Creative Writing

ENGL 71

Spring 2026   Section 02   In Person   3 Unit(s)   01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026   Modified 02/16/2026

👤 Contact Information

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🕐 Course Information

Examinations of works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction as expressions of human intellect and imagination, with an emphasis on understanding historic and global cultural contexts and the issues inherent in writing from diverse cultural traditions. Students will develop their own creative writing skills through sustained practice, producing original poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction. The course emphasizes reading as writers, engaging critically with contemporary literary forms, and participating in collaborative workshop processes.

GE Area(s): C2. Humanities

We will explore how various creative works were conceived and crafted, studying the techniques and decisions that shape them. Students will strengthen their own creativity and craft by:

- Writing short responses to assigned readings
- Participating actively in class discussions and activities
  Reading and responding to each other's work with constructive, craft-focused feedback
- Creating a polished portfolio that demonstrates growth across multiple genres

Key Course Features

- **Contemporary Literary Sources:** Core readings drawn from *The Believer*, *The Common*, and *McSweeney's*, exposing students to current voices, styles, and publishing formats.
- **Multi-Genre Practice:** Hands-on creation of visuals, poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction, allowing students to explore and refine their voice across forms.
- **Workshop-Based Learning:** Regular peer feedback sessions focused on craft, audience, and revision strategies.

- **Portfolio Development:** Students curate and revise their strongest works for a final portfolio that showcases their creative range and growth.
- **Cultural & Contextual Awareness:** Study of works from diverse cultural traditions to broaden literary understanding and inform creative choices.
- **Integration of Visual & Hybrid Forms:** Inclusion of photo essays, comics, and mixed-form works to expand narrative possibilities.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Chat GPT)

What you should know about AI Platforms

Large language models, like Chat GPT, perform intensive mining, modeling, and memorization of vast stores of language data "scraped" from the internet. They have been trained to learn language patterns and to predict the most probable next word or sequence of words based on the context they receive. In other words, it imitates or mimics what humans have put on the internet (think about that for a minute). AI writing platforms have become savvy enough to write essays, create apps, help with excel, and nearly any conceivable writing situation that relies on linguistic patterns. In this class, we'll practice learning and thinking with them. ChatGPT, like all generative AI systems, is a tool. Tools are used by humans to accomplish specific tasks. Thinking of it that way helps unlock its potential, but also avoid its pitfalls.

OUR CLASS POLICY ON GENERATIVE AI

AI tools may be used in this course to support brainstorming, outlining, reviewing, and language polishing. When you use AI tools like ChatGPT, clearly state where and how in a footnote or endnote (e.g., "Used ChatGPT to generate outline structure"). Do not submit AI-generated full drafts—your voice matters. Violations will be handled per the SJSU Academic Integrity Policy.

Generative AI programs like ChatGPT and Grammarly can and should be used as resources in this class. As a writing community, we've decided that while they can be integrated into our writing process (brainstorming, generating and organizing ideas, polishing drafts, etc.), we should not use them to write for us. Our work should represent our own ideas and our own ways of articulating them.

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The university emphasizes responsible citizenship and an awareness of ethical choices inherent in human development. Academic honesty and fairness foster ethical standards for all those who rely on the integrity of the university, its courses, and its degrees. University degrees are compromised and the public is defrauded if faculty members or students knowingly or unwittingly allow dishonest acts to be rewarded academically. This policy sets the standards for such integrity and shall be used to inform students, faculty, and staff of the university's Academic Integrity Policy.

STUDENT ROLE

The San José State University Academic Integrity Policy requires that each student:

- know the rules that preserve academic integrity and abide by them at all times, including learning and abiding by rules associated with specific classes, exams, and course assignments;
- know the consequences of violating the Academic Integrity Policy;
- know the appeal rights and procedures to be followed in the event of an appeal;
- foster academic integrity among peers.
- You can access the SJSU's comprehensive academic integrity policy here:

https://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/docs/SJSU-Academic-Integrity-Policy-F15-7.pdf

Key Policies

- **Engagement**: Active participation is required; engagement will largely be measured by responses to peer work.

