

**Fiction Writing
ENGL 3607 003
University of Memphis
Fall 2014**

Class time: 1:00-2:25 TR; Patterson Hall 329

Instructor: Dr. Wilson

Office: Patterson 108

Office hrs: TR 8:45-9:30am; 2:30-3:45pm

e-mail: btwilson@memphis.edu

*I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend. This is the only way to get in touch with me outside of office hours. Contact me at my U of M email address listed above using your U of M or other email account. **Do not email me through ecourseware.** These emails will be lost. **Always put ENGL 3607.003 in the subject line, and always sign your e-mails.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, students will be introduced to the art of writing fiction through reading and writing short stories. Students will engage in close readings of selected contemporary short stories by established artists. Class discussions of these stories will explore what it means to read as a writer and what the writers that have come before us can teach us about writing, particularly in regards to specific elements of craft such as point of view, significant detail, plot, and characterization. Students will also practice writing to develop technique through short exercises that will be read and critiqued by peers and the instructor. Each of these exercises will focus on one issue of craft but all are designed to serve as building blocks for the story students will write for the second part of the course. In the second part of the course, students will develop a complete short story, with the option to create a second story, through drafting, workshop, and revision. Students will learn the skills necessary to be an effective reader and to give constructive feedback to other writers. Students will also develop skills to critique and revise their own work. At the end of the course session, each student will submit a portfolio that includes the revised and polished short story, a process memo outlining their progress in the course, and a rating of peer workshops.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Be able to identify basic elements of fiction writing craft and define by definition and example these terms.
- Have practiced reading like a writer and explored what writers before us have to teach us about writing.
- Have practiced writing to develop technique through six short exercises, each focusing on one element of craft that were read and critiqued by peers and the instructor.
- Have written, drafted, and revised one short story, with the option of a second.
- Have learned the skills necessary to be an effective reader and to give constructive feedback to other writers.
- Have developed the skills to critique and revise their own work.
- Be able to employ the conventions of Standard Written English and MLA style.

TEXT REQUIREMENTS:

Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft 9th Edition by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French, & Ned Stuckey-French

Best American Short Stories 2016 ed. by Junot Díaz

Optional: *Naming the World* by Bret Anthony Johnston

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Daily access to a computer, the internet and ecourseware*, and Microsoft WORD software is a requirement. You must be proficient at posting files to and downloading files from ecourseware (elearn) our course website.

Computer/ technical problems are not valid excuses for coming to class unprepared or turning work in late (see late work policy below). Give yourself plenty of time to complete assignments. Back up your work. Save often.

Check ecourseware (elearn) and your e-mail everyday—I'll use them to communicate with you, as necessary.

***Ecourseware:** We will be utilizing the Ecourseware website extensively for this class during the semester. It is important that you have access to a computer and a University account for this reason. You should identify the on-campus computer labs/location of the library as soon as possible if you will need to avail yourself of these resources. You will frequently be required to post to this site. And you will be asked to check the site for important announcements. We will cover using ecourseware in-depth during the first week of class. However, future competencies with ecourseware are the student's responsibility. Any issues should be directed to the helpdesk at: 901-678-8888.

GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS:

All writing for this class must be original to this class. Do not submit work written for another class or for elsewhere. This course is designed to help you write and develop NEW work.

Assignments:

Participation/ Workshop	14 % of final grade or	14 pts
Journals (9 x 2)	18 %	18
Exercises (6x3)	18 %	18
Short Stories	50 %	50
Total:	100%	100pts.

Semester Grade Percentages

A+ (98 – 100)	A (94 – 97)	A- (90 – 93)
B+ (87 – 89)	B (84 – 87)	B- (80 – 83)
C+ (77 – 79)	C (74 – 76)	C- (70 – 73)
D+ (67 – 69)	D (64 – 66)	D- (60 – 63)
	F (0 – 59)	

Assignment Descriptions:

- **PARTICIPATION / WORKSHOPS: (14%)**

This has two parts: class participation in discussion of readings (7%) and verbal and written participation in workshopping of peer work (7%).

1. Class participation in discussion (first half of semester): You will be expected to have read the stories and chapters from the textbook we are discussing ahead of time, completed and posted your reading journal on them (see below), and be prepared to participate actively in a technical/ craft discussion of each story. That is, we will not be talking so much about the subject or the themes, etc. but rather about how the story was made.

