

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature English 71,
Introduction to Creative Writing,
Section 6, spring 2016

“Let’s Get Weird”:
Pushing the Boundaries of What We *Think* Creative Writing Can Do

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Office Hours:	Tues. 2-3pm; Weds. 12:15-1:15pm; Fri. by appointment
Class Days/Time:	M/W 1:30-2:45pm
Classroom:	BBC 123
GE Category:	Letters area of Humanities & the Arts

Canvas Access and MySJSU Messaging

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, and assignment instructions can be found on the Canvas learning management system course website. You are responsible for accessing the site to learn of any updates, announcements, or new materials. Access to “Writer’s Help,” a comprehensive writing and style guide on Canvas, is mandatory. Please ensure that the email address linked to your MySJSU account is the one you check regularly.

ENGL 71 General Course Description

Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course designed, adopted, implemented, and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San Jose State University in accordance with the University’s General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts. Also note that this course is an elective in the English major and Creative Writing minor. It is a prerequisite for taking upper division Creative Writing workshops.

In this course, we will read, discuss, and write poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction. The course will be taught using a combination of reading, discussion, written responses, and, most importantly, writing workshops. In class discussions, contemporary and historical published works will be closely read and analyzed to

assess the technique and craft of each writer. In our writing workshops, creative work written by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision. Students will provide written responses to each workshop piece; these responses should display analytical acumen, personal sensibility, and serious engagement with the text.

Prerequisites: I recommend at minimum the completion of English 1A or equivalent. Excellent composition skills are the basis for any creative writing—you have to know the rules of writing before you can break them.

Section-Specific Course Description: The Fun Stuff

This is not your mother's creative writing class. In each genre we cover (fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction), you will be encouraged to leave your comfort zone behind and experiment as much as possible. This means no sob stories about break-ups, no zombie apocalypses (apocoli?), no formless poems about trees. It's been done. Not to say you can't write any of these in experimental ways and make them new, but usually these common (dare I say, boring) modes don't challenge us as writers. The goal of this course is to get you to write things you never thought you would tackle. I want your writing to get weird. Be experimental. Throw ideas at the page and see what sticks. Don't be weird for weirdness's sake, or course, but push yourself. That could mean incorporating magical realism or a formal conceit into a short story, or writing a nonfiction piece like a novel, or experimenting with formal poetry in interesting ways. In a word (or three): **try something new.**

College is the time you *should* experiment, not just with you want to do with your life, but with your writing as well. Our class is a safe, no-risk environment to try something you didn't think you could pull off. And if you don't pull it off the first time, *we will help you* make it better. The secondary texts I have selected do experimental things with fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. These are meant to inspire you (as well as give us a chance to discuss craft and technique), but you don't have to emulate them. Remember: as writers, we create worlds on the page. With that kind of magic, why stick to what you already know?

Departmental Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, 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, and/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 the 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: ALL texts and materials listed are required for class participation. If reading is assigned for a particular text, you must bring that text to class. Our course texts will comprise traditional books on craft as well as popular fiction/nonfiction/poetry. Most of these are readily available at any bookstore (or as e-books to keep costs down).

**A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Jennifer Egan)

**On Writing* (Stephen King)

The Poet's Companion (Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux)

Eunoia (Christian Bok)

Devil in the White City (Eric Larsen)

Story Craft (Jack Hart)

Course reader (compiled by us; posted on Canvas) by week 2

***Please get these two books immediately as well will begin them very soon. Both are readily available at any bookstore.**

Other equipment/material requirements:

- 1 journal for writing exercises (separate from journals for other classes, please)
- Stapler: **All work stapled before class**
- Regular internet access
- The ability to print 8-10 copies of assignments for workshop

Classroom Protocol

Participation: Participation is essential to active learning and to the learning process in general. Participation includes but is not limited to being engaged in small and large group discussions, bringing materials to class, focusing on the task at hand instead of, for example, other classes or your phone, and essentially contributing to the learning process of our discussion-style classroom. In-class participation will make up a substantial portion of your grade. Your journal and any written homework assigned will be counted as part of your overall participation score; if you do not do the homework or complete in-class journal exercises, it will significantly affect your grade.

Workshop materials: Please **NUMBER ALL PAGES** in each submission and **ALWAYS DOUBLE SPACE**. Make sure you print enough copies for everyone in your workshop group. We will only workshop hard copies—do not expect me or classmates to comment on your computer screen if you forget your manuscripts. Please do not turn in sloppy writing; I expect proofreading, proper quote set-up, etc.

Sensitivity: Writing is a sensitive, personal process. I expect all class members to keep this in mind when offering constructive criticism. Be respectful and kind if you are commenting on another's piece, no matter the content of your critique, and avoid defensiveness when your own piece is being workshopped. If anyone crosses a line, I will gently point this out.

