

English 5302
Creative Writing—Fiction
Spring 2015

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Hours: M/W/F 10-11; M/W 12-1
T/Th 10-12:30
(and by appointment)

English 5302 is an advanced, graduate-level fiction writing course. We will explore the limits of our creative and technical abilities in order to improve our craft, as well to further our critical thinking skills and pedagogies through discussions and analysis of our and our colleagues' work. The workshop will, of course, function as an academic course, which dictates the approach we take to writing and workshop. In essence, the course will focus on improving writing techniques (and subsequent products thereof) through documented methodologies while also examining and learning to clearly discuss these methods. After all, I hope that you will ultimately feel qualified and drawn toward the teaching of writing in your professional lives. This course will help you on the way.

The actual writing for this course is focused on manuscript workshop and revision and how invention can and, indeed, should dictate both. The course will focus on foundations of the short story through the reading and discussion of masters in this very American craft. Finally, the course will examine and delve into the techniques of invention as central forays into the creation of short fiction.

I make the assumption that you are working on projects, either long or short, as we embark upon the course. We will begin with invention techniques and manuscripts immediately, workshopping and discussing directions we might take in order to revise and create/recreate improved versions. Then, we will explore how invention techniques, study of the masters, and consideration of writers' own discussion on craft can serve as openings for thoughtful and successful writing.

I have chosen texts that are foundational reading for all serious fiction writers—especially those writers pursuing craft through academic channels. I have also chosen to mix texts on invention, with an anthology of short fiction masters and books featuring writers talking about their craft and the craft of others so we may gain a complete picture of the field as well as further our own opportunities to create and improve. You might recognize these writers for their fictions, rather than for subsequent critical approaches, but the insight into fiction writing these texts provide should prove inspiring and instructive.

Course Goals:

1. To improve fiction writing using documented methodologies.

2. To apply these methodologies to the critical examination of the students' own and their peers' manuscripts.
3. To increase confidence in the student's ability to teach writing in their professional lives.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course the students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe 3 methodologies for improving fiction writing.
2. Describe how to use the "invention" techniques to construct a manuscript workshop.
3. Describe how to apply these methodologies to create a successful composition and revision strategy.
4. Describe the foundations of the short story and identify several masters of the short story form.
5. Discuss how the masters' own discussion of the writing craft can serve as openings for thoughtful and successful composition and revisions.

Required Texts:

Bernays, Anne, and Pamela Painter. *What If?* Third edition.

R. V. Cassill. *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*. Shorter Seventh Edition.

The New York Times. *Writers on Writing, Vols. I and II*.

First Class and Beyond:

By noon, on the first class day, I will have posted opening/welcoming remarks and suggestions for getting started in the course. On subsequent days, please check announcements for instructions on lectures and answers to class questions, which will also be posted weekdays (i.e. Monday-Friday) when necessary and/or appropriate. I will be "off-line" on the weekends, which will begin by 12 p.m. Fridays and continue until 12 p.m. Mondays. Office hours follow those listed above. I will be "off-line" during the week after 3 p.m. daily (i.e. look for email responses within 48 hours—or check the announcements, as I often answer general course questions there.

Please check announcements often. I post information and clarifications there at least twice a week; this information generally proves crucial, sometimes interesting, often helpful.

The best forum for receiving fast answers to questions is to email me.

Coursework:

****Please note that you must write attached assignments in Microsoft Word to insure we may all utilize them. Work may be submitted in “.doc, .docx, or .rtf. Please contact Sandy Bogus at sbogus@sulross.edu (or 432.837.8523) if you have technical problems or questions.****

****Blackboard only works best in Mozilla Firefox, which is a free download. Internet Explorer tends to cause problems in accessibility and utilization.****