2. This class is largely workshop based. You will be reading and responding to each other's work regularly. The critiques are to be given orally in class and in writing (on drafts and typed separately) for your group. In the first part of the term, you will respond in small groups to group members on exercises with guidance from the instructor.

You will be divided into groups when we begin workshopping full stories. You will be responsible for giving formally written critiques for your group only (instructions below and in Workshop Guidelines posted in ecourseware). When your group members are not being workshopped, you will still be required to read the stories and respond orally in class and informally on the draft itself. Each writer will receive formally written critiques from group members only and informal critiques from the rest of the class. You should be prepared to take notes through your entire workshop for other class members' critiques. You may make an appointment with me at any time to discuss your work.

*Full class workshop (second half of semester): **Before** each workshop day, post to the ecourseware Workshop Discussion Board a critique of about 300-500 words for each story we are workshopping that day. Critiques should be (1) honest, (2) kind, (3) thorough and (4) specific. Excellent critiques are those that most help the writer to revise the story and bring it closer to its most fully realized form.

Also, write on the actual story draft with suggestions, praise, and critiques in the margins. Hand this back to the author following their workshop. **DO NOT CORRECT GRAMMAR AND TECHNICAL ERRORS UNLESS THEY SERIOUSLY HINDER THE READING OF THE PIECE.** You are NOT the editor, but a reader.

You can print and attach your typed critique also if you wish, but it is not required.

*Following discussion, the author of the story will, with guidance from me, grade the critiques (formal and informal) on a scale of 1- 10, 5 being average; **-5 pts. if the critique is late, -10 if it's never handed in.** ** This could cost you more than a letter grade in the end. Stay on top of the reading and responding.

****Special note for workshop etiquette:** Do not attack the writer or the subject matter whatever your opinions. We are here to focus on the writing and writing techniques themselves and to help each other write the best stories that we can. Give constructive feedback and criticism of the work. "Its good" and "It sucks" are NEVER helpful comments. I expect vigorous responding with detailed and specific suggestions and critiques. (We will discuss this throughout the semester).

- **JOURNALS: (18% of grade; 9x2 each= 18 points, + 2 freebies/ extra credit)**

In the first half of the term we will read many contemporary short stories. Along with this you will be reading about writing techniques in *Writing Fiction*. You will write a short response (in format; see below) of approx. 250 words to each story in which you will apply what you learn from the technique readings to the short story readings. In the journal, you will develop ways to discuss the writing techniques used in the story. You may focus on any technique the story uses but must also discuss the element you are reading about at the time. For example, if we are reading about plot you might ask yourself: What type of plot does the story employ? Other good starting points are: What are the strengths/ weaknesses of the story? We will discuss this in more detail in class, and you will receive a handout or posting as well. Try to start thinking like a writer; try to analyze the story like a writer. What I don't want to see is a summary of the story or a discussion of its themes, symbolism, or other scholarly or literary criticism-type responses.

The purpose of the journals is to hold you accountable for the readings but also it is so that you can organize your thoughts and be ready to discuss the story in class.

*There are 11 journals, but you only 9 are required to complete to meet the 18%. Two more are offered to make up points if you miss one or offer you extra credit if you lost points somewhere you'd like to replace.

These responses must be posted in the Dropbox on our course website before class on the day the story is scheduled to be discussed. Bring a printed copy for your own reference. Late responses are not accepted for credit (see late work policy).

- **EXERCISES: (18% of grade; 6 x 3points each= 18 points)**

In the first half of the term, you'll submit six brief writing exercises. The instructions for these will be posted on blackboard under Dropbox and will be discussed in class. **Exercises (no more than a page each) must be posted on ecourseware each Thursday at 11:59pm for the first half of the term with the exception of Exercise 6, a revision exercise, which will be due on Tuesday of Week 6.** We will discuss them each Tuesday. (Follow formatting guidelines, MLA format). Although you may turn in exercises late, this could seriously hinder the development of your first story (see short story description below).

- **SHORT STORIES: (50% of final grade; 2x 25points each= 50 points)**

In the second half of the term, you'll write two complete and original short stories (from 6-8 pages in length, 1500-2000) and run it through a full class workshop. The first story will be written in pieces through the exercise prompts and then you will put it together as a complete story. Your first story **must** be the story that you write over the course of the exercises, though the story may change dramatically through

these. For the second story, you are expected to use the techniques we have learned throughout the course but do not have to write from any specific prompt.

