



English 235.503

Elements of Creative Writing

Spring 2018 | Face-to-Face

ENGL 235-505: MWF 0150pm-0240pm, LAH 401

English 235.503

Instructor Information

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LAAH 321

Office Hours: MWF 1230pm-0145pm and by appointment

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Course Description

“Initiation into the craft of creative writing in prose and poetry; extensive reading in the genres; peer workshops”

Learning Outcomes / Course Objectives

This class will approach creative writing in two ways: by reading and by writing. By reading classic and contemporary short fiction and poetry, students will come to understand the methods and techniques established writers use. By writing, students will come to understand the structure and form of stories and poems from the inside, will understand literature as a living entity, and will develop skills as literary individuals. By the completion of this class students will:

- Write @10,000 words of increasingly competent multi-genre writing
- Elevate the quality of their writing in both critical and creative genres
- Develop a **critical understanding** of short prose and poems
- Learn new practices of **creative thinking** and **critical thinking**
- Recognize and practice creative writing as an act of **human communication**,

developing, interpreting, and expressing ideas through written, oral, and visual means

- Enhance their enjoyment of literature and film
- Engage in writing as an open-ended process
- Appreciate methods of revision and revision's importance to the writing process
- Recognize the relationship of writer and audience
- Experience writing both as an individual and **community activity**
- Work toward becoming **socially responsible** "Literary Citizens" by immersion in literary, creative, and critical cultures
- Gain a basic understanding of contemporary literary publishing and other creative opportunities

Methods. This class will be taught **face-to-face** and will approach literature in two ways: by reading and by writing. By reading classic and contemporary short fiction and poetry, students will come to understand the methods and techniques established writers use. By writing, students will come to understand the structure and form of stories and poems from the inside, will understand literature as a living entity, and will develop skills as literary citizens.

Writing. Writing is a process that relies on memory and imagination, on deliberation and discovery. In this class you will use the same learned and intuitive methods used by major writers, and you will produce one short story, and at least six poems.

Reading. Reading well is crucial to writing well. Reading well—reading carefully, reading wisely—is also crucial to your success in this class. If at some point you encounter works containing language or situations that make you uncomfortable, please continue reading the material in a mature and scholarly manner. It's also important to remember that you do not have to "like" a text in order to learn from it.

Reading Responses. As specified during the semester, homework may include reading responses, exercises, short writing assignments, and other work that develops writing skills and helps you plan, draft, and revise major writing assignments.

Workshop. Parts of this course will be devoted to writing workshop. Students will read each other's work and write a short critical response to the work. This will provide helpful feedback to the student writer and, more importantly, provide important experience in critical reading to the student reader.

My Teaching Philosophy!

I do not believe that reading and writing are based on “talent,” on mysterious accidents of nature, or on gifts of generous muses. Rather I see reading and writing as skills that can be taught and learned. All my teaching is based on this perspective, a perspective that places the responsibility for success or failure on the individual student. But it is also an extraordinarily liberating perspective, I think, for in a self-directed classroom students can shake off their inhibitions and face what I see as an important truth: that with desire and hard work, anyone can write a competent essay or short story or poem. The skills of reading and writing are there for anybody to use and to learn. Once they are learned—owned, as it were—they become the personal possessions of the learner. I have many times in my life experienced the transformative power of literature, and I think it is my responsibility as a teacher to help my students achieve transformation, if they want it, to give them the opportunity to learn these skills, to use these tools, to open their lives to literature and to change. Words have power. Words change lives. And I am in the word business.

“You could tell a story to pass the time.”

Very early in the semester students become aware that I usually begin almost every class by saying something like:

“So—what’s going on today?”

I ask this question with the hope that a student will speak up and tell me something they have done since class last met. Maybe the student will have had an adventure—gotten arrested or fallen in love—or maybe they will have done something as mundane as taking out the trash. If students seem interested in something particular (or peculiar), we can sometimes improvise a writing exercise. If no one volunteers a story I’ll usually ramble on with a story or three of my own.

Every semester there is a student or two who are very annoyed by this in-class storytelling. They really do get mad! I can see it in their eye-rolling in-class faces and I can really see it in their end-of-the-semester class evaluations.

I find their annoyance both amusing and sad.

I find it amusing because these students are apparently unaware that the class will last a mere 50 minutes or 75 minutes no matter how many stories get told.

And I find it sad because these students are apparently unaware that stories are at the very heart of what we do in creative writing class. Whether through poetry or prose, creative

writing classes are devoted to increasing our individual and collective understanding of the world we live in. And stories are one of the most important ways we gain this understanding.

Remember this at all times: You have a voice. Your voice is unique. No one knows the stories you know.

Time is limited. Time is running out. Someday, sadly, you will be dead and your untold stories will die with you. So: seize every chance you get to tell your story...any story....

