

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 71-07 (27026): Argument and Analysis, Spring 2019
Introduction to Creative Writing

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Dr. Michael Tod Edgerton /ej-er-tun/
Pronouns:	he, him, his
Office Location:	Faculty Office Building (FOB) 223
Telephone:	408-924-4069
Email:	Michael.Edgerton@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	MW 3:00-4:15 and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	MW 4:30-5:45
Classroom:	Dudley Moorhead Hall 354
GE Area Category:	C2

Course Management Page and Emails

Course materials, such as syllabus, handouts, and assignment instructions, can be found on the **Canvas course management system** website. You are responsible for checking *both* your sjsu.edu email *and* the messaging system through Canvas to learn of any updates.

Course Description

“Examinations of works of poetry, creative nonfiction and short fiction as expression of human intellect and imagination, to comprehend the historic and cultural contexts, and recognize issues related to writing by men and women of diverse cultural traditions. Students will write poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction.” (Catalog description)

We will, to put it most fundamentally and simply, **make art with words**. We’ll look at a variety of literary genres and forms, writing processes and procedures in the course of our adventures in making literary art, exploring the genre conventions of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as well as moving between and beyond them to exciting new territory. We’ll move our processes off the blank page to compositional strategies that begin with and/or include other texts or art works, such as literary collage, erasure, ekphrasis, and multimedia writing. Classes will be divided between discussion of model texts (mostly PDFs) and constructive critique of student work.

English 71 GE Course Goals (GELOs):

1. Decipher and understand the form and content of assigned literary works
2. Comprehend the historical and cultural contexts of assigned literary works
3. Recognize the accomplishments of and issues related to writing by men and women representing diverse cultural traditions
4. Acquire through both individual and collaborative/workshop efforts of a written and oral nature the skills necessary for reading, discussing, analyzing, interpreting, and—most importantly—emulating and writing works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction
5. Communicate such skills with clarity and precision
6. Develop the ability to write literary works that express intellect and imagination and that represent diversity in human cultures
7. Respond to literature through clear and effective communication in both written and oral work
8. Read and respond to texts with both analytical acumen and personal sensibility;
9. Appreciate how literary works to illuminate enduring human concerns while also representing matters specific to a particular culture
10. Write works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience

English Department Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, you are expected to spend a *minimum* of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on.

In this class, you will be reading and analyzing model texts, writing creative pieces based on those texts, and constructively critiquing, or “workshopping,” one another’s work. Participation is central to this course; we will be discussing model readings, student writing, the art of writing, the writing life, and who’s dating whom (okay, probably not that last one...).

Required Texts

All required texts will be made available as PDF or Word documents or as links to online materials posted as an “Assignment” to our course Canvas site.

Technology and other requirements

A laptop or tablet computer is required; **bring it to every class** for in-class writing and accessing reading materials. If you do not have a computer to bring, you can check one out from the SJSU library (4th floor) or from the Instructional and Meeting Spaces Equipment Loan in IRC room 112 (phone: 408-924-2888; email: ims-equipment-loaning-group@sjsu.edu website: <https://sjsuequipment.getconnect2.com>). **NO PHONES may be used in class at any time for any reason** without my express permission—period (see note on participation below). Repeated violations of classroom rules will result in a deduction of participation points.

Almost if not all of your course readings will be Adobe PDF files, so you will need to download the free **Adobe Reader** from Adobe.com.

All of your own writing assignments need to be in “.docx” format. Download a free version of **Microsoft Office** (which includes **MS Word**) from the “Software Download” tab of your one.sjsu.edu page if you don’t already have it on your computer.

Grading Policy

Final Grade Breakdown

- Reading Journal: 25%
- Final Portfolio of Revised Creative Work: 40%
- In-class workshops/written critiques: 25%
- Participation (reading and workshop discussions, etc.): 10%

Determination of Grades

Grades will be allocated according to the amount of work you put into the class. While talent will be rewarded, this is an introductory creative writing course, and I certainly do not expect anyone to be writing publishable quality work (though you may). In order for you to feel free to “Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.” as Samuel Beckett characterized the artistic process, I am not going to grade the quality of your individual pieces. Instead, you will receive credit for completion. The most important thing I try to teach my creative writing students is permission, to give yourself the permission to try anything, to push the proverbial envelope, to experiment and fail, which is never failure, so long as you learn from it and keep writing. Engaging in a sustained writing practice itself is success.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

No extra credit will be given in this class.