Try to write the best and most complete stories you can. Do not turn in first drafts. Plan ahead, write and revise at least once before the due date.

Stories must be accompanied by a *process note*.

Process note: When you are ready to submit your story write a note to attach that discusses how the story evolved (i.e. from what exercises, workshop responses etc.), and what SPECIFIC concerns you have about the story (i.e. Is my ending cliché?; Is the dialogue layered enough, realistic enough? --- DO NOT USE IT AS A DEFENSE OF YOUR STORY! If you feel you must defend it, you haven't yet succeeded in writing a story that can stand without such a defense and there is obviously work to be done which you can figure out through the workshop).

Subject matter: You can write about anything you want to a point. I will present a list of things to avoid for this class. Primarily the list is designed to help you avoid pitfalls that are common to all beginning short story writers. This will allow us to focus more precisely on the writing techniques that will make you a stronger writer whatever you choose to write after this class.

The first story is due in Week 6 and the second in Week 10. All stories must be workshopped to be considered for a grade. If you turn your story in late, you risk not being workshopped and the story not accepted for credit.

Post your draft to the Short Story dropbox in ecourseware and bring **enough copies for the entire class**. Follow formatting guidelines; ALWAYS NUMBER YOUR PAGES AND STAPLE.

You will be graded not on the draft that's workshopped but rather the "finished" draft you revise and re-submit at the end of the term. However, if your story is late or severely underdeveloped for workshop, this will count against your score in the portfolio.

Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester you must turn in your final revisions, a track changes copy of each story (comparing it to the last draft I saw), and a process note about your revisions and how you have developed as a fiction writer in this class. More final portfolio instructions will be posted in ecourseware. You will turn all of these in to the Dropbox before class on the last day. Hard copies are not necessary. No late submissions accepted. I will not accept any stories that have not been workshopped by the class.

FORMAT FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, all writing assignments should be submitted (sometimes in both electronic and hard copy form) following MLA format. All must be STAPLED, typed, double-spaced, in a Times/ Times New Roman 12-point font, with one-inch margins, have numbered pages (upper right-hand corner), and a heading (upper left-hand corner of the first page): your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.

Assignments submitted electronically must be submitted as either a Microsoft Word file or in rich text format (RTF). Assignments submitted in other formats cannot be accepted. Name electronic submissions as follows: *Yourlastname_Assignmentname* (e.g., Smith_Journal1).

POLICIES

ATTENDANCE:

In a collaborative, writing workshop classroom like ours, attendance is essential. You will be allowed **TWO** unexcused absences without penalty. Unexcused absences after this may result in a lowered final course grade. More than four unexcused absences will result in a zero-participation score and put you in danger of failure from this course.

Excused absences:

You may be excused for an absence with documentation for illness, illness or death in the immediate family, and university-sanctioned organization* absences, and other incidentals as approved by instructor. In order for your absence to be excused you must provide me with documentation within two class periods. Late documentation will not excuse an absence. Many times documentation can be scanned and sent via email. All notices and documentation must cover the time/ day you missed and must be official (ie. Doctor's note, university clinic note, death announcement etc.).

You are still responsible for keeping up with the class even if you are absent (again see late work policy). Absences, of course will affect your ability to participate in class discussion and workshops. Please arrange to participate however you can ahead of time (i.e. send workshop responses to class members, etc.)

***Those involved in university-sanctioned organizations must present a schedule of absences by the second week of class.**

Tardiness/ early self-dismissal:

Coming in late or dismissing yourself early is disruptive and suggests that you do not take the class seriously. Three tardies (after roll call OR more than 10 minutes) will count as an absence. If you are more than 15 minutes late or leave more than 15 minutes early, you will be counted absent.

****It is your responsibility to make sure that you are counted as present during roll call (esp. if you come in late), and to keep up with your own number of absences and tardies.**

POLICY ON CLASSROOM CONDUCT

The *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* states: "The instructor has ultimate control over classroom behavior and may eject from the classroom any student engaged in disruptive conduct. Disruptive conduct is defined as conduct which may include, but is not limited to, intentional interference with the normal classroom procedure or presentation of the instructor or other student(s) and/or interference with another student's right to pursue coursework." Examples of disruptive classroom behavior include, but are not limited to the following: using electronic devices such as phones, iPods, and laptops; talking while the instructor is talking; personal attacks or mean-spirited criticism of the instructor or another student; sleeping or overt inattention, such as reading the newspaper or doing homework from another course. A fuller description of disruptive classroom behaviors and their consequence can be found on the Office of Judicial and Ethical Programs website.

