



English 345

Writers' Studies: Prose

Spring 2018 | Face-to-Face

MW 4:10pm-5:25pm, LAAH 301

English 345

Instructor Information

Dr. Lowell Mick White

LAAH 321

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

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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 "The Writers Environment: 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 students 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 their 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
- 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

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 twitter account
- a blog
- 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.

- Browne, Renni. *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*. New York: Harper-Collings 2010
- King, Stephen. *On Writing*. New York: Pocket, 2002.

Literary Citizenship

Novelist Cathy Day says, “A literary citizen is an aspiring writer who understands that you have to contribute *to*, not just expect things *from*, the publishing world.” The Literary Citizenship assignment for ENGL 345 is designed to help professionalize you as a writer and to encourage you to take part in a larger literary community.

To begin, you will need a blog and a Twitter account. (We will take a day to discuss blogs and social media in class). You will use these platforms to share your works-in-progress and to post your literary observations and comments. You will keep a log/journal of your Literary Citizenship activities and submit it to ecampus on **Wednesday, April 26**.

Points will be awarded:

Visiting Writer, response posted to blog	10
Big LAAH, response posted to blog	10
Writer Interview (oral), posted to blog	15
Writer Interview (email), posted to blog	12
Book Review, posted to blog and to Amazon or Goodreads	12
Shared Work-in-Progress (maximum of 5)	10
Charming Note	5
Event/Reading Tweet	2

80 to 100 points = B Grade. 100 points or more = A Grade.

Remember to tweet your observations about writing and reading—the points will pile up.

The hashtag for this class is **#tamucw**

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.

Exploration Assignments. Beginning in the seventh week of class, you will begin posting Exploration Assignments, observing something in your environment based on the prompt posted to ecampus. You will photograph your discovery, write a 150-250 word narrative reflecting on your discovery, and post the photo and your comment to your blog. (If you do not have access to a personal camera, you may borrow one from Evans Library).

Short Stories. You will write three 6-8 page stories.

Final Portfolio. The Final Portfolio will be in two parts:

1. A **revised** copy of one of your stories.
2. A 6-8 page **essay** analyzing an **element of fiction**, and using examples from **your own work** and from the works we have read in class.

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.

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	2%
Homework and In-Class Assignments	8%
Exploration Assignments	8%
Story One	8%
Story Two	8%
Story Three	8%
Literary Citizenship	8%
Final Portfolio	50%

Major Due Dates

Story One	Wednesday, February 7
Story Two	Wednesday, February 28
Story Three	Monday, March 19
Final Portfolio	Monday, May 8

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.

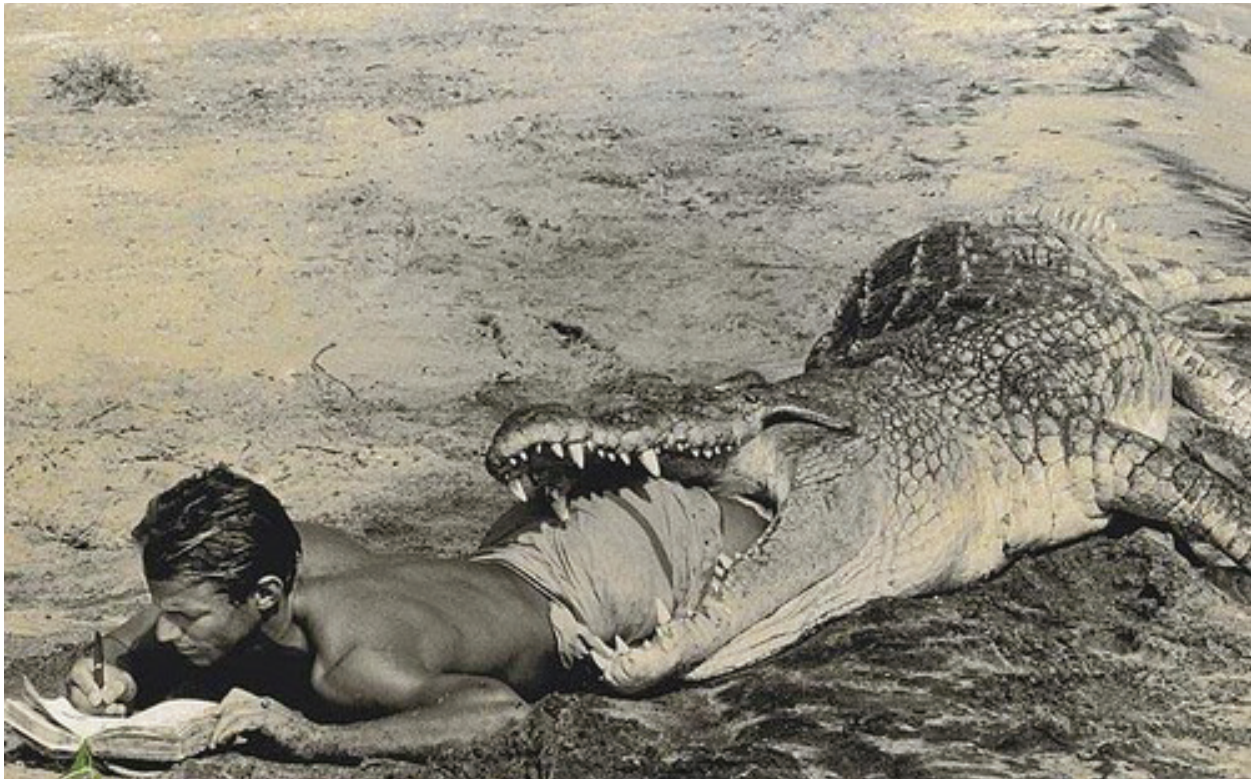
Whether or not you take advantage of those possibilities—or how you take advantage of them—is up to you. You have to find your own way as a writer and establish your own view of the world.

