

Syllabus

ENL5, Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction

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Course Description:

ENL 5F is an introductory course that will survey a wide variety of forms and styles for prose writing. This will include non-traditional and experimental forms of prose, such as interactive fiction.

Through regular writing exercises and assignments, we'll be generating new work and exploring craft elements like character development, setting, imagery and medium. By the end of this course, you'll have new tools to write the type of prose that speaks to you. You'll also have improved your group work skills, practiced constructive criticism, and honed your sense of observation.

For maximum flexibility, this asynchronous course will be focused on exercises, feedback and community support. The exercises are designed to be completed in about an hour and I will be giving everyone feedback on each assignment. For those who need structured time, we can work on exercises together/as a group during open hours.

Learning Goals:

Learning goals are transferable skills that will be useful beyond this class.

Constructive Criticism: Give constructive criticism that will highlight what someone is doing well and explore what can be improve. Don't use feedback as a Trojan Horse for hurtful comments. Graciously accept feedback, including negative feedback, without reading it as a personal attack. Improve your project by taking feedback into consideration while remaining true to your own vision.

Group Work Skills: As a primarily asynchronous course, I hope we can use this as a chance to facilitate conscientious, organized group work. It means staying accountable to your group by submitting assignments and feedback on time. When something isn't working, don't argue about it; be flexible and find a solution that will work for everyone. Don't be afraid to bring your instructor into the conversation if you need help figuring things out. I don't like to pitch skills in terms of "job readiness" but this is an essential part of running a successful team in the workplace, so it's good to practice now!

Compelling Composition: Improving your storytelling and prose skills will help you make more compelling, exciting arguments in other facets of your life, whether it's telling killer jokes at a party, writing a viral think-piece, or spicing up your academic essays.

Observation: Many of the exercises we are doing for this course involve closely observing the strange world around us, attempting to see the world in new ways. Keen observation can be helpful when you are working on a project, writing a paper, or dreaming up a new idea.

Course Delivery:

This course provides opportunities for synchronous work while remaining primarily asynchronous! We will be using Canvas, Slack and Zoom to facilitate the work we do over the quarter.

Canvas will be used to hand in all assignments and provide written feedback required for participation in this course. With the exception of Claudia Rankine's *Just Us*, all readings will either be posted on, or linked via, Canvas. If obtaining *Just Us* is difficult for you, please contact me so we can work something out.

Slack will provide an informal space for groups to work together and for us to build community online. Slack allows for additional flexibility with regards to how you choose to workshop and feedback with your group. Announcements and assignments will be cross-posted to both Slack and Canvas.

Zoom will be used for open hours, guest speakers and optional synchronous meeting.

Small Groups:

I will be breaking the class down in to four small groups. Each will be assigned a semi-private group chat channel on Slack to use for communication, feedback, etc. If your group wants to work on a different schedule or would prefer to give/receive feedback via Slack, or would like to make some other change, contact me. I trust you to manage your groups well, as they will be the core of the community component for this course. Ultimately, your success will depend on making sure that you and your group remain accountable to each other, following a consistent schedule for submitting exercises and feedback

Course Setup:

The course has two parts: exploratory writing and workshop intensive. We'll be doing exploratory writing for the first half of the course. After November 17, we will transition to a workshop intensive.

Each Tuesday, I'll post a short lecture introducing a new writing exercise and relating it to the weekly reading. Feedback for the previous week's exercise is due by (11PM) on Tuesdays.

Every Friday, you'll submit your writing exercise by the end of the day (11PM). This is so that you have the entire weekend to give feedback to your group.

On Fridays, from 10AM to 12PM PST we'll have open hours for flexible group sessions. Come hang out on Zoom and we can work on the exercises together, talk about the reading, or even play through some interactive fiction. We can also vary the day for this session if necessary. **The goal of this session is for us to come together as a community in a fun, low-stakes way.**

After November 17, we will switch to portfolio/chapbook workshopping and one-on-one meetings with your instructor. There will be no required exercises, but you will still turn in feedback on Tuesdays and submit material for feedback on Fridays. Wednesdays will remain open hours for flexible group sessions. In early November, we'll meet one-on-one to discuss your final portfolio/chapbook project.

I'll use the following categories for scoring your performance, but I'll base your final grade on a holistic assessment of your effort and work.

