

Writing Fiction

ENGL 130

Spring 2026 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 02/07/2026

Contact Information

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Associate Professor	Office Location: FO 105
Class Days / Time: MW 12:00-1:15PM	Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30PM or by appointment
Classroom: Sweeney Hall 239	Telephone: (408) 924-4449

Course Information

"Everyone you're looking at is also you." — James Baldwin

During a time shaped by spectacle and speed, literary fiction remains a rare but vital haven where our human attention and interior lives are not only preserved but cherished. This workshop examines how literary fiction works by attending to what is made possible through language—how a matrix of character, description, landscape, metaphor, and voice can create new and shared worlds. Students will consider the following questions: Why do stories captivate us in the first place? What gives a sentence its music and pressure? What makes a character unforgettable? How might a scene situate a singular experience within a larger social fabric? Why do certain stories linger past their endings? Through lecture, discussion, assigned reading, writing exercises, and peer feedback, students will take the time to study the interplay between craft and meaning as they write and revise two short stories of their own.

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

Student Expectations

Your task as a student will be to embrace the opportunities afforded to you in this class: the exploration of new reading, the discussions with your peers and me about the work at hand, the opportunity to give feedback on the works of your peers, the opportunity to receive constructive feedback on your own work, and the opportunity to take part in a thoughtful and supportive community of writers.

Because good writing often asks us to explore the sometimes difficult and ugly truths in life, there may be times when you feel uncomfortable about something that you've read or something that you're attempting to write. Please communicate with me about these situations. The sooner I know about them, the more effective I can be in helping to find solutions to ease your discomfort.

To help foster a safe and supportive writing community, I ask that you be mindful of your words, both spoken and written. If you think something you've written might be potentially disturbing to or painful for some readers, please speak to me ahead of time so that we can discuss a trigger label for it. Also, please be mindful of issues of appropriation or of harmful tropes that might exist in your work. These issues might be difficult to gauge in your own writing, but I'm always here to discuss situations or texts with you ahead of workshop, if you have concerns.

I expect that you will treat each other and me with respect and dignity at all times, and that you will attend class regularly and give your full attention to the activities and to the work of your peers. You can expect that I will treat you as an individual, and that I will challenge you to think, experiment, probe, and create. I am happy to talk to you about any concerns during office hours.

Punctuality

Given how distracting late arrivals are for the whole class, I ask that you arrive on time. If you know you are going to be late (as with an absence) telling me ahead of time allows me to accommodate this with the least amount of disruption to our community.

Workshop Attendance

Workshops are a key component of this class, and therefore it's critical that you attend your workshop. If you're going to miss class on the day you are scheduled to go up for workshop, swap days with a classmate. Missing a workshop without notifying me ahead of time will result in a 30% deduction from your

story submission grade.

Late Work

Any work not turned in by the assigned time/date will be lowered 10% per day up to 3 days. I will not accept late work for In-Class Activities and Reading Quizzes.

Workshop Etiquette

Workshop is a place for respectful and constructive criticism, one that supports and fosters growth for students from every walk of life in their early apprenticeship of becoming a writer. While we are having workshop, please take care to:

1. Actively listen to your peers without interrupting. It can be challenging to formulate a responses in front of a group. Even a slight interruption can derail the thoughts of the person speaking.
2. Focus your comments on the work, not the writer. Insults or sarcastic praise are not acceptable.
3. Bear in mind that some of the work we read may not meet your exact taste. That's life and that might just be a good thing. Differences in aesthetic choice does not prevent an astute reader from delivering a sound analysis.
4. Consider how your observations of a peers' work might apply to your own writing. Notice what engages you, what confuses you, and what feels especially effective, and identify the specific choices behind those effects. The comments you give most often to others might double as a revision checklist for your own work.

Difference of voice and experience is thoroughly celebrated in the space. To that end, spoken and written commentary must always be directed at the work, not the writer. Personal attacks and offensive or inappropriate language will not be tolerated. **Students who cannot follow these guidelines will be dismissed from the course.** See the full Workshop Protocol section on Canvas.

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.

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 Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the BA in English.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- SLO #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.
- SLO #3: Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject.

Course Materials

Supplies

For this course, you will need:

- a notebook
- a pen or a pencil
- an electronic device (ex. laptop, desktop, or tablet) with a camera and built-in microphone

- reliable internet with access to e-mail, Canvas, and Google Docs
- access to a printer

Reading Materials

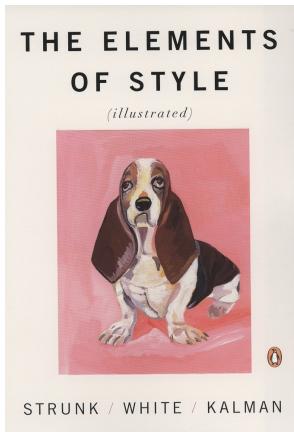
- All reading materials including published literary short fiction, craft essays, handouts, writing exercises, and student work are available on Canvas.

The Elements of Style Illustrated

Author: William Strunk

ISBN: 978-0143112723

Optional



Course Requirements and Assignments

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica.

