ENGLISH 90: Fiction Writing

Spring 2018

Instructor: Nina Schloesser Tárano
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Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, 4-6 p.m.
in Margaret Jacks Hall, Room 330

“Stories conspire not to be forgotten; they scheme to outlast their moment.”
—Ben Marcus

If you’re taking this course, chances are you’re a lover of stories. In other words, you’re a reader. Time and again, you’ve been willing to give stories a chance, to grant them your attention and put your energy and emotions at their disposal. And stories haven’t let you down. Time and again, they’ve made meaning, made feeling. They have mattered.

Seize, transport, baffle, provoke, astonish, haunt: like settings on the fiction ray gun, these verbs describe some of the ways in which stories act upon us. In this class, we will work to become aware of how the best stories do what they do. Your awareness as a reader will become the foundation of your craft as a writer. We’ll study craft elements, including character, plot, voice, and dialogue, considering them as experiences a writer designs for a reader. Increasingly, you’ll understand how to control your own reader’s experience—how to deploy language in ways that compel attention and create feeling.

In the first half of the quarter, you will draft your own brand-new short story. In the second half, our class will convene as a workshop in which we’ll read and discuss each other’s stories. The workshop is the heart of this course. It’s a kind of living laboratory in which you can test your control over your prose. Just as importantly, it’s a supportive community of fellow writers. By the end of the term, you will have gained insight into the story you want to tell and the words with which you want to tell it.

Material Requirements

• Course reader (price TBA, but it’ll be around $25). Readers will be for sale by the printer, CopyAmerica, in the lobby of Thornton Center (379 Santa Teresa Street), 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on the first ten school days of the quarter. Thereafter, you can order a reader by calling CopyAmerica at (650) 566-0344.
• Notebook.
• Access to a printer.
• In the second half of the quarter you’ll need to provide hard copies of your story for everyone in the class. Please budget for this expense.

Graded Assignments

1. Short Writing Exercises (1-3 pages). You will complete three short creative exercises. These will require you to practice an element of craft considered in class.
2. First Draft of a Short Story (10-20 pages). You will draft a complete short story and provide a hard copy to each person in the class, including me. Workshops will take place Week 5-Week 9. Your draft is due on the Wednesday before your assigned workshop day. I will assign workshop days as soon as our course roster is finalized.
3. **Response Letters.** During the workshop part of the course, every time a fellow writer’s story is up for discussion, you will respond to it in a short letter. I require a copy of every response letter you write. Detailed guidelines for the writing of response letters will be provided.

4. **Revised Short Story (10-20 pages) and Process Paper (1-2 pages).** At the end of the quarter, you’ll submit a substantive revision of your story, plus a short paper about your writing process. Your revision and process paper are due by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, June 13. No work will be accepted after that time.

**Other Expectations**

1. **Reading.** The great writer Frank Conroy said, “You read, you read, you read, you read, you read, and then you begin to write.” For this class, I expect you to do your very best reading: to come to every story in a spirit of curiosity and intellectual engagement, and to remain attentive even if you find the piece stylistically or emotionally challenging.

2. **Writing in Your Notebook.** I will assign exercises which you will complete in longhand, in your notebook. These exercises will mostly ask you to freewrite, brainstorm, or think aloud about your own writing, and they are not graded. Instead, they count toward your class participation. You receive full credit simply for completing them. I will collect notebooks periodically.

3. **Class Participation.** You will receive full credit for class participation when you:
   - Come to every class, on time.
   - Offer your thoughts in class discussion.
   - Listen carefully and open-mindedly to your fellow writers and to me.
   - Complete all notebook exercises according to instructions and on time.
   - Are a good citizen of the writing workshop (see below).

4. **Good Workshop Citizenship.** When we come together in workshop, we become part of a community of and for writers. To be a good workshop citizen is to take others’ work as seriously as you take your own. Both in discussion and in your response letters, engage respectfully and rigorously with the work of others. Be committed to supporting and challenging your fellow writers. Be especially careful to be on time to workshop. Take responsibility for making the room feel safe and fun.

5. **Creative Writing Program Event Attendance.** You are required to attend 3 events sponsored by the Creative Writing Program. These include readings by great writers, conversations with great writers, and workshops in poetry and fiction. Please join the cw-undergrad mailing list to ensure you receive announcements of upcoming events. An up-to-date list is at [http://creativewriting.stanford.edu/event-list](http://creativewriting.stanford.edu/event-list). To record your attendance at an event, post in the Canvas discussion “Which CW events have you attended?” It is your responsibility to keep your own attendance record up to date.