Grading:

Writing Exercises: 30%

Feedback: 20%

Workshop Portfolio/Chapbook (final): 30%

Participation: 20%

Extra Credit: Up to 10%

Writing Exercises (30%):

The generative exercises, which will be turned in via Canvas, are a major part of this workshop. To manage your time, you should not plan to spend more than 1 hour on a given exercise if you don't want to. Extended open hours on Fridays will provide time for us to work on exercises as a group.

Feedback (20%):

You'll be assigned to give and receive feedback from your small group this quarter. You should plan to give at least **4-5 sentences of feedback (150-200 words) and 2-3 line edits** for each of your group members, each week. Be prepared to spend about two hours per week giving feedback to members of your group.

Consider what is working well and why it is effective. Also, what can be improved upon and why? Make sure to pay attention to craft elements. Some things you can comment on include the effectiveness of the story's beginning/ending, use of details and description, characterization, conflict, setting, dialogue, point of view, use of time, and pacing. You are not limited to these categories, nor must you cover all of them. Choose a few specific things that you think are most important for the story and most helpful to the writer for the next draft (the revision).

Workshop Portfolio/Chapbook (30%):

Your final project for this course will be a workshop portfolio/chapbook. Everyone is required to turn in 7-12 pages of well-edited prose. This can be one story, multiple pieces arranged in a contiguous manner, or a digital work of interactive fiction. If you choose to include any of your exercises in this piece, the work you submit should represent a substantial edit.

Participation (20%): Participation comes from posting your feedback on time, attending office/open hours, communicating with your instructor and posting on Slack. During the workshop intensive, you must attend one one-on-one meeting with your instructor to discuss your final portfolio/chapbook project.

Extra Credit: Submit your work to literary magazines and contests for extra credit. This can catch you up for 10% of total points. Screenshots of your submission confirmation are required for extra credit.

Resources:

COVID-19: <https://studentaffairs.ucdavis.edu/news/coronavirus-faqs>

Plagiarism: <https://cieuniv.ucdavis.edu/student-life/what-is-plagiarism>

Academic Code of Conduct: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/files/cac.pdf>

Disability Accommodation: This class is inclusive to all students. If a student requires a disability accommodation, they should request one through the Student Disability Center. If you are still in the process of requesting an accommodation, please contact your instructor.

CALENDAR

WEEK 1:

Thursday, October 1: NO CLASS

Please use this time to familiarize yourself with the syllabus, Canvas, Slack and Zoom.

Before Tuesday's class (10/6), please post upload a profile picture to Canvas, Slack and Zoom. In the Slack general chat, drop 1) your name 2) preferred pronouns 3) something interesting about you 4) what you want to get out of this class.

If you would like to be grouped with someone or you would prefer not to be grouped with someone, please email me by Monday, October 5.

Reading: Course Code of Conduct, Syllabus, Announcements

WEEK 2:

We'll be starting Week 2 with an exercise designed to flex our creative circuits. What can you dream up based on a picture? How can real life act as an inspiration for a story? This week we'll be working on finding ways to draw a fictional narrative from the real world around us.

Tuesday, October 6

Lecture Video+ Exercise: Creating from a Scene

Reading: Ken Liu, *Paper Menagerie* (tags: race, fantastic)

Mahmoud Darwish, *House as a Casualty* (tags: war, death, nonfiction)

Friday, October 9

Due: Creating from a Scene

Reading: John Edgar Wideman, *BONDS* (tags: race, violence, birth)

WEEK 3:

Now that we've practiced dreaming up a story, use one of the subjects from said story (or a new one, if you wish) to create a character. An interesting character will keep the reader engaged—and the writer, too.

Monday, October 12

Due: Feedback for Creating from a Scene

Tuesday, October 13

Lecture Video + Exercise: Character Building

Reading: Tananarive Due, *Herd Immunity* (tags: pandemic, illness, death)

Friday, October 16

Due: Character Building

Reading: Claudia Rankine, from *Just Us: Lemonade, Daughter* (tags: race, relationships, illness, nonfiction)

WEEK 4:

So far, we've looked at drawing scenes from life and sketching out characters. You have the *what* and the *who*. Now, *how* will you tell the story? This week, we'll look at a fictional journal entry and a real journal entry to see how the speakers tell their own stories and how they reveal information about themselves and their context.

