

ENG 303: Introduction to Fiction

Fall 2011, Tuesdays 2-4:20pm, SOS B43

Instructor: Trinie Dalton, tc Dalton@usc.edu

Office Hours: THH 425, Tuesdays 4:30-5:30pm or by appointment

Course objective: This generative fiction-writing workshop will revolve equally around inspiring a personal writing style in new story drafts and learning craft techniques to aid revision. We'll also glance into fiction's relevance to contemporary art, film, and print media during collaborative and/or research-oriented "library" breakout sessions about independent and alternative publishing, or contemporary literary topics. By exposing participants to the rigors of fiction writing craft as well as to the consideration of a text's endurance in alternative media, this course aims to encourage an author's activity in every stage of their practice—to consider broad definitions and possibilities for fiction as a potent, lively art form.

8/23 IN CLASS: Intro: Syllabus/Orientation/Textbook
Read Aloud: Amy Hempel / Write: "Remember"
Library Session: Artists' Books Viewing

AT HOME: Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ "On Keeping A Notebook" (Didion, p.40)
2/ "Emergency" (Denis Johnson, p.47)
Get some paper/thread/needle to bring to class 8/30
Write!

8/30 IN CLASS: Write: "Camera" (p.39) & Fiction Craft Discussion
Demo: Pamphlet Stitch

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (Joyce Carol Oates, p.72)
2/ "Details, Details" (Alice LaPlante, pgs. 107-118)

9/6 IN CLASS: Workshop _____, _____
Fiction Craft Discussion: Details

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ "The Things They Carried" (O'Brien, p.131)
2/ "The Shapely Story" (Alice LaPlante, pgs. 152-165)

9/13 IN CLASS: Workshop _____, _____
Fiction Craft Discussion: Story Structures

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ "Material" (Lucy Corin, handout)
2/ A story of your choosing to map out

9/20	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, Library Session: Present Story Maps
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Brownies" (ZZ Packer, p.227)
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9/27	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, Write: "Show & Tell" Fiction Craft Discussion: Narration—Scene & Exposition
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Short Talks" (Anne Carson, handout) 2/ "Up the Old Goat Road" (Dawn Raffel, handout) Write short shorts
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10/4	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, Fiction Craft Discussion: Short Short/Prose Poem Read Aloud: Mary Ruefle/James Tate/Lydia Davis
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "St. Martin" & (Lydia Davis, Handout) 2/ "The Lady With the Little Dog" (Chekov, p.284) Research: DIY/Literary Magazines Finish short shorts to read aloud 10/11
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10/11	IN CLASS:	Library Session: DIY/Literary Magazines Class Reading: "Short Shorts"
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Ralph the Duck" (Busch, p.521) 2/ "Who's Telling This Story, Anyway?" (Alice LaPlante, pgs. 258-278)
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10/18	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, Fiction Craft Discussion: Point of View
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "My Mother's Clothes" (Richard McCann, handout)
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10/25	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, Write: "I/You/He/She/We"
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Hills Like White Elephants" (Ernest Hemingway, p.356) 2/ "You Talking to Me?" (Alice LaPlante, pgs.341-54)
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11/1	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____ Fiction Craft Discussion: Dialogue & Diction
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Protista" (Dambudzo Marechera, handout) 2/ "Signs & Symbols" (Vladimir Nabokov, handout)
11/8	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____ Fiction Craft Discussion: Story & Plot
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "People Like That Are The Only People Here" (Lorie Moore, p.479)
11/15	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____ Library Session: Team Syntax Report (Assign & Explore—Gass, Olin-Unferth, Marcus, Lutz)
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "The Indian Uprising" (Donald Barthelme, handout) Get your portfolio together
11/22	IN CLASS:	Final Portfolio Due Library Session: Team Syntax Report (Report)
	AT HOME:	Write: "Syntax"
11/29	IN CLASS:	Portfolios returned, individual meetings, celebration Class Reading: "Syntax"

Class Structure & Requirements

—Classes will alternate between workshops, literary craft discussions, and collaborative, interactive library breakout sessions and activities. At home you'll be required to 1/ write fiction, to 2/ read assigned fiction, to 3/write short weekly critical reactions, and to 4/ research and/or coordinate for library sessions. I will direct in-depth workshops of your individual stories, guide craft discussions, and initiate library sessions during which we might consider independent and alternative publishing, look at artists' books, make books, and/or explore modes of contemporary fiction. This syllabus refers you to what is happening in class that day (*In Class*) as well as the homework due following week (*At Home*).

