

CRW 2100: Fiction Writing,* Sec. 1337
Spring 2016
Matherly 0051
Tuesday, periods 9-11 (4:05–7:05 PM)

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Office hours: Wednesday 10-12, or by appointment

Required Texts:

1. *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories* edited by Ben Marcus
2. *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern
3. Various author interviews available online

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.
4. To develop serious revision skills that will help you deepen, clarify, and heighten your work.

Course Format:

1. Reading: To be a good writer, you must read.
2. Writing: To be a good writer, you must write.
3. Critiquing: To be a good writer, you must critique other writing thoughtfully and frequently, knowing that this close reading of another's prose will help your own.
4. Revision: To be a good writer, you must revise. Know that not even the best fiction writers in the world get it right the first time. Revision is part of the writing process.

BEWARE: This course is reading-intensive and writing-intensive. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative writing courses are easy. You can expect a lot of work from this course.

This is a General Education course providing student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. For more information, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx#learning>.

Reading

Do the reading. Class time is wasted if you have not. Because of this, you will be required to turn in critical response papers every week. I will know if you haven't completed the

* This syllabus was adapted from a syllabus written by Ryan Ruff Smith

reading; it will be obvious in your writing. I may also give pop quizzes. On the schedule, the “Readings” section tells you what you should have read *prior to* that particular class meeting. In other words, readings must be completed before the dates for which they are listed.

Our readings will be focused on selections from the *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories* edited by Ben Marcus, a collection that is on the whole more contemporary (and generally weirder/more experimental) than literature you likely read in CRW 1101 or other literature classes. In conjunction with these stories (and supplementary readings from Jerome Stern’s *Making Shapely Fiction*), we will also be reading author interviews for insight into each writer’s processes. Most of these interviews will come from the *Paris Review* “Art of Fiction” interview series which is available available online.

Writing

The goal of the class is to build on narrative fundamentals learned in 1101 to strike out in riskier, less traditional directions.

1. Critical response papers: You will be required to write twelve short “thought papers” in response to the assigned readings (see below).
2. Five-page, prompt-based story: Early in the semester, a five-page story based on a writing prompt will be due. These stories will be read aloud in class.
3. Workshop story: Twenty copies of your manuscript must be delivered THE FRIDAY BEFORE it is to be discussed. Length: Eight-twelve pages. Stories must avoid college tropes (parties, break-ups, dorm/greek life), genre (sci-fi, fantasy, horror, zombie, vampire, My Little Pony fan-fic), and last-page twists or other things intended to trick the reader. These genres are specialized forms that require specialized knowledge to do well: you must learn to walk before you can run, and other such platitudes. There is a slight amount of wiggle room here that will be addressed on a case-by-case, ad hoc basis.
4. Story Revisions: On the last day of class, you must turn in revised versions of both of the above stories. Revisions should be based on my comments, your colleagues’ comments in workshop, and our one-on-one meeting outside of class (see below) and MUST BE SIGNIFICANT. Proofreading is not revision. All serious writers revise seriously.

Warning: There is NO late delivery. There is no switching. No last-minute writing. Get the work done. And remember: you are responsible for knowing the basic conventions of style and usage—see the recommended writing manuals below for guidance.

Critiquing

You will write comments on each workshop story: marginal notes in ink or pencil AND a TYPED letter to the author. Attach this letter to the piece and return it to the author at the end of class. You will also deliver one copy of this letter to me. In order for a critique to be valuable, it needs to be balanced and specific. In every story, there will be both things to commend and things to recommend. A good critique will do both.

Critical Response Papers/Thought Papers

You must write weekly critical responses to the assigned readings. At the end of this syllabus, I have included detailed direction for these responses. Each critical response must be a minimum of 500 words. Do not go significantly over the minimum word count, please. No late papers will be accepted.

It is required that you come to class each day fully prepared. You may be asked to read your thought paper aloud, and I will not hesitate to cold-call on people. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. If you're hoping for an easy A, this class is positively not for you.

Tentative grade breakdown (subject to change):

1. Class Participation*:	200 points
2. Critical response papers:	300 points (25 each)
4. Prompt-based story:	100 points
5. Workshop story:	150 points
6. Story revisions:	250 points
	1000 points total

*Class participation includes written and oral peer workshop critiques as well as your presence and regular contribution in class.

Attendance

You are allowed up to two absences without explanation, but do not miss the day that your story is workshopped. Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story. Each absence after the second will lower your final grade by one full letter.

