

## ENGLISH 201-02: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING

Fall Semester 2015

TR 2:00-3:15 PM, Palmer Hall 211

CRN: 15272

---

Dr. Caki Wilkinson  
Phone: x3426  
Email: wilkinsonc@rhodes.edu

Office: Palmer 304  
Office hours: TR, 12:30-2:00 PM, and by appt.

### TEXTS

*Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (9<sup>th</sup> Edition)

Selected stories available as PDFs on Moodle

“I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say.”

– Flannery O’Connor

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to help you broaden your understanding and appreciation of the craft of fiction. We will read literary short fiction written by a variety of contemporary authors. We will take stories apart, examining their separate pieces and the techniques required to make the pieces cohere. Finally, we will do a lot of writing, discuss this writing in workshop, and learn how to make it better.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Seven writing exercises (2 pages each)
- Two short stories (6-8 pages and 10-12 pages)
- Active participation in workshop and written responses to stories

**Writing exercises.** You will complete seven writing exercises, some of which will begin with an activity in class. These exercises are designed to help you generate fresh material and experiment with different elements of fiction writing. The guidelines for each assignment will vary, but in general they should be two pages in length (double-spaced, Times New Roman font).

**Stories and final portfolio.** You will submit two short stories (6-8 and 10-12 pages), both of which will be discussed in workshop and revised as part of a final portfolio at the end of the term. These two stories are a substantial part of your grade. They **must** be submitted on time, and they **must** be complete at the time of submission, with a beginning, middle, and end.

At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio that includes the first drafts of both stories and your newly revised versions. In addition, for the second story you will include a revision narrative (two double-spaced pages) that describes your initial writing process and the choices you made when revising the story.

## Workshop

During workshop weeks, we will discuss 3-4 stories in a class period. The formats for specific workshops may change as the semester progresses, but this is how the submission process will work:

- 1) The day your story is due, you will email it to me by 9 AM. I will compile workshop packets and post them to Moodle later that evening. You **must** submit your stories on time, and they **must** be complete, with a beginning, middle, and end. Late and/or incomplete stories will receive a 0.
- 2) Prior to workshop, everyone will read the stories in the packet and write a one-page letter to each author critiquing his or her story.
- 3) You will print out and bring to class the workshop packet and **two** copies of your workshop letters (one copy for the author and one copy for me).

## Participation

Active participation is an essential component of this course. A workshop cannot succeed unless everyone in the class attends and participates. You are expected to contribute to class discussions and to critique the work of your peers with thoughtfulness and respect. If you come to class without the required materials (stories for workshop, workshop letters, handouts, books, and so forth) you will lose points from your participation grade. Workshop packets and assigned stories posted to Moodle must be printed out as hard copies (no reading from phones or laptops).

Additionally, I may give quizzes. These will be short (3-4 questions), and if you have done the reading you should not have trouble passing them.

## POLICIES

### Assignments

All work must be typed, and assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the scheduled due date. Late work will receive a 0 unless you have made specific arrangements with me beforehand. This is a firm policy. With the exception of stories submitted for workshop, I will not accept work via email.

### Attendance

You are allowed three excused absences but no unexcused absences. An absence is only excused if you have contacted me before class to explain the circumstances. For each unexcused absence, your final grade will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade. After three excused absences, your final grade will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade as well. If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course.

### Grading

<b>Stories and final portfolio</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Writing exercises</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Participation</b> (includes attendance, quizzes and workshop letters)	<b>15%</b>

Because this course is workshop-based with an emphasis on revision, you will not receive letter grades for many assignments. I will assign midterm grades to give you a sense of where you stand, and you are always welcome—and encouraged—to discuss your progress with me.

### **Academic Honesty**

All work in this course should be original and individual, unless I have made a group assignment. Evidence of collusion (someone helped you write the assignment), plagiarism (using someone else's published or unpublished words without acknowledgement), or multiple submissions (handing in the same work to different classes) will not be tolerated. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the Honor Code.

### **Rhodes College Commitment to Diversity**

A diverse learning community is a necessary element of a liberal arts education, for self-understanding is dependent upon the understanding of others. We, the members of Rhodes College, are committed to fostering a community in which diversity is valued and welcomed. To that end, Rhodes College does not discriminate—and will not tolerate harassment—on the basis of race, gender, color, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, and national or ethnic origin.

We are committed to providing an open learning environment. Freedom of thought, a civil exchange of ideas, and an appreciation of diverse perspectives are fundamental characteristics of a community that is committed to critical inquiry. To promote such an academic and social environment we expect integrity and honesty in our relationships with each other and openness to learning about and experiencing cultural diversity. We believe that these qualities are crucial to fostering social and intellectual maturity and personal growth.

Intellectual maturity also requires individual struggle with unfamiliar ideas. We recognize that our views and convictions will be challenged, and we expect this challenge to take place in a climate of open-mindedness and mutual respect.

<b>SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS</b>
---------------------------------

Reading and writing assignments are listed on the day they are due. Unless otherwise noted, all stories listed are available on Moodle as PDFs. **You must print these out and bring the hard copies to class (no reading from phones, tablets, or laptops).**

**Thursday, 8/27**

Syllabus / introductions

**Tuesday, 9/1**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 2 (21-65)

**Thursday, 9/3**

Read: Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

Amy Bloom, "Silver Water"

Write: Exercise 1 (Description)

**Tuesday, 9/8**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 4 (116-154)

**Thursday, 9/10**

Read: Matthew Klam, "Sam the Cat"

Kevin Wilson, "Grand Stand-In"

Write: Exercise 2 (Character)

**Tuesday, 9/15**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 3 (67-114)

**Thursday, 9/17**

Read: Nina McConigley, "White Wedding"

ZZ Packer, "Brownies"

Write: Exercise 3 (Dialogue)

**Tuesday, 9/22**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 7 (230-74)

**Thursday, 9/24**

Read: Frederick Busch, "Ralph the Duck"

April Wilder, "We Were Champions"

Write: Exercise 4 (Conflict 2.0)

**Tuesday, 9/29**

Read: Colson Whitehead, "The Gangsters"

Write: Exercise 5

**Thursday, 10/1**

Read: TBA

**Tuesday, 10/6**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 6 (193-229)

Write: Story 1 (Group A)

**Thursday, 10/8**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 10/13**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Story 1 (Group B)

Workshop letters

**Thursday, 10/15**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 10/20 – FALL BREAK**

**Thursday, 10/22**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 10/27**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 8 (276-314)

**Thursday, 10/29**

Read: Aimee Bender, “Debbieland”

Sam Lipsyte, “The Dungeon Master”

Write: Exercise 6

**Tuesday, 11/3**

Read: Padgett Powell, “Scarliotti and the Sink Hole”

Karen Russell, “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves” (*Writing Fiction*, 172-184)

**Thursday, 11/5**

Read: Chris Adrian, “Every Night for a Thousand Years”

Kelly Link, “Some Zombie Contingency Plans”

Write: Exercise 7 (Beginnings)

**Tuesday, 11/10**

Read: Selected Flash Fiction (packet)

Write: Story 2 (Group B)

**Thursday, 11/12**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 11/17**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Story 2 (Group A)

Workshop letters

**Thursday, 11/19**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 11/24**

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

**Thursday, 11/26 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

**Tuesday, 12/1**

Read: *Writing Fiction*, Ch. 9 (316-338)

Write: Exercise 8 (Endings)

**Thursday, 12/3**

Read: TBA

\* Bring to class a clean, double-spaced copy of Story 2

**Tuesday, 12/8**

Group Workshops (more info to come)

**Monday, 12/14**

Final portfolios due in my office by noon.