Devices: It is your responsibility to turn OFF all cell phones and other electronic devices while in class. If you wish to use your laptop/ smartphone/ tablet in class FOR CLASSWORK (notes, reference), consult me about it FIRST. It cannot take the place of printed materials needed for class preparation. If for some reason you must keep your phone on (emergencies, etc.), please discuss this with me ahead of time. If I find that you are using your laptop/ phone for things other than class work (i.e facebook, email, games, etc.) you may be counted **absent** that day and will not be allowed to use it in class again.

*Also, if you are sleeping in class, doing homework for another course, causing a disruption by talking out of turn, etc, you may be counted **absent** or asked to leave and counted absent. Please come to class prepared and ready to participate respectfully.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

In order for the class to be a safe, professional, learning environment for all students, mutual respect and citizenship manners are necessary and therefore required. We will listen and respond to each other respectfully, not judge. The following will not be tolerated in any way: prejudice towards race, gender, gender identification/ expression, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, interests, background, experiences and any hate comments concerning these.

LATE WORK:

Journals cannot be completed late for any reason. These are designed to keep you on track with the reading and make sure you are prepared for class. Other assignments may be turned in late with a penalty. Late work will receive a letter grade per class time/ day that it is late. Turning in an exercise late could cause you to be unable to fully develop your first short story. Turning in your short story draft late could cause you to miss workshop and lose

credit for the story. You must turn in short stories with enough advance time for the class to adequately critique your work. Responses to workshop stories will not be accepted more than one class period late.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

The University of Memphis Code of Student Conduct identifies cheating, plagiarism, forgery, and falsification as acts of academic misconduct. The guiding principle of academic honesty is that your submitted work is your own with accurate attributions to, and citations of, others' work where appropriate. Academic misconduct will result in failure on the assignment or other consequences as per university policy, which can include failure in the course, suspension, and/or expulsion from the university. See the Office of Judicial and Ethical Programs website for full descriptions of academic misconduct and its consequences: <http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs/>

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Students caught plagiarizing in this course will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs and could receive one or more of the following penalties (depending on the nature and / or number of offense):

1. Lowered assignment grade
2. Required to rewrite the assignment
3. Zero on the assignment
4. Failure of the course

ADA: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT:

Any student who may need class or test accommodations based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to speak with me privately to discuss your specific needs. Students with disabilities should also contact Disability Resources for Students (DRS) at 110 Wilder Tower, 678-2880. DRS coordinates accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

INCOMPLETES POLICY

A grade of "I" will be awarded only when all but a minor portion of the course work has been satisfactorily completed and only at the discretion of the instructor. An "I" will not be awarded to a student who has not submitted work according to the assigned due dates during the course of the semester. An "I" will convert to an "F" as per University policy.

**** Calendar and assignments are subject to change. Keep yourself informed.**

FICTION WRITING ENGL 3607.003**Calendar
Spring 2017**

All readings, journals, and assignments are noted clearly on the calendar. These are to be completed before class time on the date given unless otherwise noted. All exercises are due at 11:59pm on the first 6 Thursdays.

This schedule is subject to revision. Such revisions will be discussed in class and/ or announced on the course website or email. You are responsible for keeping track of schedule revisions.

Please bring your textbooks (from which we are reading) to every class session. You may also want to bring a printed copy of your journal for reference (I will not take these up but will grade them online). Bring 3 copies of each exercise to class on the Tuesday following the due date. Print and handout stories for the entire class on the day they are due.

Week 1**Getting Started: Process and Form**

T 1/17

Course introduction

Course Policy and Calendar

Core Tenants

Getting started exercise/ keeping journals

BUY BOOKS AND PRINT AND BRING COURSE POLICY AND CALENDAR

R 1/19

Short Story; Reading as Writers; Can't Write About List

Lecture Notes: Story Parts

Writing Fiction: Chapter 1: The Writing Process

Journal 1 due: opening remarks and "A & P" story parts

(all journals due in ecourseware's Dropbox before class time on the day they are listed; Journal 1 is due BEFORE class 1/19)

Exercise 1 Getting Started Due 1/19 11:59pm in ecourseware's Dropbox (we will begin the exercise in class and you will need to finish it by the end of the day Thursday).

