



English 347-901: "Writers' Workshop: Prose"  
Fall 2011  
W 1800-2100, Blocker 205B

### Instructor Information

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### Course Description and Prerequisites

Writers' Workshop: Prose focuses on the production of advanced works through peer workshops and extensive reading. The prerequisite for this class is English 235, "Elements of Creative Writing."

### Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives

Most students have already written many short stories in their creative writing classes. This class will offer students an opportunity to broaden their knowledge of fiction writing by concentrating on extended narratives—by writing novellas, or linked short stories or short memoirs, or the beginnings of full-length novels or memoirs. Students in this class will approach writing as a dynamic process that relies on memory and imagination, on deliberation and discovery, and through the writing of extended narratives they will develop a deep familiarity with the elements of plot and characterization, and an increasingly sophisticated understanding of novels and memoirs.

By the completion of this class students will:

- Produce approximately 20,000 words of original, competent writing
- Elevate the quality of their writing in both critical and creative genres
- Develop a critical understanding of narrative and the intersections of plot and character
- Engage in writing as an open-ended process
- Understand methods of revision and the importance of revision to the writing process
- Recognize the relationship of writer and audience
- Experience writing both as an individual and community activity

### 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 talent-free 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. Though this power is not directly transferable from me to the students, 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.

### Required Texts and Materials

Students will read two books from the reading list on page 4 of this syllabus. Individual reading assignments will be determined on September 7<sup>th</sup>.

You will also need the following supplies:

- a few standard-sized file folders with pockets
- one or two notebooks
- TAMU E-mail account
- a Facebook account
- a Twitter account
- a stapler
- lots of paper

### 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:

- Butler, Robert Olen. *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*. New York: Grove Press, 2005.
- 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.

### Grading Policies

#### Grading

This course will use the standard letter grading scale:

A = 100...90, B = 89...80, C = 79...70, D = 69...60, F = 59...0

#### Grade Determination

Attendance and Participation	10%
Proposal/Outline	15%
Prose	30%
Reading Presentation	15%
Reading Review	10%
Final Portfolio	20%

**Due Dates**

- Proposal/Outline is due September 14
- Reading Presentations will be due every Wednesday (beginning September 14)
- Weekly Writing assignments will be due every Wednesday (beginning September 21)
- Final Portfolio is due in my office on Tuesday, December 13, between 1200 and 1500

**Course Topics, Calendar of Activities, Major Assignment Dates****Attendance and Participation**

You are expected to attend all classes and participate in discussion, workshop, and other activities. Extra credit will at times be offered, which can help boost your grade.

**Proposal/Outline**

I know from experience as a teacher that it's easy for students to get lost when trying to write an extended narrative—and I also know this from my experience as a writer. A reasonable outline is important. Think of it as an old-time, traditional map—it does not give you turn-by-turn directions on how to get somewhere; rather, it lets you know where you are in relation to the whole geography, and offers you options on how to get from one place to another.

Your Proposal/Outline can be as detailed as you wish, but should show your starting point and your ending point, and offer ideas on how to get from one place to another. It may be in any form—pictures, diagrams, prose, charts....whatever best represents your narrative and your plans to achieve it.

**Prose**

You are expected to pound the words out in order to complete your project—20,000 over the course of the semester, or about 2000 per week over 10 weeks. Your weekly prose should be uploaded to turnitin.com before class-time every Wednesday.

Points will be awarded on the following scale:

- 2000+ words: full credit
- 1500—2000 words:  $\frac{3}{4}$  credit
- 1000-1500 words:  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit
- 500-1000 words:  $\frac{1}{4}$  credit
- Post after 5:50pm: No credit

The upside to this is that you do not have to worry about “quality.” I just want you to spill words onto the page. Ignore your internal editor—kill your internal editor!—and write. Just write. I will not be grading this prose, so do not concern yourselves at this point with getting a grade—just get the words written, get your narratives moving.

Each class session I will offer critiques of the writing of two student writers. Following this, you will workshop your weekly prose with members of your workshop group. I will be sitting in on some of these sessions to offer advice, and you of course are always welcome to come see me during office hours to discuss your work.

At the end of the semester you will submit the revised, polished, perfected beginning of your extended narrative—about 15 to 20 pages—for a final grade.

Extra Prose Credit: National Novel Writing Month takes place in November. The goal of NaNoWriMo is to write a 50,000 word novel in a 30-day period. Students are encouraged to enter and will receive extra credit if they are successful.

### Reading

Writers read. They read differently than critics or civilians do—they look for how stories mean, rather than what they mean. They pay close attention to dialogue, setting, sentence structure, etc. They look for ways they can learn from every book they read. The writers in this class will do that as well, and will each read two books from the reading list.

On one book they will give an oral report, showing the class how the narrative in their chosen book works, how the author manipulated language and reality in constructing her or his narrative. An essay of 1250 to 1750 words will accompany the student writer's oral report.