- **Late Work**: Late submissions will be accepted with a deduction of 5% per day (including weekends). The late penalty may be waived with prior notice or documented emergency. Please communicate with me as soon as possible if you anticipate difficulties meeting a deadline. Missing smaller assignments will have a limited impact on your overall grade, higher-value assignments carry significant weight and late submissions on these will more substantially affect your final course grade. See Canvas for a complete schedule of assignments and their respective point values.

Academic Integrity: All work must be your own; plagiarism will result in course failure. Refer to the SJSU integrity policy.

🖥 Course Description and Requisites

Examinations of works of poetry, creative nonfiction and short fiction as expression of human intellect and imagination, to comprehend the historic and global cultural contexts, and recognize issues related to writing of diverse cultural traditions. Students will also write poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction.

Satisfies 3A. Arts (Formerly Area C1).

Grading: Letter Graded.

✳ Classroom Protocols

Location/Time: Boccardo Business Center 124 /Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:30 PM to 2:45 PM

Instructor: David Koehn
Email: david.koehn@sjsu.edu
Office Hours: by appointment | https://calendar.app.google/A4dB28qM67ZueGMr7

AI use is encouraged: Use the SAID (Student AI Disclosure) tool to document your AI use on assignments.

Course Dates: January 22, 2026–May 11, 2026

▤ Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

> **Goal 1:** To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.
> **Goal 2:** To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.
> **Goal 3:** To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the GE website (https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as

well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

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.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature
Department Office: FO 102
Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (https://www.sjsu.edu/english)
Department email: english@sjsu.edu (mailto:english@sjsu.edu)
Department phone number: 408-924-4425

📶 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area 3A: Arts

Across the disciplines in Area 3 coursework, students cultivate and refine their affective, cognitive, and expressive faculties by studying works of the human intellect and imagination. Area 3 courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an

understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. In their intellectual and subjective considerations, students develop a better understanding of the interrelationship between the self and the creative arts and the humanities in a variety of cultures.

3A (Arts) courses emphasize the integration of history, theory, aesthetics, and criticism. Performance and studio classes may be credited toward satisfaction of this subject area if their major emphasis is the integration of history, theory, and criticism. Audition-based courses will not be approved for GE.

GE Area 3A Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a 3A course, students should be able to:

1. identify aesthetic qualities and processes that characterize works of the human intellect and imagination;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such works;
3. analyze the role and impact of the creative arts in culture and on the interrelationship of self and community; and
4. research and apply relevant aesthetic criteria and/or artistic conventions in effective written responses to works of art.

Writing requirement

3A classes require a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

📘 Course Materials

In this class, we use contemporary literary magazines and their forms to expand our creative mindset. We will use *The Common*, *McSweeney's The Believer* & *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern 77* as our primary "texts."

- *The Common, Issue 29 available at* *https://thecommon.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/thecommon/product.jsp?product=114&*

- Once you ordered the common they can get you a PDF/ePub/Online version for immediate access

- *McSweeney's The Believer* - available in SJSU Student Bookstore and online at https://store.mcsweeneys.net/
  - Code: digitalbelieversummer25 (subject to change)
- *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern 77* - available in SJSU Student Bookstore and online at https://store.mcsweeneys.net/
  - Code: SJSU
    - for McSweeney's Quarterly Concern discount code for student purchases at Mcsweeney's Store | https://store.mcsweeneys.net/ = 30 percent off issue 77 and the believer 150 (it's

actually 30 percent off anything as long as it includes those titles, if they want anything else while they're there), the code is SJSU.

- SJSU's *REED* - I will get free copies for for the class
- Photo essay craft resources (free):

- The Journal (Ohio State): "Selections from the Series Drive." https://thejournalmag.org/archives/15314 (The Journal)

- Berkeley Journal of Sociology: "Dead Pay Phones…" https://berkeleyjournal.org/2018/01/29/dead-pay-phones-within-the-context-of-the-urban-landscape/ (Berkeley Journal)

- Eclectica: "Takayama Showa Kan: A Photo Essay." https://www.eclectica.org/v19n4/brennan.html (Eclectica)

- The Hopkins Review: "Urban Still Life Photography." https://hopkinsreview.com/features/urban-still-life-photography (The Hopkins Review)