General behavior: We're all adults here, so please act as such. Don't arrive late or leave early, put away all electronics unless you are accessing a course text, and keep me informed of all extenuating circumstances. I am will to work with you to an extent if you must miss class, but you must speak with me in advance to arrange an alternative assignment.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Writing and workshop protocol: Each student will submit and revise a selection of **new** writing for each genre. For each unit, the class will divide into groups of approximately five students each. These will serve as your workshop groups. Your workshop group will consist of different students for each unit, so you will get to read work by all of your classmates. Every time you turn in a piece of your work, you will bring enough copies for everyone in your workshop group *and* your teacher *and* yourself (six 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 marked-up copies of your work. I have **zero tolerance** for late arrival to workshop; you will be asked to leave.

For each workshopped piece, you must write in-depth commentary on your classmate's manuscript and a one-page response letter in which you address big-picture ideas for the piece. **You will bring two copies of each letter to class: one for your classmate, and one for me.** These responses will inform your participation grade.

Assignments:

Fiction

- 1) Flash fiction (under 500 words)
- 2) Setting-as-character sketch (3-4 pgs.)
- 3) Formal conceit (5-10 pgs.)

Poetry:

- 1) Prose poem
- 2) Ghazal
- 3) Free choice of style

Creative nonfiction

- 1) Profile (2-4 pgs.)
- 2) Investigation (2-4 pgs.)
- 3) Sense of place (2-4 pgs.)

Reading/Discuss facilitation: Each student will be required to bring a short story, short piece of creative nonfiction, or poems (2-3) to our second class meeting. I will provide a sign-up sheet on the first day of class. You will be responsible for presenting your contribution as it related to our assigned reading for that class meeting. A schedule will be provided in week 2. **Submit something that is off the beaten path** (except for

“The Road Not Taken”—I love that poem, but we’ve all read it plenty of times). Choose a piece that is curious or quirky in some way, something that reflects the spirit of this section of Engl. 71. It doesn’t have to be unheard of or over-the-top experimental, but find a piece that can teach us something new.

Journal: You are required to keep a well-organized journal/notebook in which you will do assigned creative writing activities inside and outside class. You will also record your responses to the assigned readings here. You are urged to write down quotes and ideas from your readings that you may want to share with your classmates. You can also use your journal to develop drafts of new material or simply to react to what is working in your imagination as you respond to ideas and work presented by others in the course. Your notebook is due as indicated on the schedule. **You will be graded on the quality and quantity of your entries. (SLO #1, 2, 3, 5)**

Literary Event Response Papers: You must attend two literary events this semester on or off campus. Write a two-page paper that focuses on your response to each event and correlation to what you’ve learned in class: What did you like and why? What did you learn? What surprised you and why? What did you find interesting and why? What questions did it raise? How did the event speak to our course topics or your own writing? What new ideas did you get? At the top left of your paper list the title of the event, and the day, time and location. **(SLO #1, 3, 5)**

RESOURCES FOR LITERARY EVENT SCHEDULES:

- www.litart.org (Center for Literary Arts at SJSU)
- <http://www.pcsj.org/calendar.html> (Poetry Center San Jose)
- <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/events> (English Department Events listed)
- <http://www.livesv.com/categories/index/6/0/LITERATURE> Bay Area Literary Events
- <http://www.keplers.com/premier-events> Kepler’s Bookstore, Menlo Park
- <http://poetryflash.org/> Northern CA literary events including the Bay Area

Reading your work: Each student will give an in-class performance/reading from their final portfolio at the end of the semester. During our poetry unit, students much also choose a published poem to memorize and recite for the class. **(SLO #1, 2)**

Extra Credit: For extra credit, you may attend at up to two more readings and write responses to include in your final portfolio.

Grading: Grades will be based on your level of participation, completion of assignments, and the quality of writing you do. I also review your engagement with the workshop process. In-class writing is part of most class meetings and comprises part of your grade.

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.

A: Creative writing that receives an “A” is likely to: Fulfill **all** assignment requirements
Demonstrate complex, unique and/or insightful approach
Function well as a whole
Demonstrate engaging voice
Incorporate strong word choices
Incorporate, where appropriate, striking imagery
Lack clichéd or over-used language
Incorporate unusual/unique associations that fit the tone of the piece
Lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

B: Creative writing that receives a “B” is likely to: Fulfill the assignment requirements
Demonstrate insightful approach
Function generally well as a whole
Demonstrate a generally engaging voice
Incorporate some strong word choices
Use some concrete imagery
Mostly lack clichéd or over-used language
Mostly lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

C: Creative writing that receives a “C” is likely to:

- Meet** the assignment requirements
- Be derivative of other works
- Not completely function as a whole (some parts may be underdeveloped) Incorporate some strong, and some weaker, word choices
- Lack concrete imagery
- Include clichéd or over-used language
- Have some spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.**

D: Creative writing that receives a “D” is likely to:

- Not fulfill** the assignment requirements
- Not function as a whole
- Be a cursory response that demonstrates lack of motivation and/or poor understanding of the assignment

F: No response.