Monday, October 19

Due: Feedback for Character Building

Tuesday, October 20

Lecture Video + Exercise: Nontraditional Approaches, Dear Diary:

Reading: Hu Fang, *Dear Navigator* (tags: speculative fiction)

Friday, October 23

Due: Exercise for Dear Diary

Reading: Mahmoud Darwish, excerpt from *Memory for Forgetfulness* (tags: war, violence, nonfiction)

WEEK 5:

Thus far, we've covered scenes from life, sketched out some characters, and thought about ways to tell the story. What could possibly go wrong? Or right? This week we'll be talking about speculative fiction and the fantastic. You're not required to include any fantastic elements in your work, but this is a good chance to try it out and see if you like it. Because this topic can be controversial and isn't always covered in literary writing classes, we'll be doing more discussion this week.

Monday, October 26

Due: Feedback for Dear Diary

Tuesday, October 27

Lecture Video: Let's Talk about Spec Fic + Project Proposal Guidelines

Reading: Hao Jinfang, *Folding Beijing* (tags: speculative fiction, class, contemporary)

Class Forum (Slack): Speculative Fiction discussion Opens

Friday, October 29

Due: Post in the Speculative Fiction discussion

WEEK 6:

This week, we'll set aside space to think about what the future holds and talk about what writing can help us do as members of our communities. Claudia Rankine will be speaking to our class on Wednesday, Nov. 4 so we'll also be discussing her work on Slack.

Tuesday, November 3 (Election Day)

Holding Space. We will set this day aside to hold space and use it how we see fit. Go out and vote!

Wednesday, November 4

Claudia Rankine virtual talk

Thursday, November 5

Due: Project Proposal

WEEK 7:

This week, we'll keep things a little lighthearted by looking at interactive fiction. I'll be showing you how to make interactive fiction games using free software and we'll look into how interactive fiction can be fun and also deeply meaningful. You'll need to schedule a meeting to meet with your instructor and talk about your final project.

Sunday, November 8: Midterm Self-Evaluation

Tuesday, November 10

Lecture: Interactive Fiction

OPTIONAL Assignment: Exploring Interactive Fiction (reflection or decision tree)

Reading: Snake Game, You're a Giant Squid Can You Fight And Defeat a Boat

<https://sub-q.com/play-snake-game/>

<https://clickhole.com/you-re-a-giant-squid-can-you-fight-and-defeat-a-boat-1825124419/>

Friday, November 13

Interactive Fiction Workshop, 10:00AM-11:00AM

Followed by Office Hours, 11:00AM-12:00PM

WORKSHOP INTENSIVE

WEEK 8: Outlining and Getting Started

This week, we'll have a short outlining exercise. I'd like you to spend most of this week focusing on getting your Roughest Draft™ ready for submission on Monday, November 23. The entire goal for this week is to make sure **everyone** has a substantial rough draft that's ready to hand in by Monday, November 23.

Roughest Draft Requirements:

4 pages/1,300 Words of coherent prose. Mistakes are okay, but everything should be easily readable.

Outline headings and (insert XYZ scene here) are acceptable

Tuesday, November 17

Lecture Video + Assignment: Outlining

WEEK 9: Working Draft

This week, we'll be looking at ways to give and get more intense feedback. This week, I'd like you to focus on making sure that you can provide strong feedback to members of your group. This feedback will be critical for helping peoples' projects along, so it's important to submit it on time. You should plan to write a solid page of feedback (300 words) for each draft you review. Signup for synchronous sessions will begin on Tuesday of this week.

Monday, November 23

Due: The Roughest Draft™

Tuesday, November 24

Lecture Video + Assignment: Feedback, But More Intense?

Synchronous Workshop Session Signup Opens

Friday, November 27

Thanksgiving Break - Office hours by appointment only

WEEK 10:

This week, we'll be doing intensive editing based on the feedback that you got on your rough draft. I'll be hosting two synchronous workshop sessions for folks looking to discuss their work as it enters the final editing stage.

Monday, November 30

Due: 1 page of feedback on the Roughest Draft

Tuesday, December 1

Lecture Video: Final Editing (Zoom lecture begins 10:30AM)

Synchronous Workshop Session (Optional): 11:00AM-12:00PM

Friday, December 4

Synchronous Workshop Session (Optional): 10:00AM-11:00AM

Followed by Office Hours, 11:00AM-12:00PM

WEEK 11: Wrapping It Up!

This is the final week of classes. I'll be having office hours on Tuesday, December 8. During our normal open hours, we'll have a celebration and read from our work.

Tuesday, December 8

Office Hours, 10:00AM-12:00PM

Friday, December 11

Group Reading Celebration: 10:00AM-11:00AM

Sunday, December 13

Final Project Due - Midnight