

Required Texts:

- *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern
- Stories given to you in class (listed below)

Philosophy on Writing Creatively:

“Constraints lead to creativity.”

“Profundity is exhausting a topic through drama.”

Course Objectives:

1. To leave this course writing better than you did when you entered.
2. To leave this course reading better than you did when you entered.
3. To write fiction with more precision, force, and surprise than before.

Course Format:

1. **Reading** - to be a great writer you must read.
2. **Writing** - to be a great writer you must write.
3. **Critiquing** - to be a great writer, you must critique thoughtfully and frequently, knowing that this close reading of another’s prose should, in fact, help your own.

Beware! This course is reading intensive and writing intensive. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy.

Reading

Read. Class time is wasted if no one has anything to say about the reading. Because of this, I have required specific reactions to the assigned works. I will know if you haven’t done it. If I feel people are not reading, I will give quizzes. On the schedule, the “Reading” section tells you what you should have read by that date.

Writing

1. **Short creative exercises:** You will write short exercises each week. These are on the syllabus. Please always bring the completed exercise to class. These will have word limits, while other outside writing will be in the form of lists, and not graded as creative exercises.
2. **Short critical response papers:** You will be required to write critical papers in response to the assigned reading (see below).
3. **Long critical response paper:** You will be required to write one longer critical paper to an assigned reading (see below).
4. **Long creative exercise:** You will be required to write one longer creative piece in addition to your story.

5. **Story:** Twenty copies of your manuscript must be delivered *two classes before* it is to be discussed. Your final story should be character-driven and written for an adult audience. Length: 8–12 pages.

Warning: *There is no late delivery.* There is no switching. No last-minute writing. Get the work done. And remember: You are responsible for knowing the basic conventions of style and usage—see Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*, or me, for guidance.

Critiquing

You will write comments on each workshop story (whether for peer group or the whole class): marginal notes in ink or pencil *and* a typed letter to the author. **Attach this letter to the piece and return it to the author at the end of class. You will also deliver one copy of this letter to me.** In order for the critique to be valuable, it needs to be balanced and SPECIFIC. There will be one story to which you will be the First Responder. This means I will expect you to begin the discussion. You should come in prepared to ask questions of the class, to give suggestions, and to point out what’s working in the story.

Short Critical Response Papers

You must write **one critical response to the assigned reading each week.** Each response must total **250 words.** You should use quotations and other evidence from the texts to prove your argument. The critical responses are due at the beginning of class every week.

Please avoid “rating” the stories with remarks of taste, such as “I hated this” or “I liked this.” We will work this summer to develop your ability to talk about fiction, but please keep in mind that these are published, professional writers, meaning whether you enjoyed their writing or not, they have something to teach you about the practice and art of the written word.

These papers require no library or Internet research. Your ideas should be original and fresh. Just give me *your* take on the material and what it can teach you about writing and reading fiction. I have given you suggestions of what to think about while you are reading the stories. Feel free to use any questions I ask when writing your critical responses.

It is required that you come to class each day fully prepared. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. **If you’re hoping for an easy A, this class is not for you.**

Longer Critical Response Paper

You will write one longer critical response paper about a story that you have read this semester. I have given you specific guidelines regarding the content of this response paper. I will expect you to have learned from the feedback given to you regarding previous response papers and to show the appropriate amount of improvement.

Graded Assignments and Other Course Components

1. Class Participation*:	200 points
2. Creative exercises:	100 points (10 each)
3. Critical response papers:	200 points (50 each)
4. Longer response paper:	120 points
5. Longer creative paper:	30 points
6. Story:	150 points
7. Final Story Revision:	200 points

1000 points total

**Class participation includes written and oral peer critiques as well as your presence and regular contributions in class.*

Attendance

You are allowed one absence *without explanation*, but **do not miss the day your story is workshopped**. Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story. After the third absence — the equivalent of nine classes, since we meet weekly — you will be subjected to automatic failure.

There is **no distinction** between excused and unexcused absences. Arriving late to class is considered an absence. **Leaving class early is considered an absence.**

Meeting Outside of Class

I will give you a day during which you may meet with me about your story. I am also happy to speak with you outside of class at any other point during the summer if you arrange a meeting with me.

Final Notes

1. **You are responsible for checking your university emails.** I will sometimes give or change assignments via email, as well as make any necessary changes to the schedule. *You are responsible for checking your email and approaching me with any questions.* If I have sent an email to you, I will assume you have read and understood it.

2. I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.

3. **Use of cell phones (with hands or ears) is NOT permitted in class.** (That is rude.) *The following is useful information on university policies you should know. Please read over the links provided.*

Statement of Writing Requirement (WR).

This course can satisfy the UF requirement for Writing. For more information, see: <http://gened.ua.ufl.edu/writing-math.aspx#Writing>

Statement of student disability services.

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement on harassment.

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://regulations.ufl.edu/chapter1/1006.pdf>

Statement on academic honesty.

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Statement on grades and grading policies.

Note: UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Assessment Rubric for critical papers

Below are the criteria by which I will grade your critical response papers.

CONTENT	Ideas and analyses should be complex and critical. Papers should offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Go beyond surface matter!
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Use an orderly structure that facilitates reading, sustaining the reader's interest through effective paragraph development and use of proper transitions, presenting a logical flow of ideas.
RISK-TAKING	You must deal with the material in creative and challenging ways, developing main points based on self-initiated criteria independent of my class discussion comments, and avoiding summary unless necessary.
EVIDENCE	You must support your ideas with actual examples from the text, and use relevant details from stories that explain and support your main ideas. Try to use quotations from stories that support your points (one or two lines will do—you will be marked down for excessive use of quotations).
DEVELOPMENT	Analyze evidence in a way that supports your claims and overall thesis, including identifying literary devices/figures of speech and explaining how they contribute to the meaning of the text. AVOID SUMMARY.
MECHANICS	Spelling, grammar, punctuation must be correct. Papers must show careful proofreading, subject-verb agreement, no run-on sentences or sentence fragments, clear pronoun usage.

Recommended Reading: In choosing the readings for this course, I tried very hard to mix more established stories with newer stories because I think college-level courses should give

you a good foundation in the tradition of literature while also introducing you to writing you might not see otherwise.

Here is a list of very recommended reading that did not make it onto the schedule: “A&P” by John Updike, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor, “Hills Like White Elephants” and “The Killers” by Ernest Hemingway, “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien, “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner, “A Small, Good Thing” by Raymond Carver, “Hands” by Sherwood Anderson, “Babylon Revisited” by F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Mrs. Sibly” by William Trevor, “Hunters in the Snow” by Tobias Wolff, “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, *Jesus’ Son* by Denis Johnson, “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” by J.D. Salinger, “Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry, “You’re Ugly, Too” by Lorrie Moore, “Woman With the Little Dog” by Anton Chekhov, “Gusev” by Anton Chekhov. I also urge you to take a look at the “Art of Fiction” interviews on *The Paris Review*. (www.theparisreview.org/interviews)

Faculty Reading List: The collected stories of David Leavitt, *Half a Life*, a memoir by Jill Ciment, *The Interrogative Mood* by Padgett Powell, *Why Did I Ever* by Mary Robison. You should also take a look at *Subtropics*, the MFA@FLA’s literary journal.

Schedule

Please note that the “Reading” and “Writing” sections are listed for the day they’re due. So, if a reading is listed under January 13th, it is due January 13th.

Week 1: Orientation (8/26)

We will meet, talk about the syllabus and class expectations, and do some creative exercises. Also: talk about writing as confession.

Week 2: Writing as Confession (9/2)

Reading: “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried” by Amy Hempel; “Writing Don’ts” in Stern.

To think about: How many confessions does Hempel admit to in this story? What is the “worst” one? How would you describe her tone in the story?

Writing: Write down 5-10 things that you (and only you) bring to writing—they can be parts of your biography, relationships you are in or have been in, experiences you have had, travel/adventures, details about your family, or whatever else you can think of.

Week 3: Structure (9/9)

Reading: “Slide to Unlock” by Ed Park; “Last Night” by James Salter; “Shapes of Fiction” by Stern

To think about: Which comes first: Structure or Story? How does the shape of these stories heighten the subject?

Writing: Pick something from the list on the board and describe the type of room that would have that object in it. Concentrate on details that do more than just describe (300-500 words).

Week 4: Dialogue (9/16)

Reading: “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” by Raymond Carver, “Terrific Mother” by Lorrie Moore (I will give these to you in class).

To think about: Pick a few lines of dialogue that you think do *more than one* of the following: characterize, develop plot, portray emotions, develop/illuminate a relationship, whatever else you can think of.

Writing: Eavesdrop and write down a conversation between two or more real people. Then cannibalize the dialogue—take what works, leave the rest—and create a scene. Be sure to use speech tags & the speech itself to create believable characters (300-500 words). Bring the original conversation & the scene to class.

ALSO: Do the dialogue worksheet.

Week 5: Characterization (9/23)

Reading: “Tandolfo the Great” by Richard Bausch, “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff

To think about: What do you think about the different methods of direct presentation? What does Burroway mean by “indirect” character presentation? Find an example of direct character presentation and an example of indirect character presentation in each story and be prepared to discuss in class.

Critical responses due: Concentrate on at least one of the following in at least three of the stories (“Creative Writing”; “Fiction”; “We Didn’t”; “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”; “Terrific Mother”; “Tandolfo the Great”; “Bullet in the Brain”) that we’ve read so far →

1. Writing Process
2. Showing & Telling
3. Dialogue,
4. Characterization.

***Be sure to use quotations from the stories to prove your argument(s)!

Writing: Find someone on the street. Write down every detail you notice about them—be as specific as possible. Do not make any judgments or assumptions about them—remain completely objective (200-400 words).

Week 6: Setting (9/30)

Reading: “A Bridge Under Water” by Tom Bissell (I will give the story to you in class).

To think about: What role does setting play in this story? Pick two or three points Burroway made about the importance of setting and find specific examples in the Bissell story to illustrate these points. Be prepared to discuss in class.

Writing: Think of the neighborhood/area where you grew up. Make a list of 5-10 places where something significant happened to you. Bring this list into class.

Week 7: Time (10/7)

Reading: “The Deep” by Anthony Doerr, “Yours” by Mary Robison (I will give these to you in class).

To think about: What points did Burroway make that were new to you and/or seemed the most important or interesting? Pick a moment of summary from one of the stories and think about why it is summarized rather than in-scene. Then, pick a moment of scene and think about why it is in-scene rather than summarized. Be prepared to discuss in class.

Writing: For each year of your life, choose 1-3 significant events and make a list, e.g. *Year 5: Went to kindergarten, lost first tooth, held a séance to communicate with Marilyn Monroe*. Bring this list into class.

Week 8: Point of View (10/14)

Reading: “Access to the Children” by William Trevor, “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” by Sherman Alexie, “Cathedral” by Raymond Carver (I will give these to you in class).

To think about: “Access to the Children” and “This Is What It Means...” both have important shifts in point of view. Find the shift(s) in each story and think about why the shift occurred—how did it deepen the reader’s understanding of the story and its characters? “Cathedral” maintains one point of view. Why does the p.o.v. never shift? Why is the p.o.v./voice very significant to this particular story? Be prepared to discuss.

Writing: Write a scene in the first person. Pick one of these three scenarios for the scene: 1. A washed-up female country singer in a fancy bar in Los Angeles; 2. A seventy-year-old man waiting for the bus in the snow; 3. A six-year-old child from Ohio who is seeing the beach for the first time. Now switch the scene to the third person. Think about what is added/limited when you switch the point of view. Don’t just change “I” to “he” or “she”—really think about what freedom/limitations you have with a different point of view, and take advantage of them (each scene should be 200-300 words).

Critical responses due: Discuss at least one of the following → 1. Setting, 2. Time, 3. Form/Plot/Structure, 4. Point of View. Apply to at least three of the stories (“A Bridge Under

Water”, “The Deep”, “Yours”, “Greenleaf”, “Access to the Children”, “This Is What It Means...”, “Cathedral”, “People Like That...”). Be sure to back up your argument with evidence/quotations from the stories!

ALSO: Critique first workshop story for today. You should write notes on the story itself and bring in a letter (250-500 words) with constructive comments. One copy of this letter & the story w/ your notes should go to the writer, one copy of this letter should go to me.

Week 9: Extremely Short Fiction (10/21)

Reading: “The School” and “Some of Us Had Been Threatening Our Friend Colby” by Donald Barthelme, “Wants” by Grace Paley, “Losing the Wax” by Padgett Powell, and “The Orphan Lamb” by Amy Hempel.

To Think About: What are the limitations of stories this short? The advantages? What makes each of these a whole/complete story? Be prepared to discuss.

Writing: Either: 1. Pick one of the stories and write a scene imitating its style/voice (300-500 words), or 2. Write a complete short-short story (300-500 words).

ALSO: Critique second workshop story for today.

