

English 3355: Fiction & Fiction Writing
 TuTh 12:30-1:45 | Academic Building 007
 Fall 2021



(Garfield minus Garfield)

Instructor : Dr. Rebecca Bernard (she/her/hers)

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Office Location: Academic Building 39C

Office Hours: MW: 1-3; T/R: 11-12; 2-4; or by appointment

(If these times do not work with your schedule, we can schedule an appointment on a day and at time convenient for both of us.)

COURSE GOALS & DESCRIPTION:

Fiction and Fiction Writing is designed to teach you what it means to be a writer of fiction, honing your skills through practice and experimentation as well as through close reading of exceptional writing. To this end, our class will work partly as:

- a seminar—we will read stories by some contemporary practitioners of the short form, discussing how the stories work (form) and how writers use basic elements of fiction (point of view, setting, character, etc.) to keep the reader turning the pages (craft). We will read widely both in terms of style and author so that you may gain a better sense of what is possible, and where your own tastes and predilections might lie.
- a workshop—you will write short stories and flash exercises in response to prompts as well as in response to the published works we read, simultaneously modeling effective use of craft and making it your own. At the same time, you will thoughtfully and constructively critique your classmates' work, keeping in mind the fundamentals of craft and doing your best to understand the writer's intent, so you might suggest ways they might more closely attain this aim.

The primary goal for this course is that you will gain an understanding of the ways in which short-fiction writers create art—and that this understanding, along with ample chances to practice, will help you write more effective stories of your own.

REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS:

- *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern
- Writing journal/notebook & pen/pencil.
- An ASU email account & access to Blackboard
- Course Reader: I will provide you a hardcopy, and any additional readings will be distributed in class and on Canvas

COURSE EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Over the course of the semester you will be graded on the following assignments/tasks:

Item	Points
Short Story 1	15
Short Story 2	15
Written Responses to Peer Work	20
Participation & Online Posts	20
Macro/micro exercises	10
Portfolio Revision	20

<i>Course Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	59% and below

Short Stories: For workshop you are expected to turn in two original short stories. Each story will have a specific prompt that we will discuss in class, though on your second workshop story there will be more leniency. Each story should be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, use Times New Roman or another basic font, size 12 font. Include your name and the title of the story on the first page. Number the pages. Everyone's stories will be due on the same day so as to ensure the time and concentration to prepare for workshop. Submit each story electronically as either a Word or a PDF file to me via Blackboard by the deadline. We will sign up for workshop times toward the beginning of each unit.

We will discuss at length what makes for effective short fiction, but as a general suggestion, I encourage you to strive for: originality, thoughtful sentences and word choice, characters and plot that you have a stake in, clean prose (typo-free), and the general idea that more is less (plot-wise, and otherwise), though we will spend some time breaking the rules as well. In the same vein, I ask that you avoid (or strongly consider avoiding) cliché, stereotypes, baseless vulgarity, violence that serves no narrative or artistic purpose, and turning in work that you don't care about. Additionally, we will spend a bit of time discussing 'genre' fiction, and why we often try to avoid this in workshop (as each genre has its own complex rules and guidelines). That being said, if you prefer genre (sci-fi, vampires, romance, etc.) these elements may absolutely appear in your work. I do not require anyone to write so called, 'realistic' fiction, and we will discuss things like fabulism and magical realism that allow for the unfamiliar in a literary setting.

Written Responses to Peer Work: The workshop experience is, in many ways, a privileged experience because you have (in our case) 20 individuals carefully reading your work. To this end, I ask that everyone acknowledge both the seriousness and the weight of this work, and to give one another the fair, unrushed and judicious reading that you would like your own work to receive. I ask that you **read each other's works twice**. First, all the way through, and then a second time to make line comments. The idea is that many comments you might make on a first read, will potentially be answered further down the page. See the arc of what the writer is attempting, prior to making any assumptions. As you make line notes, don't forget to underline or star things you like—encouragement is just as important as critique. In addition to the line notes, you will compose a **typed, minimum 250-word letter** for each story. We will discuss the content of these letters in class, but in general, you should use this as a chance to do three things: highlight one thing you liked, offer a one-sentence statement of what you believe the story was attempting, and highlight the most important issues the writer should address in revision. These issues might be questions you had, or confusions within the story. Frame everything diplomatically, but directly. **Do not critique one another's grammar.** Everyone needs to get used to critique, but no one needs to receive a mean takedown. Constructive criticism is our friend, more than blind praise, and more than apathy and snark. And, of course, it need not be comprehensive; you're offering your primary concerns, questions and praise. You will turn in a copy of the feedback letter to me as well via Blackboard.

