Introduction

Writing fiction implies two equally challenging tasks. On the one hand, beginning writers need to define the core of their aesthetic concern and the themes around which they will develop their work. On the other hand, they also need to master fiction writing techniques. No class can teach beginning writers the former; the latter can be learned in a systematic manner.

This class is designed to help students bring their fiction writing technique from knowledge to mastery. The class integrates three modes of learning.

1. We will discuss texts on the craft of fiction writing keeping in mind that writers will adapt some techniques to serve their needs.
2. We will discuss students’ exercises designed to hone these techniques.
3. We will critically read the work of successful fiction writers using these techniques effectively.

In addition, we will hold two workshops in which students will discuss their work, and practice what they have learned, creating a fiction piece from first draft to completed manuscript. Rather than ready-made definitions, the class will provide several views of each technique, which students will develop and adapt to make them their own.

Students will be required to write a weekly creative response, write a technique log entry, complete the readings assigned, and read closely the fiction pieces submitted to our workshops. The final assignment for this class is a portfolio that includes all of the entries in the writing technique log and the final version of the fiction piece discussed in our workshops.
Course Goals

- Help students develop their fiction writing from knowledge to mastery
- Foster individual understanding of technique
- Develop the habit of reading as a writer
- Complete a fiction piece from draft to finished manuscript

Required Texts

The following texts are required to complete the class assignments and to participate in our discussions. Make sure that you have access to the required texts.

Nonfiction
- Stephen King: On Writing (Scribner ISBN 0-684-85352-3)
- Short excerpts from other books will be provided via Blackboard at least a week before they are required.

Fiction

Communication Channels

Your learning will happen through Blackboard. Should you need help outside the class, consider the following:

- Check the General Questions forum in the Discussion Board where you can also post questions.
- For question about the course mechanics, review the syllabus. For other questions, review the guidelines for each assignment.
- EMAIL: jdepierola@utep.edu. IMPORTANT: I reply to emails once a day, at 5:00 PM. Emails received afterwards will be answered the next business day.
- OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays from 4:00 to 6:00 PM (MT) @ Zoom (see details on Blackboard).

Suggested Fiction Writers

The techniques in this class can be studied in the work of the following authors:

James Joyce • Marcel Proust • Patricia Highsmith • Paul Auster • Jorge Luis Borges • Javier Cercas • Umberto Eco • Ha Jin • Cormac McCarthy • Toni Morrison • Orhan Pamuk • Mario Vargas Llosa • Francine Prose • Jumpha Lahiri • José Saramago • Milan Kundera • Ismail Kadare • Joyce Carol Oates • Alice Munro • Julio Cortázar • Vladimir Nabokov • Gustave Flaubert • Jane Austen

“Writing is not a race. No one really wins. The satisfaction is in the effort, and rarely in the consequent rewards, if there are any.”
—Joyce Carol Oates
“All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.” —Ernest Hemingway

Guidelines

• Students are expected to complete all the readings of the week before class. Therefore, students should secure access to the books listed under Required Texts. The other readings listed under Program will be available via Blackboard.
• Assignments for this class are of two types: posts on Blackboard, and assignments submitted through Blackboard.
• You are expected to post a reply for at least one of the discussion questions and to repost at least three times by replying to your classmates’ posts (see Course Mechanics).
• Students are expected to understand the purpose of the master scene which will be the basis for the creative response (see Assignments).
• Most assignments will be submitted in PDF format in a letter-size page with a 1.5 inches upper, lower, and left margin, and a 2.5 inches right margin; 1.5 line spacing; and a 12 point Roman font (Garamond, Georgia, Palatino). The first page should bear on the upper right corner: name, date, assignment’s name, and word count, as follows:

Ellen James
July 3, 2023

Sentences
678 words
• creative responses that do not follow the guidelines above will not be eligible for our weekly review.
• on pdf files: We will be reading and producing texts in PDF format. Make sure you have access to a program to read PDF files, and that you know how to create PDF files (see Resources in Blackboard). Other file formats will not be accepted.
• on deadlines: Because this is an online class, with students potentially living across time zones, we will use El Paso local time (MT) for all of the deadlines (see Resources in Blackboard). Blackboard will time stamp your posts and assignments.
• on email: Follow the basic professional email etiquette, i.e., greet your recipient by name, proofread your email, sign with your name, etc.
• on guidelines: Detailed guidelines for each assignment are available through Blackboard. Make sure you read the corresponding guidelines before you submit your assignment.
• important: Students cannot miss more than one week, unless they have provable impediments that merit special consideration.