The vast majority of this course will be completed via the writing of and discussion of fiction, readings, and writing processes. We will read and write about selections from the required texts for the course. You are expected to participate fully in a completely engaged manner and will be held accountable for your participation, both in formal and informal forums, throughout the completion of the semester's work. All of your participation must be thoughtful, sincere, and tactful. In the pursuit of these goals, we will write two complete fiction manuscripts. You will also complete a course journal that will hold course materials generated this semester. The course journal will consist of only assigned writings in the form of “elements.” You will participate in directed discussion boards, which will contain workshop feedback of one another's manuscripts as well as discussion prompts as listed in the syllabus. These also serve as the class participation component of the course, as they include assigned items such as and in particular workshop participation (i.e. comments and reactions to one another's fiction) and will largely determine the course grade. Finally, you will turn in a writer's memoir for the final exam, which serves as your personal statement about craft.

****I expect your coursework to mirror the time you would take with this course if it were an onsite course. Thus, you should spend the approximately three hours a week working on this course, with additional time for the actual reading and writing of the manuscripts, etc. determined by your personal reading and writing pace—just as you would for an onsite course.**

Detailed Assignment Description:

Discussion Boards—The discussion boards allow us to speak to one another. Think of the discussion boards as the “cyber” equivalent of sitting at the workshop table with one another and talking about our readings, writings, thoughts and reactions to the coursework. The first discussion boards will ask you to do just this. Please answer in detailed manners, using examples and analysis of the why and how for your answers. The posts at minimum must be approximately three hundred words. Responses to posts must be at minimum approximately one hundred words. The second half of the discussion boards serve as your workshop of one another's manuscripts (i.e. you will read each other's fiction pieces and write reactions to them). These essentially cover what you feel are the manuscripts' strengths and what, if each manuscript were yours, you would wish to work on in revision. Detailed instructions will be provided in a further lecture.

The discussion boards will improve our teaching and practice of methodologies of fiction and fiction writing through improved abilities to articulate our growing knowledge-base and expertise in the field.

Readings—The readings for the course involve two valuable types of writing: (1) short fiction by masters of fiction writing and (2) brief personal essays about fiction writing and the writing life by many of those same writers. Thus, we will be able to read great and varied examples of fiction as a way to model techniques while also glimpsing the craft of writing via those masters’ “real” lives. This allows us to increase confidence in our writing and analytic abilities as a way into our writing and ultimate teaching of writing.

Manuscript One—The short-short story is a form fast growing in popularity among writers and readers. It is essentially exactly what it sounds like—a short, short story. The length for these maxes out at six pages and can be as brief as a page (in the form of flash fiction). The manuscripts will not be formally workshopped by your peers but graded by me, and it may *not* serve as an early or first draft of manuscript two.

Manuscript Two—The manuscript will be an original short story of 10-15 pages. It will reflect knowledge and execution of the techniques of short fiction, which work to create vibrant and fully realized fiction. The goal of writing the manuscript is to apply the knowledge gained in our readings, discussions, and growing expertise in fiction writing to create an example of the craft. Manuscripts also give us practical work about which we may discuss and analyze craft and the products of this craft. Thus, the manuscript serves as a lab for improved creative and pedagogical techniques.

***Please note, the initial drafts turned in to me of the manuscripts are the graded versions. I will respond via the assignment link individually and in a graded format*

Course Journal—The course journal will consist of exercises in *What If?*. These exercises are all invention exercises whose goals are to improve techniques in fiction writing as well as abilities to write freely and with confidence. Obviously, the responses are as valuable as the effort put into them. Please feel free to use any of the notebook exercises as inspirations for the manuscripts—they are meant to be such. I will evaluate your effort on these exercises once, at the end of the course. It will be turned in as a single Word attachment. You will separate the elements by element number and page breaks. But please write the exercises as they are due—this will maximize their success for your writing.

Final Examination—The final examination will pull together the knowledge-base of our semester. That is, I will ask you to write inspired personal narratives elaborating upon your writing products, reading experiences, and writing life. These may include a discussion of where you feel your writing might be directed in the future. The goal of this assignment is to apply our discussions and growing skills in analysis of the short story, the readings of such, and the creative process, in memoir form.

