

CRW 1101: Begin Fiction Writing

Section 0218, Fall 2015; TUR B310, Monday periods 6–8 (12.50–3.50 pm)

Instructor: Chloe Lane

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Office hours: Thursday periods 4 & 5 and by appointment

Office location: TUR4315

Required Texts

* *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (9th edition) by Janet Burroway

* Handouts: readings to be provided throughout the semester

Course Objectives

1. To leave this course writing better than you did when you entered.
2. To leave this course reading better than you did when you entered.
3. To write fiction with more precision, force, and surprise than before.

This course provides introductory instruction in fiction writing and, since careful and reflective reading is the best way to learn how to write, an introductory approach to the study of literature. We will write and read with attention to how stories work—structurally, stylistically, and thematically.

The first half of the semester will be devoted to a discussion of the elements of fiction. The second half will be a traditional fiction workshop, the requirements of which will be discussed in detail later on, but which can be described in general as a format in which we apply the same critical skills to our own work that we've learned to apply to the assigned readings. We are here to study and create good writing, which requires serious work.

Course Format

1. Writing: Short writing exercises, 9 x 700-word critical reading responses, one 3-page story, one 5-page story, and a portfolio of revised work.
2. Reading: Short stories from the textbook and handouts, chapters from the textbook, and essays addressing various aspects of craft.
3. Critiquing: Of both the published stories and the work of your peers, knowing that close reading of another's prose should, in fact, help your own.

Graded Assignments and Other Course Components

Class Participation:	300 points
Creative exercises (5):	120 points (24 points each)
Critical reading responses (9):	270 points (30 points each)
Stories (2):	200 points
Final revision of stories:	110 points
	1000 points total

Class Participation 30% (300 points)

Each week we will discuss both the textbook (Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction*) and published fiction. Doing the reading is only half the assignment. In-class discussion of the material is the other half. Not having your books in class will result in a participation grade of zero for the day. I will also periodically give reading quizzes, and a failing grade will earn a participation grade of zero for that day.

At the end of the semester you will complete a short reading assignment in groups, which will contribute to your overall participation grade. For this assignment your group will nominate one short story (not from the textbook) for the class to read and discuss. When your story is up, your group will lead the discussion. This assignment is designed to encourage you to be reading around the required stories, to be reading more, to continue to read rigorously, and to show off what you've learned.

On workshop days it is expected that you will come to class having read each piece carefully *at least once*, and that you have spent time formulating a typed response to it. In addition to your marginal comments in ink or pencil, attach your typed response to the author's piece with a staple. In addition, provide me with a copy of your typed responses at the end of the semester. These typed responses will form part of your participation grade. (In-class discussion, preparedness (including timely response to all class emails), and (especially) engagement/attitude are all parts of participation. A writing workshop should be a safe place where everyone should feel encouraged and welcome to share their thoughts/feelings—the participation of those who fail to respect their peers' thoughts/feelings will be graded accordingly.)

Creative Exercises 12% (120 points)

You will write a short exercise for homework for the first five weeks of class. I will expect you to have hard copies of it to hand to your classmates and me at the beginning of class. The exercise will be in response to the elements of craft we are discussing and the authors whose work we are reading that week. I will ask you to include certain elements, eg. a specific object, a specific point of view, a specific tense, dialogue, etc.

Critical Reading Responses: 27% (270 points)

Each week, you will have 2-3 stories to read. You will write 8 x 700-word critical responses to these readings (response #9 will be a critical self-assessment submitted at the end of the semester). You will be asked to think about a specific element of writing that is exemplified by these stories. You will also be asked to consider the common threads you see among these stories—what does this author do that is different to writing by other authors? The responses will be evaluated based on the following criteria: demonstrated reading of the stories/chapters; critical thinking; depth of analysis; engagement with the discussion of craft. Your analytical and critical skills are expected to improve over the course of the semester.

You will upload your responses to Canvas before the class it is due. As well you will bring a copy (printed out or on a device) to class with you.

