

**English CENG505: Creative Writing**

Winter 2014

**Instructor: Lauren Kirshner****Office Hours:** By appointment Mondays before or after class**Email:** [lauren.kirshner@ryerson.ca](mailto:lauren.kirshner@ryerson.ca)**Course Dates**

Monday January 13 – Monday April 14

**Course Schedule**

Mondays, 6:30-9:30 pm, SHE651

**Calendar Description**

This upper-level course offers students the opportunity both to study models of good writing and to develop their own creative abilities. Class discussions and workshop groups are designed to enhance the student's understanding of the creative process, to stimulate the imagination, and to develop individual abilities. Areas of discussion include style, prosody, conflict, character, dialogue, and revision. This course is not available to BA ENGLISH students for credit.

**Detailed Description**

This course introduces students to the craft of fiction writing. It requires no previous creative writing experience, just a commitment to learning the craft, reading widely and with focus, and applying various techniques to their own work. Through lectures, in-class discussions and assignments, students will be introduced to theories of fiction writing (what authors have said about their process and motivation); explore the fundamentals of the fiction writing process (where do ideas come from, how to stay motivated, how to overcome writer's block); study and apply techniques of the fiction writing craft (including characterization, scene, dialogue); and learn how to edit fiction. The in-class writing exercises will give students a chance to practice skills covered in the course and strengthen their skills as fiction writers. From the beginning to the middle of the course, students will read widely and often; the end of the course will reduce the readings to give students time to devote to the preparation of their creative writing portfolios. Students will complete in-class writing exercises and are encouraged to be punctual and attend all classes to keep up-to-date with the course.

**Course Goal and Student Learning Outcomes**

By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- ✓ Understand how writers approach the craft of fiction writing
- ✓ Define the characteristics of fiction
- ✓ Understand key fiction writing terms (Story, plot, characterization, point of view, voice, setting, description and dialogue)
- ✓ Understand how fiction is constructed
- ✓ Read fiction closely
- ✓ Identify creative writing techniques in fiction
- ✓ Gain familiarity with major 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century works of fiction
- ✓ Employ various techniques for initiating the creative writing process including free-writing, writing from a photo, and writing from a concept
- ✓ Write stories with a clear beginning, middle and end
- ✓ Edit their own stories

**Evaluation**Quiz – 20% **Monday Jan 20**Writing assignment 1 – 20% **Monday Feb 10**

In-class story analysis – 20% **Monday March 24**

Free Writes (becomes 12% of your portfolio grade) – **Mon Feb 3, Mon March 3, 17, and 31**

Portfolio – 40% **Monday April 14**

**Materials:**

- Notebook
- Favourite writing supplies (pens, etc)
- File folder/pouch to keep materials organized
- Course books (there are two)
- Downloaded PDFs of course materials

**Required Reading**

Hodgins, Jack. *A Passion for Narrative*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.

Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, 1923.

**Required Reading Available on Blackboard or online:**

Barry, Dan. “Death of a Fulton Fish Market Fixture.” *New York Times*, Oct 15, 2010.

Cameron, Julia. From *The Artist’s Way*. New York: Tarcher Putnam, 1992.

Carver, Raymond. “Cathedral.” From *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. New York: Vintage, 1981.

Cisneros, Sandra. “Hairs.” From *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage, 1985.

DiStefano, Mike. “Uneasy Rider.” From *The New York Times*, Dec 22, 2011

Elliott, Stephen. “Where I Slept.” From *The Rumpus.com*

Gaitskill, Mary. “Secretary.” From *Bad Behaviour*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Goldberg, Natalie. From *Writing Down the Bones*. Boston: Shambala, 2005. (Excerpt).

Johnson, Denis. “Car Crash While Hitchhiking.” From *Jesus’ Son*. New York: FGS, 1992.

Johnston, Sibyl. *The Longman Guide to Fiction Writing for Beginners*. New York: Pearson-Longman, 2007.

Joyce, James. “Araby.”

Michaels, Leonard. *The Collected Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. (Excerpt).

Moore, Lorrie. “How to Become a Writer.” From *Like Life*. New York: Vintage: 1985.

Oates, Joyce Carol. “The Girl with the Blackened Eye.”

Orwell, George. “Why I Write.” *Gangrel*, London, 1946.

Paley, Grace. *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962.

Sagan, Françoise. *Bonjour Tristesse*. London: Penguin Books, 1958. (Excerpt).