Required Texts and Supplies

- Addonizio, Kim. *Ordinary Genius*. New York: Norton, 2009
- Casares, Oscar. *Brownsville: Stories*. Back Bay Books, 2003
- Kleon, Austin. *Steal Like an Artist*. New York: Workman, 2012

You will also need the following supplies:

- at least one standard-size file folder with pockets
- one or two notebooks
- Internet access and an email account
- a Twitter account
- a stapler
- lots of paper

Recommended Texts

While it is generally agreed that students cannot “learn” to write solely from a book, there are a great many fine books that give detailed and interesting analyses of the various aspects of writing literature. Here are two that previous students have found useful:

- Hills, L. Rust. *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Harcourt, 1994.

Grading Policies, Course Topics, Course Schedule, Major Assignment Dates

In this class you will be expected to go through a process that runs from creation to criticism to rigorous substantial revision. Your work will be judged on quality, improvement, and use of techniques learned in the class, as well as display of competency and/or originality. Students

are expected to meet deadlines, and may be additionally assessed by such methods as: papers, quizzes, journals, small group work, in-class writing, and self and peer assessment.

Major Due Dates

Creative Group Participation Response	Wednesday, February 7
Story One Draft Due	Wednesday, February 28
Poetry Draft Due	Wednesday, March 28
Story Two Draft Due	Monday, April 16
Final Portfolio	Monday, May 7

Grading Scale

This course will use the standard letter grading scale:

A = 90-100, B = 80-89, C = 70-79, D = 60-69, F = <60

Attendance	2%
Reading Responses	10%
Story One Draft	9%
Poetry Draft	9%
Story Two Draft	9%
Group Presentation	9%
Final Portfolio	52%

Reading Responses and Extra Credit

For most of the semester there will be a homework assignment every class day. That might sound like a lot, but the assignments are actually pretty short. They will include:

- **Prose Reading Assignment.** A short story or essay. Do the reading, write a response of about 150 words, and post the response to e-campus.
- **Poetry Reading Assignment.** Usually a passage from the Addonizio book. Read the passage and write a response of about 150 words.

Reading Responses will be due at the times listed on e-campus. Late submissions will be accepted for 36 hours past the due date, and awarded ½ credit. After 36 hours, the

Reading Response dropbox will close, forever. The end.

Occasionally, **Extra Credit** will be offered. These credits will count the same as a Reading Response assignment.

Writing: The Stories

The stories you will not write: You will not write stories that take place in the future, or on other planets, or on alternative, fantastic Earths. You will not write stories about orcs or elves or princesses, about unicorns or talking toothbrushes. You will not, in other words, write fantasy or science fiction. (There are reasons for this restriction),

I would further advise you to avoid writing stories dealing with perverse and violent crime—stories, for example, that deal with serial killers, serial rapists, school shooters, creepo stalkers, etc. I have read dozens and dozens of student stories dealing with these allegedly transgressive topics, and I've **never** read a good one. They require little imagination, and yet are quite difficult to write. Don't bore me. Don't waste your time. Be creative.

I would even further advise you to not to exhibit racism or misogyny in your writing. If your writing is unacceptable, I will call you out in class, which you will probably find embarrassing. Think about what you are writing. Think about what kind of story you are really telling. Think about what you want to say about yourself as a writer.

The stories you will write: You will write stories that take place on and in this everyday (but often very magical) world. In other words, you will be writing standard, literary fiction.

Writing: The Poems

You will not be writing formal poems, or poems that rhyme. Instead you will write poetry that relies on image and metaphor, poetry that works toward discovering emotion and meaning.

Writing: The Final Portfolio

On Monday, May 7, you will submit (both in a hard copy and an ecopy) a portfolio of your best writing. The portfolio will consist of:

- Your best short story, revised.
- Your best five poems, revised.

You will also include **a response of 250-500 words to your own work**, discussing your writing process and mentioning anything you want me to know about your writing.

I really do expect the work in your portfolio to be revised. Please understand that revision does not mean merely correcting a few grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors (though that of course is important). Revision means re-envisioning your work—re-imagining it, re-creating it, transforming it into something better than what you started with.

A Few Words on Feedback and Revision

I am not a prescriptivist instructor and this will not be a prescriptivist class. I am not going to assert dictatorial control over your life and write your poem or story for you.

However, I will criticize your work. I will offer feedback in the form of a rubric and by making a few textual annotations. I might say something like, “The ending doesn’t work—you probably want to fix the last four paragraphs.” Then it will be up to you, the writer, to find a way to make the fixes.

I will always be happy to meet with you and discuss your writing! I can show you the many options you have as a writer, and the artistic ramifications of each option.

In the end it will be up to you as a writer to seek out my advice, to choose a course of revision for your writing, and to make those revisions work. You are responsible for the quality of your work.

Here are six additional things to remember about workshop and criticism:

1. You can’t please everyone.
2. If it does seem that you’re pleasing everyone, something is probably wrong.
3. Your readers don’t know more than you do. (Except me).
4. You don’t have to take the suggestions of your peers unless the suggestions fit your overall creative and critical intention.
5. Some writing just is *better* than other writing.
6. You are the boss of your writing.

