

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
English 71, Introduction to Creative Writing, Section 5, Fall 2015

(This syllabus can be found online: www.sjsu.edu/english/ENGLgreensheets/index.html)

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Office Hours:	Monday 1:15-2:15 and By Appointment
Class Days/Time:	M/W 12-1:15
Classroom:	Clark Building 306

Course Description

English 71, Introduction to Creative Writing, is a 3-unit lower-division course designed and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San Jose State University in accordance with the University's General Education Program to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the "C2" Letters area of Humanities & the Arts.

This course will introduce students to the craft of creative writing in three genres: poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction. We will study the works of published authors and discuss their creative choices and modes of execution. Students will learn the fundamentals of craft through completing exercises, in-class writings, and an original creative project in each genre. Writing workshops will introduce students to the process of reading and critiquing the work of their peers. Writing workshops will also provide students with invaluable feedback that will help them revise their own work.

Departmental Student Learning Objectives

The Department of English and Comparative Literature has established the following Student Learning Objectives (SLO): Students will demonstrate the ability to 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric; 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature; 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject; 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Required Texts/Materials

Creative Writing: Four Genres in Brief (Second Edition Only)

Print ISBN: 9781457611568, Available at the Spartan Bookstore

Additional readings will be distributed through email

Other equipment / material requirements

Folder for in-class handouts

Binder paper or notebook for in-class writing assignments

Stapler for all assignments

Classroom Protocol

With Regards to Personal Writing

This class is meant to be a safe and supportive environment in which students can share writing of a personal nature without fear of judgment or that what they reveal will be repeated outside the class. All discussions will be conducted respectfully. When reading poetry or personal essays, you are welcome to criticize the technique, but not the actions or emotions described; your own emotional response is important and valid, as long as it is a response to the story, not the storyteller. When reading fiction, on the other hand, you must not make the assumption that a story is based on the writer's life. Please do not repeat any personal information from a classmate's writing outside of the classroom.

With Regards to Workshops

The goal of a workshop is to allow you to see and experience your work through the eyes of a reader. By understanding how readers have responded to what you've written, you will have a better sense of how well you've accomplished your goals and what aspects of the work you need to rethink, clarify, enhance, or eliminate. Workshops are not an occasion for either flattery or ridicule.

As readers and workshop participants, our job is to describe our experience of reading the work, and to point to specific aspects of the writing that have created that experience. We're not here to say whether we "liked" a piece or not, whether it's "good" or "bad" only to help the writer see it more clearly.

You are expected to read all the work turned in to your group to read it carefully, ideally twice, and to make notes on the manuscript that will help the writer understand your experience. You are expected to come to class prepared to articulate that experience in specific terms, to answer the writer's questions, and to contribute to the improvement of your classmates' writing.

Submitting work to a group of your peers can be scary. My hope is that we will form a community in which we are all supporting each other in our goals to improve our writing, and that this support will make workshops less scary, even when hearing constructive

criticisms of what you've written. Be open minded. Don't take it personally. Think of the workshop as a gift: an opportunity to see what you've written through someone else's eyes.

What Is “Literary Fiction”?

The focus of the fiction module is fiction written about real people in believable situations, and about the emotions, desires, and conflicts that drive those people and create those situations. As David Starkey writes, literary fiction values uncertainty—“the possibility that a character or situation can be interpreted in more than a single way.”

To that end this class will not explore genre fiction, such as romance, fantasy, sci-fi, and the like, which often requires writers to adhere to certain conventions, such as good triumphing over evil. Instead you will write and submit works of literary fiction, which will provide you with useful tools for tackling any genre writing you choose to explore outside of class.

Attendance

Regular attendance is mandatory. If you must miss a class, be sure to communicate with a classmate to find out what you missed and to get copies of handouts. You must come to class on time with all required materials. Chronic lateness or failure to have required materials will affect your grade.

Electronics

Cell phones must be turned off and out of sight. The use of laptop computers is permitted for course-related tasks only. Students found to be engaged in other tasks may lose the privilege of using their laptops in class.

Plagiarism

At SJSU, plagiarism is defined as “the act of representing the work of another as one's own (without giving appropriate credit) regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements.” Plagiarism is a serious academic infringement and can result in failure of the course or even dismissal from SJSU.