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Bantam, 1951. (Excerpt).

Sontag, Susan. “The Truth of Fiction Evokes our Common Humanity.”

Ueland, Brenda. *If You Want to Write*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1938. (Excerpt).

West, Nathanael. *The Day of the Locust*. Vintage: New York, 1947. (Excerpt).

You are responsible for reading the material for the week *before* you come to class. Please bring hard copies of the day’s readings (or digital) to class as I will be referencing and encouraging you to annotate this material throughout the lecture.

**Course Schedule:**

	Date	Topic	Reading (to be done <i>before</i> class)
<b>Part 1: Writers on Writing</b>			
1	Monday January 13	Introductions Why write?	Orwell, George. “Why I Write.” Sontag, Susan. “The Truth of Fiction Evokes our Common Humanity.” Fiction Writing Terms

	Monday January 20	Preparing to write <b>Quiz 1</b>	Ueland, Brenda. "If You Want to Write." Hodgins. "Getting Started." 23-45 Exercises - "Free Writing." Cameron, Julia. "The Artist Date." "To do over the weekend" handout
<b>Part 2: How Fiction Works – Techniques of Fiction Writing</b>			
3	Monday January 27	Generating story	Hodgins. "One Good Sentence..." 45-71 Forster. "The Story." 25-43 <b>Assignment 1 distributed</b> Carver, Raymond. "Cathedral." Munro. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain." "Reading Like a Writer" (on Blackboard) <b>In-class writing for your portfolio. Note: The exercises are available <i>only</i> in class, so please be here.</b>
4	Monday February 3	Plot	Hodgins. "Some Observations on Plot." 125-151 Yates. "Dr. Jack-o-Lantern." Gaitskill. "Secretary." <b>Free write 1 due (prompt distributed last week)</b>
5	Monday February 10	Character	Cisneros. "Hairs." Oates. "The Girl with the Blackened Eye." Barry. "Death of a Fulton Fish Market Fixture." <b>Assignment 1 due</b>
	Monday February 17	<b>Reading week – no class</b>	
6	Monday February 25	POV and voice	Hodgins. "Point of View..." 181-205 Moore. "How to Become a Writer." POV view third person handouts. <b>In-class writing for your portfolio. Note: The exercises are available <i>only</i> in class, so please be here.</b>
7	Monday March 3	Description	Elliott. "Where I Slept." Johnson. "Car Crash While Hitchhiking." <b>Free write 2 due (prompt distributed last week)</b>
8	Monday March 10	Setting	Hodgins. "Setting." 71-99. Joyce. "Araby." McFarlane. "Art Appreciation." <b>In-class writing for your portfolio. Note: The exercises are available <i>only</i> in class, so please be here</b>
9	Monday March 17	Dialogue	Johnson, Sibyl. "Dialogue." DeStefano, Mike. "Uneasy Rider." Story TBA <b>Free write 3 due (prompt distributed last week)</b>
10	Monday March 24	Editing I	<b>Story analysis</b> <b>In-class assignment</b> <b>In-class writing for your portfolio. Note: The exercises are available <i>only</i> in class, so please be here</b>
<b>Part 3: Your Writing Portfolio</b>			
11	Monday March 31	Editing II Exercises	Hodgins. Revision." 234-255 Editing Packet. On Blackboard. <b>Free write 3 due (prompt distributed last week)</b>
12	Monday April 7	Your portfolio	In-class writing for your portfolio. Note: The exercises are only available in class, so please be here.

13	Monday April 14	<b>Hand in your portfolio</b>	In-class sharing & celebration	
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### Description of Assignments/Quizzes

#### **Quiz (on fiction writing terms and theory) (20%) – Monday January 20**

In the first week of the course, you will be supplied with a glossary of fiction writing terms. Learning this terminology will allow you to think and read more critically as a writer and allow us, as a class, to converse about fiction writing with a shared vocabulary. As we progress in the course, we will cover these terms in much greater detail. The quiz is on fiction writing terms and major ideas contained in articles assigned in week one. The form is multiple choice, short answer and fill-in-the-blanks.

#### **Losing it: Writing Assignment 1 (20%) – Monday February 10**

A 700 word piece of fiction which allows you to apply several techniques we cover in the first four weeks of the course. See assignment sheet on Blackboard.

