

Writing Fiction Section 01

ENGL 130

Spring 2025 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/23/2025 to 05/12/2025 Modified 01/21/2025

Contact Information

Professor: Nicholas Taylor

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Office Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, 1:30 PM to 3:00 PM, Faculty Offices 106

Also available on Zoom -- send email to set up appointment.

Course Information

For the first few weeks we will be reading and discussing published stories from 2024 edition of *Best American Short Stories* and PDF handouts. I will make presentations on elements of the craft – character, conflict, point of view, etc. The goal is to practice reading like writers rather than critics (there is a difference). We'll also do some writing exercises to get your ideas flowing.

Next we will discuss your stories. Each of you will write two stories over the course of the semester. Many of us enjoy reading and writing genre fiction, such as fantasy, sci-fi, romance, horror, and crime. In this course we will be reading and writing character-driven fiction. Character-driven fiction isn't necessarily realistic, but it does focus on people who feel real to the reader, and whose situations derive from both external and internal conflict. Don't worry if you have never written character-driven fiction before. The assigned readings provide a wide variety of examples for you to study.

Course Description and Requisites

Workshop in short stories or other short fiction. Beginning the novel in individual cases. May be repeated twice for credit.

Prerequisite: ENGL 71 (or equivalent) or instructor consent.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated. If you feel threatened by a classmate, please bring the issue to my attention so I can address it promptly. Students who violate this protocol will be dropped from the course.

≡ Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
 2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
 3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
 4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
 5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.
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Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Materials

The Best American Short Stories 2024

Author: Groff, Lauren and Heidi Pitlor, eds.

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Edition: 2024

ISBN: 978-0063275959

Availability: SJSU Bookstore

Price: \$19.99

PDF Handouts on Canvas

These are available under "Files"

Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new, original pieces of fiction (PLO #3).
- Written and verbal comments on your classmates' stories (PLO #1, #3).
- Reading assignments from the textbooks. (PLO #1).
- A substantial revision of one of your stories (serves as the final exam) (PLO #3).
- Brief in-class and take-home writing exercises (PLO #3).
- Attendance at two literary readings of your choice, and a written response to each (PLO #1, #3).

Two new, original pieces of fiction (PLO #3)

After the drop date, I will send around a Google Sheets sign-up spreadsheet where each of you will choose two dates to hand in your stories. On each of those dates, you will upload a story in PDF format to the Workshop Submissions discussion board on Canvas. Your story must be double-spaced, single-sided, and include page numbers.

There are no minimum or maximum page limits, but submissions for workshop are generally between 4 and 10 pages, double-spaced. Please specify if the piece is a complete short story or part of something longer. Be sure to proofread before you submit.

Your classmates and instructor will download your story, make comments on the manuscript, and type up a paragraph (minimum) of comments, which they will post as replies to your story on the discussion board.

At the next class meeting, the instructor will lead a discussion of your story. We'll do two or three stories per class, so your story will get about twenty minutes of attention.

Final revision (PLO #3)

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a substantial revision of one of your workshop submissions. Examples of changes that might be included in a substantial revision include adding or deleting a character, changing the point of view, inserting a new scene, and altering the ending of the story. It is not enough simply to correct the spelling and grammatical errors of the first draft. To earn a high grade on the revision, you must alter the story in some significant way.

Written and verbal comments on your classmates' stories (PLO #1, #3)

Critiques will be graded on the quality and quantity of the feedback they provide. What should you cover in your comments? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story. What's your interpretation? If this were in a textbook, what would you say about it? This helps the writer understand what came across and what didn't. The second responsibility is to suggest avenues for improvement. How can the writer make this story better? Often this requires putting yourself in the writer's shoes. Remember that you can help a fellow writer with thoughtful commentary even if you would not have chosen the same topic or style in your own work.

Reading assignments from the textbooks. (PLO #1)

See the Course Schedule for reading assignments. There will be reading quizzes due on Canvas.

Attendance at two literary readings of your choice, and a written response to each (PLO #1, #3): One-Unit Enhancement

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

- International Education / Cultural Enrichment

You are required to attend **two readings** by poets or prose writers. SJSU's Center for Literary Arts (<https://www.clasanjose.org/>) has a full schedule this semester. I recommend you attend those events, but you may also choose to write your responses to readings by other authors.

Here are a few readings taking place on campus this semester:

Thurs, 2/6/2025, 6pm: Novelist **John Engell** at the Steinbeck Center (MLK Library 590)

Thurs, 2/20/2025, 6:30pm: Memoirist and journalist **Carvell Wallace** at the Hammer Theater

Thurs, 4/17/2025, 6:30pm: Poet **Natalie Diaz** at the Hammer Theater

Fri, 4/18/2025, time TBD: Poet and memoirist **Ross Gay** at the Hammer Theater

Thurs, 3/6/2025, 6:30pm: Novelist **Lauren Groff** at the Hammer Theater

Thurs, 5/8/2025, 6:30pm: Fantasy/Sci-fi Writer **Ted Chiang** at the Hammer Theater

Tues, 5/13/2025, 7pm: **Spring Steinbeck Fellows Reading** at Steinbeck Center (MLK Library 590)

If you can't make it to any of these readings, contact your local bookstore or check listings in the Metro newspaper. I will let you know about additional campus readings as I hear about them.

