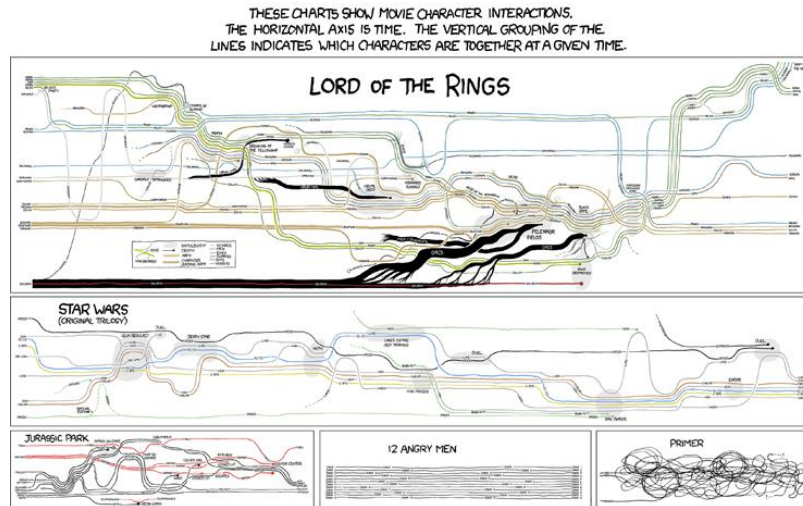


# ENGL 270g: Studying Narrative

MWF 12–12:50pm  
Fall 2024 – THH 203

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Office Hours: M 4–5pm, F 1–2pm in THH 404F



[xkcd.com/657/](http://xkcd.com/657/)

## Course Description

People say that they “get lost” in a good story—as if a story were a maze, or a wilderness, or an unknown country. The metaphor of being lost suggests the strange magic that narratives perform in transporting us elsewhere: one minute we are sitting down with a novel or starting a movie, and the next we are suddenly penned up in a storm-exposed farmhouse on a Yorkshire moor in 1802 or haunting a small, “spiteful” building at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati in 1874. But just how does this narrative magic work? In this class we put together a basic guidebook for finding our way through narratives, analyzing major narrative features and techniques, and becoming familiar with some of the key theoretical approaches to narrative study.

We begin by examining the building blocks of narrative, including aspects of narration, characterization, and plot, ranging across different narrative platforms such as short stories, novels, narrative poems, essays, comic strips, films, and musical albums. We then follow what has been called the “ethical turn” in narrative studies in considering how narratives and our experiences of them are shaped by questions of identity, empathy, and trauma. Finally, we engage with recent narrative works that illuminate the shape of narrative today, including Sally Rooney’s tour-de-force novel *Normal People* and Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s wickedly funny *Fleabag*.

## Learning Objectives

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

- Define major narrative features and elements of narrative theory, and identify and analyze examples of these features in an unfamiliar narrative text.
- Experiment with narrative techniques to understand how they affect meaning.
- Analyze complex instances of narrative focalization and of the relationship between story and discourse.
- Draw on theoretical texts in order to reflect on how stories explore identity, alterity, trauma, and sympathy.

## Course Books

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847; Penguin, 2002)  
Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (1856; Penguin, 2002)  
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927; Harcourt, 1989)  
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; Vintage, 2004)  
Sally Rooney, *Normal People* (2018; Hogarth, 2020)

H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2021)

Assigned texts not in the course books will be posted to Brightspace.

## Description of Assignments and Grading Breakdown

This seminar is designed around weekly intensive work rather than building to cumulative, high-stakes assignments. As such, it depends on your curiosity, your willingness to take intellectual risks, and your lively engagement with the readings, with one another, with me, and with yourself.

You will complete **five short exercises**, which range from applying techniques for analyzing narrative to writing your own creative experiments.

You will sign up to become an expert on two narrative concepts and will submit **two entries to the class Narrative Encyclopedia** describing how each concept works and providing examples.

The narrative encyclopedia will serve as a study guide for a **final exam**, in which you apply narrative terms from the class to analyze familiar and unfamiliar texts, and discuss how certain ethical questions reshape your understanding of course readings.

| Assignment                       | Points |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Exercises (5 at 100 points each) | 500    |
| Narrative Encyclopedia           | 100    |
| Participation                    | 150    |
| Final Exam                       | 250    |

Final Grade: A 930–1000; A- 895–929; B+ 870–894; B 830–869; B- 795–829; C+ 770–794; C 730–769

## Expectations

You will:

- **attend class regularly and on time.** Please clear legitimate absences—for illness, religious holidays, or emergencies—with me beforehand. After three unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will cost ten points from your participation grade. Three instances of tardiness count as an unexcused absence.
- **closely read assigned texts,** printing out texts and making notes while you read, and come to class prepared for discussion.
- **work to produce creative and intelligent writing.** All work should be your own. You should not need to consult ChatGPT, Grammarly, or other AI resources for completing any coursework; if you think consulting AI resources would improve your work, please check with me beforehand and be certain to cite usage appropriately.
- **turn your work in on time.** Assignments turned in after the due date will be penalized by ten points for each day that they are late. Contact me ahead of time if you will need an extension.

