

**San José State University**  
**Humanities and the Arts/English Department**  
**English 193, Literature of Self Reflection, Fall 2016**

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**Office Hours:** T/TH: 1:30-2:45  
**Class Days/Time:** T/TH: 3:00-4:15  
**Classroom:** BBC 128

### **Course Description**

**What is a Capstone course?** One answer is suggested by “seven ways of looking at an English Major.” As an English major, you are an essayist, a reader, a critic, a creative writer, a researcher, a book group participant (for this course!), and a near-graduate-with-a B.A.-in-literature-and-highly-employable. We’ll consider all those seven ways of looking at the English major.

**An essayist:** For your first assignment of the semester, you will review your years as an English major by rereading all essays/creative works you’ve written in English courses, reflecting on your development as a writer. By week two, student will have assembled a portfolio that contains ALL papers from your courses in the SJSU and other English departments, collected and organized in a way that seems appropriate to you, based on your growth as a writer. We will have in-class workshops on these portfolios, and after the workshop each student will write a 4-page reflective essay on your strengths and on the challenges you face as a writer. (see assignment below, Essay #1).

**A reader:** Why are you a reader? What are the classics and how do they impact our lives? What literature is most relevant to us, to you? What shape does fiction take today? Do you prefer fiction or nonfiction? How does the act of reading impact your future? We read for many reasons: to delight, appreciate, escape, instruct, challenge, and that range will be emphasized throughout the semester.

**A critic:** Every other week, students will write 2-page analytical reading responses, analyzing one passage in the reading and connecting that passage to the whole (part to whole is the essence of analytical thinking).

**A creative writer:** On alternate weeks, students will respond to the reading with a personal response—a personal essay or blog clearly inspired by the reading for that week.

**A researcher:** Research takes us beyond the known to places of discovery. We learn through research, and good data enhances any endeavor. Each student will write a “Familiar essay” based on Anne Fadiman’s work, selecting a topic important to you and enhancing your own knowledge of your topic.

**A participant:** Book groups can be richly rewarding; readers share ideas, interests, and the love of the written word. To model life-long reading habits, we will form book groups that will meet periodically during class time. Groups will present during the final week of class.

**Graduate with a B.A. in English:** You will soon graduate, and the future may be uncertain, may seem at once terrifying and thrilling. Throughout the semester we will discuss possibilities: jobs, graduate school, careers, professional writing, travel, relocation.

### Course Learning Outcomes

#### English Department Student Learning Objectives [SLO]

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, 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, and/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 the nature of the subject;
4. develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;
5. articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

By the completion of this course students will have evaluated their writing and reading skills; gained confidence as independent readers; honed their personal voice as a writer; developed skills as a lifelong researcher; appreciated the flexibility of an English major.

#### Required Texts/Readings

Anne Fadiman, *At Large and At Small*

Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals*

Ismael Beah, *A Long Way Gone*

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*. Illustrated by Maira Kalman

**Bookgroup texts:** Texts for group work, 3-5 in each group (copies from Amazon or Powells Books, Portland). Groups determined by **Thursday September 1.**

- a. Jonathan Franzen, *Purity*
- b. Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch* OR *The Secret History*
- c. Chad Harbach, *The Art of Fielding*
- d. Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America*
- e. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*
- f. Lauren Groff, *Fates and Furies*
- g. Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*
- h. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*
- i. William Finnegan, *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life*
- j. William Manchester, *The Wright Brothers*
- k. Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*
- l. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*
- m. Edward P. Jones, *The Known World*
- n. Anne Tyler, *A Spool of Blue Thread*
- o. Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong*
- p. Kristin Hannah, *The Nightingale*
- q. Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk*

### Course Requirements and Assignments

**I. 500-word weekly responses, 25%.** Each student will turn in analytical/personal responses at the beginning of class (as indicated on the syllabus. **Most** are due on Thursday, but one or two on Tuesday). No late responses accepted; no responses accepted from those not in class.

Each response must be identified as either analytical or personal at the top of the page, with your name and the date on the right hand side. Every other week, you will select a passage from the reading **of the past week**, discuss passage fully, and relate that passage to central themes in the book. Include **page numbers** (in parentheses) for any brief quotations. Grades of 1-10 will be assigned, and you will be graded on specificity, thoughtfulness, and how well you connect part to whole. On alternate weeks, please hand a personal response, connecting an idea in the reading to your own experience.

**9-10: A superior piece of writing.** The response is clearly focused on a passage, the language is sharp, and the writing is free of grammatical errors (please proofread for its/it's; for use of semicolons; for spelling errors; for incomplete sentences, etc.). The response has originality and shows clearly why the passage is important to the text as a whole (or as much as you have been assigned to date).

