

**English 234, Writing Fiction: Structure & Technique**  
**Course Policies, Spring 2012**

Section 002

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**Course Description**

English 234 (“Writing Fiction: Structure and Technique”) will explore many of the basic principles of successful short story writing as understood through established instructional texts and traditions. Developing a practice of creative writing in a public setting, such as the university, means embracing the notion of one’s written voice as both personal and public. In keeping with this sense of shared space, we will read works by a diverse selection of authors and explore a variety of approaches to the theory and practice of creative writing and attempt to understand how different writers use different strategies and creative philosophies to reach their audiences in specific ways. These outside readings will serve as discursive models. However, their purpose is not to stand as inviolable objects for blind imitation, but rather to ground the development of the student’s own emerging sense of voice and creative purpose. Although, instruction will begin with reading and analysis of published stories, the course will build toward a workshop format in which the entire class will read and discuss the writing of each individual student openly in the classroom.

**Course Goals and Outcomes**

- Further develop the critical reading skills necessary to succeed with a Major in English (see below).
- Consider and practice contemporary ways of producing and writing short stories.
- Develop a complex understanding of the form of the short story and its literary genres and histories.
- Develop a creative practice that you can carry on beyond this class.
- Learn how to work ethically and responsibly as a member of a collaborative creative community.
- Consider how the skills and practices of creative writing can apply to the work force challenges of the 21st century.

## **Creative Writing Department Learning Outcomes**

Students should be aware of how their work in a creative writing class fits within the English major, and how it addresses learning outcomes that the department has indicated are essential for success in this field. These include:

- Inquiry and analysis — Students will be able to demonstrate close reading and careful interpretation of a complex text.
- Critical Thinking — Students will be able to develop, in writing, an original, evidence-based analytic argument about an appropriate text or topic.
- Written Communication — Students will be able to write clear expository prose demonstrating knowledge of academic written conventions.
- Civic knowledge and engagement — Students will be participatory community members able to articulate in speech and in writing descriptions and analysis of others' choices and their possible consequences for the community of readers and writers they impact.
- Synthesis — In their writing, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of vocabulary, methods, and conventions of the discipline.
- Creativity — Students will produce original creative work that reflects thoughtful, informed engagement with its literary genre and awareness of diverse identities, perspectives, and positionalities.

### **Textbook**

Burroway, Janet. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, 8th Edition;  
ISBN: 9780205750344—if you purchase elsewhere, make sure it's the 8th edition!

This book is available at People's Books, 2122 East Locust Street; Milwaukee, WI 53211-3326; (414) 962-0575. I have contracted with People's Books because they make an effort to procure used editions of the course books and sell them for significantly less than cover prices, saving students money. The approximate cost for this book will be \$50.00 used or \$75.00 new. You cannot complete Eng 234 without this text.

### **Additional Required Materials**

Students are expected to bring the appropriate books and materials to each class session, as discussions and exercises will frequently refer to specific passages from the week's reading. Please bring a notebook and writing materials to every class. In general, students are strongly encouraged to plan for, develop and employ some system of organization for ready access to previously distributed course materials and their own accumulated writing. It is expected that all homework assignments will be typed or printed out and that multi-paged assignments will be stapled. A regular intervals throughout the course you will be expected to print out assignments and make copies of your workshop submissions for the class. Given the studio nature of a creative writing workshop, you should expect to budget approximately \$20 for photocopying costs throughout the semester.

## **Grading**

Original Short Story (1500-3000 words): 20%

Significant Story Revision: 20%

Daily In-Class Participation: 20%

Workshop Letters: 20%

Writing Exercises: 10%

Stories analyses: 10%

## **The Workshop**

Because this class is a workshop, we will spend a significant amount of course time reading and critiquing each others' writing. That means at various times you will be required to submit your own writing to the class, both in-person or on-line, and/or to sit in small groups for guided critique. Likewise, students will also be required to respond when others' work is similarly distributed. The purpose of these sessions is two-fold: as writers, students will receive focused and intentional feedback from a variety of sources; and as readers, students will be exposed to various styles of writing and thus practiced in various critical reading and thinking strategies. Along these lines, the course will endeavor to provide guidance and methodology for professional, thoughtful and critical responses as tempered by an attitude that is fundamentally developmental and appreciative of the nature of writing as a work-in-progress. This classroom should be a place where students can experience a sense of joy and freedom in their own and others' experiments with writing within a structured environment that allows for honest, sincere, constructive feedback.

## **Participation, Professionalism and Attendance**

In a collaborative learning environment such as this, you have a responsibility not just to yourselves or to me, but to one another. One of the main goals of this course is to foster customs and practices specific to a community of writers. As such, student participation in class discussions, workshops, online forums, etc. is integral not only to one's own success but also to the success of the community as well. Accordingly, students should come to class prepared and ready discuss the topic of the day. Sitting silently in a chair does not constitute class participation and merits less than a C. To prepare yourself to make contributions in class, take notes on the materials and readings before each meeting and look forward to sharing your questions, comments, observations and ideas. When everyone does this, class is more enjoyable, interesting, and productive.

Students are required to treat others' work and contributions with respect. Professional conduct means being attentive to the discussion and striving toward the expression new and deeper contexts for one's own comments as well as those of others. It does not include arriving late, leaving in the middle (or early); nor does it include listening to music or text messaging. Any student who is not in the classroom at roll call will be marked tardy for the day. Three tardies equals one absence. Any student who misses more than twenty (20) minutes of a class will be marked absent for the day. The success of workshop classes depend on everyone being present for class, so I take attendance very seriously. The first three (3) absences will not count against the final grade. After three (3) absences, each subsequent absence will lower the total final grade by 3%. Any student with eight (8) or more unexcused absences will receive an automatic F in the course regardless of what other work may have been done. The only excusable absences will be

for recognized religious observances or documented medical conditions. Students who have to be absent or leave early should let me know in advance. Students who arrive late or miss class are expected to catch themselves up on missed work, including handouts and homework assignments.

