

ENG 90: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING

Summer 2009

Instructor: Shimon Tanaka

stanaka@stanford.edu

Meeting Hours and Place: MW 11-12:50

Office Hours: M 1-1:40, W 1-3:20
in Margaret Jacks Hall

DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce you to the basic elements of fiction writing. We will read a variety of short stories by past and contemporary masters, with the purpose of learning the craft of writing. You will then write your own stories and we will read and discuss them in our workshop sessions. There is a considerable amount of reading and writing involved in the course. Writing requirements will also include ten writing exercises.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. Course reader. This can be purchased at *Copy America*, located on California Avenue in downtown Palo Alto.
2. A small notebook.
3. You will be required to provide copies of your main story for everyone in the class midway through the term, so please budget for this expense.

GRADING

Class Participation—35% This figure includes attendance, punctuality, and preparedness and involvement in class discussions, and the completion of written comments on others' stories. Full attendance is of utmost importance in a fiction workshop, as it is impossible to "catch up" on a workshop discussion you have missed, and as the workshop discussion itself suffers whenever even one voice is missing. I expect every absence to be worked out beforehand with me or the participation portion of your grade will be affected—each unexcused absence will reduce your course grade by 1/3 letter grade. Chronic absences, excused or unexcused, will affect this grade significantly. Lateness will also affect this grade.

Fiction Exercises, Stories, and Workshop Critiques—50% Includes both writing exercises, one longer story, and a revision of that story. The total number of pages will equal 30-35 pp (including exercises but not including the revision). The revision is not simply an alteration of a few details in the stories, but a top-down rewrite of the story you have turned in for workshop, incorporating the comments you have received from your me and your fellow classmates as well as your own ideas about where the story should go. Regarding workshop critiques, you will no doubt want others in the class to read and consider your work seriously, and therefore it is important to return the favor. You do not have to write volumes in your critiques, but your comments should be careful and considered, and take into account the *process* of writing fiction; i.e., we are not dealing with finished works here and you should make your comments with an eye for what you would do to better the story. Critiques given to a student after they are workshopped will be marked late, so make sure these are done on time.

Reading Attendance—15% Your attendance at three readings in the creative writing program is required. The reading schedule is given below; other readings will not be counted. Plan which events you will go to in advance so that you will be able to make your three by the end of the quarter.

MISCELLANEOUS

Format for assignments:

Stories and exercises: Double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Margins should be one-inch. Paragraphs should be formatted for print (i.e., not in web style, but with each paragraph indented, with no line breaks between them). Ink must be black. Include your name and the page number on every page of a story, and include the course number and my name on the first page. Double-sided printing is permissible. For exercises, you will only need to turn in one copy to me, but when you turn in your story, you'll be required to turn one copy for each member of the class. Make sure you staple anything more than one page. Failure to follow these guidelines may impact your grade.

Workshop comments: These should be single-spaced. Bring in two copies—one for the student being workshopped and one for me. Again, anything more than one page should be stapled. You will also mark line edits and comments on the story itself, which will then be returned to its author.

Conferences: Do stop in at any time during my office hours with any concerns you have regarding class, or just to talk about writing. I also highly recommend setting up an appointment to conference with me sometime in the week following the workshopping of your story. This is not required, but I've found that students who come in to talk about their revision strategies consistently produce better revisions.

Laptops may be used during in-class writing exercises. Feel free to bring them to class, but don't leave them open during general discussion.

Late Assignments The highest grade any late assignments will receive is a C—even if you've just forgotten to print an exercise out for class. I only accept emailed assignments if it's worked out with me, and I don't accept the excuse of a printer being out of ink. So stock up on black ink at the beginning of the course so that you will not have this problem. Also, purchase a stapler if you do not own one.

Note: Professor John L'Heureux and Senior Lecturer Tom Kealey are available for academic advising throughout the year. Please stop by to learn more about the Creative Writing Program or to ask questions or make suggestions. For this quarter's hours and location, visit <http://creativewriting.stanford.edu>.

COURSE SCHEDULE (**SUBJECT TO CHANGE**)

Week 1:

9/21 Intro and enrollment.

9/23 Discuss Atwood, Happy Endings, Annie Proulx, "The Blood Bay," Tobias Wolff, "The Rich Brother." **EX01 due**

Week 2:

9/28 Discuss Ernest Hemingway, "The Short, Happy Life of Frances Macomber," Elizabeth Tallent, "Prowler." **EX02 due**

9/30 Discuss Peter Ho Davies, "The Hull Case," Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter," **EX03 due**

Week 3:

10/5 Stephen King, "The Man In the Black Suit," *from* "On Writing." **EX 04 due.**

10/7 Haruki Murakami, "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," Edward P Jones, "Marie." **First 5 pp. of story due.**

Week 4:

10/12 Discuss James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," Janet Frame, "Gorse is Not People."

10/14 Discuss Junot Diaz, "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," ZZ Packer, "Brownies." **Story due.**

Week 5:

10/19 Workshops 1&2. **Ex 05 due.**

10/21 Read Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl," Rick Moody, "Boys." Workshops 2&3.

Week 6:

10/26 Discuss Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat." Workshops 4&5.

10/28 Joyce Carol Oates, TBD. Workshops 5&6. **EX 06 due.**

Week 7:

11/1 **EX07 due.** Workshops 7&8.

11/3 Discuss Gish Jen, "Who's Irish?" Workshops 9&10.

Week 8:

11/9 Workshops 11&12. **EX 08 due.**

11/11 Discuss Denis Johnson, "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," Workshops 13&14

Week 9:

11/16 Workshops 15&16. **EX 09 due**

11/18 Discuss Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Visiting Writer Q&A.

Week 10:

11/30 Discuss Alice Munro, "Dimension."

12/2 Discuss George Saunders, "Jon."

Monday, 11/30, Margaret Jacks Hall. Deadline for turning in revisions for conference. This is if you wish to get feedback from me about the revision in a conference after our last class on 8/12. No additional work will be required after this conference.

Friday, 12/4, 214 Margaret Jacks Hall. Deadline for turning in revision. Without a conference.

READINGS SCHEDULE

(Schedule will be updated in class and on the creative writing website. Visit <http://www.stanford.edu/group/creativewriting/events.html> for the latest info. Also, consider subscribing to the creative writing program's email list by visiting <http://mailman.stanford.edu>. Reminders about creative writing program events and news about creative writing contests is often posted through this email list.)

Wednesday, October 21, 7:00 p.m. Terrace Room, Margaret Jacks Hall (Building 460) Stegner Fellows Kirsten Quade and Erica Ehrenberg reading

Monday, November 2, 8:00 p.m. Cubberley Auditorium Author Joyce Carol Oates. Part of the Lane Lecture Series

Tuesday, November 3, 11:00 a.m. Terrace Room, Margaret Jacks Hall (Building 460) Joyce Carol Oates colloquium. Part of the Lane Lecture Series

Wednesday, November 18, 7:00 p.m. Terrace Room, Margaret Jacks Hall (Building 460) Stegner Fellows Jon Hickey and Joshua Edwards reading