I will provide you with hard copies of the stories to be workshopped in class. Some of you may be beginning writers and may feel uncomfortable critiquing the work of others at first. But even the most inexperienced writer can be instrumental in providing feedback—we are all readers, we have all read at least some fiction, and more importantly, we are all human beings with the ability to be moved, irritated, confused, delighted, and stunned. Your emotional and intellectual responses as people are valuable. (We'll discuss the workshop setting in more detail in the coming weeks.)

Macro exercises: In addition to the longer workshop stories, I want everyone to have the chance to experiment with shorter 'flash' pieces that will ask you to play with techniques and style we read in the published stories. These are a chance for you to play and discover, and I encourage you to have fun with these. Each week you will be given a specific prompt derived in part from our textbook with my own additions/spin. We will typically begin these on Thursdays, and then you will bring them to share on Tuesdays in small groups. You should bring in one printed copy (no more than 500 words on average), and you'll do small 'read-arounds' within your groups. You are welcome to turn these exercises into a longer workshop story, or they might become part of your final portfolio.

Micro exercises: These are mini exercises that we will complete during class time, that will ask you to experiment on the sentence or word-level. I will give these prompts in class, and then you'll have a short time to play around, experiment, maybe come up with a great first line or an image that takes you somewhere else.

Observed Moments: Part of being a successful writer, is being a close observer of the world around us. As we'll discuss throughout the semester, great fiction tends to come from great detail, and details, luckily, are all around us in our daily lives. When I refer to details, this could mean how a person's face moves as they speak, the tone and cadence of speech in different social situations, the natural world, the grocery store at different times of day, what it sounds like inside a car, the colors of the seats on the bus, the light at midday versus morning, the construction site by your house, day by day. This is part of the reason many writers carry around little notebooks in which to record these tiny observations. In this class, I want us to celebrate and pay attention to these observed moments, so I'll

make time each week to have something akin to a ‘show and tell’ where we can take a few minutes to share something we’ve witnessed, small, strange or everyday.

In-Class Participation & Posts: In our course, participation is crucial to both class discussion and workshop. In order to participate effectively you must come to class having carefully read the assigned readings (or workshop stories) and be prepared to share your thoughts, insights, critiques, joys, concerns, and so forth. A good discussion, like a good workshop, isn’t dominated by a few voices, but is an egalitarian conversation where everyone’s voice matters equally. Respect goes without saying, both of one another’s work, but also of the published works we read for class. To aid in our discussions, therefore, and to encourage everyone to read carefully, prior to each non-workshop class, I will ask you to post a brief response on our Canvas discussion board for the day. These will be **150-250-word posts** which cite an element of each story’s craft that you found interesting and why. What is this story doing? Something interesting with character? POV? Setting? Language? There aren’t wrong answers, but I want you thinking, and I want you reading. Additionally, for each story, I want everyone to underline/highlight a favorite sentence and be prepared to explain why. Alternately, you might underline a *least* favorite sentence, and again, be prepared to tell us why. I will check these posts for participation credit and occasionally respond.

Final Portfolio

As your final grade in this class, you will submit a portfolio comprised of one of the following:

1. A 500-word reflection on your revision/writing process and what you will take away from this course in terms of the fiction you produced and/or read AND
2. A **substantial** revision of one of your stories this semester OR
3. An expanded version of two or three of your “Macro” or “Micro” exercises (more details on this option forthcoming).

Revision is an integral part of the writing process, which I will explain in greater detail throughout the semester, but I have decided to offer the non-revision option because I also think true revision is an incredibly personal process that does not always work under the pressure of time constraints. Should you choose to revise, (which I do encourage) your revision should take into account both the critiques and workshop discussions of your classmates and my written and verbal comments, though what you ultimately decide to change should stay true to your vision.

GENERAL POLICIES FOR STUDENTS:

Absence & Tardiness Policy: Given the discussion-based focus of our course, attendance is crucial to success. I will keep track of attendance each class and missing more than three classes will begin to impact your grade. There is a clear connection between students attending class and doing well on assignments, so please make it your aim to be present. Life happens, I understand this, so keeping me aware of anything that might get in the way of your attendance or timely completion of assignments will help me help you. Three tardies counts as an absence. Consider attending class as a job, you want to be prepared and on time.

Class Behavior and Etiquette: I expect everyone to be respectful of one another’s work and time. Sharing one’s work is an exercise in trust, and we will act accordingly, both by reading each work carefully and by treating one another with dignity and respect. Defensiveness, close-mindedness, bigotry of any kind, and rudeness will not be tolerated. Listen to one another. We have all had different life experiences and we come from different backgrounds, therefore, even though you might believe your experiences are universal, they are in fact your experiences. We learn by listening critically, and

believing other's stories of their lives. In this class, we value empathy, the ability to understand and value/share the feelings of another.

