

WRTG 23600
FICTION WRITING I: SHORT STORY
MWF 2:00-2:50
Williams Hall 224
Spring 2009

Instructor **Dr. Jack Wang**
Office **404B Smiddy Hall**
Office Phone **274-3493**
Office Hours **MWF 4:00-5:00, T 1:00-3:00 and by appointment**
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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the art of fiction writing with an emphasis on literary short fiction. Through readings, class discussions, writing assignments, fiction writing workshops, and individual conferences, this course will sharpen your sensibilities as readers, develop your vocabulary for evaluating and discussing fiction, and increase your awareness of technique and craft, all of which will help you progress as a writer.

This course is as much a course in reading as it is in writing. Those who aspire to write must read, widely and often. Toward that end, we will be reading short stories by established writers as well as essays on craft. At the beginning of the semester, we will work on a series of writing exercises that will help us grasp fundamental elements of craft such as description, characterization, plot, and dialogue. We will then put the skills developed through these exercises toward two complete short stories, both of which will be discussed in workshop as part of the revision process. Because this course is based on discussion in class and in workshop, your participation is vital.

Required Text

Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft, Seventh Edition. Janet Burroway and Elizabeth Stuckey-French.

Coursework

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| Craft Annotations | 15% |
| Writing Exercises | 15% |
| Short story 1 (portfolio with at least two drafts) | 25% |
| Short story 2 (portfolio with at least two drafts) | 25% |
| Written responses to peers' stories | 15% |
| Participation | 5% |

The portfolios for both short stories must be complete in order to pass the course.

Craft Annotations

In this course, you'll be asked to read as writers, which means understanding that "the story exists as it does because the author chose his [or her] form from among other possibilities," as R. V. Cassill reminds us. For select stories, you will write a two-page double-spaced craft annotation assessing those choices. In each case, you will consider the story in light of the element of craft under discussion. For example, if the story appears in the section on point of view, consider the story's point of view: Why did the author choose this point of view? Why is it the most appropriate point of view for this story? How would the story have been different if another point of view had been employed? And so on.

Workshop and Responses to Peers' Stories

For every student story you read, you will write a one-page double-spaced response using the analytical approach to craft that you have been developing in your craft annotations. At the end of the workshop cycle for each story, you will be asked to evaluate the written feedback you received from each member of your group. This peer evaluation will form the basis of your grade for your written responses to peers' stories.

Course Policies

Blackboard

Most course materials will be distributed electronically through Blackboard, which can be accessed by going to <http://courses.ithaca.edu> or <https://akron.ithaca.edu:4440/webct/entryPageIns.doweбct> and logging in with your e-mail username and password. Please check regularly for updates and assignments.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial to your success in this course, so please come to class every day prepared and ready to contribute. All students are allowed two unexcused absences. **Thereafter, every unexcused absence will result in a one-third letter grade deduction to your final grade. In keeping with department policy, students who have nine absences (excused or unexcused) will be dropped from the course, and if the last absence occurs after the period of withdrawal, they will receive an F in the course.** Whenever possible, please let me know ahead of time that you won't be in class. In cases of emergencies and school-authorized events, please document your absence. Remember, you are responsible for anything missed in class, including any changes to the syllabus.

Grading

Specific requirements for each assignment may differ, but in all cases my evaluation of your work will consider content, expression, command of craft, and maturity of thought. General criteria are as follows:

- A An A story is a vivid, artful, and engaging work of fiction that operates fully in the fictional mode—that is, moment-to-moment through the senses. Through convincing characterization and purposeful design, the writer demonstrates a strong grasp of narrative craft. An A story is capable of producing plausible surprise and therefore bears rereading. The language is fresh and evocative and unhampered by problems with mechanics or usage.
- B A B story also operates fully in the fictional mode, though perhaps with less complexity, originality, or artfulness. For the most part, the writer’s intentions are clearly identifiable through the narrative and dramatic choices he or she has made, with only the occasional lapse in characterization or structure. The language is precise and idiomatic with few problems of mechanics or usage.
- C A C story is a clear, coherent story that demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of craft. However, the characters tend to lack dimensionality and the plot veers toward the predictable. Scenes are not fully realized and sometimes glossed over with summary. The language is appropriate but lacking in vividness.
- D A D story is clichéd and reflects consistent weaknesses in numerous areas of craft. Both plot and characterization seem unconvincing. For the most part, the story does not operate in the fictional mode but in abstraction and generalization.
- F An F story is one that does not operate in the fictional mode or one that otherwise fails to meet the requirements of the assignment. Also given in cases of academic dishonesty (please see below).

