

CRW 1101
Begin Fiction Writing
Spring 2016 Section 1632
M Period 9-11, CBD 0212

Instructor: Patrick May
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Office Hours: W 2:45-3:45 TUR 4309

This is a course on beginning to understand the fundamentals of writing fiction.

As such, we will write no science fiction stories. No horror stories. No Westerns or stories in any old-timey setting. No fantasy stories taking place in another time and place. No stories about policemen, doctors, or lawyers. No stories where the main character or any other character is revealed to be a ghost, vampire, werewolf, etc. No stories from the perspective of an animal or a very small child. No stories where everything turns out to be a dream. No twist endings. No murder-revenges. No torture. No fisticuffs. No hitting below the belt. No stories where a character has amnesia. No stories which begin with someone waking up. No stories told in the present tense. No drunks.

It is not that I don't appreciate these genres and subjects: I'm not a snob. Rather, it is precisely because I am a fan of these elements that I forbid you, for now, to write them. These elements, when used wrong, will often create perfunctory, obligatory, habitual, formulaic writing. Writing stories with these elements is like adding a 4th dimension to your story, a dimension which would drive you mad if you utilized it now. This dimension is as yet beyond you. But you will get there.

In case you are wondering, there is a formula for writing good fiction. It is:

$$\text{Story} = \frac{\text{Time} \cdot (\text{characters} + \text{Place})}{\text{Plot}}$$

where $X = \text{Your Voice}$

- cliché

There is a formula for life too but since we are tasked with only beginning to understand the fundamentals of writing fiction, I cannot share it with you.

The first half of the semester will be devoted to discussing the elements of fiction. The second half will be a fiction workshop in which we apply the same critical skills to our own work as we've learned to apply to the assigned readings.

Readings will be short stories and essays on writing. You will write critical analysis papers to enrich your understanding and use of the readings. In addition, every week you will write a short creative piece to share in next week's class.

Reading and writing are essential to this course, and so is class participation. Students will be assigned to lead discussions. It is expected students are comfortable reading their writing aloud when prompted to do so, and it is expected those of us listening to said writing will be quiet and paying attention. Everyone will be required to be critical of all readings, by which I mean we will analyze and assess, and offer feedback and improvement strategies when appropriate.

Time is precious, life precious. Make the most of your writing. Make it mean something.

Beware: this course is reading intensive and writing intensive! Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy. You are not trapped. You are here because you choose to be.

Course Policies and Requirements

Required Text: *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Sterne

The instructor will furnish other texts in PDF form or as handouts.

Assignments and Grading

For this course, you will be required to write the following:

- **Twelve 500-word short reading responses**
- **Five one-page Creative Writing Assignments**
- **Two stories to be critiqued in workshop**
- **A revised and improved copy of either the First or Second Workshop Story (as prescribed by the instructor) to be submitted with a 500-word letter detailing the changes made in conjunction with the previously assigned critical texts.**

The grading for this course will break down as follows:

Short Reading Responses: 300 points (25 points each)

Creative Assignments: 100 points (20 Points each)

Workshop Stories: 300 points (150 points each)

Revised Final Story: 150 points

Class Participation: 150 points

Total: 1000 Points

I reserve the right to change the contents of the syllabus at any time.

Short Reading Responses:

BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR RESPONSE TO CLASS.

You will turn in twelve 500-word response papers on the assigned fiction readings. You will be expected to apply critical thinking to the stories we've read. You will analyze the stories from a writerly perspective, regarding authorial choices. Please avoid "rating" the stories with remarks of taste, such as "I hated this" or "I liked this."

These papers require no library or Internet research. Your ideas should be original and fresh. Think about what you would like to discuss about these stories in class. Do feel free, however, to research the lives of the writers. Sometimes it can be useful to know when a story was written and a little bit about the author's biography.

BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR RESPONSE TO CLASS.

No late papers will be accepted. Note that you are required to turn in twelve responses. I am not responsible for managing your completion of assignments. No late papers will be accepted. Students are responsible for keeping copies of their work.

Creative Writing Assignments:

BRING ENOUGH COPIES FOR EVERYONE TO CLASS.

You will be expected to complete short, under-500-word exercises for each week's class. These are assigned in order for you to get into the habit of continuously writing. They may be in the style of or influenced by one of the previous week's writers, or be based on a prompt I will assign, or both. We will read these exercises aloud in class, which is why it's important to

BRING ENOUGH COPIES FOR EVERYONE TO CLASS.

Revision Story

Revisions will be **graded for quality**, which means they should demonstrate effective writing. What this means differs from story to story, but the general requirements are that the story be an original work that demonstrates effective use of points of view, verb tense/temporal logic, setting, sensory detail and dramatic tension. Revised stories should exhibit clear differences from submitted first drafts.

Assignment Format

All submitted assignments must meet their respective word counts and include the proper heading (student's name, course number, instructor's name, date and exact word count of story), as well as be double-spaced, written in Size 12 Courier New or Times New Roman font and be otherwise correctly formatted. All stories and essays must have titles; all pages must be numbered. Everything must be physically handed in when it is due. **DOUBLE-SIDED PAGES**

ARE FINE.

