

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Lit
ENGL 130, Writing Fiction, Fall 2018

Instructor: Christine Vines
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Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-2:30pm
Class Days/Time: Monday/Wednesday, 12:00-1:15pm
Classroom: Sweeney Hall 444
Prerequisites: ENGL 71 (Intro to Creative Writing)

COURSE RATIONALE

People often take creative writing thinking it will be an easy course, but if you are doing it right, it is actually very difficult. That doesn't mean, of course, that it won't be enjoyable. Being a good creative writer involves discipline, study and the development of technical skill, much like being an athlete. This semester, you're going to train your creative muscles, first by practicing your writing and second by being careful and engaged readers of both published writing and the writing of your peers.

"Good fiction's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."
-David Foster Wallace

"It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive."
-James Baldwin

Course policies and regulations

Attendance

- If you plan on being absent, email me in advance.
- If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, along with any assignments due for the next class. You may do this either by emailing me or getting in touch with a classmate.

Class conduct and communication

- Come to class prepared and with the necessary materials. This means annotated print-outs of the published stories and written responses to your classmates' work. This also means a small notebook or binder for in-class writing assignments (you'll want to keep them all handy as we may be returning to old prompts

throughout the semester). Be a person. Be present. Have an opinion. But above all, be thoughtful about your feedback and be kind.

- No tablets, laptops, or cell phones during class time. Rely on old-fashioned methods of writing (ie. paper and writing utensil).
- As your instructor, I will be available by appointment. Emails received after 6pm will likely be answered the following business day.

Readings

- The readings will either be available on Canvas or handed out during class.
- It is essential that you bring printed and *annotated* copies of the readings to class.
- Annotation is a form of engaging with and recording your response to a story. It may take the form of any of the following: underlining, starring, heart-ing, bracketing, question marks in the margins when you are unsure of a line's purpose, definitions when you have looked up a word/place/name, notes to yourself in the margins when you are making connections as you read. Annotation is essential. Becoming better writers means becoming better readers.

Workshop

- Every student will have his or her writing workshopped once classwide. There will be three additional workshops in small groups.
- If you are up for workshop, email your work to the class *no later than noon on Monday* of that week.
- For every workshop submission, you will give the writer a feedback letter (300 words minimum). Letters are uploaded to Canvas *before Wednesday* workshop and brought with you (printed) to class.

If you are at all invested in the writing you submit (which you will need to be in order to receive an A), workshop is a notoriously difficult process. It is difficult to have your writing critiqued by a roomful of people and it is difficult to provide a thoughtful, respectful critique to someone else. You will therefore need to put a substantial effort into delivering honest, detailed and considerate feedback. More guidelines to come as workshop approaches.

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.

Course Requirements and Assignments

- One new, original piece of fiction, photocopied for the class (SLO #3).
- Three new, original pieces of flash fiction, emailed to your group (SLO #3).
- Written and verbal comments on your classmates' stories (SLO #1, #3).
- 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 give you a boost, but it won't get you an A if you neglect the other class requirements.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

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| • Class-wide Workshop Submission | 20% |
| • Small Group Workshop Submissions | 20% |
| • Final Revision | 20% |
| • Responses to Classmates' Fiction | 15% |
| • Class Participation | 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), Books Inc (www.booksinc.net), Hicklebees in Willow Glen (www.hicklebees.com), and your local Barnes and Noble (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 **500-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.

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/>.

Course Calendar:

WEEK	DATE	READING	DUE
INTRODUCTION			
Week 1	Mon, Jan 28	Welcome! Syllabus	
	Weds, Jan 30	Woolf, Bullet in the Brain Stein, Creating the Envelope	
Week 2	Mon, Feb 4	Saunders, Escape from Spiderhead Stein, Fiction and Nonfiction	
	Weds, Feb 6	Roupenian, Cat Person Stein, Secret Snapshot	
Week 3	Mon, Feb 11	Barthelme, The School Saunders, The Perfect Gerbil	
	Weds, Feb 13	Bender, The Healer	
Week 4	Mon, Feb 18	Machado, The Husband Stitch Stein, Particularity	
	Weds, Feb 20	O'Connor, A Good Man is Hard to Find Reed, What to Leave Out and What to Put In	
Week 5	Mon, Feb 25	Safari	Story due to Small Group by noon

	Weds, Feb 27	Small Group Workshop	
Week 6	Mon, March 4	Workshop	
	Weds, March 6	Workshop	
Week 7	Mon, March 11	Workshop	
	Weds, March 13	Workshop	
Week 8	Mon, March 18	Workshop	
	Weds, March 20	Workshop	Story due to Small Group by noon
Week 9	Mon, March 25	Small Group Workshop	
	Weds, March 27	Workshop	
Week 10	Mon, April 1	SPRING BREAK	
	Weds, April 3	SPRING BREAK	
Week 11	Mon, April 8	Workshop	
	Weds, April 10	Workshop	
Week 12	Mon, April 15	Workshop	
	Weds, April 17	Workshop	
Week 13	Mon, April 22	Workshop	Story due to Small Group by noon
	Weds, April 24	Small Group Workshop	
Week 14	Mon, April 29	Workshop	
	Weds, May 1	Workshop	
Week 15	Mon, May 6	Workshop	
	Weds, May 8	Workshop	
	Mon, May 13	LAST DAY OF CLASS	Workshop Revision + Reflection due