

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 130, Writing Fiction, Spring 2017

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 1:30pm – 3:00pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Tues/Thurs 12:00pm – 1:15pm
Classroom:	Sweeney Hall 411
Prerequisites:	ENGL 71 (Intro to Creative Writing)

Course Description

For the first few weeks we will be reading and discussing published stories from 2016 edition of *Best American Short Stories* and the 2016 issue of *Reed*, the campus literary journal. I will make presentations on elements of the craft – character, conflict, point of view, etc. The goal is to practice reading like writers rather than critics (there is a difference). We'll also do some writing exercises to get your ideas flowing.

Next we will discuss your stories. Each of you will write two stories over the course of the semester. Many of us enjoy reading and writing genre fiction, such as fantasy, sci-fi, romance, horror, and crime. However, in this course we will be reading and writing character-driven literary fiction. Character-driven fiction isn't necessarily realistic, but it does focus on people who feel real to the reader, and whose situations derive from both external and internal conflict. Don't worry if you have never written character-driven fiction before. The assigned readings provide a wide variety of examples for you to study.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the BA in English. Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- SLO #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.
- SLO #3: Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

- Diaz, Junot and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2016*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
- Reed Magazine, Issue 69 (2016). San Jose State University literary journal.

Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new, original pieces of fiction, photocopied for the class (SLO #3).
- Written and verbal comments on your classmates' stories (SLO #1, #3).
- Reading assignments from the textbook. I will quiz on these (SLO #1).
- A substantial revision of one of your stories (serves as the final exam) (SLO #3).
- Brief in-class and take-home writing exercises (SLO #3).
- Attendance at two literary readings of your choice, and a 1-2 page written response to each (SLO #1, #3).

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, though subject to the instructor's subjectivity, 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. Some of you may have some natural ability writing fiction, and some may not. Think of talent as extra credit – it can make up for a blown quiz, but it won't get you an A if you neglect the other class requirements.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

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|---|-----|
| • First Workshop Submission | 20% |
| • Second Workshop Submission | 20% |
| • Final Revision | 20% |
| • Responses to Classmates' Fiction | 15% |
| • Class Participation, including Reading Quizzes | 15% |
| • Attendance at Literary Readings (and write-ups) | 10% |

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more literary readings (and write responses). These must be turned in by the last day of class.

Late assignments will not be accepted without the instructor's prior approval.

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 *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 free readings being offered on campus this semester:

Feb 24 - Bryan Stevenson (nonfiction) – 12:00pm, Hammer Theater

Mar 3 - Kim Addonizio (poetry) – 4:00-5:00pm, Steinbeck Center (MLK 590)

Mar 3 - Reed Magazine presents An Evening of Poetry 'N Film at Cinquest, 7:00pm-9:00 p.m., Uchida Hall 124

Mar 21 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Food and Travel Panel, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Mar 22 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Adventure Travel Panel feat. Susan Orlean, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Mar 23 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Travel Editors Panel, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Apr 5 - Steinbeck Fellows Reading, 7:00pm, Steinbeck Center, MLK 590

May 3 - SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day, 5:00-9:00pm, Hammer Theater

May 4 - Reed Magazine 150th Anniversary Party, 7:00pm, City Hall Rotunda

Also, here are some free events at Kepler's Books in Menlo Park:

Jan 30 - Kevin Wilson (fiction), 7:30pm - Kevin Wilson, the debut genius of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Family Fang*, celebrates the release of his new novel, *Perfect Little World* (a new favorite among the booksellers). In this lively and entertaining new work, Wilson tells the story of a quixotic psychologist, Dr. Preston Grind, as he falls down the rabbit hole of attempting to create a utopian family.

Feb 7 - Pinay Poets and Writers featuring **Arlene Biala** (Poet Laureate of Santa Clara County), **Janice Lobo Sapigao**, **Veronica Montes**, and **Barbara Jane Reyes**, 7:30pm - An evening of poetry presented by four leading Pinay poets who will read from their most recent work and discuss the long tradition of Pinay poetry, its place in the Philippines, the United States, and in the literary canon.