University Policies

You are responsible for reading the SJSU academic policies available online (<http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html>). Academic Integrity Policy (<http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/integrity.html>); Add/Drop Deadlines (http://www.sjsu.edu/provost/services/academic_calendars/index.html); Late Drop Policy (<http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/policies/latedrops/policy>). Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please see me as soon as possible. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the AEC (<http://www.sjsu.edu/aec/>) to establish a record of their disability.

Course Requirements and Grading

Participation (20%) (SLO 1, 3, 5)

A creative writing class is a community that depends upon the input, effort, and candor of all members. Please come to class on time, having done all assigned reading and prepared to discuss it. Your opinions are welcome here, as is your dissent—provided both are offered in a spirit of respect and support for the hard work of your classmates. Your participation grade also includes your written comments on your classmates' work.

Short Writing Exercises (10%) (SLO 1-3, 5)

Throughout the semester, you will complete a number of exercises to practice various literary techniques and to help you get started on your creative projects.

Literary Events (5%) (SLO 2, 3, 5)

Please attend two literary events during the semester and write a one-page reflection on each event. (See Resources for Literary Event Schedules below).

Creative Projects (45%) (SLO 1-4)

- Poetry: 4 poems, one of which must be formal
- Nonfiction: a personal essay of 6-8 pages
- Fiction: a complete short story of 6-8 pages

Revision Project (15%) (SLO 1-3)

At the end of the semester, you will turn in an in-depth revision of either your nonfiction or fiction creative project. Revisions must demonstrate a rethinking of the project and substantial rewriting, not just line editing and proofreading.

Final Reading (5%)

During our final exam period, students will give a short reading excerpted from one creative project of their choice.

Resources for Literary Event Schedules:

- www.litart.org (Center for Literary Arts at SJSU)
- www.pcsj.org (Poetry Center San Jose)
- www.livesv.com/categories/index/6/0/LITERATURE (Bay Area Literary Events)

Written Assignments

All prose assignments handed in should be typed 12 pt. font and double-spaced, with one-inch-margins, page numbers, and MLA header. Poetry is single-spaced (double-spaced between stanzas). Please only print on one side of the page. Multi-page assignments must be stapled. Buy a stapler!

Workshop Procedures

A significant part of this class is conducted in workshop format. Poetry workshops will be conducted in small groups of 5. You will workshop all 4 of your poems in your small groups. Prose workshops will be conducted as an entire class. You will have the opportunity to workshop one prose piece (either nonfiction or fiction). To that end, you must provide **hard copies** of your poems and prose for discussion **1 meeting before the date of your workshop**. Failure to distribute your poem or prose narrative on time will result in losing your turn. You must arrive on time for workshop.

After carefully reading your peers' work at home, you should critique the work through margin comments as well as an endnote (either handwritten or typed). I will collect your critiques from time to time.

Late Work

Late work receives a reduction of 1 grade if turned in by the next class session. Anything later will be graded an "F". If you cannot make it to class on the day something is due, ask a classmate to turn it in for you (and to collect handouts and assignments.) I do not accept work by email.

English Department Grading Statement

In English Department courses, instructors comment on and grade the quality of writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All your writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's individual interpretation, can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, rhythm; also meter, rhyme, and other elements of poetic style and form. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

English 71, Fall 2015, Course Schedule

*Subject to change with advance notice from me given in class and by follow-up email.
Check your email daily.*

Week One:

Mon 8/24 Introduction and Course Guidelines
Robert Cohen's Sentence Exercise
"Self-Portrait" by Adam Zagajewski, Linda Pastan, Edward Hirsch

Weds 8/26 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, "Basketball," p 71, "Postcard from Kashmir," p 72, "Repulse Bay," p 74–75

Writing and Critiquing Poetry

Due in class: "Self-Portrait" poem (5 copies)

Week Two:

Mon 8/31 "Self-Portrait" Poetry Workshop
Due in class: Workshop Comments

Weds 9/2 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, pp 20–30

The Short Poem

Week Three:

