The background of the entire page is a dark, grainy photograph. It depicts a car that has been crushed and overturned in a field. The scene is dimly lit, likely by a low sun or moon, creating a somber and mysterious atmosphere. The car's metal is twisted and mangled, and the surrounding field is dark and textured.

# **English 345**

## **Writers' Studies: Prose**

**Spring 2016 | Face-to-Face**

**MW 4:10pm-5:25pm, 465 LAAH**

# English 345

## Instructor Information

Dr. Lowell Mick White  
LAAH 321  
MWF 0900-1020 and 1230-1330  
MW 1500-1600 and By Appointment  
whitelm@tamu.edu

## Course Description and Prerequisites

Writers' Studies—Prose: A different topic for fiction writers or poets each term; may include historical development of genres; connection between biography and artistic production; study of writers' theories of the art of fiction or poetry. The prerequisite for this class is English 235, "Elements of Creative Writing."

## Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives

The basic theme for this section of Writers' Studies is "Reading and Craft."

Most of you have already written many short stories in your previous creative writing classes. This class will offer you an opportunity to broaden your knowledge of fiction writing by focusing on some of the theoretical constructs that are at the base of fictional narratives.

By the completion of this class you will:

- Focus on reading texts as a writer
- Understand the basic elements of fiction, including POV, characterization, action, setting, and style
- Elevate the quality of your writing both critically and creatively
- Develop a deeper understanding of narrative and the intersections of action and character
- Understand methods of revision and the importance of revision to the writing process
- Recognize the relationship of writer and audience

### **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....



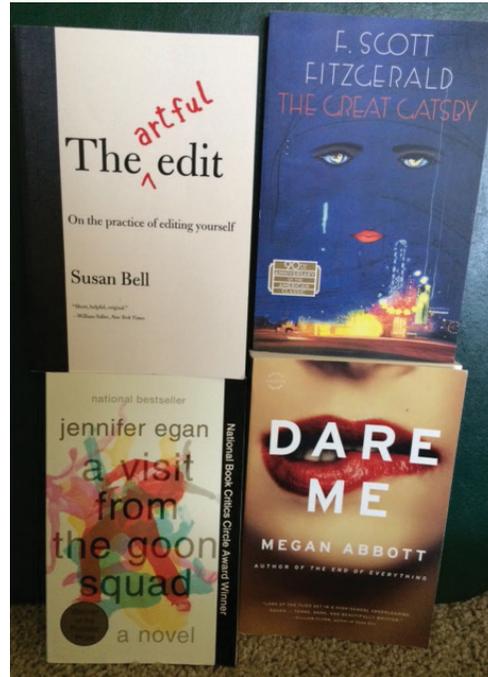
## Required Texts and Materials

*Dare Me*  
Megan Abbott  
Back Bay Books, 2012  
ISBN-13: 978-0316097789

*The Artful Edit*  
Susan Bell  
Norton, 2007  
ISBN-13: 978039333217

*A Visit from the Goon Squad*  
Jennifer Egan  
Anchor, 2011.  
ISBN-13: 978-0307477477

*The Great Gatsby*  
F. Scott Fitzgerald  
Scribner, 2004  
ISBN-13: 978-0743273565



A few additional texts will be available online or will be distributed in class.

You will also need the following supplies:

- an email account
- a few standard-sized file folders with pockets
- one or two notebooks
- a stapler

## Recommended Texts

While it is generally agreed that students cannot learn to write from a book, there are a great many fine books that give detailed and interesting analyses of the various aspects of writing literature. These include:

- Singleton, George. *Pep Talks, Warnings, and Screeds*. Cincinnati: Writers Digest Books, 2008.
- Hills, L. Rust. *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular*.

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

- Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- King, Stephen. *On Writing*. New York: Pocket, 2002.

### Classwork

**Critical Homework.** For each reading assignment, you will write a short (150 to 250-word) response and post your response to ecampus. These will be awarded a completion grade, and are designed to help you sort out your thinking about the texts.

**Short Essay.** You will write short paper of 3-5 pages analyzing and using fiction terminology and concepts.

**Short Stories.** You will write two 6-8 page stories.

**Final Portfolio.** You will submit a *revised* copy of one of their stories. You will also write an 8-10 page essay analyzing their story, discussing the ways in which you attempted to apply the concepts learned in this course while also placing your story in a larger critical context. You will be required to meet with me late in the semester to discuss your story and your essay.

### Grading Policies

**Format.** Unless otherwise specified, your work should be typed or letter-quality printed on good paper and submitted in a standard pocket folder. Your writing should always be double-spaced. For fonts I prefer 12-point Times New Roman—please at the very least use a serif font. Pages should be numbered; page numbers are acceptable in either the upper right or lower right corners. Your name, the date, and the designation of the assignment should be in the upper left corner. ***Please, please, staple your assignments!*** Assignments deviating from these standard format requirements will be returned ungraded! This will adversely affect your overall grade.