We also have "textbooks" that help us baseline as writers:

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  - Strunk & White, *Elements of Style* - available in SJSU Student Bookstore

- *Compendium by Koehn & Soldofsky - available in SJSU Student Bookstore and from https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/C/bo43347549.html*

Crafting Poems and Stories by Ethel Rackin - available in SJSU Student Bookstore and online at

☰ Course Requirements and Assignments

Key Course Design Principles – ENGL 71: Intro to Creative Writing

1. Read Like a Writer

- We engage with contemporary literary magazines (*The Believer*, *The Common*, *McSweeney's*) not just as readers, but as practitioners studying craft. Every reading is an opportunity to notice form, voice, structure, and technique we can integrate into our own work.

Write Across Genres
- Students compose in poetry, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and hybrid/multimodal forms (e.g., photo essays, comics). This multi-genre approach develops creative flexibility and strengthens the ability to

choose the most effective form for an idea.

Workshop as Collaborative Learning
- Workshops are structured, respectful, and craft-focused. We learn by giving and receiving feedback, articulating our understanding of craft, and applying peer and instructor suggestions to revision.

Revision as Discovery
- The **portfolio**-based structure emphasizes that first drafts are starting points. Revision is treated not as correction but as a process of creative discovery, deepening meaning, sharpening craft, and clarifying intention.

Creative Risk-Taking
- Students are encouraged to experiment with form, perspective, language, and imagery. This includes imitating published works, bending genre expectations, and making deliberate stylistic choices that might fail but push the writer's range.

Connection Between Form and Content
- Attention is given to how structure, sequence, and medium shape meaning. We consider how design elements (line breaks, image order, POV shifts) interact with narrative and theme.

Contextual and Cultural Awareness
- Works are examined within their historical, cultural, and global contexts, with attention to how cultural perspective informs content, voice, and form. This awareness informs students' own creative decisions.

Integrated Creative Process
- Weekly activities combine reading, analysis, in-class writing, and creative exercises. This cyclical process—study, apply, reflect—ensures steady development of both craft knowledge and creative confidence.

Weekly Modules" version of ENGL 71 built around **The Believer (Summer 2025)**, **The Common (Issue 29)**, plus your **McSweeney's 77** short-story unit and a **Photo Essay** track. Each week lists: direct links, the assignment for that week, GE C1 outcomes addressed, and a few discussion prompts.

Week	Topic
1	Welcome + What We'll Make Together
2	Nonfiction: Voice, Humor, and Point of View

3	Nonfiction: Fact, Research, & Personal Narrative
4	Comics as Creative Nonfiction (Image + Text)
5	Photo Essay (seeing as a writer)	Visit from Ed. Jen Thacker of The Common
6	CNF Workshop I
7	Nonfiction on Theme: A Modern Sense of Place
8	CNF Workshop II + Revision Plan
9	Fiction: Story Mechanics
10	Fiction: Compression & Surprise
11	Fiction Workshop + Optional Expansions
12	Poetry: Image, Music, Thinking
13	Poetry: Sequence & Portfolio
14	Mixed Forms: Schema & Critique
15	Final Portfolio & Reading Day

✔ Grading Information

More detailed assignments and word counts and rubrics in Canvas

Assignment	Word Count / Scope	GELO(s)	% of Course Grade

Creative Nonfiction (CNF) Essay	1,200–1,800 words	C1.1, C1.2, C1.3, C1.4	25%
Short Story	1,800–3,000 words	C1.1, C1.2, C1.4	25%
Poetry Portfolio	8–10 poems (image-driven, sound-driven, argumentative) + 250-word artist note	C1.1, C1.2, C1.4	20%
Photo Essay	8–12 original images + 150–250 word captions per image + 200–300 word artist note	C1.1, C1.3, C1.4	15%
Weekly Work & Participation	Reading responses, workshop feedback, in-class writing, discussions	C1.1, C1.2, C1.4	15%

🏛 University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 (PDF) (http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information (https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php)](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

📅 Course Schedule

Location/Time: Boccardo Business Center 124 /Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:30 PM to 2:45 PM