

ENGLISH 4313/6313: Craft of Fiction

TTh 11-12:15, Allen 25

Professor: Becky Hagenston

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(Email is the best way to get in touch with me, but I will not check my email after 5pm.)

Office Hours: M 10-12, T 9:30-10:30, Th 1-2 and by appointment

“I find that most people know what a story is until they sit down to write one.”

--Flannery O'Connor

Required Texts

Pushcart Prize Stories, 2015 ed. Bill Henderson

The Best American Short Stories 2014, ed. Jennifer Egan

Seagull Reader: Stories, 2nd edition, ed. Joseph Kelly

2014 O. Henry Prize Stories, ed. Laura Furman

Grad students are required to subscribe to a print journal of their choice.

This is a course for undergrads who have taken Intermediate Fiction Writing and for grad students who are writing a creative thesis and/or are interested in pursuing an MFA or PhD in fiction or poetry. I expect that everyone in this class has written and workshopped short fiction. This is not the class where you write your first short story!

Course Goals and Objectives:

The central focus of this course is to encourage and support the writing, reading, and critiquing of fiction. You are expected to develop habits of responsible, constructive peer criticism, and to cultivate strenuous standards of self-criticism/analysis.

Student Responsibilities:

Do all assigned reading and participate actively in discussion. If you haven't done the reading, I will count this as an absence. You will be reading 4 stories/week and keeping a typed list of everything you read.

Write 20-30 pages of new fiction (2 or 3 short stories), read and discuss the required stories, read and discuss all student stories, and type end comments for each story. You will also be writing an essay on some aspect of craft and an introduction to an anthology you make up from stories you choose from the texts.

All students will workshop **two NEW stories**, and one of those stories must be a form that stretches your creative boundaries (i.e., you take a chance with structure, format, point of view, etc. If you feel most comfortable writing in first person, try third, for example). Graduate students will be required to complete at least 30 pages of fiction; undergrads will complete at least 20 pages.

These manuscripts are to be **handed out one week in advance** and **must be typed and double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 pt. Times New Roman font. NO EXTRA SPACES BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS.** No horror, sci-fi, romance, erotica, or fantasy *genre* fiction. No stories that rely on love triangles or unwanted pregnancies; no stories about weddings unless you're going to do something *really* original and interesting! If you have any questions, please ask.

Along with your final revision, you will turn in a 3-5 page paper discussing this revision and what you might do in another draft.

The Anthology Intro: I expect each of you to read two stories per class period (four per week), even if these are not assigned. Keep a **typed list** of each story you read, and make a note of some aspect of craft (pov, structure, etc.).

Grad students will write anthology intros of at least 4 pages pages, for 11-15 stories; undergrads will write intros of at least 3 pages, for 8-10 stories.

The Craft Essay: You will each be writing about one aspect of craft in one short story. Grad students' craft essays are to be at least 5 pages long; undergrads' essays are to be at least 3 pages.

Workshops depend on polite and insightful criticism—without pettiness or condescension. End comments must be typed and must be thorough; **students must hand in two copies of the end comments**—one to the student, and one to me. I encourage you to mark up stories with editing suggestions and other comments. There is no final. There are no exams. Attendance at all readings is required.

Graduate Students will research literary magazines (and subscribe to at least one) and submit a story to at least one journal by the end of the semester. Graduate students cannot get an A in the class if you miss more than one class or more than one critique.

Grading: stories = 20%, revision and 3-5 page essay discussing revision = 25%, assignments & presentations = 10%, typed critiques = 20%, participation = 10%. Craft essay = 7.5%, Anthology intro = 7.5%

Attendance: If you miss a class, it's your responsibility to get the stories to be workshopped and come to the following class prepared. **These things will result in a zero for class participation:**

- Missing 2 classes or being late 4 times
- Not coming to class when your story is up for workshop
- Not bringing copies to distribute when they are due
- Texting during class or even having your phone on your lap under your desk (I really hate that.)

It is your responsibility to give yourself time to copy your stories so that you aren't late to class on the days you distribute.

PLEASE NOTE: You can not receive higher than a C on work with grammar/ tense/ punctuation/ spelling problems.

Grading Scale:	90 or above = A
	80-89.9 = B
	70-79.9 = C
	60-69.9 = D
	below 60 = F

I do not take late work, so please don't ask. You have two Emergency Assignments on MyCourses. Use this option if you cannot print an assignment or cannot make it to class when an assignment is due.

6 or more unexcused absences = F

Not being prepared for class = 1 unexcused absence

2 lates = 1 unexcused absence

Students are encouraged to bring to class literary or extra-literary news. The class should be a place where we can talk about writing in general, as well as specific stories.

All classes must be **lively**. No exceptions!

Email Etiquette:

Please feel free to email me (bhagenston@english.msstate.edu) if you have a question or need clarification on an assignment. I am happy to respond to any email that is both **necessary** (you need clarification on an assignment or to find out what you missed if you were absent) and **polite**.

Academic Honesty

Mississippi State University has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. The code is as follows:

“As a Mississippi State University Student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

IF YOU LIE, CHEAT OR PLAGIARIZE, YOU WILL GET AN F IN THE CLASS.