Mar 6 - Yiyun Li (nonfiction), 7:30pm - Yiyun Li, named one of the *New Yorker's* 20 Under 40, battled suicidal depression for over two years as she delved into her past and explored the essential questions of her occupation: Why Write? and Why Live? The book that emerged is a luminous account of both her life experience (as a scientist, author, mother, and daughter) and an homage to some of her most cherished literary influences.

Workshop Procedures

After the drop date, I will pass around a sign-up sheet where each of you will choose **two dates** to hand in your stories. On each of those dates, you will pass out photocopies of a story to everyone in the class, including the instructor (**26 copies in total**). Your story must be **double-spaced, single-sided**, and include **page numbers**.

Your classmates will take home your story, make comments on the manuscript, and type up a half page (minimum) of comments. **Students must print two copies of their critiques.** At the next class meeting, the instructor will lead a discussion of your story. We'll do two or three stories per class, so your story will get about twenty minutes of attention. At the end of the discussion, students will hand the author their marked-up manuscripts and the typed comments. **They will also turn in copies of their critiques to the instructor.** Critiques will be graded on the quality and quantity of the feedback they provide.

What should you cover in your comments? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story. What's your interpretation? If the piece were in a textbook, what would you say about it? This helps the writer understand what came across and what didn't. The second responsibility is to suggest avenues for improvement. How can the writer make this story better? Often this requires putting yourself in the writer's shoes. Remember that you can help a fellow writer with thoughtful commentary even if you would not have chosen the same topic or style in your own work.

Classroom Protocol

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated. If you feel threatened by a classmate, please bring the issue to my attention so I can address it promptly.

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 130 / Writing Fiction, Spring 2017, Course Schedule

This class meets every Tuesday and Thursday, starting on Thursday, January 26. Class will not be held on Tuesday, March 28, or Thursday, March 30 (Spring Recess). In lieu of a final exam, you will hand in your final revision on the last day of class, Tuesday, May 16.

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

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

BASS = Best American Short Stories

Reed = Reed Magazine

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/26/2017	Introduction & still write.
2	1/31/2017	Topic: Character Readings: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Apollo" (<i>BASS</i> 1); Lisa Ko, "Pat + Sam"

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		(BASS 145)
2	2/2/2017	Topic: Character Readings: William Pei Shih, "Caterpillars" (<i>Reed</i> 4); Ben Marcus, "Cold Little Bird" (BASS 158)
3	2/7/2017	Topic: Conflict Readings: Andrew Tucker, "Posthumous" (<i>Reed</i> 53); Merion Hadero, "The Suitcase" (BASS 121)
3	2/9/2017	Topic: Conflict Readings: Susannah Carlson, "Relief" (<i>Reed</i> 49), Smith Henderson, "Treasure State" (BASS 132)
4	2/14/2017	Topic: Setting Readings: Héctor Tobar, "Secret Stream" (BASS 256); Midge Raymond, "The Crying Girl" (<i>Reed</i> 66)
4	2/16/2017	Topic: Point of View Readings: Lauren Groff, "For the God of Love, for the Love of God" (BASS 103); Daniel J. O'Malley, "Bridge" (BASS 192)
5	2/21/2017	Topic: Voice Readings: John Edgar Wideman, "Williamsburg Bridge" (BASS 268)
5	2/23/2017	Topic: Allusion and Metaphor Readings: Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, "The Bears" (BASS 55); Yalitza Ferreras, "The Laetician Age" (BASS 86)
6	2/28/2017	Topic: Speculative Fiction and Fabulism Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence" (BASS 69); Louise Erdrich, "The Flower" (BASS 73)
6-16	3/2/2017 – 5/11/2017	Student Workshops
16	5/16/2017	Final Revision Due