Mon 9/7 NO CLASS—LABOR DAY

Weds 9/9 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, pp 38–42, and "I Feel Sorry for Jesus," p 85, "The Game," p 87, and, "Short Ends," p 90

The Narrative Poem

Meter and Rhythm

Due in class: Short Poem (5 copies)

Week Four:

Mon 9/14 Short Poem Workshop
Due in Class: Narrative Poem (5 copies) and Workshop Comments

Weds 9/16 Reading: **David Starkey**, *Creative Writing*, pp 42–54
Narrative Poem Workshop
Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Week Five:

Mon 9/21 Reading: **David Starkey**, *Creative Writing*, pp 55-64
Formal Poems: Villanelle, Sestina, Pantoum, Sonnet

Weds 9/23 Reading: **Additional Formal Poems**, emailed PDF (*Print out and bring to class, or access on your laptop/ipad (no phones). If using e-copy, you must be able to annotate the PDF.
Formal Poems Continued

Week Six:

Mon 9/28 No Reading. Start revising poems for Creative Project 1
How to Revise a Poem (**Bring 3 earlier poems to class**)
Looking Ahead to Creative Nonfiction, Fiction Modules
Due in Class: Formal Poem (5 copies)

Weds 9/30 No Reading. Continue revising poems for Creative Project 1
Formal Poem Workshop
Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Week Seven:

Mon 10/5 Reading: **David Starkey**, *Creative Writing*, pp 175–189
Creative Nonfiction: Finding Your Topic
Due in Class: 4 Revised Poems

Weds 10/7 Reading: **David Starkey**, *Creative Writing*, pp 190–199 and “Westbury Court,” pp 217–220
In-class Writing Exercise: Setting the Scene

Week Eight:

Mon 10/12 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, pp 200-209 and “My Papa’s Waltz,” pp 215–217

In-class Writing Exercise

Due in Class: Setting the Scene Exercise

Weds 10/14 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, “In the Dark,” pp 223–225, “The Witching Hour,” pp 227–231 and “Dreads,” pp 231-232

In-class Writing Exercise

Week Nine:

Mon 10/19 Reading: Patricia Hampl, “Memory and Imagination,” emailed PDF*

Effective Workshop Techniques

Due in Class: Creative Non-fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from half of group 3

Weds 10/21 Nonfiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Creative Non-fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from members of group 4

Week Ten:

Mon 10/26 Nonfiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Creative Non-fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

Weds 10/28 Nonfiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Creative Non-fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from group 5

Week Eleven:

Mon 11/2 Nonfiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Weds 11/4 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, pp 116–132, “Marzipan,” pp 107–108, and “Symphony,” pp 161–163

Intro to Short Fiction

On Characters, Dialogue, and Scene

In-class Writing Exercise: Characterization

Week Twelve:

Mon 11/9 Reading: David Starkey, *Creative Writing*, pp 133–140, “Popular Mechanics,” pp 155–158, “Doves,” pp 158–163. And “Girl,” pp 163–164

On Point-of-view, Tone, and Style

In-class Writing Exercise: Opening Lines

Due in class: Characterization Exercise

Weds 11/11 NO CLASS—VETERAN’S DAY

Week Thirteen:

Mon 11/16 Reading: Tim O’Brien, “The Things They Carried,” emailed PDF*

In-class Writing Exercise

Due in Class: Five Opening Lines

Weds 11/18 Reading: Lorrie Moore, “How to Become a Writer,” emailed PDF*

In-class Writing Exercise

Effective Workshop Techniques

Due in Class: Short Fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from members of group 1

Week Fourteen:

Mon 11/23 Short Fiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Short Fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from members of group 2

Weds 11/25 Short Fiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Short Fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

+ 1 copy of manuscript from remaining members of group 3

Week Fifteen:

Mon 11/30 Short Fiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Short Fiction Manuscript (26 copies) from

Weds 12/2 Short Fiction Workshop

Due in Class: Workshop Comments

Week Sixteen:

Mon 12/7 Effective Revision Techniques

On Performing Your Work

Week Seventeen: Final Exam Period

Thurs 12/10, 9:45-12 Class Reading

Due in Class: Revised Fiction/Nonfiction Creative Project, stapled or paper-clipped to original draft.