All written assignments, including drafts, must be typed, double-spaced, titled, paginated, and submitted in MLA format. **Late work will be penalized 10% a day. Assignments more than two days late (including weekends) will not be accepted.**

Academic Dishonesty

Anyone who attempts to present someone else’s fiction—published or unpublished, in whole or in part—as their own will fail the course and may face further action by the College. It’s simple: tell your own stories.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who wish to receive reasonable accommodations, as required by law, should identify themselves to the professor as early in the semester as possible. Please register with and bring documentation to the Office of Academic Support Services for Students with Disabilities and bring documentation to me from the ACSSD indicating the need for academic accommodation, preferably during the first week.

Schedule

CA=Craft Annotation

Week 1

W January 21 Introduction to Fiction Writing I.

F January 23 “1 Whatever Works: The Writing Process” (1-22).

Week 2

M January 26 **Showing and Telling**
“2 Seeing Is Believing: Showing and Telling (25-39);
“Big Me” by Dan Chaon (39-53).

W January 28

Characterization

“3 Building Character: Characterization, Part I” (80-86, 97-99);
“Gryphon” by Charles Baxter (99-110). **CA 1 due.**

F January 30

“3 Building Character: Characterization, Part I” (86-97);
“Rock Springs” by Richard Ford (120-34).

Exercise 1 due.

Week 3

M February 2 “4 The Flesh Made Word: Characterization, Part II” (137-53);
“Bullet in the Brain” (158-61).

T February 3

A.O. Scott Lecture, 7:30 pm, Klingenstein Lounge, Egbert Hall

W February 4

“Tandolfo the Great” by Richard Bausch (161-69). **CA 2 due.**

F February 6

Plot

“7 The Tower and the Net: Story Form, Plot, and Structure” (259-275); “The Use of Force” by William Carlos Williams (277-79).

Exercise 2 due.

Week 4

M February 9 “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” by Joyce Carol Oates (65-77).

W February 11

Point of View

“8 Call Me Ishmael: Point of View” (296-311);

“Orientation” by Daniel Orozco (311-15). **CA 3 due.**

F February 13

No Class.

Week 5

M February 16 “Who’s Irish” by Gish Jen (315-23).

Exercise 3 due.

W February 18

“Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter” by Chitra Divakaruni (239-52).

Divakaruni Reading, 7:30 p.m., Clark Lounge, Egbert Hall

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| F February 20 | “Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Connor (282-92). CA 4 due. |
| Week 6 | Setting (Place) |
| M February 23 | “5 Far, Far Away: Fictional Place” (173-87); “Love and Hydrogen” by Jim Shepard (206-215). Exercise 4 due. |
| W February 25 | Setting (Time) “6 Long Ago: Fictional Time” (218-31); “A Serious Talk” by Raymond Carver (253-56). CA 5 due. |
| F February 27 | “The Swimmer” by John Cheever (231-39) |
| Week 7 | |
| M March 2 | “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood (279-81). |
| W March 4 | First draft of Story 1 due. Bring copies for workshop. Introduction to workshop. |
| F March 6 | No class. |
| Week 8 | |
| March 7-15 | Spring Break. |
| Week 9 | |
| M March 16 | Workshop Story 1. |
| T March 17 | Jean Valentine Reading, 7:30 pm, Emerson Suite A, Phillips Hall |
| W March 18 | Workshop Story 1. |
| F March 20 | Workshop Story 1. |
| Week 10 | |
| M March 23 | Workshop Story 1. |
| W March 25 | Workshop Story 1. |
| F March 27 | Workshop Story 1. |
| Week 11 | |
| M March 30 | Revision “11 Play It Again, Sam: Revision” (388-97). |
| W April 1 | “Notes on ‘Keith’” and “Keith” by Ron Carlson (398-410). |
| F April 3 | Final Draft of Story 1 due. |

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| Week 12 | Figurative Language |
| M April 6 | “9 Is and Is Not: Comparison” (336-47); “Hotel Touraine” by Robert Olen Butler (350-56). |
| W April 8 | “10 I Gotta Use Words When I Talk to You: Theme” (359-68). “Winky” by George Saunders (368-77). |
| F April 10 | Theme, continued. Discussion of Story 2. |
| Week 13 | |
| M April 13 | First draft of Story 2 due. Bring copies for workshop. |
| W April 15 | Workshop Story 2. |
| F April 17 | Workshop Story 2. |
| Week 14 | |
| M April 20 | Workshop Story 2. |
| W April 22 | Workshop Story 2. |
| F April 24 | Workshop Story 2. |
| Week 15 | |
| M April 27 | Workshop Story 2. |
| W April 29 | More Strategies for Revision. |
| F May 1 | Course Wrap-up. |
| Week 16 | |
| M May 4 | Final draft and portfolio of Story 2 due. |