

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 130, Writing Fiction, Fall 2017

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 1:30pm – 3:00pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Tues/Thurs 12:00pm – 1:15pm
Classroom:	Sweeney Hall 444
Prerequisites:	ENGL 71 (Intro to Creative Writing)

Course Description

For the first few weeks we will be reading and discussing published stories from 2016 edition of *Best American Short Stories* and the 2017 issue of *Reed*, the campus literary journal. I will make presentations on elements of the craft – character, conflict, point of view, etc. The goal is to practice reading like writers rather than critics (there is a difference). We'll also do some writing exercises to get your ideas flowing.

Next we will discuss your stories. Each of you will write two stories over the course of the semester. Many of us enjoy reading and writing genre fiction, such as fantasy, sci-fi, romance, horror, and crime. However, in this course we will be reading and writing character-driven literary fiction. Character-driven fiction isn't necessarily realistic, but it does focus on people who feel real to the reader, and whose situations derive from both external and internal conflict. Don't worry if you have never written character-driven fiction before. The assigned readings provide a wide variety of examples for you to study.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the BA in English. Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 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/Readings

Textbooks

- Diaz, Junot and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2016*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
- *Reed Magazine 150th Anniversary Edition* (Issue 70 - 2017). San Jose State University literary journal.

Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new, original pieces of fiction, photocopied for the class (SLO #3).
- Written and verbal comments on your classmates' stories (SLO #1, #3).
- Reading assignments from the textbook. I will quiz on these (SLO #1).
- A substantial revision of one of your stories (serves as the final exam) (SLO #3).
- Brief in-class and take-home writing exercises (SLO #3).
- Attendance at two literary readings of your choice, and a 1-2 page written response to each (SLO #1, #3).

Final Revision

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a substantial revision of one of your workshop submissions. Examples of changes that might be included in a substantial revision include adding or deleting a character, changing the point of view, inserting a new scene, and altering the ending of the story. It is not enough simply to correct the spelling and grammatical errors of the first draft. To earn a high grade on the revision, you must alter the story in some significant way. The revision is due the last day of class.

Grading Information

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's 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, and rhythm. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

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. Some of you may have some natural ability writing fiction, and some may not. Think of talent as extra credit – it can make up for a blown quiz, but it won't get you an A if you neglect the other class requirements.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

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| • First Workshop Submission | 20% |
| • Second Workshop Submission | 20% |
| • Final Revision | 20% |
| • Responses to Classmates' Fiction | 15% |
| • Class Participation, including Reading Quizzes | 15% |
| • Response Papers for Literary Readings/Performances | 10% |

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more literary readings (and write responses). These must be turned in by the last day of class.

Late assignments will not be accepted without the instructor's prior approval.

Determination of Grades

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

One-Unit Enhancement: Attendance at Literary Readings

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

- International Education / Cultural Enrichment

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 *San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro*. Most local bookstores host author events. Check out Kepler's Books in Menlo Park (www.keplers.org), Books Inc (www.booksinc.net), Hicklebees in Willow Glen (www.hicklebees.com), and your local Barnes and Noble (www.bn.com) for listings.

If your schedule will not allow you to attend any literary readings in person, you may watch two readings by authors on YouTube, however you must check with the instructor to make sure the videos you plan to watch are acceptable.

After attending each reading, you will write a **1000-word personal response to each**. 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. Explore how your attendance at the reading changed the way you think about creative writing as an art form or as a profession. Your response papers are due within a week of the reading. The instructor will provide written commentary on your responses.

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

Friday, September 22, 7:00pm
Reed Magazine 150th Anniversary Gala
Morris Dailey Auditorium

Weds, October 18, 7:00pm
Viet Thanh Nguyen
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Sympathizer*
reading & conversation with Andrew Lam
Hammer Theatre

Fri, Oct 27, 7:00pm
Annual Edgar Allan Poe Fest
Dramatic readings of Poe's work, plus an open mike and refreshments.
Spartan Memorial (Chapel)

Weds, November 8, 7:00pm

William Finnegan

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction for *Barbarian Days*
reading & conversation with Cathleen Miller
Café Stritch, 374 S 1st St, San Jose, CA 95113

Thurs, December 7, 7:00pm

Fall Steinbeck Fellows Reading

Three of the 2017-2018 Steinbeck Fellows in Creative Writing read from new work and answer questions.
Steinbeck Center – MLK Library 590

Workshop Procedures

After the drop date, I will pass around a sign-up sheet where each of you will choose **two dates** to hand in your stories. On each of those dates, you will pass out photocopies of a story to everyone in the class, including the instructor (**26 copies in total**). Your story must be **double-spaced, single-sided**, and include **page numbers**.

Your classmates will take home your story, make comments on the manuscript, and type up a half page (minimum) of comments. **Students must print two copies of their critiques.** At the next class meeting, the instructor will lead a discussion of your story. We'll do two or three stories per class, so your story will get about twenty minutes of attention. At the end of the discussion, students will hand the author their marked-up manuscripts and the typed comments. **They will also turn in copies of their critiques to the instructor.** Critiques will be graded on the quality and quantity of the feedback they provide.

What should you cover in your comments? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story. What's your interpretation? If the piece were in a 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.

Classroom Protocol

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. If you feel threatened by a classmate, please bring the issue to my attention so I can address it promptly.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

ENGL 130 / Writing Fiction, Fall 2017, Course Schedule

This class meets every Tuesday and Thursday, starting on Thursday, August 24. Class will not be held on Tuesday, November 23 in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday. In lieu of a final exam, you will hand in your final revision on the last day of class, Thursday, December 7.

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

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class.

BASS = Best American Short Stories

Reed = Reed Magazine

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/24/2017	Introduction & still write.
2	8/29/2017	Topic: Character Readings: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Apollo" (BASS 1); Lisa Ko, "Pat + Sam" (BASS 145)
2	8/31/2017	Topic: Character Readings: Ben Marcus, "Cold Little Bird" (BASS 158)
3	9/5/2017	Topic: Conflict Readings: Au-Co Tran, "Milk, Beer" (Reed 25); Caille Millner, "The Politics of the Quotidian" (BASS 177)
3	9/7/2017	Topic: Conflict Readings: Kris Faatz, "Portrait in Limbo-Land" (Reed 75); Smith Henderson, "Treasure State" (BASS 132)
4	9/12/2017	Topic: Setting Readings: Héctor Tobar, "Secret Stream" (BASS 256); Paula Paige, "POSSLQs" (Reed 49)
4	9/14/2017	Topic: Point of View Readings: James Valvis, "The Winters in Jersey" (Reed 70); Daniel J. O'Malley, "Bridge" (BASS 192)
5	9/19/2017	Topic: Voice Readings: Nick Taylor, "Sven" (Reed 125), John Edgar Wideman, "Williamsburg Bridge" (BASS 268)
5	9/21/2017	Topic: Allusion and Metaphor Readings: Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, "The Bears" (BASS 55); Yalitza Ferreras, "The Laetician Age" (BASS 86)
6	9/26/2017	Topic: Speculative Fiction and Fabulism Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence" (BASS 69); Karen Russell, "The Prospectors" (BASS 196)
6	9/28/2017	Topic: Endings and Resolution Meron Hadero, "The Suitcase" (BASS 121); Lauren Groff, "For the God of Love, for the Love of God" (BASS 103)
7-16	10/3/2017 – 12/5/2017	Student Workshops
16	12/7/2017	Final Revision Due