I will:

- **prepare for class time** while remaining flexible to respond to your interests, questions, and concerns.
- **approach each day with enthusiasm** and an openness to learning alongside you.
- **communicate clearly and in a timely manner** about assignments, deadlines, and grading criteria.
- **be available** over email and during office hours to discuss issues relating to the course, and to serve as a resource for your reading, thinking, and writing.
- **read your work carefully, provide thoughtful feedback, and evaluate it fairly** according to clear standards.

## Note on AI

This course is designed to help you grow as a reader, a thinker, and a writer. This growth requires direct contact with language, even if that contact involves making mistakes or hitting creative dead-ends. AI cannot do your learning for you!

Any use of AI to help you write will be considered a violation of the academic honor code and may result in failure for an assignment or in the class. This includes the use of Grammarly to suggest alternative words or sentence constructions. There are many AI apps out there; please ask if you have any questions about what constitutes an improper use of AI.

| Schedule of Readings |   |  |                         |
|----------------------|---|--|-------------------------|
|                      | Topics  | Readings   | Tasks                   |
| <b>Week 1</b>        |   |  |                         |
| Aug 26               | beginnings  | first paragraphs of <i>Wuthering Heights</i> ,<br><i>Madame Bovary</i> , <i>To the Lighthouse</i> ,<br><i>Beloved</i> , <i>Normal People</i>   |                         |
| Aug 28               | middles, ends   | Helen Oyeyemi, “books and roses”<br>Abbott, “Narrative and Life,” pp. 1–11   |                         |
| Aug 30               | <b>narration</b><br>narrative levels;<br>embedding      | Emily Brontë, <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 1–7<br>Abbott, “The Borders of Narrative,” pp 29–31  |                         |
| <b>Week 2</b>        |   |  |                         |
| Sept 2               |   | LABOR DAY – NO CLASS   |                         |
| Sept 4               | story v. discourse<br>(order)                           | Emily Brontë, <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 8–11<br>Abbott, “Defining Narrative,” pp. 15–21  |                         |
| Sept 6               | story v. discourse<br>(duration, frequency)             | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 12–16<br>Gérard Genette, fr. <i>Narrative Discourse</i>  |                         |
| <b>Week 3</b>        |   |  |                         |
| Sept 9               | narrator; narratee                                      | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 17–21<br>Abbott, “Narration,” pp. 72–78  |                         |
| Sept 11              | distance; focalization                                  | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 22–28<br>Abbott, “Narration,” pp. 79–83  |                         |
| Sept 13              | paratext  | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , chs. 29–34<br>Charlotte Brontë, Editor’s Preface to the New<br>Edition of <i>Wuthering Heights</i><br>Abbott, “The Borders of Narrative,” pp. 31–2,<br>“Narrative Contestation,” pp. 183–89         | <b>Turn in<br/>ex 1</b> |
| <b>Week 4</b>        |   |  |                         |
| Sept 16              | adaptation  | Kate Beaton, “Wuthering Heights,” parts 1–6<br>Kate Bush, “Wuthering Heights”<br>Daniel M. Lavery, fr. <i>Texts from Jane Eyre</i><br>William Wyler, <i>Wuthering Heights</i><br>Abbott, “Adaptation Across Media,” pp. 118–33 |                         |
| Sept 18              | film narration  | Alfred Hitchcock, <i>Vertigo</i><br>Seymour Chatman, fr. <i>Coming to Terms</i> , pp.<br>133–36  |                         |
| Sept 20              | <b>characterization</b><br>plot v. character;<br>agency | Gustave Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 1<br>Aristotle, fr. <i>Poetics</i><br>Abbott, “Character and Self in Narrative,” pp.<br>136–144  |                         |
| <b>Week 5</b>        |   |  |                         |
| Sept 23              | dramatic functions                                      | Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 2, Chs. 1–6  |                         |

