

ENGL 296-02: Techniques of Fiction

Winter Session 1-4:20pm via Zoom

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Student office hours: After every class session and by appointment.

Introduction

ENGL 296 is an introduction to fiction course that emphasizes reading, writing, and critical thinking about story. This workshop operates on the philosophy that you must become a skilled critical reader of fiction to become a better writer. Our discussions will employ the types of vocabulary and considerations specific to the craft of fiction writing. These discussions will help you to articulate your impressions and criticisms, a skill you will use when we workshop the stories of your peers, as well as when you write your own original fiction.

Required Text

- *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide* by Michael Kardos
ISBN-13: 978-1319030421
- Readings and video/audio links provided on Moodle and the Library Course Reserve.

Suggested Resources & Further Reading

- *The Language of Fiction: A Writer's Stylebook* (Brian Shawver)
- *On Writing: A memoir of the Craft* (Stephen King)
- *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them* (Francine Prose)

Course Outline

Time Commitment: This is an intensive course and will require a large time commitment. While the exact number of hours will vary individually, I recommend that you budget at least three hours to complete the reading, assignments, homework, and presentation every day. I have designed the class so that it should be feasible to satisfactorily complete the requirements within the allotted time between classes.

Reading: This course operates on the principle of a “flipped classroom” which means that you will be reading stories and theoretical texts in advance and should come to class prepared to discuss them and apply what you’ve read to the class discussions and exercises. You are expected to make notes about readings in your journal, including quotes and page numbers to refer to in the text, so that we may use class time productively.

Writing: We'll be writing two stories, one flash fiction piece and a longer story of up to 10 pages, both of which will be workshopped. A substantial rewrite of one of your submitted stories, using the feedback received from me and your fellow writers, and using the rewriting techniques appropriate for fiction will be due for finals. In addition you will be expected to complete four writing assignments and hand in three reflective journals.

Workshop: Your story draft is due two days before your workshop. A 2-page double-spaced critique of each of your fellow writers' stories is due on the day of their workshop. In addition to the written critique, you will also be required to use the Track Changes feature in Word to make comments on their manuscript. The marked-up manuscript and written critique should be in one document and uploaded to the Workshop discussion board/forum as a response to the writer's posted story to receive credit.

Presentation: You will pick one story from the anthology at the back of the Kardos textbook and prepare a video presentation of around 5-10 minutes in length in which you discuss how the author employed craft elements in the piece. These will be posted for the whole class on a discussion board/forum along with 5-7 discussion questions as an initial post to facilitate our conversation about the story. You should give a short introduction to the author but use the bulk of your time to discuss the craft elements, and genre conventions of the story. You need to sign up for a presentation slot and story before the start of class.

Homework Assignments: In addition to the required readings, the course work includes writing assignments and journal responses uploaded to Moodle for credit. All written homework for the day is due by the start of class.

- **Writing Exercises:** These will be brief and aimed at discovering and practicing specific elements of fiction writing and how they can be incorporated in your own work. These exercises should demonstrate your understanding of the topic at hand.
- **Reflective Journal:** responses should be 3+ pages long (Times New Roman 12pt., double-spaced) and reflect on the stories, discussions, textbook chapters, other critical readings we've done up to that point, as well as your own writing and process. These journals are low-stakes and informal but should be thoughtful and show intellectual consideration. The aim is not to provide a summary or literary analysis, but rather to reflect on the work you're doing and to make connections between texts, concepts, and writing discovery in order to solidify understanding and promote learning.
- **Freewrite Journal:** You will be provided with a freewrite and writing exercise prompt for every class. Your freewrites are an essential part of your writing process and will be handed in at the end of the term. These will not be scrutinized for any formal value but should demonstrate that you are committing time to divergent creative practice.

Class participation: Because this is a discussion-based class, you are expected to be an active participant. This requires that you be vocal, but respectful both in zoom sessions as well as on the discussion forums. Discussion enables you and your classmates to understand, investigate, and apply course concepts. Together we comprise a community of writers, and you are an essential part in making the course interesting and meaningful. Your preparation for class and active participation in discussions and group activities are mandatory components of this class and count for 25% of your final grade. I define active participation as contributing a minimum of three analytical and constructive (not summary) comments in each class as well as one post followed by one response to another writer's post for each discussion forum. Usage of any device to access social media and other sites that fall outside the scope of our class during class time will constitute a check minus for participation.

