English 9CT: Special Topics in Creative Expression in Writing: Flash Fiction and other Short Flights

Spring 2018
Instructor: Kate Petersen
Tuesday and Thursday, 11:30AM – 1:20 PM
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Office hours: TTh 1:30-3:00 or by appointment

Course Description

What can and ought a story do, and how many words does it take to do it? If a short story is designed, as the writer Ben Marcus argues, to outlast its moment in the mind of the reader, then how do very short pieces (250-1500 words) prepare themselves for this trip? This class is a writing class that explores the effects of brevity on narrative, and the effects of narrative on the world. Together we’ll explore how we can become more alert to the world and how, through language, we can respond in fresh ways to the events of our lives.

In this class, you will become a member of a community of writers prepared to support and aid each other as we navigate the process of creation. Among us, we bring hundreds of thousands of pages to the table, things we’ve read and written over the years, and all these pages inform what happens we sit down to read or to write. These collective pages constitute a great asset, but to become a writing community in short 10 weeks, we’ll need also to develop a common vocabulary as readers and craftspeople of flash fiction and prose poems.

This quarter, you’ll generate ideas that you will develop and shepherd through revision. The course offers opportunities for you to experiment with form and content and to develop a vocabulary with which to discuss your own work. Through close reading, writing exercises, collaborative projects, workshops, and discussion, you’ll explore the role narrative, compression, and language plays in your own life.

Creative Expression in Writing fulfills Stanford’s Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing Creative Expression Requirement: The ability to design, create, and perform – each enriches our lives in substantial and meaningful ways. Thinking creatively, giving expressive shape to ideas, and communicating those ideas with imagination and precision are not only indispensable to all artistic endeavors, they also represent broadly applicable skills that strengthen and enhance traditional academic pursuits, stimulate effective problem-solving, and foster originality and innovation in new areas.

Course Objectives for Creative Expression students:

1. Explore your own potential and produce original creative projects.
2. Engage in artistic collaboration and the creative reinterpretation of art made by others.
3. Take creative risks beyond your comfort zones
4. Experience what it is to make the unimagined possible and real.
5. Appreciate how experimentation, failure, and revision can play a valuable role in the creation of successful and innovative works.
6. Consider multiple and possibly divergent solutions to a problem.
7. Explore the role of artistic expression in addressing issues that face society.
Required Materials

1. Course texts
   **You must have both course texts as printed books no later than Tuesday, April 10.**

2. A writing notebook reserved for this class alone, and writing implement (pen/pencil)

3. A budget for photocopying and printing your work. Please note that you will be required to print and photocopy written assignments to turn in to me throughout the quarter.

Grading Breakdown

35% - Class Participation
This includes attendance, punctuality and involvement in class discussions, as well as the completion of written comments on canvas discussion forums. Full attendance is of utmost importance in this class; it's impossible to “catch up” on a missed class discussion, and the dynamics of a writing class can suffer when even one voice is missing. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, please work this out with me in advance; otherwise every unexcused absence after the first will reduce your course grade by half a letter grade.

Please come to class prepared, which means: having read the assigned material attentively and in a spirit of curiosity and intellectual engagement. Be ready to offer your thoughts in class discussion. When responding to the work of your fellow writers, please treat it with the same respect and open-mindedness with which you want your own work to be read. Our goal is to create for each other an environment for sharing work and ideas that is supportive, challenging, collaborative, and fun.

35% - Written Exercises
This class is about building and sustaining a creative practice, and thus you’ll be generating a lot of raw material. To this end, you’ll be completing many written exercises, both in class and out. These exercises will include imitations, flash fiction, prose poems and micro-essays, and many other things. You will turn in your exercises, typed, so that I can read your work and understand your process. Some, but not all, of these exercises will receive feedback, either in the form of written comments, peer exchange, or in a workshop. At the end of the quarter you will compile and turn in a portfolio that will include your revised work and a creative manifesto.

In addition to your typed exercises, you’ll also be keeping a daily journal, which will include observations, illustrations, thoughts, quotations, ideas, and anything else you might like to include. You’ll be encouraged to share something with us at the beginning of each class; so do bring your journal to every class meeting.

