**Engl 284 B: Beginning Short Story Writing**

**Meeting Time:**

TTh 1:30pm - 2:50pm

**Location:**

Zoom :(

**My Email:** ahz2109@uw.edu

In this class, you will put words on a page, read them, hate them, rearrange them, and then do it over again. And again. Meanwhile, you’ll read the work of others—published writers and your own classmates. Through discussion and close reading, critiques and encouragement, false starts, revisions, and second attempts, you might wind up with a few real words, a page or two that you’re truly proud of.

I want this class to center experimentation. Maybe there’s a writer you’ve always wanted to imitate, or a short story you’ve always wanted to take apart, to figure out how its pieces go together. Throughout the course, we’ll take readings as jumping off points, as experiments that we can re-run in our own work. We’ll read masters and innovators, study the rules and the rule breakers to learn how the best, most exciting fiction works. We’ll hone in on specific skills and facets of story. In short writing exercises, you’ll isolate and execute these elements, identifying strengths and weaknesses in your prose and acquiring writing tools and tactics.

Expect to read and write every week. Not every writing exercise or prompt will be personally exciting to you; not every reading will hit you in the gut. In addition to practice, you’ll leave this course with opinions—about the kind of writing you’re drawn to and what makes something worth reading. Better able to articulate what it is that you admire, you’ll become more capable of producing the kind of writing that you crave.

We’ll read and respond to each other’s work throughout the quarter, and the course will culminate in a larger writing project and more formal workshop. This introduction to the workshop model will help prepare you for creative writing courses you might take in the future, as you’ll learn how to give and receive writing feedback, and how best to incorporate encouragement and criticism into your subsequent revisions.

Through this class, you will become part of a writing community. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been writing for years or are just now attempting fiction; no matter where you’re coming from, I promise that you can, and will, get better. We are all here, myself included, just trying to put words on a page. The only thing to do is start.

Course goals:

* Learn to read as a writer—breaking down the piece into a series of decisions and choices that were made, evaluating how a piece of writing works (and if it does)
* Build skills and play with techniques through a series of writing exercises/prompts
* Learn how to give and receive meaningful feedback through peer reviews and later, workshop
* Learn how to incorporate that feedback in revisions, to make major changes to an early draft

Types of assignments:

* Readings--Self-explanatory, I think
* Exercises--Throughout the course, I’ll ask you to attempt targeted exercises and free writes; while the course is designed for these exercises to feed into your short story draft, you’re also welcome to use them as an opportunity for play, outside and independent of your working draft.
* Imitation exercises--You’ll also attempt two imitation exercises, in which you’ll adapt/react to/subvert/mimic the work of writers we’ve read for class. These exercises might find a way into your “final” short story, or they might just be for fun.
* Short story--This course will culminate in a workshop period, during which you’ll each get a chance to submit a working draft of a short story.
* Final portfolio--Your final assignment, which I’ll discuss more later on, will consist of your revised short story, your various exercises and attempts throughout the course (unrevised), and a kunstlerroman (don’t worry, we’ll talk about it).

Attendance Policy & Participation Conduct

Please let me know BEFORE class (and that means more than 5 minutes before…) if, due to extenuating circumstances (illness, family emergency, etc.), you will not be able to make our Zoom meeting. If you do not run your absence by me ahead of time, that will be reflected in your class participation grade.

Arrive on time, with all the reading complete and your assignments turned in, ready to participate and contribute. It is my prerogative to count lateness or lack of preparation against you in your class participation evaluation. If you are concerned with your attendance record/participation, it is your responsibility to reach out to me and check in.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing--as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability that requires any special course accommodations please submit the appropriate paperwork to me and I will make the necessary accommodations.

Grading

Your final grade will be determined by the quality of work submitted to class, the quality of work in your final portfolio, your engagement with writing assignments, and the quality of your class participation.

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation ....…….…………………………………………………………………… 20 %