**7-8: A good piece of writing, solid and clear.** This response may lack the innovation and sharpness of the top category. The point is clear but could be supported with additional details. There may be minor spelling, typographic, and/or grammatical errors. But it is interesting enough to hold a reader's attention.

**5-6: This is an average response, acceptable senior-level work.** It meets the requirements of the assignment, but it does not go beyond. The point may be too broad or

unsupported. Examples may be general rather than specific. There may be grammatical errors. The central idea may not be fresh. The writing may be wordy or vague.

**3-4: These responses are short, general, and lacking in examples.** There may be serious grammatical errors.

**1-2: Unacceptable work.** Lacks insight and clarity.

## II. 3 Essays, 65%

**Essay #1: Self-reflective essay, 15%. Due September 22.** “What kind of writer am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses?” 4 page essay + ***an additional page that is a list*** that you generated noting your strengths and weaknesses as a writer (that list is the basis for the essay that you write).

**First**, collect and organize into a portfolio ***all*** the papers from your English courses, both at SJSU and at community college. **Second**, reread the papers and all comments from professors and peers. As you reread your essays, write a list of what you see as your strengths and weaknesses as a writer—you will bring that list to class for a workshop on your writing + an introduction to your essay, 4-5 sentences long, that identifies what you see as your strongest traits as a writer as well as your greatest challenges as a writer (***not*** identifying individual papers that may be strong but ***characteristics*** of your writing: clear sentences, sentence variety, logic, style, grammar, use of details, specificity, use of parallelism, vivid verbs, use of stylistic devices—etc). **After the workshop, you will write a four to five page essay** that focuses on your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, drawing from the papers you have written as an English major to support your points (please consider only papers written for your major, in both lower division and upper division classes). In short, the papers you examine and organize for your portfolio will be your “evidence” and the essay you write will reflect on what those papers tell you about your own writing: What are your strongest characteristics as a writer? What are your challenges? How confident do you feel in grammar? Are your sentences varied? Paragraphs coherent? Evidence strong? Have you developed a personal voice?

### **Essay #2: Familiar essay 25%.**

Each student will write a “Familiar Essay” modeled on Anne Fadiman’s essays. Select a topic that is important to you—it can be a hobby, an academic interest, an author, a summer job—almost anything, as Fadiman’s book suggests. This essay is in part personal and in part factual, based on research. Each “familiar essay” will quote from at least 4 solid and useful sources and list at least 5 works in the bibliography.

The final grade will consider of the following. All dates are firm and not meeting the various deadlines will result in a lower grade on final essay:

- a. Originality of idea: Two ideas for a paper are due Tuesday September 13.
- b. Narrow by September 20 (the idea can be further narrowed in process of research)
- c. Preliminary notes: October 4 (from at least 3 sources) + annotated bibliography of those three sources (2 sentences on each source).

- d. Annotated bibliography + notes for at least 5 solid sources—journal articles, newspapers, books, magazines—NOT Wikipedia: October 18
- e. Thesis statement + first paragraph + rough outline: October 25.
- f. Rough draft + Works Cited, 5 sources in MLA format: November 3. **Mandatory in-class workshop.**
- g. Final essay: November 10. Please turn in a,b,c,d,e as well, stapled to final essay. No essays accepted without all previous work attached.

### **Essay #3: Presentation/paper on bookgroups, 25%**

Working in groups of 4-5, you will select **one** book from the additional reading list, above. After reading groups are determined, each group will spend 15 minutes on September 1 exchanging email addresses, work schedules, and preference of where to meet.

#### **Group organization and group dynamics:**

Each book group will read one long book over the course of the semester. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate how book groups can enrich even the busiest lives.

So that you don't have to find time outside class for meetings, I have scheduled bookgroup meetings during several class periods. At the end of each 40 minute session, each group will return to class and hand in a ½ sheet that indicates briefly what were the most fruitful discussion points of that session, signed by each member of the group.

Near the end of the semester, each group will create a book-review presentation for the class. Please include outside resources—biographical or critical or cultural. On the day of that group presentation, each student will hand in a four to five page essay which will cover the following in separate sections:

- Part I: Two thematic issues that were most intriguing to you; explain why in detail.
- Part II: Relate the book you read to another book read this semester in class.
- Part III: Was biographical/scholarly/cultural research helpful in your presentation? Important to your understanding of the text? What outside resources did you, personally, use to prepare for the presentation?
- Part IV: What was best about your group and/or the books you read? What was the greatest challenge for you or your group?