To help in this regard, the course online site will provide convenient, 24 hour access to all past and present documents and assignments. Please be advised, an absence is not an excuse for subsequent late work.

### **Collaborative Writing**

In this class you will be asked to participate in collaborative writing assignments with your peers from time to time. Research in creative writing studies shows that collaborative learning builds student confidence and creates a sense of shared responsibility in the classroom. Collaborative assignments also leverage the workshop ethos from the perspective of the classroom teacher, providing a manageable and practical compliment to theoretical discussion of complex forms and concepts. It is my hope that these writings will offer a fun, low stakes point of entry into our exploration the form of the short story.

### **Writing Assignments and Story Analyses**

The work in this course will consist of creative writing, critical reading, and workshop responses designed to supplement and focus one's individual creative efforts. Much like other English department course offerings, students can expect that homework assignments will contain a reasonable amount of reading and writing every week and that homework will assigned with regularity.

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class on the day specified by the instructor and/or the syllabus. They are to be printed or type-written in a suitable typeface, at a reasonable size on clean sheets of paper with one inch margins, and, if more than one page, stapled. Email is not acceptable as a means of submitting work. Students who have to miss class should submit work to the course website drop-box before class on the day that it is due.

Weekly assignments will be graded for their thorough and thoughtful completion of the required objectives and timely submission of the work. In addition each exercise will be considered holistically based on its craft, organization, development, originality and thoroughness meeting stated objectives. Late assignments will not receive written comments. Further, late assignments will be down-graded one third of a letter grade for each day that they are late.

Your workshop drafts will be graded in much the same fashion. Of course I understand that they are drafts. A draft does not have to be perfect to receive an A, but it does have to demonstrate that the author has carefully considered their objectives and spent meaningful time crafting and developing the ideas represented.

Your final revisions will be held to higher standards, so that a draft that receives an A would not necessarily receive an A as a final revision. Your final revision will be graded with particular emphasis on how the materials have improved from earlier versions based on the techniques discussed in class.

### **When Your Draft Is Up For Workshop**

Workshop submissions should be double-spaced in a normal 11- or 12-point font and carefully proofread, with your name on each numbered page. Please bear in mind that you are asking 15 people to give you 2-3 hours of their valuable time and expertise. Take the opportunity seriously, prepare for it carefully, and thank the class for their feedback. If you miss your submission deadline, you may not be rescheduled. If you know ahead of time that you will need to miss your workshop date, let me know ASAP and we will try to adjust the schedule.

### **Workshop Letters**

Workshops will be accompanied by 200-word responses to each writer's manuscript, due with (and stapled to) your marked-up copy of their work. As in responses to published authors, these should contain references to specific concepts within the student's work. Quoting short passages of the work in order to more closely critique is both acceptable and useful.

### **Conferences**

Individual conferences occur once during the semester. These conferences are mandatory and will be scheduled at least one week prior. Missing a scheduled conference without prior notice will have a significant negative impact on your final grade. These individual conferences will allow you not only to discuss revision one-on-one with the instructor, but to go over what might be the "poetics" or writing philosophy you see yourself developing.

### **Final Portfolio**

The Final Portfolio should consist of at least two drafts of your semester story project. To be eligible for Final Portfolio your fictional short story must have been written for this class during this semester, and it must have been revised at least once since the last comments were received. The portfolio drafts should be accompanied by a cover letter explaining how the final draft accounts for the feedback received over the course of the term and reflects the writer's attempts to work with course concepts.

### **Administrative Drop**

Any student who does not attend the first full week of class (or its equivalent) will be automatically dropped from the course.

### **Calendar**

The course calendar can be found on D2L. The calendar describes what we'll be working on in class on any given week and what work you should have completed to prepare.

### **Email and D2L**

This section of English 102 extensively uses both email and the D2L online course system. If you have not already used these technologies, it is imperative that you become familiar with them as soon as possible. You will need to know your ePanther ID. If you do not know your ePanther ID and password, visit: <https://pantherlink.uwm.edu/>.

UWM provides all students, staff, and faculty with a Panthermail account.

- All course correspondence will be sent to your Panthermail account
- You must check your Panthermail 24 hours prior to and after each class session

### **Student Accessibility Center (SAC)**

Students who work with an advisor at the SAC should send their VISA statement to their instructor in the first week of class. Any student having questions or concerns about their unique learning abilities may visit the Center at UWM in 112 Mitchell Hall.

### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Plagiarism has serious consequences for writers at every level of their academic career. Plagiarism can involve actual copying, having someone else write your papers, or even unintentionally borrowing without proper documentation. Any student caught plagiarizing in this course will receive a failing grade and may be subject to further disciplinary action at the departmental or university level.

### **The UWM Writing Center**

Students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with The Writing Center. As a resource, UWM's Writing Center offers a wide range of reading and writing-related services free of charge. The highly trained staff maintains a close familiarity with the regulations and documents of the First-year Composition Program, and offers a high degree of flexibility in scheduling one-on-one, peer-to-peer, confidential consultations for readers and writers at all levels of skill and experience in any stage of their writing process.

Locations: Curtin Hall, Rm 127

On-line: <http://www.writingcenter.uwm.edu>

Phone: 229-4339

Director: Margaret Mika, [mmika@uwm.edu](mailto:mmika@uwm.edu)

### **Administrative Drop**

Students who do not attend the first week of classes will be administratively dropped from the course.

### **Other University Policies:**

For more information about the full range of UW-Milwaukee campus policies on-line, visit: <http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf>