

Creating Short Stories Undergraduate Workshop

Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible.

- Virginia Woolf

Course Information

CRWT 3307.001
Creating Short Stories
Fall 2019: August 19 – December 2
Monday 4 – 6:45pm
Classroom JO 3.906

Professor Contact Information

Professor Kendra Greene, office JO 5.205
office hours: Mondays 2:30 – 3:30pm & by appointment
kendra.greene@utdallas.edu, 972-883-2654

Almost everything is best addressed in person. Do take advantage of office hours.
Please use email for one of two purposes: to make an appointment for office hours or to provide advance notice & documentation for an absence. And when you do, please put “Short Stories” in the subject line.

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Prerequisite: [CRWT 2301](#)

Course Description

A creative workshop on the art of the short story which both investigates the creative techniques and processes involved in writing short stories and also concentrates on a variety of experimental and traditional forms that combine the art of words with the visual and performing arts.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

The objective of workshop is to (1) create original writing, and (2) develop the critical and aesthetic skill of both the workshop participants and the writer whose text commands our attention. We aim to accomplish this collaboratively, setting out each meeting to examine, articulate, and understand how the text functions and what it aspires to do.

This course does not aim to teach you how to write, but to teach you a framework and tools to engage with the practice and discipline of being a writer.

We will read, write, and discuss. We will develop our writing community, hone our skills as colleagues, reflect upon our contributions, consider what the writing can do, and do our level best to advance it.

The blue-backed notebooks, the two pencils and the pencil sharpener (a pocket knife was too wasteful), the marble topped tables, the smell of early morning, sweeping out and mopping, and luck were all you needed. For luck, you carried a horse chestnut and a rabbit's foot in your right pocket.

- Ernest Hemingway

Required Textbooks & Materials

Readings will be posted and available to you as PDFs on our Blackboard/eLearning page.

Additionally, you'll also need the standard tools of our trade:

- paper and ink;
- reliable computer, printer, and Internet access;
- a notebook for taking class notes, conducting interviews, aggregating research, sketching out ideas;
- proof reading skills;
- a folder or binder to archive assignments and all other work generated in this course.

Suggested Course Materials

Library card, a good reading chair, walking shoes, bus fare, snacks, and a working of knowledge of local independent bookstores.

If you do not have a proofreader in your life, or would benefit from additional writerly support, note that we have a **Writing Center** on the first floor of McDermott Library: MC 1.310. Call 972-883-6736, email writingcenter@utdallas.edu, or book an appointment online at: <https://www.utdallas.edu/studentsuccess/writing-and-speaking/writing-center/>

The contact information for two classmates who can get you up to speed in the event you are late or absent:

1) _____ 2) _____

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

- Joan Didion

Course Components & Protocols

On Attendance & Participation, Weekly Reading, Story Prompts, Workshop Stories, & Response Letters

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

We build the culture of this class together. Your voice is vital and irreplaceable in that endeavor.
Be on time—nay, be early.
Be prepared.
Be physically and intellectually present.
Be respectful, empathetic, open-minded, and considerate.
Be aware of your own wellbeing, and that of those around you.
Be an active participant in your own and your classmates' work.

I reserve the right to call on you for insights and questions to further class discussion—do not confuse this guidance with a substitute for your own initiative. When that proves challenging, some strategies to keep in mind: come to class with issues you'd like to explore already in mind, make your contributions early, build on the contributions of your colleagues.

WEEKLY READING

Weekly readings and corresponding prompts are designed to explore style, form, and options within the genre. They intend to expand your familiarity with the genre and its possibilities.

Every week you will do the assigned reading, and **bring your annotated text to class**.

Make note of **at least 3 techniques that define this story for what it is** and contribute essentially to how the story functions. Come to class ready to discuss how the story works. If you are moved to look up a little context about the reading or its author, that information will be welcome in our discussion.

WEEKLY STORY-PROMPT WRITING

Using full sentences to make your observations, **list at least 3 techniques** central in shaping the week's reading.

Choose one to adopt as an additional element in responding to the week's prompt. Bold, circle, or otherwise indicate which of the techniques you've selected to guide this week's prompt-based short story.

Prompt short stories will be **1-3 double-spaced pages in length**, and are due the same day we discuss the reading. Some will themselves be discussed in class, and you should be prepared to read from your writing.

TWO WORKSHOP SHORT STORIES

Write what is urgent, necessary, and remarkable in your estimation.

Set yourself an experiment and see what happens.

Make something original, purposeful, and complete.

The length of a workshop short story is dictated by what can sustain a robust half hour discussion about a stand-alone work of short fiction. For our purposes, the first short story you submit for workshop will be **3-10 pages**. The second will be **5-15 pages**.

Everyone will sign up for 2 workshop dates on the first day of classes.

- If you miss your selected workshop date, even if excused, it may not be possible to reschedule.

Writers will submit their work the week prior to their workshop date.

- As a standard concession to legibility, pages will be double-spaced in a text-weight 12-point font.
- Please include your name, the due date, and the common courtesy of page numbers.
- Remember to bring enough copies for every member of the workshop & the professor

* Work written previous to this class, especially if it has been published or has already received credit in another class, is not eligible for our consideration here.

* If you want your workshop short story to build upon something you discover in a prompt short story, follow your inspiration but do make sure the new interpretation is decidedly its own work; this is often accomplished by a piece that is radically longer and more considered, but run your plan past me and secure permission prior to turning anything in.

WORKSHOP RESPONSE LETTERS

You will respond to each workshop story with a letter to its author.

For our purposes, letter form includes a date, a salutation, and your signature at the end of **one full single-spaced page**. These letters will be deeply concerned with assisting your colleague and written in accordance with your own voice and understanding. They will endeavor to lay out the structure and functioning of the text without assigning value judgments.

Your goal is to be useful to the author by holding up a mirror. Quite likely that will include:

- A focused explanation of how the piece was interpreted by the reader—its intention, theme, tone, intended audience, literary context & other works the workshop story is in conversation with, use of symbols and metaphors, etc.
- A corroboration of said interpretation through examples from the text itself
- Some practical ways in which what the reader perceives as the central driving force of the story could be emphasized, enhanced, or clarified for the intended audience

As your professor, I will be looking for:

- Clear evidence the story was carefully read, objectively considered, deliberately unpacked, and judiciously analyzed.
- Obvious efforts towards understanding this story, identifying its mechanisms, suggesting aspects of its next iteration.
- Undeniable respect for the story, the author, and the efforts made by all in this class to produce worthwhile (whether that mean resonant, articulate, experimental, moving, traditional, and/or challenging) work.

Response letters are due the day we workshop the story in class. Please **bring 2 copies**: one copy of your letter for the author and one turned in to the professor.

ARCHIVE

All of the work you have done for this class, organized chronologically, collected in one place, with a table of contents (or similar finding aid), and an artist statement.

Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year. It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow. Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the playtime.

- W.E.B. Du Bois

Assignments & Academic Calendar

All reading and writing is DUE on the date listed. Workshop stories are turned in the week prior.

CALENDAR

Week 1 / August 19 *Introductions, Aspirations, Getting on the same page*

Week 2 / August 26 *What We Talk About When We Talk About Workshop*

Reading due: I Love Girl – Simon Rich

Prompt due: 1. Have two artists try to talk to each other. 2. Define “artist,” “try,” and “talk” however you like. 3. Remember that who, what, when, and where they are is up to you.

Week 3 / September 2 *Labor Day – No Class*

Week 4 / September 9 *Practice Workshop*

Reading due: The Swim Team – Miranda July

Museum – Naomi Shihab Nye

Prompt due: 1. Write a Workshop Response Letter to Miranda July. 2. Write a Workshop Response Letter to Naomi Shihab Nye

Week 5 / September 16 *Object Lesson*

Reading due: selections from *Significant Objects* – Rob Walker & Joshua Glenn

Prompt due: 1. Within your current possession or obtainable from a friend/thrift store, select an item from the world that has a resale value of less than \$5. 2. Tell a story about it that makes it priceless. 3. Bring the object to class.

Week 6 / September 23 *Taking from Reality*

Reading due: Jungle Without Water and The Lovely Village – Sreedhevi Iyer

Prompt due: 1. Choose a story from the news. 2. Make it an allegory or tell it from an individual perspective. 3. Be prepared to explain your choice.

Workshop 1 Writers: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____

Week 7 / September 30 *Invented History / Historical Fiction*

Reading due: Fantasy for Eleven Fingers – Ben Fountain

Prompt due: 1. Pick a time, any time, even now. 2. Add a story of that time to the record.

Workshop 1 Writers: 5) _____ 6) _____ 7) _____ 8) _____

Week 8 / October 7 *Fantastic or History Forgotten?*

Reading due: A First-Rate Material – Sayaka Murata, trans. Ginny Tapley Takemori

Prompt due: 1. Create a conflict. 2. Give both sides reasonable positions. 3. See where that friction takes you.