All assigned exercises must be typed and printed and turned in on time. Late exercises will only receive half-credit. No work will be accepted by email.

15% - Flash Fiction in the World: Presentation
In the second half of the quarter, each student will research, prepare and present to the class on an aspect of flash fiction and current practice using web journals and other literary magazines.

15% - Outside reading attendance
Attendance at three readings in the Creative Writing program is required. You don't need to write a reaction to the readings, but you do need to let me know that you attended. A list of readings this quarter can be found at http://creativewriting.stanford.edu and http://events.stanford.edu/. I'll also announce them as they come up in class.

Please also sign up for the Creative Writing Events Listserv by going to http://mailman.stanford.edu and joining “cw-undergrad.”

Classroom Etiquette and Expectations
I respect you all as fellow writers and expect you to extend the same respect to me, and to your colleagues. Therefore:

• Arrive to class on time. Don’t leave early.
• No cell phone, smartphone, or laptop use in class, except those exceptions covered under accommodations (see below).
• Be honest and respectful. Sharing your creative work with a room full of strangers is an extremely difficult thing to do! Our comments to one another are valuable only if they are honest, and helpful only if they are delivered with compassion and respect.
• This class requires verbal participation. If this is a concern to you, come talk to me.
• Helping a writer see where a piece is working and memorable is as useful—often more so—than pointing out where it loses steam.
• When you are on the receiving end of criticism, I invite you to be thick-skinned and to remember that all serious engagement with your work is a compliment.
• If you feel that criticism of your work or others becomes insensitive or threatening, please speak up or send me a confidential email.
• I reserve the right to report language that may be perceived as threatening to yourself or others, whether fictional or otherwise, to University authorities. Writing that makes reference to specific members of the class, directly or otherwise, will not be tolerated.

Attendance & Participation
Though writing is mostly a solitary sport, a writing course is undeniably a team one. That means the success of this class (and your grade) hinges on your participation and preparation for the class—engaging on the stories we read and each other’s work.

• Unexcused absences will affect your grade significantly. You have one to give, no questions asked. After that, each unexcused absence will reduce your course grade by 1/2 a letter grade. If you are more than 10 minutes late to class or leave early, I will mark you absent.

An excused absence includes religious holidays observed, military service, medical appointment etc. I require documentation (a doctor’s note, for example) and email notification at least 24 hours ahead of time. If you have a question about this, email me. I cannot excuse an absence after the fact.
Late Policy

Turning in late assignments will negatively affect your participation grade. Absence on a due date doesn’t excuse you from these requirements; so if you know you’ll miss a class, plan to turn in your assignments early. See attendance policy.

For assignments, here is the lateness protocol:
• A late assignment receives half credit.
• I do not accept assignments by email unless noted beforehand in class.

Email Policy

I will respond to you within 48 hours of sending me an email. I will send important class updates and correspond with you via your Stanford email, which I expect you to check at least daily.

Conferences

I really enjoy speaking with you about stories and writing in my office hours, and invite you to come to them. Additionally, we’ll have the opportunity to individually conference during class time in Lab Week (Week 5) and at the end of the quarter. I really look forward to these meetings as a chance to get to know you and your work better.

Format

Please type all assignments in 12-pt Times/Times New Roman or Georgia 10.5 with one-inch margins, and double space. Number all pages.

Proofread all of your writing. Then do it again. Mechanical and grammatical errors (including spelling and typos) will negatively affect your grade on a given assignment.

Accommodation

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oaе).

Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:
The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as
themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

**Plagiarism**

I expect the work you turn in to be your own. Lifting or using portions of someone else’s work, whether verbatim or summarized, without giving him or her credit, is considered plagiarism, and will not be tolerated.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, using ideas, information or quotes from published work or online sources without providing proper citations; copying all or part of an assignment from someone else; turning in work you did for other classes.

A student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including a failing grade for the course.

**Calendar**

I will provide you with a class calendar in the third class meeting that is subject to revision throughout the quarter.