Missed in-class or late work will only be accepted at the discretion of the instructor. If accepted, a penalty of up to 10 percentage points per day late may be assessed.

Classroom Protocol

PARTICIPATION is required from *all students*—there is no room for wallflowers in this class. If you’re a shy student, take this course as a challenge and opportunity to build your confidence and public-speaking skills. We all say something “wrong” or that makes us feel “stupid” sometimes—so what? It’s not the end of the world. It’s often, in fact, how we learn, and we are all learning and developing as readers and writers together. We will work collaboratively, helping one another to improve our skills. We will not judge but support one another, even as we debate controversial issues, evaluate one another’s performances, and critique one another’s arguments—all for our mutual betterment.

This class is not a lecture but a seminar, and I will be facilitating *your* discussions of readings and student writing. Your physical and mental presence is therefore expected at *each and every* class meeting. This is *not* the kind of class you can miss and just get the lecture notes from a friend to catch up. *Every class will require your active participation.* **A writing course is a community of learners**

undergoing a *process* whereby they develop their reading and writing skills over time, through hard work and dedication. Writing courses are by their nature time- and energy-intensive courses. Staying on track with homework assignments and being present (both physically and mentally) and actively contributing to class discussions and completing in-class writing or other assignments is *absolutely essential* to your success in this course.

You are therefore expected to arrive on time, fully-prepared, and ready to participate actively in each class meeting. To receive credit for contributions to discussions, **you must offer new insights or pose questions that lead to productive conversation, not just repeat what someone else has said.** This also means that you must come to class with all required assignments completed and reading and writing homework materials in hand (be that as a print-out or on your computer). **Missed and late assignments will not be accepted and make-up work or extra credit will not be given (or only at my discretion, and may incur a grade penalty, as outlined in “Grading Policies” above).**

Discussion Guidelines

- Be RESPECTFUL (almost every other guideline is a subcategory of this all-important one!)
- No yelling, talking over, interrupting, or—obviously—no personal insults.
- Try to understand and be considerate of others’ perspectives, opinions, and feelings
- Come prepared so you can actively and substantively contribute to discussion (and not waste your classmates’ time B.S.-ing). Read and write your assigned analyses/responses and bring those to class along with the reading so you have all of your materials, notes, and ideas at hand.
- Speaking of wasting others’ time, don’t just repeat what someone else already said. You can certainly extend it, offer a different perspective on it, etc., but don’t just repackage it in different words and hope we don’t notice.
- Let others speak. We don’t want class to devolve into a situation where the same five people carry the conversation all the time. The popcorn method was a good suggestion for doing this, too (although “hot potato” and “tag” seem like more accurate analogies to me...but whatever). It’s where one student starts out with a contribution and then randomly passes the discussion baton on to another person.
- To that end, BE COGNIZANT of yourself and of others. Always be “taking the temperature” of the room, and give others space to speak.
- And to *that* end: Don’t Be Afraid of Silence. Sometimes a minute or two of silence gives more tentative people time to step up.
- Offer CONSTRUCTIVE critique. While our goal is to discuss, debate, and rigorously evaluate one another’s reading and writing to help one another improve throughout the semester, we want to do this in as *supportive, encouraging, and positive* a manner as we can.
- Conversely, be open to criticism. It’s the only way to learn, and becoming defensive can just shut out what others have to have offer you. We’re not going to judge one another, but help everyone improve as much as we can.
- Stay on topic. Tangents are usually counterproductive.
- ACTIVELY LISTEN AND PARTICIPATE in discussions, don’t zone out, drift off or get up and leave in the middle of class (use the bathroom beforehand). If you’re going to be sick, of course, by all means run!
- Be CONFIDENT in your presentations of your analyses, interpretations, evaluations and critiques. It’s fine to admit when you know you’re going out on a limb, taking a stab in the dark, but if you feel you have a strong case to make for the strength or weakness of an argument or its

evidence, for example, don't be afraid to say—and stand by—it. Even if you don't always feel that way, try to hold yourself with confidence—fake it 'til you make it! (Arrogance is something altogether different, and we want to avoid it.)

- The first step in gaining confidence in your ideas is to always ground them in the language, logic, and evidence of the text itself, in what's *actually on the page*. Not all interpretations are equally valid—or valid at all. Although I always welcome going out on a limb when faced with a difficult text (again, trying and “failing” is never failure), try to be aware of your own cognition as you read, and of where you might be projecting something onto the text where there's no real basis for it in the language used.

