

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 241, MFA Fiction Workshop, Fall 2016

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 12:00pm – 1:00pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Thurs 4:00pm – 6:45pm
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 and Open University students may enroll with instructor permission. The majority of our class time will be spent discussing student work. We will also read from a fiction anthology and a photocopied anthology of published stories selected by members of the workshop. Additionally, we will discuss aspects of the writing profession. Topics include finding time to write, managing time, revision, genre, using material, finding an agent or publisher, and networking.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

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.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

- Boyle, T.C. and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2015*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-547-93941-4
- Photocopy packet of published short stories selected by your classmates (available at the third class meeting)

Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new pieces of fiction. There may be time to turn in additional pieces if you choose. [SLO #5]
- In place of a final exam, you will turn in a significant revision of one of the pieces you workshopped. [SLO #5]
- Your comments on your classmates' work. [SLO #4]
- Participation in class discussions. [SLO #4]
- Leading class discussion on a published story of your choice. [SLO #3]
- Attendance at least two literary readings and 1-2pp responses. [SLO #3, #4, #5]

Final Examination or Evaluation

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a substantial revision of one of your workshop submissions. Examples of changes that might be included in a substantial revision include adding or deleting a character, changing the point of view, inserting a new scene, and altering the ending of the story. It is not enough simply to correct the spelling and grammatical errors of the first draft. To earn a high grade on the revision, you must alter the story in some significant way. The revision is due the last day of class.

Grading Information

Creative writing can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, and rhythm. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops.

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% |

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more literary readings. Responses must be turned in by the last day of class.

Determination of Grades

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.

Attendance at Literary Readings

You are required to attend **two readings** by poets or prose writers presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions, where seven days a week one can attend a reading by a renowned writer at a bookstore, college, community center, or library. Readings are listed in the Sunday editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro*. After attending each

reading, you will write a brief response (1-2pp). You may respond to any aspect of the reading, for example the speaker, the venue, the material performed, or the Q&A with the audience.

Here are some of the readings being offered on campus this semester:

September 22: T.T. Monday, a.k.a. Nick Taylor

Whet your World Series fever as SJSU professor Nick Taylor introduces us to Johnny Adcock, a baseball pitcher who moonlights as a private eye.

7:00 PM Thursday

MLK 225

September 28: Francisco Jiménez Accepts the John Steinbeck Award

Jiménez, author of *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*, accepts the Steinbeck Award after an on-stage interview with cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz (*La Cucaracha*).

7:30 PM Wednesday

Student Union Theatre

Tickets \$10

October 15: Reed Magazine at Lit Crawl

Join editor-in-chief Cathleen Miller to celebrate Reed's 150th-anniversary edition, along with readers Cristina Garcia, Arlene Biala, Vendela Vida, Andrew Lam, and Nick Taylor.

San Francisco's Mission District

Time and exact location TBA

October 19: Luis Valdez: Houston Lecture

Meet SJSU alumnus and award-winning playwright, Luis Valdez, author of *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, as we celebrate 30 years of the CLA at this gala fundraiser in the newly refurbished Hammer Theatre.

7:00 PM Wednesday

Hammer Theatre

Tickets \$30

November 15: Vendela Vida, SJSU Lurie Author-in-Residence 2017

Novelist, founder of the journal *The Believer*, and with her husband Dave Eggers, screenwriter for *Away We Go*

7:00 PM Tuesday

MLK 225

December 7: Steinbeck Fellows

Featuring Metro columnist Gary Singh and novelist Xochitl-Julisa Bermejo

7:00 PM Wednesday

MLK 225

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 (what the story is about, what the author is trying to accomplish) 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 talking 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.

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/>.

ENGL 241 / MFA Fiction Workshop, Fall 2016, Course Schedule

This class meets every Thursday, starting on Thursday, August 25. The last class is Thursday, December 8. Class will not be held on Thursday, November 24 (Thanksgiving). In lieu of a final exam, you will submit your final revision on the last day of class.

Reading assignments meet SLO #1, writing assignments SLO #3.

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class.

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/25/2016	Introduction and writing exercises.
2	9/1/2016	Readings: <i>Best American Short Stories 2015</i> , "Foreward" through "M&L"

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
3	9/8/2016	Readings: <i>Best American Short Stories 2015</i> , “Jack/July” through “Mr. Voice”
4-16	9/15/2016 - 12/1/2016	Student Workshops
16	12/8/2016	Final Revision Due