A few absences due to illness or family crisis may be excused if documented to the instructor's satisfaction. Even documented absences will not be excused if many or prolonged. Students participating in a university-sponsored event (athletics, theater, music,

field trip) will be excused if there is documentation from an appropriate authority. Students excused from an absence are not excused from the work assigned for a class session; each student must arrange with the instructor for make-ups.

Tardiness will be excused if the reasons are acceptable to the instructor (e.g., a long exam in the previous class; a bus breakdown) and if there is valid documentation. Otherwise, tardiness is unacceptable because disruptive; both the overall grade and the grade for class participation will be lowered by tardiness.

Meeting Outside of Class

You must meet with me outside of class to discuss your story within the week following your workshop. My office hours will be held on Wednesday 10:00 AM--12:00 PM. If that time does not work for you, making an alternate appointment with me is YOUR responsibility, not mine.

Final Notes

1. You are responsible for checking your university emails. I may 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 that you have read and understood it.
2. I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.
3. Use of cell phones (with hands or ears) is NOT permitted in class.

The following is useful information on university policies that you should know. Please read over the links provided.

Statement of Composition (C) credit

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition. For more information, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general.education.requirement.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 education 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 are required to 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>

Statement on University Policies:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Statement on Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at:

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu>

Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at:

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>

University Writing Studio

If you find that you need additional help with your writing outside of class, I strongly recommend that you acquaint yourself with the University Writing Studio (formerly the Reading and Writing Center). The Writing Studio is a free service for current UF graduate and undergraduate students. Students have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a

consultant on issues specific to their own particular development. More info is available here:

<http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-center/>

Recommended Writing Manuals

For additional style and usage help, I recommend the following:

- *The Elements Of Style* by Strunk and White
- *The Bedford Handbook* by Diana Hacker
- The Purdue OWL website: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

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.

Instructions and Guidelines for Critical Responses/Thought Papers

Every week, we will be focusing on a specific author and the skills/strategies used by that author. For instance, one week we might be talking about Lydia Davis and the minimalism of her work. For your critical response paper, you should write about the author's writerly strategies as they are seen in their story/stories and the author interviews/critical readings. Focusing on the unique qualities of the writer, the ways in which they stand out from the pack, is often a good angle to take. For instance, when writing about Lydia Davis you might want to focus on her vocabulary and the moment in her *Paris Review* interview where she says: "More and more I think that each of us, as a writer, has a preferred vocabulary."

You will need to directly reference the critical work/interview as well as the assigned fiction reading. Most weeks, the interview will come from *the Paris Review* "Art of Fiction" interview series. These interviews should be helpful as they provide both an overview of the author's work and the author's own insights into their writing and fiction as a whole. You should also include specific quotations from the story or stories themselves to support your position.

Each week I will also assign three terms from the glossary ("From Accuracy to Zigzag") of Jerome Stern's book *Making Shapely Fiction*. You must reference at least one of these terms in your response as well.

Your critical responses should NOT:

- Simply make a value judgment about the story, such as "I loved it" or "I hated it. Everything we will read in this class is a good piece of writing by an accomplished writer—I'm looking for you to engage critically with the work on the level of craft.

- Say that you liked a story because “you could relate to it,” or did not like a story because “you could not relate to it.” This is not analysis, and it is not a valid critique. Good fiction takes us out of ourselves and allows us to experience the consciousness of another person—that is the point.
- Use excessive quotation or summary. You should use evidence to support your points, not to avoid having to make them.

Assessment Rubric for Critical Papers

Below are the criteria by which I will grade your critical response papers. “A” papers will demonstrate a strong command of each of the following criteria.

Content	Ideas and analyses should be complex and critical. Papers should offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Go beyond surface matter.
Organization and coherence	Use an orderly structure that facilitates reading, sustaining the reader’s interest through effective paragraph development and use of proper transitions, presenting a logical flow of ideas.
Risk-taking	You must deal with the material in creative and challenging ways, developing main points based on self-initiated criteria independent of my class discussion comments, and avoiding summary unless necessary.
Evidence	You must support your ideas with actual examples from the text, and use relevant details from stories that explain and support your main ideas. Try to use quotations from stories that support your points (one or two lines will do—you will be marked down for excessive use of quotations).
Development	Analyze evidence in a way that supports your claims and overall thesis, including identifying literary devices/figures of speech and explaining how they

	contribute to the meaning of the text. AVOID SUMMARY.
Mechanics	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation must be correct. Papers must show careful proofreading, contain no errors in subject-verb agreement, contain no run-on sentences or sentence fragments, and demonstrate clear pronoun usage.

Class Schedule

January 5

Why, hello there!