Makeup/Late Assignment Policy: The main issue with late work is that I don't want anyone to fall behind, and I want you to be able to participate fully in the class discussions and in-class writing time. Consistent late work will affect your grade. If you're absent, check Blackboard. I post everything to Blackboard prior to the start of class, so there's never a reason not to know what took place during a session you missed. Most importantly, I'm a resource for you, so don't be shy about reaching out if you need more time or if something has come up in your life outside class.

Electronics: Please keep cellphones on silent and laptops closed during class time. This is a class focused around our ability to share ideas and work with one another and electronics will only impede said interaction. If you must, for some reason, have an electronic device, please make special provisions with me beforehand. If you need to have your cellphone on for emergency purposes, please keep it on vibrate and let me know if there are extenuating circumstances.

Email: Please check your ASU email regularly. This is how I will communicate with you. Please always email me from your school email and not your personal email. This is important for FERPA considerations.. Please also check Blackboard frequently. If you ever miss class, check Blackboard to see what we covered and what you might have missed.

Software: You will submit all homework and writing assignment responses through Blackboard. All assignments must be submitted in Microsoft Word format. You cannot upload links to Google Docs within Blackboard. As an ASU student, you have **free access** to [*Office 365*](#), which includes MS Word. Visit the Office 365 website and log in with your ASU email and password. You can download the software onto your computer or compose and save writing within the site's cloud-based storage. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to download some reading assignments and other course materials. Likewise, I encourage each of you to get in the habit of using One Drive (through Outlook) or GoogleDocs or DropBox, or any file sharing service so all your materials are available to you anywhere (helpful for our lab work days).

Technical Support: If you are having technical issues with Blackboard, contact technical support one of the following ways: 325-942-2911 or toll free at 1-866-942-2911

Any course content-related questions should be directed toward me.

Office Hours: I want to talk to you about your writing. Please, don't be shy and feel free to make an appointment to discuss your work with me at any point in the semester. If my scheduled hours don't work, please email me and we can set up a time to meet.

Conferences: Later in the semester, I will ask students to schedule conferences with me during a given week in this course. Conferences will be treated as class period and not showing up will count against your attendance.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Title IX: The University prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other types of Sexual Misconduct. Sexual Misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination including: sexual assault, sex-based discrimination, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, public indecency, interpersonal violence (domestic violence and/or dating violence), and stalking. As a faculty member, I am a Responsible Employee, meaning I am obligated by law and ASU policy to report any allegations I am notified of to the Office of Title IX Compliance.

Students are encouraged to report any incidents of sexual misconduct directly to ASU's Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator:

Michelle Miller, J.D.
 Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator
 Mayer Administration Building, Room 210
 325-486-6357
 michelle.miller@angelo.edu

You may also file a report online 24/7 at www.angelo.edu/incident-form.

If you wish to speak to someone about an incident in confidence, you may contact the University Health Clinic and Counseling Center at 325-942-2173 or the ASU Crisis Helpline at 325-486-6345.

For more information about Title IX in general, you may visit www.angelo.edu/title-ix.

Accommodation Statement: If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class or complete course requirements, contact the Student Affairs Office as soon as possible at 325-942-2047 or studentservices@angelo.edu. It is located in the Houston Harte University Center, Suite 112. To receive any academic accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Affairs. Student Affairs works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission.

Plagiarism Policy: Plagiarism is a type of academic dishonesty. It occurs when writers deliberately use another person's language, ideas, or materials and present them as their own without properly acknowledging the source.

Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism can include any of the following:

- Failing to quote material taken from another source,
- Failing to cite material taken from another source,
- Submitting writing that was written by another person *or for another class* (even if it was for a 1301 course you took and dropped), and
- Submitting writing that was substantially edited by another person.

Procedures for Handling Plagiarism Cases

If an instructor thinks a student may have plagiarized, they will follow these steps:

- Meet privately with the student to discuss the assignment in question and the evidence of plagiarism,
- Identify the appropriate consequence, and
- File a report with the Office of Student Services.

Possible Consequences

The instructor and the English Department Chair decide the academic consequence to be imposed, depending on the seriousness of the violation. Sanctions include the following:

- Adequately redo or revise the assignment in question,
- Fail the assignment in question,
- Fail the class, or
- Be subject to more severe sanctions imposed by the Dean of Students.

All students suspected of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Services, who maintains a file of past plagiarism cases. The [ASU Student Handbook](#) further elaborates ASU's Academic Integrity policy.

Observances of Religious Holidays: A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within what the instructor deems a reasonable time after the absence.

Writing Center Information: The Writing Center is an academic support service available to all ASU students. Peer tutors help experienced and inexperienced writers with all steps of the writing process: locating an angle, writing a thesis, organizing ideas, developing paragraphs, locating grammar and punctuation errors, documenting sources, etc.; however, tutors ***do not edit or proofread papers***. To learn more about their services, visit the Writing Center's [website](#).

