

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 71, Intro to Creative Writing
Spring 2016

Instructor: Nick Taylor
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Office Hours: Mon/Weds 2:00pm - 3:00pm and by appointment.
Class Days/Time: Mon/Weds 9:00am - 10:15am
Classroom: Clark 306

Course Description

Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course offered in accordance with the University's General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts (Area C2).

In this course we will read, discuss, and write poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. The course will be taught using a combination of discussion and writing workshops. In the discussion, published works of creative writing will be read closely and analyzed. In the writing workshops, creative work by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision.

Student Learning Objectives

SLO 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.

SLO 3 - Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

Required Texts

- Handler, Daniel, ed. *Best American Nonrequired Reading 2014*.
- *Reed Magazine*, Volume 68 (2015 edition). *Reed* is the campus literary journal and will be available to purchase in class from a *Reed* staff member.
- Photocopied poetry handout

Writing Assignments

Poetry

- A self-portrait poem
- A poem containing sensory images and concrete details
- A metaphor poem (also known as a "conceit" poem)
- A villanelle

Fiction

- Character sketch (2pp)
- Scene (2-4pp)
- Short story (4-10pp)

Creative Nonfiction

- Memoir/personal essay (2-4pp)
- Work essay (2-4pp)
- Travel essay (2-4pp)

Final Portfolio

- Revised versions of all writing assignments
- Responses to attendance at two Bay Area literary readings

Assignment Format

All material handed in should be **typed and double-spaced with page numbers**. Multi-page assignments must be **stapled**. Your name, the assignment title, and the date should be included at the top of the first page.

Attending Readings / Lectures

You are required to attend **two readings** by poets or prose writers presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions, where seven days a week one can attend a reading by a renowned writer at a bookstore, college, community center, or library. Readings are listed in the Sunday editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro*. After attending each reading, you will write a brief response (1-2pp) to include in your final portfolio. You may respond to any aspect of the reading, for example the speaker, the venue, the material performed, or the Q&A with the audience.

Here are some of the readings being offered on campus this semester:

Weds, February 10, 7:00pm, MLK 225/229

Ann Packer (fiction) reading and booksigning

Tues, March 8, 7:00pm, MLK 225/229

Cristina Garcia (fiction) reading and booksigning

Weds, April 6, 7:00pm, MLK 225/229

Andre Dubus III (fiction) reading and booksigning

Thurs, April 7, 1:30pm, MLK 225/229

Andre Dubus III (fiction) in conversation with Cathleen Miller

Weds, April 13, 7:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)

Steinbeck Fellows reading with Candace Eros Diaz (fiction), Jennie Lin (fiction), Gabriel Thompson (nonfiction)

Thurs, May 5, 5:00pm, location TBA

U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera reading and booksigning

Monday, May 9, 7:00pm, MLK 225/229

Paul Douglass and Julia Markus (nonfiction) reading and booksigning

Extra Credit Assignments

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more fiction readings and write responses to include in your final portfolio.

Class Workshop Procedures

For each unit (poetry, fiction, nonfiction) I will divide the class into four groups of approximately six students each. Your workshop group will consist of different students each unit, so you will get to read work by all of your classmates. Every time you turn in a piece of writing, you will bring enough copies for everyone in your workshop group *and* your teacher *and* yourself (eight copies, usually). We will critique the pieces at home (writing directly on the manuscripts) and discuss them in workshop groups during the following class period. At the end of the discussion, you will get to keep the seven or so marked-up copies of your work.

So what do you comment on? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story, poem, or essay. What's your interpretation of it? If the piece were in the textbook, what would you say about it? This helps the writer understand what came across and what didn't. The second responsibility is to suggest avenues for improvement. How can the writer make this story better? Often this requires putting yourself in the writer's shoes. Remember that you can help a fellow writer with thoughtful commentary even if you would not have chosen the same topic or style in your own work.

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated.

Grading

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops and class discussions.

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's individual subjectivity, 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.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

- Poetry 20%
- Non-fiction 20%
- Fiction 20%
- Final Portfolio (incl. literary events) 20%
- Class participation (incl. reading quizzes) 20%

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.

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.

Schedule and Assignments

This class meets every Monday and Wednesday, starting on Monday, February 1. The last class is Monday, May 16. Class will not be held on March 28 or 30 (SJSU Spring Recess). There is no final exam. Instead, on the last day of class, you will submit a final portfolio.

Reading assignments meet SLO #1, writing assignments SLO #3.

Reed = *Reed Magazine 2015*

BANRR = *Best American Nonrequired Reading 2014*

Handout = Photocopied poetry handout

Mon, Feb 1

Topic

Introduction; still write

Wed, Feb 3

Topic

Self portrait poems

Reading Due

Adam Zagajewski, "Self Portrait" (Handout)

Linda Pastan, "Self Portrait" (Handout)

Mon, Feb 8

Writing Due

Self portrait poem

Topic

Sensory images and concrete details

Reading Due

Lucie Brock-Broido, "Two Poems" (*BANRR* 181)

Ali Liebegott, "Shift #6" (*BANRR* 197)

Matthew Dickman, "Sidewalk Poem" (*BANRR* 86)

Kyle G. Dargan, "The Robots Are Coming" (*BANRR* 134)