Tentative Schedule

Week One

MLK Day	J17 Syllabus Worskhop	J19 Questions!
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Week Two

J22 Kleon, 1-67	J24 Kleon, 68-end	J26 Presentation Prep
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Week Three

J29 Presentations	J31 Presentations	F2 Presentations
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Week Four

F5 "Ah, Love! Ah, Me!" (In class)	F7 "Indian Camp" & "Three Shots" (Online)	F9 What You Pawn..." (Online) Presentation Response Due No Class!
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Week Five

F12 "Afraid of the Dark" (Online)	F14 See, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 (online)	F18 "Pugilist at Rest" (Online) In Class: Flashback Exercise
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Week Six

F19 "Found Objects" (Online)	F21 Character Workshop	F23 Small-Group Workshop
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Week Seven

F26 Story One Due In Class: Annodizio, "What Do Women Want?"	F28 Addonizio, pp 19-34	M2 Addonizio, pp 35-46
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Saturday, March 3: Black Box Speaks

Week Eight

M5 Addonizio, pp 61-73	M7 Addonizio, pp 99-108 Big LAAH: Sara DiCaglio	M9 Addonizio, pp 110-122
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Week Nine

M12 <i>Spring Break</i>	M13 <i>Spring Break</i>	M15 <i>Spring Break</i>
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Week Ten

M19 TBD	M21 TBD	M23 TBD
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Week Eleven

M26 Small-Group Workshop	M28 Poetry Due	M30 <i>No class</i> Casares, "Mr. Z"
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Week Twelve

A2 Casares, "RG"	A4 Casares, "Chango."	A6 <i>No Class</i>
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Week Thirteen

A9 Casares, "Domingo."	A11 Casares, "Charro."	A13 Casares, "Yolanda"
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Week Fourteen

A16 TBD	A18 Small-Group Workshop Big LAAH: Susan Stabile	A20 Story Two Due
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Week Fifteen

A23 Revision Techniques	A25 Revision Workshop Big LAAH: Gordone Winners	A27 Revision Workshop
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Week Sixteen

A30 Last Day of Class Class Photo	M2 DO SOME WRITING	M4 DO SOME WRITING
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Week Seventeen

M8 Portfolios Due	M10 (Reflect on your accomplishments)	M12 (Continue reflection....)
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Additional reading assignments will/might occur throughout the session....

Other Pertinent Course Information

Attendance. You are expected to attend class according to the times published in the fall schedule of classes. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late will have their attendance mark reduced by one-half.

Authorized Absences. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. You are responsible for providing evidence to substantiate “authorized absences.” If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you are responsible for informing me. Excessive unexcused absences (more than three) may result in the final course grade being lowered at least one letter grade.

Classroom Behavior. I define disruptive classroom behavior as anything that interferes with my ability to conduct the class or as anything that distracts students from the instructional program. This can include sleeping, talking, TEXTING, reading the newspaper, or playing with your phone (always remember to turn off your phone when you enter the classroom and keep it OFF your desk). Please pay attention. PLEASE RESPECT YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.

Food: Please do not inflict your eating habits on the rest of the class!

Incomplete. An incomplete grade may be assigned in rare instances when a student is unable to complete a course due to circumstances beyond his/her control. You must have completed a majority of the coursework to be eligible for this consideration..

Mid-Semester Grades. Grades reported at mid-semester will be based on homework, presentations, weekly writing assignments, and in-class assignments. This is not 50% of your final grade.

Final Grades. Grades are not negotiable. Your final course grade will be based on your work in the course. If you are concerned about a grade, please see me during office hours or make an appointment.

E-mail and Fax. Because of security issues, I will not discuss grades via email or fax. I will, however, be happy to answer email questions about the readings or assignments.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637.

For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

It's my intent that the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of students be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I also intend to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. I encourage your suggestions about how to improve the value of diversity in this course.

This course meets the following standards for diversity content and instruction in the following ways:

- Course content that includes readings and other materials that address various categories of social difference (gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age, sexuality, political affiliation, socio-economic status, ability, linguistic background, etc.) on the course topic.
- Course content that is inclusive of various learning needs and that has a clear plan to utilize a variety of teaching techniques so as to contribute to an overall inclusive learning environment, in which students feel equally valued.
- Tying current events and local histories centered on the production of social difference into classroom activities.

The Aggie Honor Code and Academic Integrity

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Scholastic Dishonesty.

Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the TAMU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System.

Information about the Honor Council Rules and Procedures is available online:

<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>

Scholastic Dishonesty. It is your responsibility to know the Aggie Honor Code and to understand what constitutes scholastic dishonesty and to avoid it at all costs. Anything (homework, quizzes, daily work, papers, and exams) that appears to be a violation of the Aggie Honor Code will be reported to the Aggie Honor System Office:

<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>

Final Note

When the person who is grading your papers writes a syllabus, or hands you anything that says, “These are my values—this what I’m looking for,” you can believe them.