On the schedule, the "Readings" section tells you what you should have read and responded to before that class. My goal is that your reading responses achieve the following:

1. Make a claim about the stories based on Burroway's ideas or those we discussed in class. If ideas are taken from Burroway, those ideas, whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, should be cited using MLA style.

2. Provide textual support for your claim from the story being discussed. Point to the specific words in the text of the stories that made you think what you thought and that support and prove your point.
3. Provide analysis of your claim and the text. Answer the question “so what?” What does this mean within the context of the work as a whole? How does this section contribute to the author’s overall intent?
4. Cite all quotations in-text in MLA style.

Please avoid “rating” the stories with remarks of taste, such as “I hated this” or “I liked this.” We will work during the semester to develop your ability to talk about fiction, but please keep in mind that these published, professional writers, whether you enjoyed their writing or not, have something to teach you about the practice and art of the written word. Which is not to say they are gods! Or infallible! Or that you must worship at the altar of their prose or their ideas!

Rubric of Evaluation for Reading Responses

- A: Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has exceptionally well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.
- B: Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.
- C: Contains some analysis of the texts and develops some original ideas about them. Has adequately well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), adequately-supported claims, and some appropriate stylistic elements.
- D: Contains minimal analysis of the texts. May lack well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, and/or a persuasive organizational structure. Fails to adequately support its claims and/or use appropriate stylistic elements.
- E: Lacks analysis of the text, and therefore fails to demonstrate reading and/or comprehension

Two Stories: 20% (200 points)

You will write two stories (a 3-page story (worth 100 points), and a 5-page story (worth 100 points)). Do not write these stories the night before they are due. I will be able to tell if this is the case, and your grade will be lowered accordingly. Manuscripts must be delivered to the class *the week before* they are to be workshopped. There is no late delivery. There is no switching. No last-minute writing. If you are unable to turn in the story on time, an entire letter grade will be deducted from your final grade. Please bring enough copies for everyone.

Final Revision of Stories: 11% (110 points)

You will rewrite/revise your stories, based on my comments and those of your peers. Your revisions will be turned in as your final project. If you want, you may extend your stories up to two pages each. This portfolio should be polished and thoroughly proofread.

Formatting

Each assignment will be submitted at the beginning of class in double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman (or Garamond or Baskerville) typeface. Pages must be numbered. One staple goes in the upper-left-hand corner if you're submitting a hardcopy. There must be a title, something beyond "First Reading Response" (for reading responses the title must be interesting and informative; for stories, well, do your best). You are responsible for photocopying your workshopped stories. Each formatting failure will result in a 5% deduction on the grade of that assignment.

Attendance

You are allowed one absence without explanation, but do not miss the day your story is workshopped. Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story. An absence after the first will lower your final grade by a full letter (A to B, B to C etc.). A third absence will result in a failing grade for this class. Reserve the day you don't attend class for a day you really need it. Doctor's notes will not be accepted. Only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, are exempted from this policy. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed. Two tardies (arriving more than five minutes late, or leaving class early) equals one absence.

Notes

- You are responsible for checking your university emails. I will sometimes give or change assignments via email, as well as make any necessary changes to the schedule. *You are responsible for checking your email and approaching me with any questions.* If I have sent an email to you, I will assume you have read and understood it.
- I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.

Beware: This course is reading intensive and writing intensive. It is required that you come to class each week fully prepared. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy. If you're hoping for an easy A, this class is not for you.

Final grade appeals: Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

UF Reading and Writing Center: The Reading and Writing Center at the University of Florida is an excellent resource for improving reading comprehension and writing skills. For more information, see: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

Statement of Composition (C) credit: This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-educationrequirement.aspx>

Statement of Writing Requirement (WR): This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/writing-math.aspx#Writing>

Statement of student disability services: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement on harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://regulations.ufl.edu/chapter1/1006.pdf>

Statement on academic honesty: All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Statement on grades and grading policies: Note: UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grading:

A: 94-100	A-: 90-93	B+: 87-89	B: 84-86
B-: 80-83	C+: 77-79	C: 73-76	C-: 70-72
D+: 67-69	D: 63-66	D-: 60-62	E: 0-59

Class Schedule

Note: All assigned stories are in *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (marked *WF*) or will be provided on Canvas as pdfs or online links.

