

CRW 2100 – FICTION WRITING (sec. 2268), Spring 2017

Instructor: Thomas Sanders

Class time: MAT 0012, Wednesday periods 6-8

Instructor's Office: Turlington 4413

Office hours: Tentatively, 4:00—6:00 PM Wednesday

Course website: Canvas

Instructor Email: sandete0@ufl.edu

Course Description

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.
4. To develop serious revision skills that will help you deepen, clarify, and heighten your work.

Course Format:

1. Reading: To be a good writer, you must read.
2. Writing: To be a good writer, you must write.
3. Critiquing: To be a good writer, you must critique other writing thoughtfully and frequently, knowing that this close reading of another's prose will help your own.
4. Revision: To be a good writer, you must revise. Know that not even the best fiction writers in the world get it right the first time. Revision is part of the writing process.

BEWARE: This course is reading-intensive and writing-intensive. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative writing courses are easy. You can expect a lot of work from this course.

General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for Composition (C), and also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Books and Materials

Required Texts:

1. *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories* edited by Ben Marcus
2. *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern
3. *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson
4. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan
4. Various author interviews available online

Required Materials

1. A pen
2. A notebook for note taking and in-class writing assignments

Assignments

Writing Assignments

The goal of the class is to build on narrative fundamentals learned in 1101 to strike out in riskier, less traditional directions.

1. Critical response papers: You will be required to write twelve short “thought papers” in response to the assigned readings (see below).
2. Five-page, prompt-based story: Early in the semester, a five-page story based on a writing prompt will be due. These stories will be turned in members of your assigned small group the week prior to the workshop class.
3. Workshop story: Sufficient copies (one for each class member plus your instructor) of your manuscript must be delivered **THE CLASS PERIOD BEFORE** it is to be discussed. Length: Eight-twelve pages.
4. Story Revisions: On the last day of class, you must turn in a revised version of your longer story. Revisions should be based on my comments, your colleagues’ comments in workshop, and our one-on-one meeting outside of class (see below) and **MUST BE SIGNIFICANT**. Proofreading is not revision. All serious writers revise seriously.

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 the recommended writing manuals below for guidance.*

Formatting: Unless otherwise noted, all papers and documents should be double-spaced 12 pt. Times New Roman font with one inch margins.

Reading

Our wider-ranging readings will be focused on selections from the *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories* edited by Ben Marcus, a collection that is on the whole more contemporary (and generally weirder/more experimental) than literature you likely read in CRW 1101 or other literature classes. In conjunction with these stories (and supplementary readings from Jerome Stern’s *Making Shapely Fiction*), we will also be reading author interviews for insight into each writer’s processes. Most of these interviews will come from the *Paris Review* “Art of Fiction” interview series which is available available online.

We will also be reading a novel (*Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson) and a “novel”/collection of connected short stories (*A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan). We are doing this reading in order to discuss, analyze, and eventually practice

writing literary structures on a large scale. Short stories are fantastic in their own right, but to ignore the existence of the novel would be doing you a disservice.

Do the reading. Class time is wasted if you have not. Because of this, you will be required to turn in critical response papers every week. I will know if you haven't completed the reading; it will be obvious in your writing. I may also give pop quizzes. On the schedule, the "Readings" section tells you what you should have read *prior to* that particular class meeting. In other words, readings must be completed before the dates for which they are listed.

Critiquing

You will write comments on each workshop story: 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 a critique to be valuable, it needs to be balanced and specific. In every story, there will be both things to commend and things to recommend. A good critique will do both.

Fictional Work:

You will be writing two major fictional pieces in this class, the previously mentioned 4/5-page story and your 8/12-page story. Along with these pieces you will complete a final revision and a number of smaller pieces written inside and outside of class.

Guidelines: Stories must avoid college tropes (parties, break-ups, dorm/greek life), genre (sci-fi, fantasy, horror, zombie, vampire, My Little Pony fan-fic), and last-page twists or other things intended to trick the reader. These genres are specialized forms that require specialized knowledge to do well: you must learn to walk before you can run, and other such platitudes. There is a slight amount of wiggle room here that will be addressed on a case-by-case, ad hoc basis.

Violence: You *are* allowed to include violence in the fiction you write for this class. However, please refrain from using violence for shock value only. Too often writers add violence to their writing in an attempt to amplify the drama of a particular scene or story without considering the ramifications of that violence on their characters and readers. Like any element you add to a story, make sure it is fully integrated into and crucial to the narrative. *Gratuitous* is defined as "uncalled for; lacking good reason; unwarranted." Please avoid gratuitous violence.