**Late Assignments.** You are required to submit all your work to me in class or in my office and electronically on due dates listed on this syllabus. ***YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS NOT CONSIDERED COMPLETE UNTIL BOTH THE E-COPY AND THE HARD-COPY HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED!*** Late submission will result in a grade deduction of 10% per day. Work submitted outside of class (for example, left under my office door or left in the wrong office) will receive a grade of zero ("0") if they are lost, and will have points deducted for late submission if they are late.

You are responsible for presenting appropriate documentation to excuse late work. If you do not submit appropriate written documentation, you will have points deducted for late submission.

### Grading

This course will use the standard letter grading scale:

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

Attendance	5%
Homework and In-Class Assignments	15%
Short Essay	10%
Story One	10%
Story Two	10%
Final Portfolio: Essay	25%
Final Portfolio: Story	25%

### Major Due Dates

Story One	Wednesday, February 10
Story Two	Wednesday, March 2
Short Essay	Wednesday, March 9
Final Portfolio	Friday, May 6

## A Few Words on Prescriptivism

Few things annoy me more than a teacher who gets all prescriptivist about creative writing. *I am not a prescriptivist professor 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 or essay for you.

That's not my job.

My job, as I see it, is to show you some of the almost endless possibilities you have as a writer.

Whether or not you take advantage of those possibilities—or how you take advantage of them—is up to you. You have to find your own way as a writer and establish your own view of the world.

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 your suggestions of your peers unless they fit your overall critical intention.
5. Some writing just is *better* than other writing.
6. You are the boss of your writing.

### **Tentative Schedule**

#### Week One

<i>J18</i>	<i>J20</i> Syllabus Workshop
------------	---------------------------------

#### Week Two

<i>J25</i> "Reading Like a Writer" Three Shots/Indian Camp	<i>J27</i> Egan, 3-18
--	--------------------------

#### Week Three

<i>F1</i> Egan, 19-38	<i>F3</i> Egan, 39-58 Visiting Writer Dave Oliphant
--------------------------	---

#### Week Four

<i>F8</i> Egan, 59-83	<i>F10</i> Egan, 84-91 <b>Story One Due</b>
--------------------------	---

#### Week Five

<i>F15</i> Egan 92-108	<i>F17</i> Egan 111-136
---------------------------	----------------------------

Week Six

<i>F22</i> Egan 137-165	<i>F24</i> Egan 166-185
----------------------------	----------------------------

Week Seven

<i>F29</i> Egan 186-207	<i>M2</i> Egan 208-233 <b>Story Two Due</b>
----------------------------	---

Week Eight

<i>M7</i> Egan 234-309	<i>M9</i> Egan 186-207 <b>Short Paper Due</b>
---------------------------	---

Week Nine

<i>M14</i> <i>Spring Break</i>	<i>M16</i> <i>Spring Break</i>
-----------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Week Ten

<i>M21</i> Abbott. 1-80	<i>M23</i> Abbott, 81-160
----------------------------	------------------------------

Week Eleven

<i>M28</i> Abbott, 161-240	<i>M30</i> Abbott, 242-320
-------------------------------	-------------------------------

Week Twelve

A4 Gatsby, 1-60	A6 Bell, 42-64
--------------------	-------------------

Week Thirteen

A11 Gatsby, 61-120	A13 Bell, 65-84 Visiting Writer Kent Wascom
-----------------------	---

Week Fourteen

A18 Gatsby, 121-180	A20 Bell, 106-135
------------------------	----------------------

Week Fifteen

A25 Workshop: Macro Edits, Micro Edits Bell, 88-89, 136-137	A27 Big LAAH: Cliff Hudder
---	-------------------------------

Week Sixteen

M2 Workshop: Partner Edits Bell, 138-140  Last Class Day Class Photo	M6 (Friday) Final Portfolio Due
---	------------------------------------

Additional reading assignments will probably occur throughout the semester....

### ***Distinguished Visiting Writers and other Special Events***

Several writers and scholars will be visiting campus this spring to present their work. Several of them will occur during class time, and we will attend these events as a class. Still, you can earn valuable extra credit by writing a short response to the readers.

- Wednesday, February 3: Poet Dave Oliphant
- Wednesday, April 13: Novelist Kent Wascom

### ***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) will result in the final course grade being lowered at least one letter grade. Students who have not attended at all or who have been excessively absent from may be dropped from the course.

**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. Disruptive or inappropriate behavior can be cause for dismissal from this course; except in the most egregious cases, you will receive a warning.

**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>

## **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>

During the semester, you will be expected to sign the following statement as you hand in papers, quizzes, and exams:

“On my honor, as an Aggie, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work.”

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