|                |   |   |                     |
|----------------|---|---|---------------------|
| Sept 25        | character systems                         | Vladimir Propp, fr. "The Functions of Dramatis Personae"  |                     |
| Sept 27        | direct v. indirect v. free indirect style | Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 2, Chs. 7–10<br>Alex Woloch, fr. <i>The One and the Many</i>                  |                     |
| <b>Week 6</b>  |   |   |                     |
| Sept 30        | free indirect style, cont'd.              | Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 3, Chs. 1–6<br>Abbott, "Narration," pp. 83–85                                 | <b>Turn in ex 2</b> |
| Oct 2          | <b>plot</b><br>agon                       | Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 3, Chs. 1–6<br>Abbott, "Closure," p. 61, "Narrative Worlds," pp. 167–174      |                     |
| Oct 4          | suspense; surprise                        | Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , Part 3, Chs. 7–11<br>Peter Brooks, fr. <i>Reading for the Plot</i>                 |                     |
| <b>Week 7</b>  |   |   |                     |
| Oct 7          | causation                                 | Virginia Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "The Window," chs. 1–8<br>Abbott, "The Rhetoric of Narrative," pp. 46–52 |                     |
| Oct 9          | constituent v. supplementary events       | <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "The Window," chs. 9–14<br>Abbott, "Defining Narrative," pp. 22–26                       |                     |
| Oct 11         |   | FALL RECESS – NO CLASS  |                     |
| <b>Week 8</b>  |   |   |                     |
| Oct 14         | motifs; themes                            | <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "The Window," chs. 15–19<br>Abbott, "Interpreting Narrative," pp. 101–103                | <b>Turn in ex 3</b> |
| Oct 16         | gaps                                      | <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "Time Passes"<br>Abbott, "Interpreting Narrative," pp. 92–101                            |                     |
| Oct 18         | masterplots; acts v. happenings           | <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "The Lighthouse," chs. 1–4<br>Abbott, "The Rhetoric of Narrative," pp. 52–56             |                     |
| <b>Week 9</b>  |   |   |                     |
| Oct 21         | discovery; peripety                       | <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , "The Lighthouse," chs. 5–13<br>Aristotle, fr. <i>Poetics</i>                             |                     |
| Oct 23         | closure                                   | Akira Kurosawa, <i>Rashomon</i><br>Abbott, "Closure," pp. 62–71   |                     |
| Oct 25         | review                                    | review  |                     |
| <b>Week 10</b> | <b>Narrative Ethics</b>                   |   |                     |
| Oct 28         |   | Jhumpa Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies"<br>Wolfgang Iser, fr. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach"   |                     |
| Oct 30         |   | Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , Part One, chs. 1–3  |                     |

|                          |  |   |                              |
|--------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| Nov 1                    |  | Ursula Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"<br><i>Beloved</i> , Part One, chs. 4–8<br>Emmanuel Levinas, fr. <i>Alterity and Transcendence</i> |                              |
| <b>Week 11</b><br>Nov 4  |  | <i>Beloved</i> , Part One, chs. 9–14<br>Saidiya Hartman, fr. "Venus in Two Acts"  | <b>Turn in ex 4</b>          |
| Nov 6                    | <i>Beloved</i> , Part One, chs. 15–18<br>Suzanne Keen, fr. "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" |   |                              |
| Nov 8                    | <i>Beloved</i> , Part Two, ch. 19<br>Cathy Caruth, fr. <i>The Unclaimed Experience</i>     |   |                              |
| <b>Week 12</b><br>Nov 11 |  | VETERANS' DAY – NO CLASS  |                              |
| Nov 13                   |  | <i>Beloved</i> , Part Two, chs. 20–25<br>Homi Bhabha, fr. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation"                       |                              |
| Nov 15                   |  | <i>Beloved</i> , Part Three, chs. 26–28<br>Kimberly Chabot Davis, fr. "Postmodern Blackness: Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> and the End of History"   |                              |
| <b>Week 13</b><br>Nov 18 |  | review  | <b>Turn in ex 5</b>          |
| Nov 20                   | <b>Contemporary Narrative</b>  | Sally Rooney, <i>Normal People</i> , pp 1–84 (up to "Three Months Later (February 2012)")   |                              |
| Nov 22                   |  | <i>Normal People</i> , pp. 85–140 (up to "Four Months Later (January 2013)")  |                              |
| <b>Week 14</b><br>Nov 25 |  | <i>Normal People</i> , pp. 141–205 (up to "Three Months later (March 2014)")  |                              |
| Nov 27                   |  | THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS   |                              |
| Nov 29                   |  | THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS   |                              |
| <b>Week 15</b><br>Dec 2  |  | <i>Normal People</i> , pp. 207–73   | <b>Turn in narr. entries</b> |
| Dec 4                    |  | <i>Fleabag</i> , Season 2, Episodes 1–3   |                              |
| Dec 6                    |  | <i>Fleabag</i> , Season 2, Episodes 4–6   |                              |
| <b>Week 16</b>           |  | <b>Final Exam Friday, Dec 13, 11am–1pm</b>  |                              |

## Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

### Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

### Support Systems:

#### Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

#### 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

#### Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

#### Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

#### Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

#### The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411*

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101*

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call*

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

*Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)*

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.