Your grade for this assignment will be based on the following, each receiving equal weight:

- a. Quality of the team's group work (questions generated each session, noted on ½ sheets as well as participation: 20%)
- b. Oral presentation (ie. voice projection, enthusiasm for material, original ideas generated, integrated research, each participant discussing issues in both books: 40%)
- c. Originality of the essay: clarity, specificity, lucid examples, etc. 40%

### **III. Other: Class participation and final evaluation, 10%**

Participation is important to the success of a seminar; I will determine this part of your grade as follows:

6-7 points: Someone who has been a reliable and constant positive force in class, who has not missed classes, and who turns in a carefully revised resume and writes a careful and thoughtful and specific exam.

5-6 points: Someone who has been a reliable and constant positive force in class but may have missed one or two classes. Resume is good, exam is good but could be more specific and thoughtful.

3-4 points: A mostly positive force in class but sometimes unprepared. Someone who has missed a few classes. Resume needs more work and exam is brief and/or vague.

1-2 points: Someone who has not contributed because of poor attendance and poor participation and poor preparedness. Resume may be weak, and exam is very general.

The final evaluation is a group activity that will take place on December 20, at 2:45.

### **Grading:**

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: *A+/A/A-* = excellent; *B+/B/B-* = above average; *C+/C/C-* = average; *D+/D/D-* = below average; F = failure. *Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.*

**Determination of final grade** will depend on completion of work noted under "Course Requirements and Assignments." Failure to complete any of the assignments will result in a 0 earned for that part of the course, thus significantly lowering the final grade.

### **University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>

## Schedule

### PART I: Essays and Familiar essays

**August 25:** Introduction: “Secret Ingredient for Success.”

**August 30:** Reflecting on literary studies: Fadiman: “Preface” and “Procrustes and the Culture Wars,” 75-94. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/opinion/sunday/the-decline-an-fall-of-the-english-major.html?emc=eta1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/opinion/sunday/the-decline-an-fall-of-the-english-major.html?emc=eta1&_r=0)

**September 1:** More on the English major:

<http://www.deanrader.com/uploads/5/1/3/8/5138027/rader-sfc-op-ed.pdf>

<https://www.openforum.com/articles/why-english-majors-are-the-hot-new-hires/?extlink=of-social-twt-o>

Fadiman, “The Unfuzzy Lamb”; Charles Lamb: “A Dissertation on Roast Pig” and “Coleridge the Runaway” “Kubla Khan” (online) <http://www.ucs.louisiana.edu/~jer6616/>

Book groups determined by this date; 15 minutes for in-class meeting.

**September 6:** Fadiman, “Ice Cream” “Night Owl.” Strunk/White/Kalman, Chapter II

**September 8:** Fadiman, “Mail,” “A Piece of Cotton,” “Insert a Carrot” (sent as PDF);

Review the English Department’s Student Learning Goals, above, for in-class discussion. In class, we will write reflections on why this goal is the most important one to you.

**September 13: Book group meeting #1.** Everyone should have read at least 75 pages. Strunk/White/Kalman, Chapters I, III. Submit 2 ideas for Familiar essay, with two sentence explanation of why you chose each.

**September 15:** Workshop on essay portfolios. Please bring to class your 1 page list of strengths/weaknesses + opening paragraph.

**September 20:** Familiar essay topic selection. Strunk/White/Kalman, Chapter IV. “Holy Writ” <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/holy-writ>

**September 22: Essay #1 due. Book group meeting #2: Everyone should have read at least 125 pp.**

**September 27:** Strunk/White/Kalman, Chapter IV, V. Extra credit for attending the Steinbeck Award, 7 pm, and turning in 2 pp. response.

### PART II: Reading reflectively.

**September 29:** Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Chapters 1-4.

**October 4:** Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, 5-11. Notes on Familiar essay due.  
**October 6:** Didion, *Year of Magical Thinking*, complete. **Book group meeting #3**—everyone should have read 250 pp.

**October 11:** Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals*. Part I.

**October 13:** Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals*. 7-11.

**October 18:** Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals*, complete. Completed notes for Familiar essay + annotations complete.

**October 20:** **Book group meeting #4**—400 pp read.

**October 25:** Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, Chapters 1-6. Familiar essay thesis statement + introduction due.

**October 27:** Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, Chapters 7-13.

**November 1:** Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, complete. **Book group meeting #5**—books complete.

**November 3:** Familiar essay rough draft due. Mandatory in-class workshop.

### **PART III: Graduate with a BA in English**

**November 8:** Speaker on Beah (tentative date)

**November 10:** Familiar essay due. Workshop on resumes. Handout: “Graduates’ First Job Marketing Themselves.”

**November 15:** **Book group presentation I.** Workshop on interviews.

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/02/how-to-make-optimism-work-for-you-2/>

**November 17:** Speaker on nonprofits, Lori Wood.

**November 22:** **Bookgroup presentation II, III.**

**November 24:** Thanksgiving

**December 29:** Reading graphic novels. *Fun Home*, Chapters 1-3.

<http://www.npr.org/2015/04/16/400095882/broadway-passes-the-bechdel-test-with-fun-home>.

