

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 130, Writing Fiction, Fall 2019

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Mon/Weds 12:00pm – 1:00pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Mon/Weds 10:30am – 11:45am
Classroom:	Sweeney Hall 444
Prerequisites:	ENGL 71 (Intro to Creative Writing)

Course Description

For the first few weeks we will be reading and discussing published stories from 2018 edition of *Best American Short Stories* and the 2019 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. 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

- Gay, Roxane and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2018*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018.
- *Reed Magazine 2019 Edition* (Issue 152 - 2019). San Jose State University literary journal.

Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new, original pieces of fiction (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 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.

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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|--------------------------|-----|
| • Workshop Submission #1 | 20% |
| • Workshop Submission #2 | 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), 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 **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 by the end of the semester.

Here are some on-campus readings this semester:

Jonathan Franzen: Sep. 20, 7PM, Hammer Theatre Center
Rita Bullwinkel: Oct. 10, 7PM, SJSU, MLK Library, Room 225/229
Carmen Maria Machado: Oct. 24, 7PM, MACLA
Tyehimba Jess & Harmony Holiday: Nov. 7, 7PM, Forager
Marilyn Chin, Shawn Wong, & Lawson Fusao Inada: Nov. 21, 6:30PM, SJSU, MLK Library, Room 225/229
Fall Steinbeck Fellows Reading, Dec 5, 7PM, Steinbeck Center, MLK 590

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 upload a story in PDF format to the Workshop Submissions discussion board on Canvas. Your story must be double-spaced, single-sided, and include page numbers.

Your classmates and instructor will print out your story, make comments on the manuscript, and type up a half page (minimum) of comments, which they will post as replies to your story on the discussion board.

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.

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 this 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. Students who violate this protocol will be dropped from the course.

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 Monday and Wednesday, starting on Weds, August 21. Class will not be held on Mon, Sept 2 (Labor Day); Mon, Nov 11 (Veteran’s Day); or Weds, Nov 27 (Thanksgiving holiday). In lieu of a final exam, you will submit your final revision on Canvas by Monday, Dec 16, at 5pm.

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	8/21/2019	Introduction & still write
2	8/26/2019	Topic: Character Readings: Jamel Brinkley, “A Family” (<i>BASS</i> 15); Dina Nayeri, “A Big True” (<i>BASS</i> 197)
2	8/28/2019	Topic: Character Readings: Maria Anderson, “Cougar” (<i>BASS</i> 1); Rivers Solomon, “Whose Heart I Long to Stop with the Click of a Revolver” (<i>BASS</i> 279)
3	9/2/2019	NO CLASS – LABOR DAY
3	9/4/2019	Topic: Conflict Readings: Curtis Sittenfeld, “The Prairie Wife” (<i>BASS</i> 262); Robert Morgan Fisher, “The Scorch” (<i>Reed</i> 46)
4	9/9/2019	Topic: Conflict Readings: Esmé Weijun Wang, “What Terrible Thing It Was” (<i>BASS</i> 290); Jad Josey, “Light and Time, How They Canter” (<i>Reed</i> 22)
4	9/11/2019	Topic: Setting Readings: Emma Cline, “Los Angeles” (<i>BASS</i> 62); Jacob Guajardo, “What Got Into Us” (<i>BASS</i> 141)
5	9/16/2019	Topic: Point of View Readings: Carolyn Farrell, “A History of China” (<i>BASS</i> 102); Andrew Lam, “What We Talk About When We Can’t Talk About Love” (<i>Reed</i> 27)
5	9/18/2019	Topic: Metaphor and Allusion Readings: Alicia Elliott, “Unearth” (<i>BASS</i> 76); Amy Silverberg, “Suburbia!” (<i>BASS</i> 251)

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
6	9/23/2019	Topic: Political Fiction Readings: Christine Henriquez, “Everything Is Far from Here” (<i>BASS</i> 149); Jocelyn Nicole Johnson, “Control Negro” (<i>BASS</i> 167)
6	9/25/2019	Topic: Voice Readings: Nayomi Munaweera, “Excerpts from <i>What Lies Between Us</i> ” (<i>Reed</i> 12); Peter Nathaniel Malae, “Crazy Not Lazy, Loco No Flojo” (<i>Reed</i> 90)
7	9/30/2019	Topic: Endings and Resolution Readings: Ron Rash, “The Baptism” (<i>BASS</i> 242); Larry Malchow, “Wash the Crying River” (<i>Reed</i> 3)
7-17	10/2/2019 – 12/9/2019	Student Workshops
18	12/16/2019	Final Revision Due