Wed, Feb 10

Topic

Workshop self portrait poems

Mon, Feb 15

Topic

More on sensory images and concrete details

Reading Due

Mary Elizabeth Parker, "Jar on an Island Not in Tennessee" (*Reed* 99)

Sandra Chavez Johnson, "The Steps of Self-Exam" (*Reed* 103)

Valentina Cano, "Yellow" (*Reed* 108)

Wed, Feb 17

Writing Due

Imagery poem

Topic

Metaphor or Conceit Poems

Reading Due

John McKernan, "A Ninety Three Year Old Woman Was Run Over..." (*Reed* 100)

Robert Black, "Er!kah92" (*Reed* 111)

Emily Dickinson, "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" (Handout)

Marsha de la O, "Under the Lemon Tree" (Handout)

Mon, Feb 22

Topic

Workshop imagery poem; more on metaphor poems

Reading Due

Rae Armantrout, "Exit Row" (Handout)

Sandra M. Castillo, "Letter to Yeni on Peering into Her Life" (Handout)

Billy Collins, "Litany" (Handout)

Wed, Feb 24

Writing Due

Conceit poem

Topic

Structured poetry; the villanelle

Reading Due

"Poetic Form: Villanelle" (Handout)

Dylan Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night" (Handout)

Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" (Handout)

Mon, Feb 29

Topic

Workshop conceit poem; more on villanelle

Reading Due

Sylvia Plath, "Mad Girl's Love Song" (Handout)
Dan Lechay, "Ghost Villanelle" (Handout)

Wed, Mar 2

Writing Due

Villanelle

Topic

FICTION UNIT BEGINS; listen to "Healthy Start" by Etgar Keret

Mon, Mar 7

Topic

Workshop villanelle; elements of narrative; character

Reading Due

Adam Johnson, "Nirvana" (*BANRR* 326)

Wed, Mar 9

Topic

More on character

Reading Due

Allison Grace Myers, "Conditions" (*Reed* 3)
Karen Pullen, "Side Effects" (*Reed* 23)

Mon, Mar 14

Writing Due

Character sketch

Topic

Conflict and scene

Reading Due

Louise Marburg, "The Narrow Rim" (*Reed* 53)

Wed, Mar 16

Topic

Workshop character sketch; more on conflict

Reading Due

Amoz Oz, "Two Women" (*BANRR* 88)

Mon, Mar 21

Writing Due

Scene

Topic

Point of View

Reading Due

Andrew Foster Altschul, "Embarazada" (*BANRR* 136)

Wed, Mar 23

Topic

Workshop scene; setting; working with material

Reading Due

V.V. Ganeshanathan, "K Becomes K" (*BANRR* 287)

Michael Erickson, "Snow Geese" (*Reed* 32)

Mon, Mar 28

No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Wed, Mar 30

No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Mon, Apr 4

Writing Due

Short story

Topic

NONFICTION UNIT BEGINS; listen to David Sedaris, "Santaland Diaries"

Wed, Apr 6

Topic

Workshop short story

Mon, Apr 11

Topic

Memoir / personal essays

Reading Due

Joshua Davis, "Just a Race" (*Reed* 150)

Doan-Trang Nguyen, "Suitcase Full of Dresses" (*Reed* 141)

Wed, Apr 13

Topic

More on memoir

Reading Due

Andrew Lam, "Dear TC" (*Reed* 192)

Maia Morgan, "The Saltwater Twin" (*BANRR* 317)

Mon, Apr 18

Writing Due

Memoir/personal essay

Topic

Writing about work

Reading Due

Karen Maner, "Hugo" (*BANRR* 44)

Wed, Apr 20

Topic

Workshop memoir; discuss work essay assignment

Mon, Apr 25

Writing Due

Work essay

Topic

Travel writing

Reading Due

Tom Pyun, "Seven Pills" (*Reed* 162)

Janine di Giovanni, "Seven Days in Syria" (only section 1, "Hossam," *BANRR* 94-99)

Wed, Apr 27

Topic

Workshop work essay; discuss travel essay assignment

Mon, May 2

Writing Due

Travel essay

Topic

Hybrid forms

Reading Due

Beth Roddy, "Single Worst Book" (*Reed* 133)

Yumi Sakugawa, "Have Cake and Tea with Your Demons" (*BANRR* 216)

Wed, May 4

Topic

Workshop travel essay

Mon, May 9

Topic

Revision and submitting work for publication; discuss final portfolio

Wed, May 11

Topic

Profile

Reading Due

Nathaniel Rich, “The Man Who Saves You from Yourself” (*BANRR* 21)

Mon, May 16

Writing Due

Final portfolio

Academic Honesty

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy, requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The Policy on academic integrity can be found at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else’s words or ideas and is considered an instance of academic dishonesty that instructors must report. You commit plagiarism by:

- buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper (or story)
- hiring someone to write a paper (or story)
- building on someone’s ideas without providing a citation
- copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing

In other words, **submit only your own work.**

Peer Connections

Peer Connections is an on-campus center that provides peer tutoring for San José State University students. They offer assistance with writing, and if you feel you need intensive help beyond what I can provide during office hours, please request a writing tutor. Peer Connections has two locations on SJSU's main campus: in the Student Services Center (SSC) 600, on the corner of 10th and San Fernando (inside the 10th Street parking garage building), and in the Academic Success Center in Clark Hall, on the first floor next to the Computer Lab.

Disabilities Policy

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 make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.