1. Write and workshop two new, original pieces of fiction (SLO #3)
2. Write feedback letters for your classmates' stories (SLO #1, #3)
3. Read assigned short stories from the textbook (SLO #1)
4. Complete quizzes on the assigned readings (SLO #1)
5. Fully participate in In-Class Activities (SLO #3)
6. Attend two literary readings of your choice, and write a response to each (SLO #1, #3)
7. Complete a substantial revision of one of your stories and write a Critical Introduction to it (serves as the final exam) (SLO #3)

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:

- Service Learning/Field Experience/Civic Engagement
- International Education/Cultural Enrichment

1-Unit Enhancement: Attend & Respond to Two Literary Readings

You are required to attend two literary fiction readings by published authors presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Center for Literary Arts here at SJSU is the premiere reading series of Silicon Valley and has recently hosted Percival Everett, Jhumpa Lahiri, Paul Beatty, Joy Williams, Torrey Peters, Tommy Orange, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Carmen Maria Machado, Ottessa Moshfegh, Tyehimba Jess, Hanif Abdurraqib, Kiese Laymon, Lauren Groff, Anthony Doerr, Jonathan Franzen, Claudia Rankine, and Ocean Vuong among many others. Announcements will be posted on Canvas and on clasanjose.org.

You'll attend the reading and write a 1000-word response to it. Your response should include a description of the event, a summary of what was read, and your reflection on the experience. Should you be unable to attend two readings live in-person, you can find live streamed readings given through UC Berkeley, Stanford University, and book stores throughout the Bay Area as well as local arts organizations like City Arts & Lectures.

Final Revision with Critical Introduction

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a substantial revision of one of your workshop submissions with a Critical Introduction. The manuscript should be annotated to direct me to the specific changes you have made. 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. Your Critical Introduction will discuss your influences for and choices with the piece, as well as any concerns you have moving forward.

✓ Grading Information

Grading Matrix

Creative writing 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 workshop.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

Workshop Submission #1	20%
Workshop Submission #2	20%
Final Revision with Critical Introduction	20%
Peer Letters	15%
In-Class Activities	10%
Literary Reading Response Paper #1	5%
Literary Reading Response Paper #2	5%
Reading Quizzes	5%

Academic Integrity

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating, plagiarism, and/or collusion will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

Statement on Artificial Intelligence

In this course, every element of class assignments—drafts, brainstorming, re-wording, revision, final drafts, etc.—must be fully prepared by the student. The use of generative AI tools for any part of your work will be treated as plagiarism. If you have questions, contact me.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' Syllabus Information web page at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

Criteria

Please be advised that students enrolled in this course will be studying and aspiring to write literary fiction—that which has artistic merit, is character and voice driven, and is concerned with the human condition.

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

ENGL 130 Fiction Workshop, Spring 2026, Course Schedule

The Fiction Workshop meets every Monday and Wednesday of the Spring 2026 semester, starting on January 26. Class will not meet on March 30 and April 1 during Spring Recess. The last class meeting is May 6. For the final project, students will submit the Final Revision on May 13, the last day of the course. Reading assignments meet SLO #1, writing assignments SLO #3.

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class.

PROLOGUE

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments Deadlines
1	M 1/26 W 1/28	Welcome & Introduction "Cringe is the Enemy of Creativity" by Lindsey Deloach Jones, "The First Day" by Edward P. Jones, 1-Page Introduction Assignment

ACT I

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments Deadlines
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2	M 2/2 W 2/4	Reading for an Audience, Writing Exercises & Story Beginnings, Workshop Procedure, Workshop Sign Up Plot Structure & Metaphor, "Escapes" by Joy Williams, Quiz, Reading Quiz
3	M 2/9 W 2/11	Conflict & Tone, "Poseidon" by Franz Kafka, Workshop Round #1 Begins "A Country Doctor" by Franz Kafka; <i>The Trial</i> dir. Orson Wells
4	M 2/16 W 2/18	Character & Symbolism, "Lady With the Little Dog" by Anton Chekov, Reading Quiz Excerpts of <i>The Bell</i> by Iris Murdoch, <i>Herzog</i> by Saul Bellow, and <i>Oreo</i> by Fran Ross
5	M 2/23 W 2/25	Setting & The Uncanny, "Worlds That Flourish" by Ben Okri "Mothers Lock Up Your Daughters Because They Are Terrifying" by Alice Sola Kim, Reading Quiz Literary Reading Response #1 is due

ACT II

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments Deadlines

6	M 3/2 W 3/4	Voice, Excerpts from Paul Beatty, Rebecca Curtis, Philip Roth, Diane Williams, Breece Pancake, ZZ Packer, Etgar Keret, Carter Sickles, Randa Jarrar, Brontez Purnell
7	M 3/9 W 3/11	Music, Excerpts from Gayl Jones, Niccolette Polek, Ernest Hemmingway, J.M. Coetzee, Margarita Karapanou, Gore Vidal, V.S. Naipal
8	M 3/16 W 3/18	Virginia Tufte: <i>Artful Sentences & Grammar as Style</i> , Take Home Writing Exercises Workshop Round #1 Concludes
9	M 3/23 W 3/25	Radical Honesty & Keeping a Journal, Kathleen Collins Lecture (1984) Reading Quiz (Canvas) Free Agents -OR- Student Conferences
10	M 3/30 W 4/1	Spring Recess – No Class

ACT III

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments Deadlines

11	M 4/6 W 4/8	Revision: Strategies, Exercises, & (Ideal) Audience, Workshop Round #2 Begins "Household Gods" by Torrey Peters, Reading Quiz (Canvas)
12	M 4/13 W 4/15	Revision: "L.A." by Ling Ma Ling Ma's CLA Lecture (2021)
13	M 4/20 W 4/22	Revision: "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" and "Beginners" by Raymond Carver, Reading Quiz (Canvas)
14	M 4/27 W 4/29	Recommended Reading, Literary Outfits & Getting Published Literary Reading Response #2 is due

ACT IV

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments Deadlines
15	M 5/4 W 5/6	Final Thoughts & Fond Farewells Last Day of Class, Workshop Round #2 Concludes

16	M 5/11 W 5/13	Dead Day Final Revision Due