After attending each reading, you will write a **1000-word personal response to each**. You may respond to any aspect of the reading, for example the speaker, the venue, the material performed, or the Q&A with the audience. Explore how your attendance at the reading changed the way you think about creative writing as an art form or as a profession. Your response papers are due on Canvas by the end of the semester.

✓ Grading Information

Criteria

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's subjectivity, can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, and rhythm. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops. Some of you may have some natural ability writing fiction, and some may not. Think of talent as extra credit – it can make up for a blown quiz, but it won't get you an A if you neglect the other class requirements.

Determination of Grades

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Breakdown

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

- 20%: Workshop Submission #1
- 20%: Workshop Submission #2
- 20%: Final Revision
- 15%: Responses to Classmates' Fiction
- 15%: Class Participation, including Reading Quizzes
- 10%: Response Papers for Literary Readings/Performances

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more literary readings (and write responses). These must be turned in by the last day of class.

Late assignments will not be accepted without the instructor's prior approval.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

This class meets every Tuesday and Thursday, starting on Thurs, Jan 23. Class will not be held Thurs, Mar 27 (instructor will be at a conference) or Tues/Thurs, Apr 1/3 (SJSU Spring Recess). The last day of class is Thurs, May 8. In lieu of a final exam, you will submit your final revision on Canvas by Weds, May 14, at 5pm.

Reading assignments meet PLO #1, writing assignments PLO #3.

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class and posted on Canvas.

BASS = Best American Short Stories

PDF on Canvas = find under "Files" on the Canvas site for this course.

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1/23/2025	Introduction & still write
1/28/2025	Topic: Character Readings: Shastri Akella, "The Magic Bangle" (BASS1); Daniel Mason, "A Case Study" (BASS 211)

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1/30/2025	<p>Topic: Character</p> <p>Readings: Alexandra Chang, "Phenotype" (<i>BASS</i> 54); Laurie Colwin, "Evensong" (<i>BASS</i> 69)</p>
2/4/2025	<p>Topic: Conflict</p> <p>Readings: Madeline Ffitch, "Seeing Through Maps" (<i>BASS</i> 130); Susan Shepherd, "Baboons" (<i>BASS</i> 281)</p>
2/6/2025	<p>Topic: Conflict</p> <p>Readings: Steven Duong, "Dorchester" (<i>BASS</i> 119); Kirstin Valdez Quade "The Five Wounds" (PDF on Canvas)</p>
2/11/2025	<p>Topic: Setting</p> <p>Readings: Taisia Kitaiskaia, "Engelond" (<i>BASS</i> 168); Azareen Van der Vleet Oloomi, "Extinction" (<i>BASS</i> 298);</p>
2/13/2025	<p>Topic: Point of View</p> <p>Readings: Lauren Groff, "The Wind" (PDF on Canvas); Jamel Brinkley, "Blessed Deliverance" (<i>BASS</i> 38)</p>
2/18/2025	<p>Topic: Voice</p> <p>Readings: Selena Gambrell Anderson, "Jewel of the Gulf of Mexico" (<i>BASS</i> 8); Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence" (PDF on Canvas); Carvell Wallace, "You Can't Stop" (PDF on Canvas)</p>
2/20/2025	<p>Craft talk with author Carvell Wallace. Class will meet in the Steinbeck Center, MLK Library 5th Floor</p>

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
2/25/2025	<p>Topic: Speculative Fiction</p> <p>Readings: Marie-Helene Bertino, "Viola in Midwinter" (<i>BASS</i> 24); George Saunders, "I Can Speak!" (PDF on Canvas)</p> <p>Beginning of Student Workshops</p>
2/27/2025	Student Workshops
3/4/2025	Student Workshops
3/6/2025	Craft talk with author Lauren Groff. Class will meet in the Steinbeck Center, MLK Library 5 th Floor
3/11/2025	Student Workshops
3/13/2025	Student Workshops
3/18/2025	Student Workshops
3/20/2025	Student Workshops
3/25/2025	Student Workshops
3/27/2025	NO CLASS (instructor at an academic conference)
4/1/2025	NO CLASS (SJSU Spring Recess)
4/3/2025	NO CLASS (SJSU Spring Recess)
4/8/2025	Student Workshops

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
4/10/2025	Student Workshops
4/15/2025	Student Workshops
4/17/2025	Student Workshops
4/22/2025	Student Workshops
4/24/2025	Student Workshops
4/29/2025	Student Workshops
5/1/2025	Student Workshops
5/6/2025	Student Workshops
5/8/2025	Craft talk with author Ted Chiang. Class will meet in the Steinbeck Center, MLK Library 5 th Floor.
5/14/2025	Final Revisions and Responses to Literary Readings due on Canvas