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.



Explore your environment and reflect on its meaning!

Tentative Schedule

Week One

<i>MLK Day</i> MLK Day	<i>J17</i> Syllabus Workshop Questions
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Week Two

<i>J22</i> Two essays on "Reading Like a Writer" (online) Oates, "This I Believe"	<i>J24</i> Hem, "Three Shots"/"Indian Camp" (online)
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Week Three

<i>J29</i> Hatley, "Who's Got the Body?" (online)	<i>J31</i> Casares, "RG" (online)
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Week Four

<i>F5</i> Earley, "Charlotte" (online)	<i>F7</i> Granados, "A River of Misunderstanding" (online) Story One Due
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Week Five

<i>F12</i> Jones, "First Day" (online)	<i>F14</i> Abani, "Albino Crow" (online)
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Week Six

<i>F19</i>	<i>F21</i>
Egan, "Found Objects," and "The Gold Cure"	Egan, "Ask Me if I Care," and "Safari"

Week Seven

<i>F26</i>	<i>F28</i>
Egan, "You (Plural)," and "X's and O's," and "A to B"	Egan, "Selling the General, and "Forty-Minute Lunch"
Exploration One: "The ground beneath your feet...."	Story Two Due

Week Eight

<i>M5</i>	<i>M7</i>
Egan, "Out of Body," and "Good-by, My Love"	Egan, "Great Rock and Roll Pauses," and "Pure Language"
Exploration Two: "Everything is alive...."	

Week Nine

<i>M12</i>	<i>M14</i>
<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>Spring Break</i>

Week Ten

<i>M19</i>	<i>M21</i>
Abbott. 1-80	Abbott, 81-160
Story Three Due	
Exploration Three: "Look closer...."	

Week Eleven

M26 Abbott, 161-240 Exploration Four: "Alter your course...."	M28 Abbott, 242-320
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Week Twelve

A2 Bell, 42-64 Exploration Five: "Everything is a story...."	A4 Gatsby, 1-60
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Week Thirteen

A9 Bell, 65-84 Exploration Six: "Patterns (visual or behavioral)"	A11 Gatsby, 61-120
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Week Fourteen

A16 Bell, 106-135 Exploration Seven: "Origins...."	A18 Gatsby, 121-180
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Week Fifteen

A23 Workshop: Macro Edits, Micro Edits Bell, 88-89, 136-137	A25 TBA
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Week Sixteen

A30 Workshop: Partner Edits Bell, 138-140 Last Class Day Class Photo	M2 Do Something Creative
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Week Seventeen

M7 Final Portfolio Due	M9 Reflect on Your Accomplishments
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Additional reading assignments will probably occur throughout the semester....

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, CAT VIDEOS, 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. 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>

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