#### **In-class story analysis (20%) – Monday March 24**

This in-class assignment will ask you to analyze several extracts from stories read in the course. Through short answers you will identify which fiction writing techniques the author is utilizing (such as scene, dialogue, exposition, etc) and answer questions about the purpose of specific fiction writing techniques (i.e.: “This story is written in first person; name two benefits and limits of this point of view). This analysis is concerned with technique, so you don’t have to memorize plot elements or character names.

#### **Portfolio (40%) – Monday April 14**

The portfolio is a collection of your best, edited writing. See assignment sheet under “assignments” on Blackboard.

#### **Free Writes (12% of above 40%) – Mon Feb 3, Mon March 3, 17, and 31**

Free writes are edited 400-word vignettes based on a prompt given in class. You will be given in-class time to write the rough copy (first draft) of your vignette. You will then have one week to work on your vignette (edit, re-write as you wish). Your free write will be due the week after the prompt. For example, I will give you the first prompt in-class on Monday January 27. You will be given approximately 20 minutes to write in class. That edited free write (400 words max) will be due at the beginning of class the following week, Monday February 3. I will return your free write with comments the week after that. The purpose of having you hand in free writes regularly is to encourage you to keep up your writing and editing practice, and for me to have an ongoing conversation with you about your writing. Each free write is worth 3% of the 40% of your portfolio grade. Include your marked free writes in your final portfolio. **(Please note: you must be in class to receive the free write prompt. I will not provide you with the prompt by email except in cases where you are absent with medical/personal extenuating circumstances documentation. Without exception, free writes are due the week after they are distributed).**

#### **A Note on Formatting and Presentation:**

Please print and double-space your assignments and use 12 Times New Roman font. Assignments must be handed to me in hard copy, in class. Assignments are not accepted via email or in my box (without prior permission) under any circumstances.

#### The Final Portfolio

Please put your materials in a large envelope with your name and student number clearly written on the front. Roughly one week after the last class, I will send you an email letting you know where and when you can pick up your marked portfolio.

## **University Policies**

Students are required to familiarize themselves with and adhere to all of the following University policies:

1. For the student code of **Academic Conduct** (including policies on plagiarism), please see: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf>. You must submit only original work in this class. Creative writing you have written in the past, though an integral part of your process and development as a writer, cannot be submitted for grading in this course.

2. For the student code of **Non-Academic Conduct**, please see: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol61.pdf>

3. **Academic Consideration:** For specific policies regarding academic consideration, see: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol134.pdf> Policy 134 - *Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals*.

5. Ryerson policy on student email: Students are required to use and maintain their Ryerson email address as their official communication with the Instructor. <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol157.pdf> Policy 157 - *Student email Policy*

## **Course Policies**

### **Assignments and late penalties**

You are responsible for turning in all assignments on the posted due dates. Late submissions are subject to 5% per day penalty to a maximum of seven days; after seven days assignments are not accepted without a doctor's note.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. Absences will result in missing in-class assignments – which contribute towards your final portfolio, 40% of the final mark. If you miss a class for reasons other than illness or emergency, as documented by a medical note, explanation of what you missed in class will not be supplied by email; you will simply pick up where we are when you return to class.

### **Use of Blackboard**

Course reading packets will be posted on Blackboard every week. Please download the packets and read all materials before coming to class.

### **Punctuality**

Please be punctual. The class begins at 6:30 pm on Mondays. Please strive to arrive ten minutes before class to set up your writing materials and get settled in.

### **Classroom etiquette**

Please don't text, web browse, game, or watch movies while I'm teaching or your colleagues are speaking. Cell phones must be fully turned off for the duration of each class.

### **Communication with instructor**

I am accessible by email. If your question requires a lengthy answer or discussion, make an appointment to see me during office hours. Please remember to treat your email as a professional writer's communication by including a salutation (ie: Hi/Dear Lauren) and a signature (your name).

### **Concerns/Issues with the course**

Should you have any concerns with the course work, or if you do not understand an assignment, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. I am here to support your learning process and creative journey, and no question is too great or small. I look forward to getting to know you and reading your work!

*And most of all – ENJOY THIS TIME FOR YOUR WRITING JOURNEY!*

“When I used to teach creative writing, I would tell the students to make their characters want something right away - even if it's only a glass of water. Characters paralyzed by the meaninglessness of modern life still have to drink water from time to time.”

- **Kurt Vonnegut**

“The most beautiful things are those that madness prompts and reason writes.”

- **Andre Gide**

“The first draft of anything is shit.”

- **Ernest Hemingway**

“The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart.”

- **Maya Angelou**