Week 1: August 24 | Introduction

In class: Introductions; Syllabus; Contract; “Letter to a Frozen Peas Manufacturer” by Lydia Davis; In-class writing exercise

Week 2: August 31 | Getting Started & Showing and Telling

Readings: “The Swimmer” by John Cheever, “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” by Amy Hempel

WF: Chapters 1 & 2

Due: Reading Response #1 & Creative Exercise #1

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 3: September 7

No class: Labor Day

Week 4: September 14 | Characterization I

Readings: “Fiesta, 1980” by Junot Diaz, “Emergency” by Denis Johnson (both in *WF*)

WF: Chapter 3

Due: Reading Response #2 & Creative Exercise #2

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 5: September 21 | Characterization II

Readings: “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff (*WF*), “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros (*WF*), “The Day We Got Drunk on Cake” by William Trevor

WF: Chapter 4

Due: Reading Response #3 & Creative Exercise #3

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 6: September 28 | Fictional Place

Readings: “The Flowers” by Alice Walker (*WF*), “Rock Springs” by Richard Ford, “Swans” by Janet Frame

WF: Chapter 5

Due: Reading Response #4 & Creative Exercise #4

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 7: October 5 | Fictional Time

Readings: “You’re Ugly, Too” by Lorrie Moore (*WF*), “Alyosha the Pot” by Leo Tolstoy, “The Other Place” by Mary Gaitskill

WF: Chapter 6

Due: Reading Response #5 & Creative Exercise #5

In class: Discuss readings and share creative exercises

Week 8: October 12 | Form, Plot, and Structure

Readings: “Escapes” by Joy Williams (*WF*), “Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Connor (*WF*), “The Kiss” by Anton Chekhov

WF: Chapter 7

Due: Reading Response #6

In class: Discuss readings; in-class writing exercise

Week 9: October 19 | Point of View

Readings: “Victory Lap” by George Saunders (*WF*), “Cathedral” by Raymond Carver

WF: Chapter 8

Due: Reading Response #7 (except workshop group #1); Workshop #1 stories (3-pager group #1)—critique them for October 26

In class: Discuss readings; in-class writing exercise

Week 10: October 26 | Revision

Readings: “Battery” and “Following the Notes” by Pia Z. Ehrhardt (*WF*), “Beginners” by Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” audio by Raymond Carver

WF: Chapter 9

Due: Reading Response #8 (except workshop group #2); Workshop #2 stories (3-pager group #2)—critique them for November 2

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #1

Week 11: November 2 | Not Knowing

Readings: “Greenleaf” by Flannery O’Connor, “Not Knowing” (essay) by Donald Barthelme

Due: Final Reading Response (except workshop group #3); Workshop #3 stories (3-pager group #3)—critique them for November 9

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #2

Week 12: November 9 | Voice

Readings: “The School” by Donald Barthelme, “Wants” by Grace Paley, “Water Liars” by Barry Hannah

Due: Workshop #4 stories (5-pager group #1)—critique them for November 16; Class reading nominations emailed to me

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #3

Week 13: November 16 | Humor & Short Shorts

Readings: “The Leopard” by Wells Tower, excerpt from *The Collected Stories* by Lydia Davis, “I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone” by Richard Brautigan, Two Stories by Padgett Powell

Due: Workshop #5 stories (5-pager group #2)—critique them for November 23

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #4

Week 14: November 23

Readings: Week off to work on group presentations

Due: Workshop #6 stories (5-pager group #3)—critique them for November 30

In class: Discuss readings; Workshop #5

Week 15: November 30

Readings: Student nominations (TBD)

In class: Reading presentations/discussions; Workshop #6

Week 16: December 7

Readings: Student nominations (TBD)

Due: Final story revision; Gems!; 700-word critical self-assessment

In class: Reading presentations/discussions; Select your best page of writing to share