**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Writing Exercises</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft of Short Story</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Letters</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revision of Story &amp; Process Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Writing Program Event Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Policies

- **Canvas.** As soon as the course roster is finalized, I will add you to our Canvas site. I will post all assignments and all handouts on Canvas ([https://classes.stanford.edu/](https://classes.stanford.edu/)).
- **Attendance.** I take attendance at the beginning of class. If you’re late, it’s up to you to remind me at the end of class to record your presence.
- **Unexcused Absences.** I will subtract 5 points from your final grade for each unexcused absence. If you’re absent four times, you fail the course.
- **Excused Absences.** If you must miss class (due to illness or athletic commitments, for example) and you believe your absence should be excused, contact me as soon as you know you will be absent, not five minutes before class. Remember to check Canvas for handouts distributed and work assigned in your absence.
- **Punctuality.** Being on time to class shows respect for me, your fellow writers, and the craft we are studying together. If, after the first day, you are more than ten minutes late to class (or leave early without my prior permission), it’ll count as an absence. If there’s a good reason why you may sometimes be late—e.g. a class immediately before on the other side of campus—let me know.
- **Electronic Devices.** No laptops or tablets, please. Phones must not make sounds.
- **Late Assignments.** A late writing exercise or late response letter will receive a maximum grade of B. If the first draft of your short story is late, or if your revision is late, it will receive a maximum grade of B-.
- **Office Hours and Conferences.** Please drop by my office hours—they’re for you! They do get crowded as the quarter goes on, so making an appointment is best. In addition, I expect that you’ll sit down with me for a 45-minute conference after your workshop.
- **Communication with Me.** Email is the best way to reach me. I check email every day and respond as promptly as I am able. I will address all communications to your Stanford email and expect you to check it at least daily.
- **My Basis for Grading Fiction.** I expect you to do your best creative work for this class. However, you won’t be graded on my perception of your talent! Your grade is based on your development as a writer over the course of the quarter. I will measure your development by the degree of control you exhibit over your prose. As your control increases, you will be better able to implement your own stated goals for your fiction—to write the way you want to write. I value creative risk-taking and will take it into account when grading.
- **Formatting Guidelines.**
  - All creative assignments should be double-spaced. Response letters may be single-spaced.
  - Use 12-point font.
  - Margins should be reasonable (1” or close).
  - Use print, not web, formatting. That means: indent your paragraphs; no double line breaks between paragraphs.
  - Number the pages of your document.
  - Write your name on your document.
  - Double-sided printing is encouraged.
  - Staple anything over one page.
  - Please spell-check and proofread.
- **Plagiarism.** The Board on Judicial Affairs says: “For purposes of the Stanford University Honor Code, plagiarism is defined as the use, without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or source, of another person’s original work, whether such work is made up of code, formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other form(s).” If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism in the context of this course or a particular assignment, ask me.
Students with Documented Disabilities

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) and provide all required documentation. Professional staff will evaluate the request, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter. 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 (voice: 723-1066, TTY: 723-1067, http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).

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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.
Course Schedule

(subject to revision)

Week One
Tue 9/26 Welcome & Introduction
Thu 9/28 Reading Like a Writer

Week Two
Tue 10/3 Character
Thu 10/5 Plot and Its Delivery

Week Three
Tue 10/10 Point of View & Voice
Thu 10/12 Dialogue

Week Four
Tue 10/17 Lab Day: Drafting
Thu 10/19 Showing vs. Telling (And Why You Need Them Both)

Week Five
Tue 10/24 Revision and the Editing Process
Thu 10/26 Visiting Writer: Aamina Ahmad
Bring in drafts Arielle & Tabitha

Week Six
Tue 10/31 Workshops 3 & 4 bring in drafts Dillon & Ben
Thu 11/2 Workshops 5 & 6 bring in drafts Julien & Jesse

Week Seven
Tue 11/7 Workshops 7 & 8 bring in drafts Hannah & Jimmy
Thu 11/9 Workshops 9 & 10 bring in drafts Divya & Patricia

Week Eight
Tue 11/14 Workshops 11 & 12 Elizabeth & Dee Dee
Thu 11/16 Workshops 13 & 14 Ahmed &

NO CLASS on Tue 11/21 and Thu 11/23 (Thanksgiving Recess)

Week Nine
Tue 11/28 Workshops 15 & 16 Annie & Annalee
Thu 11/30 Lab Day: Revision

Week Ten
Tue 12/5 Visiting Writer TBA
Thu 12/7 End-of-Term Party