Final grades in this section will be the product of the following factors based on a 1,000 pt. scale, with the following percentages contributing to the final total.

- Fiction 20%
 - Poetry 20%
 - Non-fiction 20%
 - Journal 20%
 - Participation 20%
- (Including poetry readings and event papers)

To receive full credit in each genre, you must revise one selection from each unit based on workshop commentary, to be submitted in a final portfolio with your event papers.

More Words to the Wise

Meet with Me! I’m in my office for a couple of hours every week, just for you! Try and come in throughout the semester to discuss your prose and poetry. An appointment is recommended even during office hours so you don’t have to wait around. Take advantage of some one-on-one time. **I AM HERE TO HELP YOU, I WANT TO HELP YOU, BUT I CAN’T HELP IF YOU DON’T ASK.** I love meeting with students to discuss your work in-depth. Don’t leave me hanging.

Late Work: Late work receives a reduction of 1 grade if turned in at the next class session. Anything later will be graded an “F.” If the paper is turned in after the class period on the assigned due date, the essay will be graded down half a letter grade. If you are sick or have to miss class for any other reason on the day something is due, arrange to have a classmate turn it in if you do not want a grade reduction. For extenuating circumstances, I must be contacted *before* the due date to consider an extension.

No Work by Email. No work in my mailbox. No exceptions. I do not accept work by email or in my campus mailbox. If you need to miss a class session, ask a classmate to turn in your classwork and to collect handouts and assignments for you. Otherwise, turn in the work as “late” next class session.

Academic integrity: In a word, PLAGIARISM: DON'T DO IT

Your commitment, as a student, to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The [University Academic Integrity Policy S07-2](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S07-2.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S07-2.pdf> requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. **If you plagiarize**, you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The [Student Conduct and Ethical Development website](http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/) is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>.

Important Note for Spring 2016 Classes:

The California Faculty Association is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with management over salary issues. Higher pay for faculty is crucial to attracting and keeping better professors and improving the quality of your education. It is possible that the faculty union will picket, hold rallies, or perform other job actions during this semester, up to and including a strike. If the faculty are forced into any of these activities, we will try to keep you apprised and to minimize any disruption to your education.

Students showing support for the faculty will be a very helpful factor in getting a quick settlement that benefits everybody. For more current information you can visit the California Faculty Association website at <http://www.calfac.org/>

SJSU Writing Center:

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall. It is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. Our writing specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. The WC website is located at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/about/staff/>. **NOTE: We have a few creative writers on staff, but all of our tutors are excellent and will be a huge help, especially with grammar and mechanics for your prose.**

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<p>Read poetry selections from course reader (2-3 poems <i>each</i>)</p> <p>Reading presentations by: (1) (2) (3)</p> <p>Discuss Ghazals and formal poetry</p>
13	4/20	<p>Read selections from <i>Poet's Companion</i>; take notes</p> <p>In-class writing time with optional professor conferences</p> <p>Choose poem to memorize for final presentations: sign up</p>
13	4/25	Second and third poetry assignment DUE: Ghazal AND free choice—TWO POEMS for this workshop
14	4/27	<p>WORKSHOP: GHAZAL AND FREE CHOICE POEM</p> <p>Mark group member's manuscripts; write response letters (2 copies each)</p>
14	5/2	<p>Read 3 non-fiction selections from course reader</p> <p>Reading presentations by: (1) (2) (3)</p> <p>Discuss profiles</p>
15	5/4	<p>Read 1st half of <i>Devil in the White City</i>; take notes</p> <p>Find a short creative non-fiction essay that uses experimentation; bring 2-3 copies</p>
15	5/9	<p>Finish reading <i>Devil in the White City</i>; take notes</p> <p>First non-fiction assignment DUE: Profile OR investigation (bring 6-8 copies for small group and professor)</p> <p>Read profile/investigation example(s) on Canvas</p>
16	5/11	<p>WORKSHOP: PROFILE</p> <p>Mark group member's manuscripts; write response letters (2 copies each)</p> <p>Read 3 non-fiction selections from course reader</p> <p>Reading presentations by: (1) (2) (3)</p> <p>Discuss investigations</p>
16	5/16	<p>Second non-fiction assignment DUE: Sense of Place (bring 6-8 copies for small group and professor)</p> <p>Read 3 non-fiction selections from course reader</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		Reading presentations by: (1) (2) (3)
Final Exam	WEDS., MAY 18 12:15- 2:30pm	WORKSHOP: SENSE OF PLACE Mark group member's manuscripts; write response letters (2 copies each) Final readings; Potluck NOTE: Attendance to the Final Exam period is mandatory FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE MAY 21