Values:

Manuscript One:	20%
Manuscript Two	20%
Course Journal:	20%
Discussion Boards:	20%
Final Examination:	20%

Assessment:

This course will be assessed using a scale of one hundred percent:

A=90-100
B=80-89.5
C=70-79.5
D=60-69.5
F=59 and below

Attendance:

As this is a web-format, workshop course, consistent participation is absolutely necessary. Remaining current with the course schedule and taking part during the expected due dates will not only keep you personally engaged, but will ensure that other participants of the course can benefit from your thoughts, ideas, and reactions toward the readings and writing assignments. *If you miss due dates, I will not expect others in the class to consider your work in arrears. If you have missed a discussion board and have received a zero for the missed attempt, move on to the next ones; I will not change grades. If you fail to participate in a workshop during the workshop timeline, you will miss out on a major component of your discussion board grade. Other late work will result in an automatic ten points being taken off your grade; thus, if you received a B on an assignment, it will be reduced to a C. I do not accept any late work for this course after the final exam period has ended.*

****Please note that this course is a workshop which necessitates that students complete discussion boards and major assignments on the day on which the assignments are made. Thus, discussion boards must be posted by 7 p.m. on Tuesdays and responses be posted by midnight on Thursdays. This will ensure that the course's discussions move forward timely and with minimum inconvenience to your fellow students. I will shut down the discussion board after the due date and time. Thus, if you miss the assignment, you will not be able to make it up and will lose the credit.**

Late Work:

Assignments that are turned in late receive a 10-point deduction, regardless of how late the work is. Thus, an assignment that is graded at a B will be automatically reduced to a C, if the assignment is late. Assignments are due at the dates and times posted. Assignments turned in at any time after the posted due date and time are considered late. Please let me know in advance if you are experiencing a problem. I will not accept any late work after the final examination period for this course. It is completely the student's responsibility to make arrangements for and to turn in late work. I will not remind students of late or missed work. If you see a zero in the gradebook for an assignment, move on to further assignments.

****Manuscript Two (for workshop) must be turned in on the date and time due or they will not be workshopped by the class. In addition to not enjoying the readings of your original work by your peers, this late assignment will lose 10 points.**

Miscellaneous but Important:

If, for any reason, you require accommodations for the successful completion of this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that we may make arrangements.

I require that all discussions of our creative work remain tactful, sincere, and highly ethical. Take the time with one another's work that you would wish taken with your own. If you do not feel up to this challenge, please find another course.

My office hours are, of course, "cyber" hours, although I will be available on campus at Sul Ross during those hours as well. Please do not hesitate to call the office phone. Or, I can provide further numbers and arrange more convenient times to speak as necessary. I will answer emails within 48 hours of receiving them (with the exception of weekends), so please do not wait until the last moment to ask questions.

The Writing Center: The Writing Center is an academic support service available to all Sul Ross students. I strongly encourage you to make the center an integral part of your writing process by visiting the tutors frequently during the semester. The benefits of such visits are readily apparent in your work. The Center is located on the first floor of MAB, room 102, and its phone number is 432.837.8270.

Disabilities Statement: Persons with disabilities that may warrant academic accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that we may make arrangements to ensure the most hospitable and enhancing (cyber) learning environment as possible.

Academic Ethics: Any student who represents someone else's work as his or her own will automatically receive a zero for that assignment. Plagiarism can be purposeful or

inadvertent, but either results in an unacceptable and unethical academic performance. Plagiarism will most likely result in a failure for the course.

Syllabus

Date

Assignment

Week One

*read course introduction and policies

***Discussion Board 1:** * Introduce yourself to the class:
What do you like to read? What do you hope to gain in the course? Respond to two other writers.