Meeting after workshop: You are required to meet with me during the two weeks following your workshop. This meeting is a chance for us to debrief on the

workshop experience and brainstorm about your final revision. You are responsible for scheduling this meeting.

Grading: Your fiction will be graded based on the following rubric. Note, though, that the descriptions attached to these categories do not and cannot entirely encompass my evaluation of your story. I will respond to your story with a personalized and specific letter giving feedback on the story's strengths and weaknesses.

Originality/Creativity	Stories must be fresh and inventive, avoiding tropes and clichés. If the story covers territory already covered in fiction (likely), the writer must offer a unique perspective on the situation and narrative.
Character development	The writer must provide adequate interiority and insight into the main character's (or characters') thoughts, motivations, and feelings. Characters must feel particular rather than universal. Remember that this is one of the elements that sets fiction apart from other mediums of art.
Story	Does the story draw readers into the world it creates? Does it contain enough tension and drama to keep readers interested? Regardless of its adherence to rules <i>or</i> its divergence from tradition, does it work? This category is a quality we will talk about as a class prior to, during, and after workshop.
Narrative coherence/Logic	The story must have an engaging and discernable narrative that draws readers through the piece. This holds regardless of where the story falls on the realism/fantastical spectrum and even if the story is more experimental than traditional in style. Stories must also avoid unintentional shifts in tense or points of view. Pay attention to the proper use of pacing and structure.
Mechanics	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation must be correct. Stories must show careful proofreading, contain no errors in subject-verb agreement, and demonstrate clear pronoun usage. Pay especially close

	attention to proper indentation and formatting.
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Critical Response Papers/Thought Papers

You must write weekly critical responses to the assigned readings. Each critical response must be a minimum of 500 words¹. No late papers will be accepted.

It is required that you come to class each day fully prepared. You may be asked to read your thought paper aloud, and I will not hesitate to cold-call on people. We are here to study and create serious fiction, which requires serious work. If you're hoping for an easy A, this class is positively not for you.

Every week, we will be focusing on a specific author and the skills/strategies used by that author. For instance, one week we might be talking about Lydia Davis and the minimalism of her work. For your critical response paper, you should write about the author's writerly strategies as they are seen in their story/stories and the author interviews/critical readings. Focusing on the unique qualities of the writer, the ways in which they stand out from the pack, is often a good angle to take. For instance, when writing about Lydia Davis you might want to focus on her vocabulary and the moment in her *Paris Review* interview where she says: "More and more I think that each of us, as a writer, has a preferred vocabulary."

You will need to *directly* reference the critical work/interview as well as the assigned fiction reading. Most weeks, the interview will come from *the Paris Review* "Art of Fiction" interview series. These interviews should be helpful as they provide both an overview of the author's work and the author's own insights into their writing and fiction as a whole. You should also include specific quotations from the story or stories themselves to support your position.

Each week I will also assign three terms from the glossary ("From Accuracy to Zigzag") of Jerome Stern's book *Making Shapely Fiction*. You must reference at least one of these terms in your response as well.

¹ If you would like to write longer papers, you can increase the length of your critical responses by increments of 500 words. This will result in a corresponding bump in point value with every additional 500 words conferring +25 pts. For instance, if you turned in a paper totally 1500 words that paper would be worth 75 pts. This policy should allow you to pursue deeper lines of inquiry should you encounter a topic of interest. However, it is up to you to keep track of your word count and ensure you complete the 6000 words required in this course. This should also not become an excuse to procrastinate. Don't plan on panic writing a 2000-word paper at the end of the semester to make up for four missed response papers. Finally, increments other than 500 words will be rounded down, so an 820-word paper will only count as 500.

Your critical responses should NOT:

- Simply make a value judgment about the story, such as “I loved it” or “I hated it. Everything we will read in this class is a good piece of writing by an accomplished writer—I’m looking for you to engage critically with the work on the level of craft.
- Say that you liked a story because “you could relate to it,” or did not like a story because “you could not relate to it.” This is not analysis, and it is not a valid critique. Good fiction takes us out of ourselves and allows us to experience the consciousness of another person—that is the point.
- Use excessive quotation or summary. You should use evidence to support your points, not to avoid having to make them.

Paper Maintenance Responsibilities. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.

Assessment Rubric

Below are the criteria by which I will grade your critical response papers. “A” papers will demonstrate a strong command of each of the following criteria.