THE FINAL PORTFOLIO

will consist of 4 or 5 significantly revised versions of your stories, poems, and essays (no page minimum or maximum—within reason), followed by 3-5 pages of new work. For your portfolio, you should choose those pieces most accomplished and successful in meeting their aims; the most ambitious; the pieces from which you learned the most in the process of composition; and the pieces that show your capacity for effective revision. Include both the original and the newest versions of each piece, followed by polished, completed new work.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURES

Rule number one: as with discussions of model readings, remain respectful, but honest. **Our main goals are to communicate our full sensory, emotional, and intellectual experience of the work, to articulate what we see the piece's aims being** (which may or may not line up with the author's actual intentions—and so good for her to know), **and to constructively critique how well the work is meeting those goals**, perhaps offering alternative possibilities for various artistic choices, from wording to imagery, narrative strategies, characterization, such poetic structures as line and stanza breaks, etc. What does the piece do to us and how does it do it?

If your piece is being workshopped, you can inform us ahead of time if you want your piece approached with certain questions or concerns, just add a prefatory note in the Word/PDF document itself before the title of the piece (I'd put it on its own page). Always include your name inside the file and as part of the file name: “JaneDoe-TitleofPiece,” for instance.

Here are some specific questions and concerns to consider when reading your peers' work and model readings alike:

1. What effects does this piece produce in you (ideas, emotions, questions, appreciation of style, etc.) Another way of putting it: What are the aims of this piece? These may or may not be the conscious intentions of the writer—we can't read their minds, so we can only be concerned with what we think the poem or story is aiming at, regardless of the writer's intentions. The writer will have to decide for herself whether to attend to any discrepancies or embrace a new reading and new aim for her work, perhaps revising towards this new interpretation and leaving her original intention behind.

2. How does it go about achieving these aims (what specific aspects or elements help produce and shape the experience you have of the writing)? That is to say, by what means of literary form and technique, such as narrative, dialogue, character, poetic line, rhythm/music, tone, diction, figurative language (metaphor, metonymy, allegory, etc.), image, grammar and syntax, etc. does the piece produce the effects it does--what are its gears and pulleys, what is its code and are there any bugs in it?

3. What elements/choices are hindering the piece, undermining its effectiveness, or otherwise feel at odds with the rest (in a way that doesn't further its aims, that is unproductive, even disruptive and distracting)?

Framing our critiques/responses in this manner will be more productive in approaching the pieces than merely saying "I like/don't like X, Y, or Z." It's easy to fall into this, and I'm sure we all will at some point, but we need to make a concerted effort not to reduce critique merely to the polling of the audience as to what they like, which may be beside the point for the writer, who isn't, certainly, trying to please the group, but to better understand how her piece operates and what the range of choices might be for revising it.

We'll turn in work in Word and/or PDF document format on our Canvas course site. We will use the "Track Changes" and "New Comment" functions in the MS Word Review Pane. In Adobe Acrobat Reader, we will use the "Highlight" and "Add Sticky Note" or "Add Text" functions. In Word, you want to select the word or phrase or punctuation mark you are commenting on, click on the Review tab, and click the New Comment button (In the middle of the toolbar you will find a dropdown menu that will most likely start with "Final"; you may have to choose "Final: Show Markup" to view the comment bubbles in the right hand margin. In Acrobat Reader, select and then "highlight" in yellow the text on which you're commenting. Place your cursor at the end of this highlighted text or in the margin next to it and click "Insert Sticky Note." Type away!

NOTE: Work to be critiqued will be submitted by 11:59pm a week prior to whatever day it is scheduled to be workshopped in class.

University Policies

The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, and so forth: <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/index.html>. The First-Year Writing Program's policies can be found:

http://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program_policies/index.html. Plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated under any circumstances. For your convenience, I have copied below some of the most important and/or useful.

Academic integrity

Your commitment, as a student, to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The [University Academic Integrity Policy F15-7](#) requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Visit the [Student Conduct and Ethical Development](#) website for more information.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. [Presidential Directive 97-03](#) requires that students with

disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the [Accessible Education Center](#) (AEC) to establish a record of their disability.