What If?:

*read pgs. 169-170
*complete exercise 73, pg. 185
(journal element 1)

*read pgs. 5-6
*complete ex. 3 pg. 14-17 (journal element 2)

*read “Shiloh” pg. 153
*read “Gryphon” pg. 287
*read “How to Talk to a Hunter” pg. 340

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Pupils Glimpse an Idea, Teacher Gets a Gold Star,” pg. 23

Week Two

*read lecture one: “Foundations for All Writers”

***Discussion Board 2:** *Briefly discuss your writing processes, story ideas and respond encouragingly to two writers—ask questions, help build ideas, community! Respond to two colleagues.

What If?:

*read pgs. 261-262
*complete exercise 108 pg. 270
(journal element 3)

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “How Can You Create Fiction When Reality

Comes to Call” pg. 35

“Those Words That Echo . . . Echo . . . Echo . . .
Through Life” pg. 123

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “Young Goodman Brown” pg. 325
*read “The Yellow Wallpaper” pg. 302

Week Three

*read lecture two: “Narrative Techniques”
*read Assignment: “Manuscript One”

***Discussion Board 3:** *Gilman’s story is about post-partum depression, a controversial idea for its time; and Hawthorne’s, about questioning faith, controversial for his time, as well. Discuss controversial topics which could be well explored in fiction today. Explore also how these writers utilized symbolism to further their thematic ideals. How might you utilize symbolism to best effect as these writers managed? Respond to two posts.

What If?: *Read pgs. 31-32
*complete exercise 13 pg. 42 ([journal element 4](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “When Inspiration Stared Stoically from an
Old Photograph” pg. 89

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “Fall of the House of Usher” pg. 661
*read “The Story of an Hour” pg. 123

Week Four

*read lecture three: “What Makes Short Fiction Short??”

***Discussion Board 4:** Both “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “Story of an Hour” present surprise endings. Discuss your conception of the surprise. When is the surprise satisfying and when does it move to artifice? Finally, do you see yourself as a short-form writer or a longer form? Respond to 2 posts.

What If?: *Complete exercise 105, pg. 265 ([journal element 5](#))

*Read pgs. 55-56

*Complete exercise 19, pg. 57 ([journal element 6](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Characters’ Weaknesses Build Fiction’s Strengths”
pg. 28
”From Echos Emerge Original Voices” pg. 43

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “Hills Like White Elephants” pg. 335
*read “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall”
pg. 675

Week Five

*read lecture four: “Tenses”

***Discussion Board 5:** *Discuss tense—what are the opportunities and challenges offered in the use of each? Be specific, citing stories read for class. To which tense are you most attracted to as a writer? Why? Respond to two posts.

What If?: *Complete exercise 11, pg. 36 ([journal element 7](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Two Languages in the Mind, but Just One in the Head” pg. 54

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “A Rose for Emily” pg. 262
*read “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” pg. 297

Week Six *read lecture five: “Drafting, Redrafting, Editing”

***Discussion Board 6:** Discuss the value of redrafting, revision. Have you experienced either satisfying or frustrating revision processes? Why? How? Respond to two posts.

What If?: *Read pgs. 89-93
*Complete exercise 38, pg. 109 ([journal element 8](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “A Path Taken with All the Certainty of Youth”
pg. 9

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “Babylon Revisited” pg. 269
*read “The Man Who Was Almost a Man”
pg. 825

Week Seven **Manuscript One Due!!!**

***Discussion Board 7:** *Discuss your writing processes from the moment of idea building to polishing. What works best for you and what has moved into the ugly realm of bad habits? How are you feeling about the draft you are working on? Respond to two posts.

What If?: *Read pgs. 111-113

*Complete exercise 39, pg. 114 ([journal element 9](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “A Novelist’s Vivid Memory Spins Fiction of Its Own” pg. 8

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “Calming the Inner Critic and Getting to Work”
pg. 71

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty”
pg. 720

*read “Everyday Use” pg. 776

Week Eight

*read assignment “Manuscript Two”

***Discussion Board 8:** *Discuss one or more of the writers on writing pieces we have read thus far, one that has struck you with that moment at which you feel the writer is speaking just to you, has experienced what you have as a writer. Have any of the essays presented notions you either have never thought of or about which you felt no connection? Respond to two posts.