Week 10: Humor in Fiction (10/28)

Reading: “Do Not Disturb” by A.M. Homes, “Emergency” by Denis Johnson (I will give to you).

To think about: What role does humor play in these stories? What does it mean for stories like these to be funny? How does the humor reflect the voice/subject matter?

ALSO: Critique third workshop story for today.

Week 11: Surrealism in Fiction (11/4)

Reading: Ramona Ausubel & George Saunders (I will give to you).

To Think About: What does “surrealism” mean in fiction? Is a surrealist story less believable than a realist story? How can surrealism amplify the meaning of fiction? Be prepared to discuss.

Writing: Find an example of surrealist art. Write 300-500 words inspired by the artwork. Think about the content of the artwork, but also think about the mood/colors/etc.—the less tangible, more emotional/sensory aspects of it. Feel free to make your writing as surreal as you like. Bring this w/ the title & artist into class.

ALSO: Critique fourth workshop story for today.

Week 12: Coming of Age/Epiphanies in Fiction (11/11)

Reading: “Territory” by David Leavitt (I will give to you).

To think about: While some kind of change must occur during any short story, a coming of age/epiphany story deals with a fundamental shift in the protagonist’s point of view. Where would you say the shift occurs here? What do these epiphany stories have in common? Point of view? Voice? Content? Tense? Think about why this might be. Be prepared to discuss.

Writing: Think about a time you realized something. It could be about your family, about life, about school, about a friend, and it could have happened recently or a long time ago. Write the scene right before you learned this—describe what it was like for you in the last moment before you came to this realization (300-500 words). Bring to class and write at the top what the realization was.

Critical Response Due (choose #1 or #2):

1. You can choose at least two of the short-short stories (“The School”, “Some of Us Had Been Threatening Our Friend Colby”, “Wants”, “Losing the Wax”, “The Orphan Lamb”) and at least two of the other stories (“In the Cemetery...”, “Emergency”, Ramona Ausubel, George Saunders, “Territory”, “Forever Overhead”) to write about. Please either apply one of the aspects of writing we’ve discussed (see two lists above) or one of the themes (surrealism, epiphany/coming of age, humor) to the stories, using quotations as evidence.
2. You can write just about the short-short stories we read. Talk about the limitations/advantages of such short fiction. Discuss what makes these stories complete or, if you think some/all are incomplete, what they are missing. Think, too, about genre—where do you draw the line between short fiction, short-short fiction, and poetry? Use quotations as evidence.

ALSO: Critique fifth workshop story for today.

Week 13: Unconventional Form (11/18)

Reading: “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood, story by Kevin Wilson (I will give to you).

To Think About: Why did the author choose this format? How does it help to deepen the impact of the story’s message? Are there any disadvantages to this form? Be prepared to discuss.

Writing: Find a photograph online. It should have at least one person in it. Answer these questions about them:

What do they do for a living? How old are they? Where are they from? Where do they live? Are they in a relationship? With whom? Are they happy? Do they smoke? What do they wear when they sleep? What is their favorite food? How is their relationship with their mother and/or father? How do they shake hands? What does their house/apartment/room look

like? What do they feel guilty about? What are they proud of? When they were five years old, what did they want to be when they grew up? Then answer two or three questions of your own. Bring in the questions & answers (300-500 words).

ALSO: Critique sixth workshop story for today.

Week 14 – Thanksgiving Break/No Class (11/25)

Week 15– Memoir/Creative Non-Fiction (12/2)

Reading: Read excerpts from “If This Is A Man” by Primo Levi and “The Year of Magical Thinking” by Joan Didion.

To Think About: These are true stories written in the style of a creative piece. How does your view of them change when you think of them as nonfiction rather than fiction? What makes these like fiction? What makes them different?

Writing: Write a scene that happened to you recently. Do not change any facts or leave anything out, but describe the scene as if it were fiction. (300-500 words)

ALSO: Critique seventh workshop story for today.

Week 16 — FINAL READING (12/9)

Readings and presentations.

NOTE: Final drafts of stories & final critical responses due at the beginning of class!

Final drafts: The stories should be polished. They should have no grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors. They should reflect deep thought and a real attempt to incorporate feedback from workshop into the new story. Take a chance and be bold—I would rather see you go too far with revision than be too safe with it.

Final critical responses: Tell me what you learned about the editing/revision process. Use quotations/examples from the stories we read this week. Point out aspects of your own story that you changed and why. Talk about what was easiest/most difficult about revision.