

**WRTG 43600**  
**Writing the Short Novel**  
**MW 4:00-5:15**  
**Smiddy Hall 432**  
**Fall 2009**

<b>Professor</b>	<b>Dr. Jack Wang</b>
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<b>Office Hours</b>	<b>MWF 3:00-3:50 and by appointment</b>
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**Course Description**

According to *A Handbook to Literature* by Harmon and Holman, a short novel is a “work of intermediate length between the short story and the novel, roughly between 15,000 and 50,000 words.” Also known as a *novella* or *nouvelle* or *novelette*, a short novel is an attempt to combine the compression of a short story with the development of a novel. In this course for advanced writers, we will read and write about short novels in order to better understand the aesthetics of the form. We will also attempt a short novel of our own, and read and respond critically to each other’s attempts in a workshop that will emphasize analysis and revision. Through critical essays, we will also consider the art of subtext and the habits and sensibilities that befit the novelist. Ultimately, our goal is to deepen our command of the art of fiction writing, whatever the length of the story.

**Required Texts**

*Goodbye, Columbus*, Phillip Roth (0679748261)  
*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark (0061711292)  
*Desperate Characters*, Paula Fox (039331894X)  
*So Long, See You Tomorrow*, William Maxwell (0679767207)  
*The Mezzanine*, Nicholson Baker (0679725768)  
*On Chesil Beach*, Ian McEwan (0307386171)  
*The Art of Subtext*, Charles Baxter (1555974732)

**Coursework**

Short novel (first and final drafts, plus query letter)	45%
Craft annotations	30%
Written responses to peers’ stories	15%
Participation	10%

*The Short Novel*

Your major assignment in this course will be to write a complete short novel between 60 and 100 pages in length (approximately 15,000 to 25,000 words).

### *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 every story assigned, you will write a three-page double-spaced craft annotation assessing those choices. Guiding questions include "What are notable aspects of this writer's craft?" "How has the author employed certain techniques to achieve desired effects?" and "What are some things I've learned from this story/writer that I could use in my own work?"

In addition to the traditional craft annotation, focused on an element or elements of craft of your choosing, you are required to write at least two craft annotations that make significant use of essays by Charles Baxter in *The Art of Subtext* (a different essay for each annotation). You may also write up to two craft annotations that closely examine an emblematic passage à la David Lodge (see handouts). For each craft annotation, you must submit both a hard copy to me and an electronic copy via Blackboard. The electronic versions of your craft annotation will be collated into an ongoing document entitled *The Art of the Short Novel*. In other words, your craft annotations will be an individual as well as a collective task, the results of which will be a resource for all of us to share. Moreover, your craft annotations will frequently form the basis of discussion.

### *Written Responses to Peers' Stories*

For every workshop story you read, you will write marginal notes and a two-page double-spaced set of end notes that addresses the manuscript in terms of craft. Your goal here, as in your craft annotations, is to be analytical in terms of technique and effect. Remember, you are not writing a review that merely reflects your own tastes and proclivities. At the end of every workshop, you will give your marginal notes and a copy of your end notes to the student whose work is under discussion.

After every story has been workshopped, each of you will be given a form asking you to assess the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of the feedback you received from your peers. This will form the basis of your grade for your written responses to peers' stories.

### *Participation*

Because this is a 400-level course, and because this is the most advanced course in the fiction writing sequence, students are expected to be conversant in the language of craft and to contribute their thoughts in class on a regular basis. Because classroom participation is not just a matter of personal preference but one of academic responsibility, it is important for you to come to class every day prepared to speak.

## Course Policies

### *Blackboard*

Some course materials will be distributed electronically through Blackboard, which can be accessed by going to <https://akron.ithaca.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct> and logging in with your e-mail username and password. Please download any required readings and bring a copy to class.

### *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. Students who have six 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.

### *Lateness*

Chronic lateness will count as absences at my discretion, so please be on time.

### *Grading*

Specific requirements for each assignment may differ, but in all cases my evaluation of your work will consider content, expression, originality, 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 must be typed, double-spaced, titled, and page-numbered. **Late work will be penalized 10% a day. Assignments more than two days late will receive a grade of F (0-59%). Failure to turn in a draft of your short novel on time may result in the forfeit of your place in workshop.** On weekends, late work should be submitted electronically.

#### *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. Furthermore, you are not allowed to submit any work that was previously submitted for another course unless (1) it has been significantly revised or (2) it constitutes less than 20% of the final draft. Please take this opportunity to tell your own story and to generate new work.

#### *Students with Disabilities*

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to the College before any academic adjustment will be provided.

### **Schedule**

#### **Week 1**

W August 26

Introduction to Writing the Short Novel.  
Read “How to Write a Query” at Agent Query:  
[http://www.agentquery.com/writer\\_hq.aspx](http://www.agentquery.com/writer_hq.aspx)

**Week 2**

M August 31

**Brief query letter due.***On Chesil Beach* by Ian McEwan.

TAOS: "Introduction" (3-5) and "The Art of Staging" (7-31).

W September 2

*On Chesil Beach*, continued.**Week 3**

M September 7

**Labor Day. No class.**

W September 9

*The Mezzanine* by Nicholson Baker.

TAOS: "Digging the Subterranean" (33-61).

**Week 4**

M September 14

*The Mezzanine*, continued.

W September 16

*So Long, See You Tomorrow* by William Maxwell.

TAOS: "Creating a Scene" (115-42).

**Week 5**

M September 21

*So Long, See You Tomorrow*, continued.

W September 23

*Desperate Characters*, Paula Fox.

TAOS: "Loss of Face" (143-75).

**Week 6**

M September 28

*Desperate Characters*, continued.

W September 30

**First 40-50 pages of short novel due for group #1.**

Bring copies for workshop.

**Week 7**

M October 5

Workshop.

W October 7

Workshop.

**Week 8**

M October 12

Workshop.

W October 14

Workshop.

**Week 9**

M October 19

Workshop.

W October 21

**First 40-50 pages of short novel due for group #2.**

Bring copies for workshop.

Workshop.

**Week 10**

M October 26

Workshop.

W October 28

Workshop.