**December 1:** **Book group presentation IV**

**December 6:** *Fun Home*, complete.

**December 8:** The English major: final reflections.

## Secret Ingredient for Success

By CAMILLE SWEENEY and JOSH GOSFIELD

WHAT does self-awareness have to do with a restaurant empire? A tennis championship? Or a rock star's dream?

David Chang's experience is instructive.

Mr. Chang is an internationally renowned, award-winning Korean-American chef, restaurateur and owner of the Momofuku restaurant group with eight restaurants from Toronto to Sydney, and other thriving enterprises, including bakeries and bars, a PBS TV show, guest spots on HBO's "Treme" and a foodie magazine, Lucky Peach. He says he worked himself to the bone to realize his dream — to own a humble noodle bar.

He spent years cooking in some of New York City's best restaurants, apprenticed in different noodle shops in Japan and then, finally, worked 18-hour days in his tiny restaurant, Momofuku Noodle Bar.

Mr. Chang could barely pay himself a salary. He had trouble keeping staff. And he was miserably stressed.

He recalls a low moment when he went with his staff on a night off to eat burgers at a restaurant that was everything his wasn't — packed, critically acclaimed and financially successful. He could cook better than they did, he thought, so why was his restaurant failing? "I couldn't figure out what the hell we were doing wrong," he told us.

Mr. Chang could have blamed someone else for his troubles, or worked harder (though available evidence suggests that might not have been possible) or he could have made minor tweaks to the menu. Instead he looked inward and subjected himself to brutal self-assessment.

Was the humble noodle bar of his dreams economically viable? Sure, a traditional noodle dish had its charm but wouldn't work as the mainstay of a restaurant if he hoped to pay his bills.

Mr. Chang changed course. Rather than worry about what a noodle bar should serve, he and his cooks stalked the produce at the greenmarket for inspiration. Then they went back to the kitchen and cooked as if it was their last meal, crowding the menu with wild combinations of dishes they'd want to eat — tripe and sweetbreads, headcheese and flavor-packed culinary mashups like a Korean-style burrito. What happened next Mr. Chang still considers "kind of ridiculous" — the crowds came, rave reviews piled up, awards followed and unimaginable opportunities presented themselves.

During the 1970s, Chris Argyris, a business theorist at Harvard Business School (and now, at 89, a professor emeritus) began to research what happens to organizations and people, like Mr. Chang, when they find obstacles in their paths.

Professor Argyris called the most common response single loop learning — an insular mental process in which we consider possible external or technical reasons for obstacles.

LESS common but vastly more effective is the cognitive approach that Professor Argyris called double-loop learning. In this mode we — like Mr. Chang — question every aspect of our approach, including our methodology, biases and deeply held assumptions. This more psychologically nuanced self-examination requires that we honestly challenge our beliefs and summon the courage to act on that information, which may lead to fresh ways of thinking about our lives and our goals.

In interviews we did with high achievers for a book, we expected **to hear that talent, persistence, dedication and luck played crucial roles in their success. Surprisingly, however, self-awareness played an equally strong role.**

The successful people we spoke with — in business, entertainment, sports and the arts — all had similar responses when faced with obstacles: they subjected themselves to fairly merciless self-examination that prompted reinvention of their goals and the methods by which they endeavored to achieve them.

The tennis champion Martina Navratilova, for example, told us that after a galling loss to Chris Evert in 1981, she questioned her assumption that she could get by on talent and instinct alone. She began a long exploration of every aspect of her game. She adopted a rigorous cross-training practice (common today but essentially unheard of at the time), revamped her diet and her mental and tactical game and ultimately transformed herself into the most successful women's tennis player of her era.

The indie rock band OK Go described how it once operated under the business model of the 20th-century rock band. But when industry record sales collapsed and the band members found themselves creatively hamstrung by their recording company, they questioned their tactics. Rather than depend on their label, they made wildly unconventional music videos, which went viral, and collaborative art projects with companies like Google, State Farm and Range Rover, which financed future creative endeavors. The band now releases albums on its own label.

No one's idea of a good time is to take a brutal assessment of their animating assumptions and to acknowledge that those may have contributed to their failure. It's easy to find pat ways to explain why the world has not adequately rewarded our efforts. But what we learned from conversation with high achievers is that challenging our assumptions, objectives, at times even our goals, may sometimes push us further than we thought possible. Ask David Chang, who never imagined that sweetbreads and duck sausage rice cakes with kohlrabi and mint would find their way beside his humble noodle dishes — and make him a star.

Camille Sweeney and Josh Gosfield are the authors of the forthcoming book “The Art of Doing: How Superachievers Do What They Do and How They Do It So Well.”