Writing Exercises …………………………………………………………………………… 20 %

Short Story Submission ……………………………………………………………………… 20 %

Final Portfolio ………………………………………………………………………………… 40 %

**Fall Quarter 2020: TTh schedule**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WEEK 0** | **IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES** | | **HOMEWORK** |
| Thu 10/1 | Before class starts: submit your 3-5 minute introduction video on Canvas  In class: in breakout groups, click through The Bureau of Linguistical Reality [website](https://bureauoflinguisticalreality.com/portfolio/) ; as a group or as individuals, pick out a few neologisms that you found particularly resonant. Why (or why not) does inventing new words to describe our current reality strike you as a fitting/crucial/urgent project?  In class writing exercise: write about a 2020 emotion/reality/phenomenon that you think merits a neologism. Feel free to use the “definition” and “usage” format; feel free not to. Bonus points for proposing a word!  Share? | | Listen to: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/episodes/on-the-media-2017-07-07>  Read: <https://tinhouse.com/how-do-we-write-now/>  Read:  <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-35/fiction-drama/the-feminist/> |
| **WEEK 1** |  | |  |
| Tue 10/6 | In class: Discuss homework readings; writing and reading in our current surreality  What function does writing and reading play in your mid-pandemic life? | | Read: Ramona Ausubel’s “You Can Find Love Now”  Read: [“Bettering Myself”](https://www.theparisreview.org/fiction/6208/bettering-myself-ottessa-moshfegh) by Ottessa Moshfegh  Read: https://lithub.com/on-the-many-different-engines-that-power-a-short-story/ |
| Thu 10/8 | In Class: Go over Ramona Ausubel’s “You Can Find Love Now”; break it down. What is characterization? What is *good* characterization? When it comes to building/developing characters, what are our tools? What questions can we ask to get to the bottom of our characters? | | Write: A character study--feel free to play with form (a Q&A, an obituary, a summation of a life, a single scene?) |
| **WEEK 2** |  | |  |
| Tue 10/13 | In Class: Paired breakout groups--character study peer review  Exercise: two minute interesting object roundup  Free write: Build a new character around a handful of your classmates’ interesting objects--how can you build from the outside in, generating an entire interiority (needs, desires, voice, etc.), from just a collection of objects? How can you pull the objects into your work in order to best capture/illustrate the character you’re creating? | | Read: [“Why not”](https://www.lavrev.net/2011/11/sarah-schulman.html?m=1) by Sarah Schulman  Read: [The Lost Performance of the High Priestess of the Temple of Horror](https://granta.com/lost-performance/) by Carmen Maria Machado |
| Thu 10/15 | In class: Discuss world-building in fiction, the components and rules of a world  Free Write: World build around the image I bring in (think beyond description to relationships, past present and future, gravity)  Free Write: Working off of one of your character studies, start to build your character a world (one way to do this--a series of questions and answers, ranging from what is going on politically in their corner of the world and how does it affect them, to what do they see out their window every morning) | Read: [“The Hortlak”](https://libros.metabiblioteca.org/bitstream/001/325/8/%EF%9C%B9%EF%9C%B7%EF%9C%B8-%EF%9C%B1-%EF%9C%B9%EF%9C%B3%EF%9C%B1%EF%9C%B5%EF%9C%B2%EF%9C%B0-%EF%9C%B1%EF%9C%B5-%EF%9C%B7.pdf) by Kelly Link; Work on/polish your world-building exercise | |
| **WEEK 3** |  | |  |
| Tue 10/20 | Talk: Dialogue  Watch: [Tommy Pico](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBWpGAAbu_0)  Watch: [Juno](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAvpcjbEdQU) & [Juno](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Dyl2mpd9F0) | | To do: Go out and collect at least ten lines of interesting dialogue |
| Thu 10/22 | Free write: Stolen dialogue exercise  Share in breakout groups--assign roles; read it out loud! | | Write: Insert dialogue (either your full in-class exercise, a piece of it, or entirely new work) into a previous writing exercise/working story draft |
| **WEEK 4** |  | |  |
| Tue 10/27 | Introduce/discuss imitation exercise (worksheet)  Talk a bit about voice (child vs. adult perspective) | | Write: Imitation exercise one |
| Thu 10/29 | Conferences | | Read: “This is the Life” by Annie Dillard  Read: “Break It Down” Lydia Davis |
| **WEEK 5** |  | |  |
| Tue 11/3 | Discuss: Time--how does it work in fiction? How do we make it work?  Exercise: In pairs, five minute life story | | Homework: take the character that you’re working with (or one of the characters) and plot out their life story. Then, write down what they do in an average day. Think about what unit of time you’d like to tackle in your finished story. |
| Thu 11/5 | In-class writing exercise: one new scene (emphasize—this should be for your short story) | | Homework: Read “For Esme with Love and Squalor” by J.D. Salinger; Read [“Aurora”](http://rvannoy.asp.radford.edu/rvn/340/Diaz.pdf) by Junot Diaz; Read [“Emergency”](https://www.narrativemagazine.com/issues/stories-week-2014-2015/story-week/emergency-denis-johnson) by Denis Johnson |
| **WEEK 6** |  | |  |
| Tue 11/10 | Model workshop with “Emergency”; go through workshop sheet; sign up for workshop slots | | Imitation exercise two |
| Thu 11/12 | In-class writing exercise: one new scene | | Homework: polish your WIP story, send it to your peer review partner |
| **WEEK 7** |  | |  |
| Tue 11/17 | Due by beginning of class today: submit an early draft of your final short story for peer review  Talk about the Capstone project in more detail, open up for questions about workshop/finishing their stories more generally. Talk about the revision process. | | Work on peer review notes/line edits |
| Thu 11/19 | Peer review break out groups | | Read 11/24 Workshop submissions |
| **WEEK 8** |  | |  |
| Tue 11/24 | First Workshop | | Read 12/1 Workshop submissions |
| Thu 11/26 | Thanksgiving | |  |
| **WEEK 9** |  | |  |
| Tue 12/1 | Workshop | | Read 12/3 Workshop submissions |
| Thu 12/3 | Workshop | | Read 12/8 Workshop submissions |
| **WEEK 10** |  | |  |
| Tue 12/8 | Workshop | | Revisions/final portfolio work |
| Thu 12/10 | Last day of class/workshop | | Revisions/final portfolio work |