Workshop 1 Writers: 9) _____ 10) _____ 11) _____ 12) _____

Week 9 / October 14 *Autofiction*

Reading due: Consuelo & Wild Kingdom – Octavio Solis

Prompt due: 1. Think about a life-changing event. 2. Allow it the patina of memory. 3. Make changes and additions and subtractions until what you have is a story, not a memoir.

Workshop 1 Writers: 13) _____ 14) _____ 15) _____ 16) _____

Week 10 / October 21 *Polyglot*

Reading due: By Claw, By Hand, By Silent Speech – Elsa Sjunneson-Henry & A. Merc Rustad

Prompt due: 1. Use at least two languages. 2. Write what couldn't be accomplished in one alone.

Workshop 1 Writers: 17) _____ 18) _____ 1) _____ 2) _____

Week 11 / October 28 *Overheard*

Reading due: Why Don't You Dance? – Raymond Carver

Prompt due: 1. Start with a line overheard in real life. 2. Tell most or all of the story through dialogue.

Workshop 1/2 Writers: 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____ 6) _____

Week 12 / November 4 *Interiority*

Reading due: A Chicken & Family Ties – Clarice Lispector

Prompt due: 1. Stay in the head of your main character. 2. Filter everything through their consciousness.

Workshop 2 Writers: 7) _____ 8) _____ 9) _____ 10) _____

Week 13 / November 11 *Unreliable*

Reading due: The Verb to Kill – Luisa Valenzuela

Prompt due: 1. Leave breadcrumbs to the fact that the narrator can't be trusted.

Workshop 2 Writers: 11) _____ 12) _____ 13) _____ 14) _____

Week 14 / November 18 TBA

Reading due: TBA

Prompt due: TBA

Workshop 2 Writers: 15) _____ 16) _____ 17) _____ 18) _____

Week 15 / November 25

Fall Break – No Class

Week 16 / December 2 *Conclusions*

Due: THE ARCHIVE

Bring your chronologically ordered archive of things you've written in this class: response letters you've written, prompt stories, workshop stories (their response letters are optional).

Prepare a **2 minute reading** from your archive.

Grading Policy

Your work will be evaluated on evidence of preparation, effort, and follow through.

The marks you can expect to see on written work include:

- ✓+ for super high caliber work, or an A- to A
- ✓ for good, solid work, or a B- to B+
- ✓- for work needing literary resuscitation, or a C- to C+
- X for unacceptable work, or a D/F. If you try your level best and don't plagiarize or otherwise violate policies, it's unlikely you'll earn any of these.

Your grade will be derived from the following:

1. Attendance and participation (14 class meetings x 1% each = 14%)
 2. Story prompts (12 story prompts x 3% each = 36%)
 3. Workshop short stories (2 workshop stories x 8% each = 16%)
 4. Workshop response letters (17 letters x 2 rounds x 1% each = 34%)
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Course & Instructor Policies

Come to class, let your voice be heard, turn things in on time

Like any lab or studio class, workshop only works because of your **attendance and participation**.

We only meet 14 times this semester. Make every class count.

- You are expected to attend every class meeting unless you have an excused—and documented—absence.
- You will be allowed a total of **two excused absences** before it is incumbent upon you to discuss the matter with me in order to avoid failing the course. Likewise for **one unexcused absence**.
- Being more than **15 minutes late** to class (without an excuse) will be counted as one absence.
- Exceptions, if they exist, must be arranged directly with me.
- I am not, however, unreasonable and I will make a sensible effort to accommodate all excused absences, which are caused by such unavoidable circumstances as illness, family and personal emergencies, religious practices, etc. You are nonetheless responsible for documenting any and every excused absence, as well as catching up on any work you may have missed.
- In a similar vein, late work will only be credited by arrangement with me. Assignments will be **marked down 10% for every day after the due date** (days end at midnight), unless you have made arrangements with me prior to class.

To sum up: It is essential that you complete work on time, come to class on time, and bring exceptional circumstances to my attention as soon as possible.

Furthermore, you are expected to recognize the humanity, vulnerability, and struggle entailed in participating in a creative writing workshop. Treat workshop material as private unless the writer states otherwise. Give all presented work the benefit of the intellectual and artistic doubt.

Which is to say: Be smart, be respectful, be wise, and, especially with your own work, be courageous.

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.