Students with Disabilities

MSU, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, will make every reasonable accommodation for students with special learning needs. If you wish assistance under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact me as soon as possible.

Your Name

Writer's Name, "Story Title"

Date

End Comments:

You must provide **two copies of end comments** for every story up in workshop. These comments must address the strengths and weaknesses of the story. The comments should be thoughtful, tactful, and to the point. One copy of the end comments goes to the author of the story; the other copy goes to me. **End comments should be at least 1.5 pgs, typed, 12 point Times or Times New Roman font, double-spaced.** (Or about a page, single-spaced.)

If you only bring one copy of your comments, you will give that copy to the writer, and you will have a zero from me.

Some *possible* things to address:

Summarize the story in a few sentences: What happens?

What part of the story interested you most? Least?

Is the story told in the most effective tense (past or present)?

Is there a better point of view for this story?

Are there places where you got lost or stuck?

Are there places that should be in scene (rather than summarized)?

How can the characters be made more believable?

Is the setting of the story vivid enough?

What is the central conflict of the story, and is it conveyed effectively?

Are there enough concrete details, or are there unnecessary details?

Does the dialogue serve more than one purpose (sets tone, advances story, reveals character)?

Can you tell what has changed in the main character's situation (or our perception of it) by the end of the story?

Do you get a sense of movement and tension in the story? If not, where does it seem to stall?

Is flashback used effectively? (If applicable—not all stories need flashback scenes.)

VERY TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: Subject to change

- T 1/13 Introduction to course and in-class assignment
Bring *The Seagull Reader* to class.
- Th 1/15 Discuss “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin + a story of your own choosing
In-class writing assignment: What If and Family Mysteries
- T 1/20 Discuss “Currents” by Helen Voskuil & “Digging” by Beth Lordan
DUE: Photo Assignment: first 500 words of a story
- Th 1/22 Discuss “Tooth and Claw” by T.C. Boyle (Seagull) & “The Night of the Satellite” by T.C. Boyle (BA)
DUE: What If/Family Mystery assignment: 500 word scene
- T 1/27 Discuss: “The Women” by William Trevor (O.H.) & _____
In-class writing: 5 killer first sentences
DUE: Bring in a news article and a typed up list of 10+ What-If’s
- Th 1/29 **DUE: (Read in class): News article assignment**
Read: _____ + _____
We’ll also discuss your list of stories you’ve read so far.
Distribute: 1 _____ and 2 _____
- T 2/3 Discuss: _____ + _____
Distribute: 3 _____ and 4 _____

NOTE: Even when all that’s scheduled is workshop, you are still to be reading 4 stories a week and keeping a list of them!

- Th 2/5 Workshop 1 _____ and 2 _____
Distribute: 5 _____ and 6 _____
- T 2/10 Workshop: 3 _____ and 4 _____
Distribute: 7 _____ and 8 _____
- Th 2/12 Workshop: 5 _____ and 6 _____
Distribute: 9 _____ and 10 _____
- T 2/17 Workshop: 7 _____ and 8 _____
Distribute: 11 _____ and 12 _____
- Th 2/19 Workshop 9 _____ and 10 _____
Distribute 13 _____ and 14 _____
- T 2/24 Workshop 11 _____ and 12 _____
Distribute: 15 _____
- Th 2/26 Workshop 13 _____ and 14 _____
- T 3/3 Workshop: 15 _____
Discuss mini craft essay and imitations
- Th 3/5 Discuss _____ + _____
DUE: Mini craft essay or Imitation

SPRING BREAK

T 3/17	Discuss _____ + _____ Get into workshop groups
Th 3/19	Discuss: _____ + _____ Discuss craft essays
T 3/24	Discuss: _____ + _____
Th 3/26	Get into workshop groups and discuss stories
T 3/31	Distribute stories to group members and read out loud.
Th 4/2	Workshop
T 4/7	Workshop
Th 4/9	Finish workshop: Critique comments due Discuss editors' intros to anthologies (read at least 2 of them)
T 4/14	Mini-presentations of craft essays (3-5 minutes)
Th 4/16	Finish presentations Due: List of stories (table of contents) for your anthology. You can arrange them in any order you like, including alphabetical. (See * below)
T 4/21	Discuss revisions, portfolios, anthologies DUE: Craft Essays
Th 4/23	DUE: Anthology introductions & Table of Contents
T 4/28	LAST CLASS: Grad students present on literary magazines FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE: A folder or binder containing: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. 3-5 page essay discussing revision2. Revised story, clean copy3. Revised story, marked and highlighted to show what you changed4. Original workshop draft5. Your other story or stories (Grad students turn in at least 30 full pages of short stories; undergrads turn in at least 20 pages. Your revision essay does <i>not</i> count toward these pages)

Remember that these pages are to have **1 inch margins and be in 12 point Times New Roman font, and no extra spaces between paragraphs.** If it seems as if your work is less than the required number of pages formatted this way, you will lose points.

*Anthology: Is the purpose pedagogy? Or entertainment? Or to show a variety of the best stories? What makes these the best? Choose no more than 1 (undergrad) or 2 (grad) from the Seagull reader.