On the second book, the student writer will write a report of 750-1000 words.

I will also accept extra-credit book reports of 500-750 words.

### The Final Portfolio

On Tuesday, December 13, you will submit a portfolio of your best writing. The portfolio will consist of:

1. The first 15-20 pages of your extended narrative, revised and polished.
2. Your original outline/proposal.
3. Your updated outline/proposal (if you updated your outline/proposal)
4. A cover memo of 250-500 words describing your writing process and your experience in this class

### Reading Assignments

9/14	Shirley Jackson, <i>We Have Always Lived in the Castle</i>
9/14	Sandra Cisneros, <i>House on Mango Street</i>
9/21	Sarah Bird, <i>Mommy Club</i>
9/21	Ernest J. Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i>
9/28	Hunter Thompson, <i>Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas</i>
9/28	James Hynes, <i>Kings of Infinite Space</i>
10/12	Patti Smith, <i>Just Kids</i>
10/12	Mary Karr, <i>Cherry</i>
10/19	Patricia McConnel, <i>Sing Soft Sing Loud</i>

10/19	Tayari Jones, <i>Silver Sparrow</i>
10/26	John Graves, <i>Goodbye to a River</i>
10/26	Annie Dillard, <i>A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i>
11/02	Susan Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i>
11/02	Joyce Carol Oates, <i>Black Water</i>
11/09	Lowell Mick White, <i>That Demon Life</i>
11/09	John Kennedy Toole, <i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i>
11/16	Oscar Casares, <i>Brownsville</i>
11/26	Tiffani Yanique, <i>How to Escape from a Leper Colony</i>
11/30	Jim Harrison, <i>Returning to Earth</i>
11/30	Percival Everett, <i>Erasure</i>

### Other Pertinent Course Information

#### turnitin.com

To register for turnitin, go to <http://turnitin.com> and follow the instructions for creating a user profile. The class ID for **ENGL 347, Section 901** is **4285424**. The password is **texas**.

Additional information about turnitin is available online: <http://itsinfo.tamu.edu/turnitin/>

#### Social Networking

In order to better develop a community of writers and scholars, this class will experiment with the use of social networking platforms Facebook and Twitter. Students should register for accounts, if they don't already have them, and begin participating as soon as possible.

The Facebook page for this class is:

**ENGL 347-901**

This is a private page—no one who is not in our class can see the postings.

The Twitter feed for this class is:

**@LMWclasses**

With the hashtag:

**#347901**

Once you register for Twitter, search for our account, and choose to follow it. If you have questions about writing or about the class, please ask them on Twitter with the hashtag #235504, so that other students may participate in our dialogue.

### **Classroom Policies**

*Texas A&M Student Rules* are available at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu> You are responsible for being familiar with these policies and rules.

Attendance. You are expected to attend class according to the times published in the spring schedule of classes. Students who arrive more than 20 minutes late will have their attendance mark reduced by one-half. University rules related to excused and unexcused absences are located on-line at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>

Authorized Absences. According to *TAMU Student Rules*, 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. I will take attendance and enter the number of absences on the final roster. See *TAMU Student Rules* for an explanation of authorized absences. Excessive unexcused absences (more than **three**) will result in the final course grade being lowered at least one letter grade. For excessive excused absences, I will recommend that you see your academic advising office about the options outlined in TAMU Student Rule 7.8.

Classroom Behavior. Disruptive classroom behavior is defined as anything that would interfere with "an instructor's ability to conduct the class" or "the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program." This can include sleeping, talking, **texting**, reading the newspaper, playing with your phone (always remember to turn off your phone when you enter the classroom and **keep them OFF your desks**). Please pay attention. **PLEASE RESPECT YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.** *TAMU Student Rules* explicitly prohibit disruptive behavior, and, as stated above, you are responsible for knowing these rules.

Food: We are meeting in a cramped and poorly-ventilated classroom. Please do not inflict your eating habits on the rest of the class. When we meet in the computer classroom, all food and drink are of course prohibited.

Grade of I. You should not assume that you may take an incomplete in this course. TAMU Student Rules provide guidelines for assigning a grade of *I*. Requests will be considered only if you have a grade of C or above and only if you have completed 60% of the work in the course.

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

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, see me during office hours or make an appointment.

Final Exam. I reserve the option of asking the class meet at the final exam time for a short in-class writing assignment, quiz, or other course-related activity. You should mark the date and time of our "final" on your calendar:

***Date: Tuesday, December 13      Time: 0800-1000***

E-mail and Fax. As stated previously, I will not discuss grades via email. I will, however, be happy to answer email questions about the readings or assignments. I don't have access to a fax machine, and the English Department will not accept faxes to instructors.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

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, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 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:

[aggiehonor.tamu.edu](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu)

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### **Final Note**

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