Attendance: A big part of the writing process is discussion and the sharing of ideas. Because a lot of learning happens during class discussion and interaction with your fellow writers, attending class zoom meetings is crucial, especially on workshop days. Mark yourself present on Moodle by clicking on the Attendance section under Class Information. Please always reach out to me if there are any technical issues that prevent you from attending a session. Missing more than one class for any reason will result in a lowering of your final grade. Missing three classes will constitute an automatic failure of the course.

Feedback and Grading

It is a difficult task to assess creative work, especially when grades are involved, as the appreciation of a creative work is subjective. Therefore, initial drafts of creative exercises and stories are graded on a credit/no credit basis to encourage you to take risks and express yourself freely. I will make notes on your story and return my comments in a timely manner. If at any point you have questions or concerns about your grade, I encourage you to set up a meeting with me. You will do a substantial revision of one of your stories for your Final. At this point, stories will be assessed based on the depth of revision, using feedback, and techniques learned in class.

To receive a passing grade, you must complete all major written assignments and requirements for the course as set out in this syllabus. You are required to attend class meetings and discuss stories in a way that demonstrates you've analyzed the assigned reading, participate in online discussions, show effort in your freewrites, and hand in properly formatted assignments that address all requirements.

This class will function on the premise that we are here to help one another to become better writers. Comments or behavior I deem aggressive, hostile, or threatening to other students or that compromises the positive learning environment of our class as a whole will earn you a "check minus" for participation and will be reported to your Class Dean. Failure to submit an initial story draft, complete the workshop process and hand in a final rewritten story will constitute an automatic failure of the course.

Your final grade is weighted as follows:

Class participation and preparation, presentation, forum participation - 25%

Workshops - 35%

Writing assignments & Journals - 25%

Freewrite journal - 5%

Finals 10%

Course Policies

Community of Writers: Our class will function as a community of writers, which means your peers will read and critique your work. Only submit work you are comfortable sharing. Everyone in our class, including me, must remain civil and courteous at all times. We will often have the opportunity to share our opinions and beliefs, but racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist or any other negative communication harmful to an individual or group will not be tolerated. Whether something is offensive or not will be determined by the people whom it might offend or their advocates. In writing workshops, we often deal with sensitive material. In order to make the classroom a safe space, discussions should remain confidential and other writers' work may not be shared outside the classroom. For group work it is vital that we respect one another's opinions and experiences even as we provide constructive criticism.

Content/Trigger Warnings: The nature of Creative Writing is such that the focus of a story is often on sensitive subjects or events that may be traumatic to certain individuals. Should you feel that you need to be warned in advance about the content of a story, please email me or discuss it with me during student office hours. I'm happy to accommodate any reasonable request, but please note that I do not have any control over the content brought to class by student writers and it is up to them to disclose any potentially triggering material.

Conference: I have an open-door policy and encourage you to meet with me if you have questions about your progress in the course, the work we are doing, or if you have any other concerns.

Work Format: All story drafts and written assignments must be typed in 12pt. Times New Roman, titled, double-spaced, and submitted as a Word document in .doc or .docx format. Make sure your last name and the page number appear in the upper right-hand header of every page. Critique of your fellow writers' work will consist of notes made on their manuscript using the Track Changes/Insert Comment features in Word in addition to a 2-page written critique in the form of a letter to the writer.

Complete drafts: You are required to upload a copy of the complete first draft of your story by the due date. Workshop feedback must be complete and uploaded by the assigned workshop date to get credit. Incomplete, rushed, and sloppy homework assignments that do not meet the minimum length requirements will not receive credit.

Late Assignments: All assignments must be submitted by their due date in the specified format. I will not accept late assignments unless you contact me directly to request an extension.

Email: I use e-mail to communicate important information about the class. You are responsible for checking your school account daily.

Moodle

Be sure to check Moodle and your university email account daily for assignments and communications from me. Announcements, course readings, videos, links, and homework assignments and submissions will be available on Moodle. You can also use the site to connect and collaborate with other students. Throughout the semester you will be required to submit journal responses, discussion posts, workshop critiques, and story drafts electronically through the site. Also note that any schedule provided for this class is tentative and will change during the semester to accommodate class needs so always use my weekly announcements on Moodle as your primary source of information. **All homework assignments and readings will be posted at least two weeks in advance and it is your responsibility to complete all tasks on time and submit written work for the week by the start of class the following Monday.**

Zoom

We will use Zoom to facilitate our online discussions during our scheduled class times. A link to our class Zoom will be provided on Moodle. Please do not share links or passwords with anyone outside our class. To facilitate the smooth running of our meetings, please adhere to the following:

- Access the meeting in a quiet, calm environment, and enable your video but mute your microphone, except when you are speaking.
- Please put your preferred name and pronouns in your profile.