CLASS SCHEDULE
(Subject to change)

(The reading indicated is what is due that day and what we will be discussing in class. *MSF*= *Making Shapely Fiction*. Stories are available on Blackboard or copies will be distributed in class)

Week	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Assignments Due
Week 1	Tuesday Aug. 24	Syllabus & Introductions & Bones of a Story	"Stories" by John Edgar Wideman	
	Thursday Aug. 26	Details	<i>MSF</i> : "Accuracy," "Immediacy," "Write What You Know," "Premise" Stories: "Bullet in the Brain" Tobias Wolff; "The Rememberer" by Aimee Bender	
Week 2	Tuesday Aug. 31	Point of View	<i>MSF</i> : "Façade," "Point of View," "Narration" Stories: "Audition" by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh; "Little Things" by Raymond Carver	
	Thursday Sept. 2	Beginnings	<i>MSF</i> : "Psychic Distance," "Trauma," "Exposition" Story: "Waugh" by Bryan Washington;	
Week 3	Tuesday Sept. 7	Dialogue	<i>MSF</i> : "Dialogue," "Iceberg" Stories: "Great Kills" by Claire Jimenez	
	Thursday Sept. 9	Plot and Scene	<i>MSF</i> : "Showing and telling," "Plot," "Juggling," "Ambiguity," "Endings" Stories: "Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman" by Haruki Murakami; "Fly Away" by Etgar Keret	
Week 4	Tuesday Sept. 14	Bad Guys	<i>MSF</i> : "Transitions," "Anti-hero," "Specimen" Story: "The Other Place" by Mary Gaitskill	
	Thursday Sept. 16	Workshop Prep	<i>MSF</i> : "Character," "Description," "Workshop," "Aha" Story: "Never Marry a Mexican" by Sandra Cisneros	Short Story 1 due by Wednesday Sept. 15th by Noon via Blackboard
Week 5	Tuesday Sept. 21	Short Story Workshop	Student stories	
	Thursday Sept. 23	Short Story Workshop	Student stories	

Week 6	Tuesday Sept. 28	Short Story Workshop	Student stories	
	Thursday Sept. 30	Short Story Workshop	Student stories	
Week 7	Tuesday Oct. 5	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	
	Thursday Oct. 7	Rule Breaking	<i>MSF</i> : “Don’t Do This,” “Coincidences,” Story: “Wild Swans” by Alice Munro;	
Week 8	Tuesday Oct. 12	The Uncanny	<i>MSF</i> : “Style,” “Blue moon,” Story: “The Stone” by Louise Erdrich	
	Thursday Oct. 14	Imagery	<i>MSF</i> : “Motif,” “Imagery,” “Metaphor” Stories: “Emergency” by Denis Johnson; “You are Now Entering the Human Heart” by Janet Frame	
Week 9	Tuesday Oct. 19	The Smoking Gun	<i>MSF</i> : “Bathos” “Explosion”; Story: “Whose Heart I Long to Stop with the Click of a Revolver” by Rivers Solomon;	
	Thursday Oct. 21	The Collective Voice	<i>MSF</i> : “Bear at the Door,” Story: “Erasure” by Sakinah Hofler	
Week 10	Tuesday Oct. 26	The Voice & Stream of Consciousness	<i>MSF</i> : “Stream of Consciousness,” “Interior monologue” Stories: “Minor Key” by Leonora Desar; “Ordering Fries at Happy Hour” by Christopher Gonzalez;	
	Thursday Oct. 28	Voiced Narration	<i>MSF</i> : “Flashbacks”; Story: “Heads of the Colored People” by Nafissa Thompson-Spires	
Week 11	Tuesday Nov. 2	Stories in Form	<i>MSF</i> : “Parable” Stories: “Two Men Arrive in a Village” by Zadie Smith; “Inventory” by Carmen Maria Machado	Short Story 2 due by Wednesday, Nov. 3 at Noon via Blackboard
	Thursday Nov. 4	Multiple Points of View	“Victory Lap” by George Saunders	
Week 12	Tuesday Nov. 9	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	

	Thursday Nov. 11	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	
Week 13	Tuesday Nov. 16	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	
	Thursday Nov. 18	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	
Week 14	Tuesday Nov. 23	Short Story Workshop	Student Stories	
	Thursday Nov. 25	THANKSGIVING		
Week 15	Tuesday Nov. 30	Revision	TBD	
	Thursday Dec. 2	Wordplay	Readings from Student Stories	
Week 16				Final Portfolio Due through Blackboard on Dec. 7th by 11:59pm

*Final Exam Scheduled Thursday, December 9th 10:30AM-12:30PM (we will not meet).