—On a weekly basis, beyond the generation of your own work and peer reactions, you should submit to me a one-page commentary on literature assigned. This is a personal reaction, so format is flexible. It can be a compare/contrast, an examination of one aspect of the story you are particularly drawn to, a note about how the readings inform your work. You can discuss style, craft, subject matter...this is also a great time to ask questions. Goals here are to 1/ hone your critical mind and writing, to 2/ create a private dialogue between student and instructor, and to 3/ prepare you not only to discuss assigned stories in class but also to ideally apply their notable concepts in peer workshop. (Also, bear in mind that

at the end of the semester these commentaries will be collected into a portfolio to influence your final grade.)

—Final Portfolio should include: 1/ your fiction + any revisions, 2/ your assigned reading commentaries that I handed back to you (with my marks), 3/ notes from peers about your workshop submissions, 4/ library session research and/or project evidence. Portfolio design is optional; have fun with it!

Preparing for a peer's fiction workshop:

Please prepare detailed notes about the prose your peer submits to workshop, to bring to class as reference during workshop. Be very specific with your suggestions, and give examples with quotes when possible. Bring a copy of these notes to give to your peer after their workshop. While these notes will not be submitted to me, they will be turned in with your peer's final portfolio—Therefore, I will see them and these notes contribute to your participation grade. Save everything, including these notes, to compile portfolios.

Your fiction submission:

1/ Submit enough copies of your piece for everyone in class (12) the week **previous** to your workshop. After your workshop, we will return to you all copies of your text marked up with editorial, along with our notes.

2/ Your commentary on assigned reading is due, but you get a one-week extension. Therefore, it is due not the week you submit prose, but the week after your workshop.

—A note on what to submit to workshop:

You can submit whatever you want, as long as it is sincere and it exemplifies your capability. Don't be afraid to submit something that is imperfect (that's what we're here for!), but do try to get as far as you can on the prose before submitting it. Page-count is not set in stone, though generally it runs to 7-10 pages (maximum 12 pages; if submitting short shorts or flash fiction then maximum 4 prose selections, up to 12 pages). If you are working on a novel, choose a short passage and provide an ABSTRACT as foreword, notifying the class of pertinent details. This class is tailored to the short story, but is open to genre-boundary challenges and to various prose styles.

Assigned Texts & Further Reading:

—The required text for this course is **The Making of A Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing**, by Alice LaPlante. It is available in the USC Bookstore; please purchase it asap.

—Though we will not be officially reading other craft books and essay collections this semester, I can recommend these for further reading:

The Modern Library's Writer's Workshop: A Guide to the Craft of Fiction, by Stephen Koch

The Writer's Workshop: Craft Essays from Tin House

Mystery and Manners, by Flannery O'Connor

Great Writers on the Art of Fiction: From Mark Twain to Joyce Carol Oates, edited by James Daley

The Art of Fiction, by John Gardner

Alone With All That Could Happen: Rethinking Conventional Wisdom About the Craft of Writing Fiction, by David Jauss

Burning Down the House, by Charles Baxter

Class Conduct & Grading Policy

1/ Grades are based on the quality of your scheduled submitted fiction & written critiques (50%), your final portfolio (25%), class participation (10%), and library sessions (15%). My primary concerns are that we dialogue openly, engage in focused conversation, that your attendance is good, and that your writing and authorial identity are strengthened during our semester together. A lackadaisical presence in class will lower your grade as will multiple absences (three or more absences = one letter grade drop). Notify me of impending absences. Please submit work on time; late or missing assignments can disturb the rhythm of a small class. Compiled written work will be assessed for final grading based on your **PORTFOLIO** that is due **November 22nd**, though you will be graded along the way as well and will be notified at midterm of your progress. On **November 29th**, I'll return your final portfolio during our brief, individual final grade meetings. The last class will also be a class reading and CELEBRATION of your INDUSTRY!

A=Amazing; turns in all assignments on time and quality of written work is stellar.

B=Good; turns in all or most assignments, makes most deadlines, and quality of written work is absolutely passable.

C=Needs improvement; misses too many classes, deadlines, and is not generally with it. Doing the bare minimum to pass.

D=Not passing.

2/ Be on time. Chronic tardiness is considered a class disruption and will lower your grade. However, if occasionally late, it's better to come in quietly to join class than to skip.

3/ CELL PHONES OFF por favor **ZERO TOLERANCE**

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5pm, M-F. 213-740-0776.

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the student guidebook, contains Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Nice to meet you; I sincerely look forward to our class. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.