

**San José State University**  
**Department of English and Comparative Literature**  
**ENGL 130, Writing Fiction, Fall 2018**

**Course and Contact Information**

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| <b>Instructor:</b>      | Nick Taylor                                    |
| <b>Office Location:</b> | Center for Steinbeck Studies, MLK Library 590  |
| <b>Telephone:</b>       | (408) 808-2067                                 |
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| <b>Office Hours:</b>    | Tues/Thurs 12:00pm – 1:00pm and by appointment |
| <b>Class Days/Time:</b> | Tues/Thurs 1:30pm – 2:45pm                     |
| <b>Classroom:</b>       | Sweeney Hall 444                               |
| <b>Prerequisites:</b>   | ENGL 71 (Intro to Creative Writing)            |

**Course Description**

For the first few weeks we will be reading and discussing published stories from 2017 edition of *Best American Short Stories* and the 2018 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

- Wolitzer, Meg and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2017*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- *Reed Magazine 2018 Edition* (Issue 151 - 2018). 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 Revision

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% |
| • Response Papers for Literary Readings/Performances | 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.

## One-Unit Enhancement: Attendance at Literary Readings

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

- International Education / Cultural Enrichment

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*. Most local bookstores host author events. Check out Kepler's Books in Menlo Park ([www.keplers.org](http://www.keplers.org)), Books Inc ([www.booksinc.net](http://www.booksinc.net)), Hicklebees in Willow Glen ([www.hicklebees.com](http://www.hicklebees.com)), and your local Barnes and Noble ([www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)) for listings.

If your schedule will not allow you to attend any literary readings in person, you may watch two readings by authors on YouTube, however you must check with the instructor to make sure the videos you plan to watch are acceptable.

After attending each reading, you will write a **1000-word personal response to each**. 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. Explore how your attendance at the reading changed the way you think about creative writing as an art form or as a profession. Your response papers are due within a week of the reading. The instructor will provide written commentary on your responses.

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

#### Friday, Sept. 21: 7 p.m.

Reed 151 Launch Party featuring **T.C. Boyle** at the Hammer Theatre

#### Tues, October 9, 7:00pm

Former Steinbeck Fellows **Dallas Woodburn** (*Woman, Running Late, In A Dress*) and **Peter Nathaniel Malae** (*Son of Amity*) will read from new works of fiction. Reception to follow.

#### Weds, Oct. 17: 7 p.m.

**Gary Kamiya** Reading and Conversation with Michael Johns at the Hammer Theatre

#### Weds, Nov. 7: 7 p.m.

**Mighty Mike McGee** Reading and Conversation with Tshaka Campbell at Café Stritch, 374 S 1st St, San Jose.

## **Weds, November 28, 7:00pm**

Three of the six 2018-2019 **Steinbeck Fellows** will read from new work and answer questions from the audience. Reception to follow.

## **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, Course Schedule**

This class meets every Tuesday and Thursday, starting on Tuesday, August 21. Class will not be held on Thursday, November 22 in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday. In lieu of a final exam, you will hand in your final revision on the last day of class, Thursday, December 6.

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

| <b>Week</b> | <b>Date</b>              | <b>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</b>   |
|-------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1           | 8/21/2018                | Introduction & still write.   |
| 1           | 8/23/2018                | Topic: Character<br>Readings: Kevin Canty, "God's Work" ( <i>BASS</i> 28); Leopoldine Core, "Hog for Sorrow" ( <i>BASS</i> 72)                            |
| 2           | 8/28/2018                | Topic: Character<br>Readings: Jai Chakrabarti, "A Small Sacrifice for Enormous Happiness" ( <i>BASS</i> 41); Sonya Larson, "Gabe Dove" ( <i>BASS</i> 164) |
| 2           | 8/30/2018                | Topic: Conflict<br>Readings: Fiona Maazel, "Let's Go to the Videotape" ( <i>BASS</i> 181); Lauren Groff, "The Midnight Zone" ( <i>BASS</i> 147)           |
| 3           | 9/4/2018                 | Topic: Conflict<br>Readings: Eric Puchner, "Last Day on Earth" ( <i>BASS</i> 202); Sophie Anne Berti, "Reservoir" ( <i>Reed</i> 38)                       |
| 3           | 9/6/2018                 | Topic: Setting<br>Readings: Willy Lizárraga, "Black and White Doesn't Mean Gray" ( <i>Reed</i> 26); Steve H. Vu, "East Side" ( <i>Reed</i> 93)            |
| 4           | 9/11/2018                | Topic: Point of View<br>Readings: Chad B. Anderson, "Maidencane" ( <i>BASS</i> 1); Jess Walter, "Famous Actor" ( <i>BASS</i> 267)                         |
| 4           | 9/13/2018                | Topic: Metaphor and Allusion<br>Readings: T.C. Boyle, "Chicxulub" ( <i>Reed</i> 16); Susan Lowell, "The Frog Prince" ( <i>Reed</i> 66)                    |
| 5           | 9/18/2018                | Topic: Political Fiction<br>Readings: Curtis Sittenfeld, "Gender Studies" ( <i>BASS</i> 255)  |
| 5           | 9/20/2018                | Topic: Speculative Fiction<br>Readings: TC Boyle, "Are We Not Men?" ( <i>BASS</i> 11); Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Alien's Tale" ( <i>Reed</i> viii)          |
| 6           | 9/25/2018                | Topic: Endings and Resolution<br>Readings: Mary Gordon, "Ugly" ( <i>BASS</i> 126)   |
| 6-16        | 9/27/2018 –<br>12/4/2018 | Student Workshops   |
| 16          | 12/6/2018                | Final Revision Due  |