Student Technology Resources

Computer labs and other resources for student use are available in:

- [Associated Students Print & Technology Center](http://as.sjsu.edu/asptc/index.jsp) at <http://as.sjsu.edu/asptc/index.jsp> on the Student Union (East Wing 2nd floor Suite 2600)
- [The Spartan Floor](http://library.sjsu.edu/about/spartan-floor) at the King Library at <http://library.sjsu.edu/about/spartan-floor>
- [Student Computing Services](http://library.sjsu.edu/student-computing-services/student-computing-services-center) at <http://library.sjsu.edu/student-computing-services/student-computing-services-center>
- [Computers at the Martin Luther King Library](https://www.sjpl.org/wireless) for public at large at <https://www.sjpl.org/wireless>
- Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college

A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from [Collaboration & Academic Technology Services](#) located in IRC Building. These items include DV and HD digital camcorders; digital still cameras; video, slide and overhead projectors; DVD, CD, and audiotape players; sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

SJSU Peer Connections

Peer Connections' free tutoring and mentoring is designed to assist students in the development of their full academic potential and to inspire them to become independent learners. Peer Connections tutors are trained to provide content-based tutoring in many lower division courses (some upper division) as well as writing and study skills assistance. Small group and individual tutoring are available. Peer Connections mentors are trained to provide support and resources in navigating the college experience. This support includes assistance in learning strategies and techniques on how to be a successful student. Peer Connections has a learning commons, desktop computers, and success workshops on a wide variety of topics. For more information on services, hours, locations, or a list of current workshops, please visit [Peer Connections website](http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu) at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. All Writing Specialists have gone through a rigorous hiring process, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment or to refer to the numerous online resources offered through the Writing Center, visit the [Writing Center website](http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>. For additional resources and updated information, follow the Writing Center on Twitter and become a fan of the SJSU Writing Center on Facebook.

SJSU Counseling and Psychological Services

The SJSU Counseling and Psychological Services is located on the corner of 7th Street and San Carlos in the new Student Wellness Center, Room 300B. Professional psychologists, social workers, and counselors are available to provide confidential consultations on issues of student mental health, campus climate or psychological and academic issues on an individual, couple, or group basis. To schedule an appointment or learn more information, visit <http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling>.

Course Schedule for ENGL 71: Introduction to Creative Writing*

* This outline is a provisional sketch of our semester; it is subject to change. **See Canvas for full instructions and due dates for all assignments.** A helpful guide to Canvas can be found here: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>. For important university-wide dates and deadlines (e.g., add-drop), see the San José State University Spring 2019 Academic Calendar at <http://www.sjsu.edu/registrar/calendar/2192/index.html>.

Week 1: World into Words

Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish”; Jorie Graham, “The Turning”; Mark Doty “The Art of Description”

Week 2: Words Creating Worlds

Christopher Isherwood, pp. 3-5 (to the break) from *A Single Man*; Kenneth Goldsmith “10:00,” from *Fidget*; Jamaica Kincaid, “What I Have Been Doing Lately”

Week 3: One’s World Unmade: Personal Essays at the Limit of “Self”

James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”; Annie Dillard, “Living Like a Weasel”; Maggie Nelson, from *Bluets*

Week 4: Upper Limit, Music I: The Singing Word

Gertrude Stein, Haryette Mullen, Carole Maso, Andrew Joron, Terrence Hayes

Week 5: Text/Art I: Field Composition and Visual poetry

Forrest Gander, Eric Baus, D. A. Powell, Douglas Kearney, Diana Khoi Nguyen, et al.

Week 6: Upper Limit, Music II: Sonnets, the “Little Songs”

William Shakespeare, John Donne, John Keats, Haryette Mullen, Terrence Hayes, et al.

Week 7: Lower Limit, Speech I: Voicing Character

Junot Díaz, Jamaica Kincaid, Vladimir Nabokov, C. D. Wright, Ocean Vuong, et al.

Week 8: Essaying the Social Lyric

Claudia Rankine, from *Citizen: An American Lyric*; C. D. Wright, from *One Big Self*

Week 9: Text/Art II: Ekphrastic Translations

Cole Swensen, “To Writewithize”

Ekphrastic poem packet and ekphrastic fiction online in *Tarpaulin Sky* magazine

Week 10: Spring Break

Week 11: Lower Limit, Speech II: Dialogic Voices

Toni Morrison, George Saunders, Justin Torres, Alexander Chee, Suzan-Lori Parks, David Mamet, et al.

Week 12: Text/Art III: Erasure

Jen Bervin, Tom Phillips, Ronald Johnson, Tracy K. Smith, et al.

Week 13: TBA/Overflow/Portfolio Conferences

Weeks 14-16: Final Portfolio Workshops

- **Complete, revised Final Portfolios are due by 11:59pm *a week to the day* you workshop your last selection from it.**