***YOU MUST PURCHASE TEXTBOOKS BY END OF FIRST WEEK

**Many of the readings from *The Best American Short Stories 2013 (BASS)* are as new to me as they are to you. We will look for what they can teach us about technique together. It will be a collaborative process designed to help you become active readers (as all writers should be) and to help you take responsibility for your own apprenticeship into writing by reading today's best short fiction by today's best and up and coming writers. I have chosen most selections somewhat randomly, and I encourage you to read what I did not select on your own.

Week 2**Showing and Telling**

T 1/24

Writing Fiction (WF): Ch. 2 Seeing is Believing

Journal 2 "What Is Visible" Kimberly Elkins (pdf)

Discuss/ workshop exercise 1

Butler emotions lecture/ exercise 2 assigned

R 1/26

Best American Short Stories (BASS) Forward and Introduction

Journal 3 "On This Side" Yuko Sakata (BASS)

Exercise 2: Showing and Emotion due in Dropbox 11:59 pm

Week 3**Building Character**

T 1/31

Writing Fiction: Ch. 3 Characterization Pt. I

Journal 4 “Emergency” Denis Johnson p.106
Discuss/ workshop exercise 2
Assign exercise 3

R 2/2

Writing Fiction: Ch. 4 Characterization Pt. II

Journal 5 “For The God of Love, For the Love of God” Lauren Groff (*BASS*)

Exercise 3 Working with Characters Due 11:59pm

Week 4

Fictional Place and time

T 2/7 Fiction Ch. 5 Fictional Place

Journal 6 “Secret Stream” Héctor Tobar (*BASS*)

Discuss/ workshop exercise 3

Assign exercise 4

R 2/9

Writing Fiction Ch. 6 Fictional Time

Journal 7 “Bullet in the Brain” Tobias Wolff (pdf) and “The Flower” Louise Erdrich (*BASS*)

*Note if and how the stories we read break our “Can’t Write About Rules”. How do they get away with it?

Exercise 4 Setting and Clock Due 11:59 pm

Week 5

Story Form, Plot and Structure

T 2/14

Writing Fiction Ch. 7 Story Form...

Journal 8 “Everything That Rises Must Converge” Flannery O’Connor p. 262

Discuss/ workshop exercise 4

Assign exercise 5

R 2/16

Journal 9 “The Prospectors” Karen Russel (*BASS*)

Exercise 5 due 11:59 pm

All first stories due 2/23 in class. All second stories due 3/23.

Week 6

T 2/21 Point of View

Writing Fiction Ch. 8 Call Me Ishmael: Point of View

Journal 10 “Williamsburg Bridge” John Edgar Wideman (*BASS*)

Discuss/ workshop exercise 5

Assign exercise 6*

Since Exercise 6 is a revision exercise, it is due Tuesday 2/21 at 11:59pm

R 2/23

Discuss/ workshop exercise 6

Workshop guidelines

Mock workshop

Journal 11 “Girl” Jamaica Kincaid (pdf) Write a critique of the story.

*****FIRST WORKSHOP STORIES DUE – COPIES FOR ENTIRE CLASS, POST TO ECOURSEWARE DROPBOX UNDER SHORT STORIES**

Workshop critiques are to be completed before class on the day the story is to be discussed.

Workshop order and groups will be assigned on ecourseware

Week 7

WORKSHOPS

T 2/28 Workshop; stories by: (20-25 min. per story)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 3/2 Workshop; stories by:

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Week 8

HAPPY SPRING BREAK!

No class meeting

Week 9

T 3/14 Workshop; stories by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 3/16 Workshop; stories by:

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Week 10

T 3/21 Workshop; stories by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 3/23 Workshop; stories by:

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

3/23 ***SECOND WORKSHOP STORIES DUE – COPIES FOR ENTIRE CLASS

Week 11

T 3/28 Workshop; stories by: **(Begin second stories)**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 3/30 Workshop; stories by:

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Week 12

T 4/4 Workshop; stories by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 4/6 Workshop; stories by:

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Week 13

T 4/11 Workshop; stories by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

R 4/13 **Workshop; stories by:**

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Week 14

T 4/18

Writing Fiction Ch. 9 Play it Again, Sam

Revision Exercises

Catch up if needed

R 4/20

Proofreading workshop. Bring final drafts.

Week 15

T 4/25 Extra Credit Reading

Last Day of Classes FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE IN DROPBOX (don't forget comparison copies, and final process memo) I WILL TAKE FINAL PORTFOLIOS EARLY BUT NOT LATE