Class:

- Introductions
- Review syllabus
- Class policies
- Writing Exercise

January 12

Contemporary Magical Realism

Read:

- "Introduction" by Ben Marcus (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- "The Girl in the Flammable Skirt" by Aimee Bender (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Aimee Bender interviews from [The Rumpus](#) and [The Missouri Review](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Point of View* (pp. 178-192), Reading (199-200)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #1

January 19

Padgett Powell(ism)

Read:

- “Scarliotti and the Sinkhole” by Padgett Powell (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Padgett Powell interview with [The Believer](#) and [essay on Donald Barthelme](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* “A Cautionary Interlude” (pp. 61-76)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #2

January 26

(Sur)Realism

Read:

- “Someone to Talk to” by Deborah Eisenberg (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Deborah Eisenberg interview with the [Paris Review](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Revision

Due:

- Your own “weird story” (as discussed last class)
(4-5 pages double-spaced, bring hard copy to class)

February 2

Family

Read:

- “Tiny, Smiling Daddy” by Mary Gaitskill (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Mary Gaitskill interview with [The Believer](#) and [The Fiction Writer Review](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Catharsis, Flashback, Motif

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #3
- **NOTE:** Stories by the first two students submitting for workshop must be turned in today.

February 9

The Darker Side of Fiction

Read:

- “The Paper Hanger” by William Gay (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [The Oxford American “At Home with William Gay”](#) and William Gay [interview with Lit Reactor](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Interior Monologue, Narrator, Showing and Telling

Workshop:

- (Students 1 and 2)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #4

February 16

The Word Level

Read:

- “Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned” by Wells Tower (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [Barry Hannah and Wells Tower](#) conversation and [“The Tuber” \(essay\)](#) by Wells Tower
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Comedy, Freytag’s Pyramid, Intrigants

Workshop:

- (Students 3 and 4)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #5

February 23

Writing into the Future-Past

Read:

- “Sea Oak” by George Saunders (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Jennifer Egan and George Saunders [conversation](#), *The Paris Review* [“Gchatting with George Saunders,”](#) and [“The Humor of George Saunders”](#) from *The New Yorker*.
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Anti-hero, Character, Hero

Workshop:

- (Students 5 and 6)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #6

March 8

Going Small

Read:

- “The Old Dictionary” by Lydia Davis (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [“Long Story Short”](#) (essay on Lydia Davis from *The New Yorker*)
- *Paris Review* interview: [Lydia Davis](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Accuracy, Dialogue, Voice*

Workshop:

- (Students 7 and 8)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #7

March 15

Best Left Unsaid

Read:

- “You Drive” by Christine Schutt (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [“First Time.”](#) a conversation with Christine Schutt (video from *the Paris Review*)
- Christine Schutt [interview](#) with *HTMLGiant*

Workshop:

- (Students 9 and 10)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #8

March 22

I know all the words but it’s still hard to read

Read:

- “PEOPLE SHOULDN’T HAVE TO BE THE ONES TO TELL YOU” by Gary Lutz (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [“The Sentence is a Lonely Place”](#) by Gary Lutz (*The Believer*)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Description, Frame Story, Imagination*

Workshop:

- (Students 11 and 12)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #9

March 29

Non-fiction's influence

Read:

- "Field Notes" by Rick Bass (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- ["On the Fly: Rick Bass"](#) from the Iowa Writers Workshop
- ["Writing Advice: Rick Bass's 'Danger'"](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Structure, Tension*

Workshop:

- (Students 13 and 14)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #10

April 5

Poetry, Prose, and Prose-Poetry: The Overlap

Read:

- "Short Talks" by Anne Carson (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [The Art of Poetry #88: Anne Carson](#) (*The Paris Review*)
- ["The Inscrutable Brilliance of Anne Carson"](#) by Sam Anderson
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Ambiguity, Realism, Subtlety*

Workshop:

- (Students 15 and 16)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #11

April 12

"Experimental"

Read:

- ["Dark Arts"](#) by Ben Marcus (*The New Yorker*)

- [“Cold Little Bird”](#) by Ben Marcus (*The New Yorker*)
- [“This Week in Fiction: Ben Marcus on the Cruelty of Children”](#) (*The New Yorker*)
- [“The Rumpus Interview With Ben Marcus”](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Negative Positive Knowledge, Position, Trust Your Material*

Workshop:

- (Students 17 and 18)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #12

April 19

Where we are now

Read:

- Two stories of your choice from contemporary publications (as I showed in class, you can find plenty of stories online and through the UF library’s various resources)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #14

Workshop Schedule

The date you are assigned is the date that you will have to TURN IN your story. The stories will then be workshopped during the following class period. You must bring in a copy of your manuscript for every student in the class as well as the instructor. No late delivery. No switching.