Assignments

• creative response: Due the weeks when we discuss readings on craft (see Program), this is a 600-word creative response in which you rewrite the master scene focusing on one of the techniques discussed that week. I will randomly select two assignments and post my comments on our discussion board of the week.
• technique log: Due each week, except on workshops, this is a two-page (≈600 words) entry that condenses, in your own words, adapting it if necessary, one of the techniques of the week.
• editorial review: Due on each workshop day, this is an assessment of a classmate’s submission. Guidelines will be provided.
• fiction piece: Submitted in two stages: draft 1 (Week 3) and draft 2 (Week 6). Draft 1 may be of any extension; however, the final manuscript should be at least 10 pages long (≈3,000 words). The fiction piece may be part of a work in progress, but it must be new material.
• portfolio: The final project for the class consists of three parts: 1. technique reference: this is an compilation, with examples, of the narrative techniques we have discussed in class (≈2,000 words); 2. preface: a short discussion of your editing process as you went from draft 1 to manuscript (≈1,200 words). The final draft of your fiction piece, as close as possible to submission.
Course Mechanics

- Students will turn in creative responses by Wednesday at 5:00 pm and technique logs by Friday at 5:00 pm.
- Creative responses will be a rewrite of the master scene focusing on only one of the techniques of the week. For instance, the creative response for week 1 may focus on “words” or “sentences” but not both.
- Each week, I will randomly select two creative responses, annotate them, and post them on the Discussion Board of the current week.
- Discussion Questions will become available by Monday at 9:00 am. However, you will not be able to see your classmates replies until you post yours.
- Students will post a reply to at least one of the Discussion Questions by Wednesday at 5:00 pm. Your post should show that you have read carefully the week’s selection. Depending on the quality of your post, you may earn up to 5 points.
- Students will repost engaging with at least one post by another student by Friday at 5:00 pm. Each repost may earn you up to one point, and all the reposts may earn you up to 3 points each week. This is the central learning activity in our class; therefore, grading will reflect closely the quality of your participation in the Discussion Board.
- Your posts and reposts must show that you are following closely the thread in which you are participating. Responses that address just the previous post, or repeat what other students have posted already do not count. For more information, read Discussion Board Guidelines under Assignments.

Program

Week 1: Words & Sentences
- York: “What is a Story” & Waitzin: “Making Smaller Circles”
- Prose: “Three: Sentences” & Fish: “Four” to “Seven” & Christensen: “A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence”

Week 2: Paragraphs & Transitions

Week 3: Dialogue & Characters

Week 4: Workshop 1

Week 5: Consciousness

Week 6: Form & Counterform
- Smith: “Postmodern f(r)ictions”

Week 7: Workshop 2

“…”If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There’s no way around these two things that I’m aware of, no shortcut.”
—Stephen King

Grading Policy

- Creative Responses: 10%
- Technique Entries: 10%
- Discussion Board: 30%
- Workshop: 20%
- Portfolio: 20%

University Policy Statements

SELF IDENTITIES: The Department of Creative Writing at UTEP supports students’ right to define their identity in terms of name, pronoun, and mode of address. This class will provide each student the opportunity to let their preference be known. Should you need to discuss this issue with your instructor in private, you are encouraged to make an appointment early in the semester.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY STATEMENT: Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording, and it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to http://www.utep.edu/ods/academic.htm for further information.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CAS) at (915) 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the cass@utep.edu website at https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cas/.

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