Content (5 pts)	Ideas and analyses should be complex and critical. Papers should offer personal, fresh insights into the material. Go beyond surface matter.
Organization and coherence (4 pts)	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 (4 pts)	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 (4 pts)	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 (4 pts)	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 (4 pts)	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation must be correct. Papers must show careful proofreading, contain no errors in subject-verb agreement, contain no run-on sentences or sentence fragments, and demonstrate clear pronoun usage.

Tentative grade breakdown (subject to change):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Class Participation: | 150 points |
| 2. Workshop Letters | 150 points |
| 3. Critical response papers: | 300 points (25 each) |
| 4. Prompt-based story (4/5 pager): | 100 points |
| 5. Workshop story: | 175 points |
| 6. Story revisions: | 175 points |
| | 1000 points total |

*Class participation includes regular contributions to group discussions and peer workshop critiques as well as your physical and mental presence/engagement in class. This will also include coming to class prepared, i.e. having read the assigned readings.

Course Policies

Course completion: You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.

Attendance

You are allowed one absence without explanation, but do not miss the day that your story is workshopped. **Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story.** Each absence after the first will lower your final grade by one full letter.

A few absences due to illness or family crisis may be excused if documented to the instructor's satisfaction. Even documented absences will not be excused if many or prolonged. Students participating in a university-sponsored event (athletics, theater, music, field trip) will be excused if there is documentation from an appropriate authority. Students excused from an absence are not excused from the work assigned for a class session; each student must arrange with the instructor for make-ups.

Tardiness will be excused if the reasons are acceptable to the instructor (e.g., a long exam in the previous class; a bus breakdown) and if there is valid documentation. Otherwise, tardiness is unacceptable because disruptive; both the overall grade and the grade for class participation will be lowered by tardiness.

Meeting Outside of Class

You must meet with me outside of class to discuss your story within the week following your workshop. My office hours will be held on Wednesday 4:00 PM--6:00 PM. If that time does not work for you, making an alternate appointment with me is YOUR responsibility, not mine.

Device Policy: Laptops, phones, and tablets are prohibited during class unless otherwise noted. The exception to this rule is e-readers, black-and-white only (Kindles and their ilk). I can, of course, make an exception to this policy should you require it.

This policy may seem backwards in our connected age, but I have found it nearly impossible to compete for your attention against Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, et al. Furthermore, monitoring your device usage is an exercise in futility given your tab-switching skills. Most class materials will be physical to allow your undivided attention. You will need pen and paper to take notes and complete in-class writing assignments.

Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.

Accommodations: Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.

Grading: For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grade Appeals. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

Course Evaluations. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course:

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

Help: Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>

UF's policy on Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty:

<http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>

Statement on University Policies:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Paper Maintenance Responsibilities.

Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.

University Writing Studio

If you find that you need additional help with your writing outside of class, I strongly recommend that you acquaint yourself with the University Writing Studio (formerly the Reading and Writing Center). The Writing Studio is a free service for current UF graduate and undergraduate students. Students have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a consultant on issues specific to their own particular development. More info is available here:

<http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-center/>

Recommended Writing Manuals

For additional style and usage help, I recommend the following:

- *The Elements Of Style* by Strunk and White
- *The Bedford Handbook* by Diana Hacker
- The Purdue OWL website: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Final Notes

1. You are responsible for checking your university emails. I may 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 that 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.

Class Schedule

Week 1

Why, hello there!

Class:

- Introductions
- Review syllabus
- Class policies

Week 2

Why do we write?

Read:

- First three stories in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (henceforth *AVftGS*)
- "Introduction" by Ben Marcus in *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories* (*ABoNASF*)
- ["How to Become a Writer" by Lorrie Moore](#) (linked)
- ["The Ambition of the Short Story" by Stephen Millhauser](#) (linked)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Short Story (pp. 216-217), Endings (124-126)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #1 (Due prior to class on Canvas. Bring a copy to class printed out)

Week 3

Read:

- Next three in *AVftGS*, "Safari," "You (Plural)," and "X's and O's"

- [“Two Men Arrive in a Village”](#) by Zadie Smith
- [“This Week in Fiction: Zadie Smith discusses “Two Men”](#)
- OPTIONAL: Zadie Smith interview from [NYPL](#), [Granta](#), and [The Atlantic](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Point of View, Realism, Novel

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #2

Week 3

Padgett Powell(ism)

Read:

- Next four in *AVftGS*, “A to B,” “Selling the General,” and “Forty Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens Up”
- “Scarliotti and the Sinkhole” by Padgett Powell (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- Padgett Powell interview with [The Believer](#) and [essay on Donald Barthelme](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* “A Cautionary Interlude” (pp. 61-76)

Due:

Week 4

Egan/Connected Shorts

Read:

- Last four in *AVftGS*, “Out of Body,” “Good-bye, My Love,” “Great Rock and Roll Pauses” ([link to PowerPoint here](#)), and “Pure Language”
- Jennifer Egan interview with [BOMB magazine](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Science Fiction, Short Novel, Voice

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #4

Week 5

Family

Read:

- [“The Other Place”](#) by Mary Gaitskill (*The New Yorker*)
- Mary Gaitskill interview with [The Believer](#) and [The Fiction Writer Review](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Catharsis, Flashback, Motif

Due:

- Four copies of your 4-5-page short story due in class this week for discussion in week 6.

Week 6

Novel Beginnings

Read:

- Pages 1-74 of *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson
- "Letters to Wendy's" by Joe Wederoth (*tABoNAST*)
- Wederoth interview in [Rain Taxi](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Interior Monologue, Narrator, Showing and Telling

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #5

Week 7

Going Small

Read:

- *Housekeeping* 75-148
- "The Old Dictionary" by Lydia Davis (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- "[Long Story Short](#)" (essay on Lydia Davis from *The New Yorker*)
- *Paris Review* interview: [Lydia Davis](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction* (A-Z): Accuracy, Dialogue, Voice

Workshop:

- (Students 1 and 2 turn in hard copies this week)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #6

Week 8

Writing into the Future-Past

Read:

- Finish *Housekeeping*
- Interview with Marilynne Robinson, [the Paris Review](#)

- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Anti-hero, Character, Hero*

Workshop:

- (Students 3 and 4 turn in)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #7

Week 9

Writing into the Future/Past

Read:

- "Sea Oak" by George Saunders (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- ["Adams" by George Saunders \(The New Yorker\)](#)
- Jennifer Egan and George Saunders [conversation](#), *The Paris Review* "[Gchatting with George Saunders](#)," and "[The Humor of George Saunders](#)" from *The New Yorker*.

Workshop:

- (Students 5 and 6 turn in)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #8

Week 10

Best Left Unsaid

Read:

- "You Drive" by Christine Schutt (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- ["First Time,"](#) a conversation with Christine Schutt (video from *the Paris Review*)
- "PEOPLE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO BE THE ONES TO TELL YOU" by Gary Lutz (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- ["The Sentence is a Lonely Place"](#) by Gary Lutz (*The Believer*)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Description, Frame Story, Imagination*

Workshop:

- (Students 7 and 8 turn in)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #9

Week 11

Non-fiction's influence

Read:

- "Field Notes" by Rick Bass (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- ["On the Fly: Rick Bass"](#) from the Iowa Writers Workshop
- ["Writing Advice: Rick Bass's 'Danger'"](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Structure, Tension*

Workshop:

- (Students 9 and 10)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #10

Week 13

Poetry, Prose, and Prose-Poetry: The Overlap

Read:

- "Short Talks" by Anne Carson (*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*)
- [The Art of Poetry #88: Anne Carson](#) (*The Paris Review*)
- ["The Inscrutable Brilliance of Anne Carson"](#) by Sam Anderson
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Ambiguity, Realism, Subtlety*

Workshop:

- (Students 11 and 12 turn in)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #11

Week 14

"Experimental"

Read:

- ["Dark Arts"](#) by Ben Marcus (*The New Yorker*)
- ["Cold Little Bird"](#) by Ben Marcus (*The New Yorker*)
- ["This Week in Fiction: Ben Marcus on the Cruelty of Children"](#) (*The New Yorker*)
- ["The Rumpus Interview With Ben Marcus"](#)
- *Making Shapely Fiction (A-Z): Negative Positive Knowledge, Position, Trust Your Material*

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #12

Week 15

Where we are now

Read:

- Two stories of your choice from contemporary publications (as I showed in class, you can find plenty of stories online and through the UF library's various resources)

Due:

- Critical Response Paper #14

Workshop Schedule

The date you are assigned is the date that you will have to TURN IN your story. The stories will then be workshopped during the following class period. You must bring in a copy of your manuscript for every student in the class as well as the instructor. No late delivery. No switching.

Grade Scale

For information on UF Grading policies, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Letter Grade Percent

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	65-66
E/F	Below 65