- Do an equipment check ahead of time.
- Refrain from texting and other distracting behaviors during our meetings and group discussions and give speakers your full attention. Any behavior which I deem inappropriate or intentionally distracting will result in your immediate dismissal from the meeting and will earn you a check minus for participation.

Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance and understanding of the policies outlined in this syllabus, all Wesleyan or English Department policies, and your commitment to adhere to all policies and employ your best efforts to accomplishing course objectives.

Course Calendar: Please note that this schedule is subject to change so always follow the daily assignments checklist on Moodle for current readings and assignment submissions.

To do before the start of class sessions:

- Watch posted lecture on creativity and do exercises in freewrite journal.
- Read Kardos Chapter 1-4 and make notes for discussion.
- Hand in Flash Story Draft and start work on your longer 10-page story.
- Introductions Forum Participation.
- Sign up for presentation slot and story on Moodle.

1/4

Assignments Due:

- Reflective Journal 1
- Writing Assignment 1

To Read for Class:

- “Sticks” (Saunders)
- “Nothing About Love or Pity (Mun)
- “The House on Mango Street” (Cisneros)
- “Incarnations of Burned Children” (Wallace)

1/5

Assignments Due:

- Writing Assignment 2
- Rules of Critique Forum

To Read for Class:

- Kardos Chapters 5 & 6
- “Bullet in the Brain” (Wolff)

- “Hell-Heaven” (Lahiri)

1/6

Assignments Due:

- Writing Assignment 3
- Small Group Workshop 1 Written Critiques

To Read for Class:

- Workshop Critique Guidelines
- Kardos Chapter 7
- “My Son the Murderer” (Malamud)

1/8

Assignments Due:

- Longer Story Draft
- Reflective Journal 2

To Read for Class:

- Kardos Chapter 10 & 11
- Presentation Stories – Check the Presentation Schedule under Class Information on Moodle for the assigned stories for the day.

1/9

Assignments Due:

- Writing Assignment 4
- Presentation Forum Participation

To Read for Class:

- Kardos Chapter 8 & 9
- Presentation Stories

1/10

Assignments Due:

- Small Group Workshop 2 Written Story Critiques
- Presentation Forum Participation

To Read for Class: Presentation Stories

1/12

FORMAL WORKSHOP STARTS

Assignments Due:

- Written Story Critiques

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation Forum Participation <p>To Read for Class: Presentation Stories</p>
<p>1/13 Assignments Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Story Critiques • Presentation Forum Participation <p>To Read for Class: Presentation Stories</p>
<p>1/14 Assignments Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Story Critiques • Presentation Forum Participation <p>To Read for Class: Presentation Stories</p>
<p>1/16 Assignments Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Story Critiques • Presentation Forum Participation <p>To Read for Class: Presentation Stories</p>
<p>1/17 Assignments Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Story Critiques • Presentation Forum Participation <p>To Read for Class: Presentation Stories</p>
<p>11/19 Due for Finals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story rewrite • Final Reflective Journal

Covid-19 Code of Conduct

To protect your health and safety, the health and safety of instructors and staff, and the health and safety of your peers, all students must understand and adhere to the University's Covid-19 Code of Conduct. Students are encouraged to review the code of conduct regularly to stay up to date on the current code. The course instructor reserves the

right to refuse to allow any student into the classroom who does not adhere this code of conduct.

Accommodation Statement

Students with Disabilities:

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021 or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

In addition, the student representatives from the WSA have requested that these statements below also be included in your syllabi:

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources:

If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at dleipziger@wesleyan.edu or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html>.

For a list of a religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan's Multifaith calendar which can be found at: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaith-calendar.html>.

Title IX Resources:

If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements.

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics,

veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Classrosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [the student code](#).

Self-Advocacy

I expect you to take responsibility for your education in this class. Self-advocates do not wait for someone else to speak for them; instead, they identify problems in the classroom environment and engage productively with the other members of the classroom and actively work with me to solve those problems and identify barriers to your full participation in classroom.

Discrimination and Harassment

Wesleyan University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. Wesleyan will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this Wesleyan policy, "**Protected Classes**" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact [the Office for Equity and Inclusion](#) at 860-685-4771. The [responsibility of the University Members](#) has more information.

Honor Code

All students of Wesleyan University are responsible for knowing and adhering to [the Honor Code](#) of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council—Office of Student Affairs. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). The [Office of Student Affairs](#) has more information.