highly-legible font
- ❖ your name, course and section number, the assignment title, and date single-spaced in the upper left-hand corner of the first sheet
- ❖ double space, then center the title on the first page; double space again and then begin the body of the text
- ❖ include page numbers
- ❖ staple or paper clip pages together

SJSU ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.htm>. The SJSU rules against plagiarism are set forth in the SJSU Catalogue, which defines plagiarism as the act of representing the work of another as one's own (without giving appropriate credit), regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements. Plagiarism at SJSU includes, but is not limited to: (1) the act of incorporating the ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, or parts thereof, or the specific substance of another's work, without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one's own work. It is the role and obligation of each student to know the rules that preserve academic integrity and abide by them at all times. This includes learning and following the particular rules associated with specific classes, exams, and/or course assignments. Ignorance of these rules is not a defense to the charge of violating the Academic Integrity Policy. All instances of violating the Academic Integrity Policy will be reported to the Dean of Student Services.

CAMPUS POLICY ON COMPLIANCE WITH AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

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.