Grading Rubric

Students can reasonably expect the following grades based on the quality of work received:

- A (excellent work)** Work submitted exceeds all requirements in refinement, quality and insightfulness. The assignment takes risks that pay off, is correctly formatted and is free of distracting errors. An example would be a particularly insightful presentation with challenging questions or a refined, unique, creative final story.
- B (good work)** Work submitted meets all requirements and shows the beginnings of insight. The assignment takes risks that may or may not pay off and is largely free of errors. Responses that show insight but take a wrong turn or do not fully pursue a question posed could merit such a grade.
- C (acceptable work)** Work submitted meets most requirements but takes few risks or is laden with summary/shallow analysis. The assignment takes few risks and/or contains distracting errors. An example would be a response that summarizes without analyzing or a directionless presentation.
- D (poor work)** Work submitted does not meet most requirements of the assignments and/or takes few risks and/or is full of distracting errors and/or is careless in execution.
- E (unacceptable)** Work fails to meet even basic requirements and shows an egregious lack of creativity, insight and carefulness.

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The grading scale used for this course is as follows:

A	4.0	930-1000	C	2.0	730-
A-	3.6	900-929	C-	1.6	700-
B+	3.3	870-899	D+	1.3	670-
B	3.0	830-869	D	1.0	630-
B-	2.6	800-829	D-	0.6	600-
C+	2.3	770-799	E	0.0	0-599

Submitting Work for Workshop

In order to ensure that everyone has time to read the stories that are due for workshop, students who are due to be workshopped must bring in printed copies of their completed stories **THE WEEK PRIOR TO THEIR WORKSHOP DATE**. Failure to do so will result in a deduction of at least a letter grade. Contact the instructor if you are struggling, or use a prompt to help you get started.

Workshop Feedback

Feedback is essential to helping your peers improve their stories—just as all students would wish for constructive, useful feedback, so should all students provide constructive, useful feedback to their classmates.

Each student should **read each submitted story twice** and make marginal notes or comments to suggest changes to structure or content. More detailed feedback for overarching issues such as plot, character or theme should be addressed in a **letter**, which should contain at least **three comments on what was effective** and **three comments on what could be improved**. Letters must be typed separately and included with the marked-up draft to be given back to the writer at the end of workshop. **One copy of the letter shall also be given to me.**

Attendance and Expectations

This course is organized in a three-hour block in order to maximize the amount of time we have to discuss, critique, read and analyze. Because of this, you will be expected to arrive on time and to limit your total absences to **two missed courses maximum** (six course hours). Students missing more courses than this will **not pass** unless the circumstances surrounding the absences are extenuating (e.g., a family emergency, extreme illness, etc.). Please discuss any extenuating circumstances

with the instructor **before** any absence.

Anyone more than **ten minutes late** to class will be counted **tardy**, and three tardies will count as an absence.

Attendance on the day on which your story is to be workshopped **is mandatory** unless cleared with the instructor due to aforementioned extenuating circumstances.

In addition to the basic expectation of timely attendance, everyone in workshop is expected to help ensure that, for the three hours of the course, everyone feels comfortable, safe and willing to share his or her writing. Writing can be very personal—much of the best fiction draws to some extent on the author's own experiences—and some students are not as comfortable sharing their writing as others. For this reason, all students should be careful to avoid bigotry, insensitivity, insults and derision. A successful workshop should be a critical environment but not a hostile one. If a student personally offends other students, he or she may be asked to leave, which could result in an unplanned absence.

Laptop and Smartphone Policy

Though laptops and tablets will be necessary for those students exclusively reading electronic versions of the reading, texting and being constantly tapped into social media greatly affects concentration. **Texting and checking social media in class will not be tolerated.** If it is an emergency, please leave the room to use your phone; if it is not, I may ask you to do so anyway. Phones should be kept on silent or vibrate mode to minimize distraction.

Email

You are responsible for checking your university emails. I may give or change assignments via email as well as make any necessary changes to the schedule. You are responsible for checking your email and letting me know if you have any questions. If I send you an email, you NEED to read it.

Course Credit and Academic Honesty

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for

writing. For questions about meeting course requirements, see the course catalog or contact the Registrar's Office.

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. Plagiarism is a very serious offence and may result in a zero for an assignment, failure of the course and/or a referral to the Dean of Students' Office. If you copy some or all of your work from any source without citation— including your work in past courses—you are committing plagiarism. Plagiarism is relatively easy to check and consequences will be immediate.

For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

and/or consult with the instructor.

Sexual Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. Anyone found harassing or degrading course participants will be subject to expulsion from the class, a referral to the Dean of Students and/or other disciplinary action. Students should immediately report any harassing behavior.

For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

Students with Disabilities

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities or other special needs. Students who meet this description should contact the instructor and/or the Dean of Students prior to the course's first meeting so that any arrangements can be made. The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. See also: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>