What If?: *Read pgs. 73-74

*Complete exercise 29, pg. 84 ([journal element 10](#))

*Complete exercise 26, pg. 75 ([journal element 11](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Directions: Write, Read, Rewrite, Repeat” pg. 217

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “Easy on the Adverbs, Exclamations Points, and

Especially Hoopedoodle” pg. 143

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “The Chrysanthemums” pg. 704
*read “A Worn Path” pg. 799

Week Nine *read lecture six: “Workshop Guidelines”

***Discussion Board 9:** Discuss how your manuscript is going. Ask advice of classmates. Respond encouragingly to two posts.

What If?: *complete exercise 26, pg. 75 ([journal element 12](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Starting with a Tree and Finally Getting to the Death of a Brother” pg. 204

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “Before a Rendezvous With the Muse, First Select the Music” pg. 26

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “Blackberry Winter” pg. 783
*read “Royal Beatings” pg. 569

Week Ten **Manuscript Two Due!!!**

*read lecture seven: “Group Workshop Instructions”

***Discussion Board 10:** *Both “Blackberry Winter” and “Royal Beatings” are what I consider “quiet” stories. By this I mean that they are visceral, subtle in meaning. Discuss your readings of their meanings and the effect that this type of story has on you as a reader and, more importantly, a writer. Respond to two posts

What If?: *Complete exercise 42, pg. 120 ([journal element 13](#))

*Read pgs. 247-248

*Complete exercise 100, pg. 255 ([journal element 14](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Embarking Together on a Solitary Journey”
pg. 263

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “A Narrator Leaps Past Journalism” pg. 77

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “King of the Bingo Game” pg. 228
*read “The Things They Carried” pg. 603

Week Eleven

***Discussion Board 11:** *Read and respond to posted manuscripts according to instructions.

What If?: *Complete exercise 102, pg. 259 ([journal element 15](#))

*Read pgs. 143-144

*Complete exercise 55, pg. 150 ([journal element 16](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “Inspiration? Head Down the Back Road and Stop for the Yard Sales” pg. 185

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “Family Ghosts Hoard Secrets that Bewitch the Living” pg. 237

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”
pg. 616
*read “The Conscience of the Court”
pg. 340

Week Twelve

***Discussion Board 12:** *Read and respond to posted manuscripts according to instructions.

What If?: *Complete exercise 57, pg. 153 ([journal element 17](#))

*Complete exercise 58, pg. 156 ([journal element 18](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “*Questions of Character: There’s No Ego as Wounded as a Wounded Alter Ego*” pg. 236

Norton Anthology of Short Fiction: *read “A&P” pg. 765
*read “Why I Like Country Music” pg. 517

Week Thirteen

***Discussion Board 13:** *Read and respond to posted manuscripts according to instructions.

What If?: *Complete exercise 61, pg. 162 ([journal element 19](#))

*Read pgs. 133-134

*Complete exercise 49, pg. 135 ([journal element 20](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. I: “A Sacred Magic Can Elevate the Secular Storyteller” pg. 258

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “Still Replying to Grandma’s Persistent ‘And Then?’” pg. 251

Week Fourteen

***Discussion Board 14:** *Read and respond to posted manuscripts according to instructions.

What If?: *Complete exercise 84, pg. 215 ([journal element 21](#))

Writers on Writing Vol. II: “The Eye of the Reporter, the Heart of the Novelist”
pg. 195

Week Fifteen

**Final Examination Due!!
Journal Due!!**

***Discussion Board 15:** *Read and respond to posted manuscripts according to instructions. Check announcements for alternative DB if we have no further manuscripts (as determined by class size and manuscripts turned in on time).

What If?: *Read pgs. 197-198
*Complete exercise 78, pg. 199 ([journal element 22](#))
*Complete exercise 81, pg. 209 ([journal element 23](#))