

Fiction Writing Workshop

ENGL 241

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: W 7:00-9:45PM	Office Hours: W 6:00-7:00PM or by appointment
Classroom: FO 104	Telephone: (408) 924-4449

Course Information

"A man's style is his mind's voice."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

In this fiction workshop, students will study a wide range of styles to discover what excites them as readers and transforms them as writers. Style, defined broadly, is the unique way a writer presents a story, that which is closely linked to the meaning of the work itself. We will examine a variety of sensibilities and aesthetic possibilities, reading authors who work across various traditions—as well as those who dare to challenge convention—and we will thus explore the many ways that fiction can stir, fascinate, and level us, both magically and irrevocably. In addition to providing thoughtful written feedback to their peers, students will submit two original pieces of fiction *plus* a major revision.

Course Description and Requisites

Fiction writing as preparation for thesis. Study of canonical and contemporary fiction and fiction produced by students. Intensive workshop experience. May be repeatable for credit for up to 12 units.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Workshop Procedure

During the second class meeting, students will sign-up for workshop, choosing two dates to hand in their work. Workshop submissions must be double-spaced, 12 point font, and paginated. Students will read the piece up for discussion, make comments in the margins, and type a 500-word written commentary of constructive criticism. Submissions and peer commentaries are posted on Canvas in the Discussions section.

Peer Commentaries

Typed commentary for each student story will address:

1. the student's interpretation of the work (what the piece is about, what the author is trying to accomplish)
2. comments and analysis of what is working well
3. suggestions for improvement.

Students are to submit their peer commentaries on Canvas in Discussions as a reply to each workshop submission. A portion of the final grade will be determined by the quality of these peer commentaries.

Workshop Etiquette

Workshop is a safe place for respectful and constructive criticism, a place that supports and fosters growth for students from every walk of life in their early apprenticeship of becoming a writer. Difference of voice and experience is thoroughly celebrated here. 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.

Procedure for Discussing Published Literary Fiction/Student Presentations

One of the most useful skills a student can learn in graduate school is how to lead a discussion. Beginning in Week 6, students will lead the class discussion of the assigned reading, addressing craft issues and aesthetic concerns. Groups will consist of 3-4 students each, and presentations will run 15 minutes in length. Beginning with a brief introduction of the author, each group will pose questions to the class that are

from a writer's perspective. That is, they will ask questions that are more interested craft issues (ex. point of view, voice, metaphor, landscape) than thematic ones. On the day each group is scheduled to present, one group member should submit the visual component of the presentation, complete with discussion questions in the section on Canvas labeled [Group Presentations](#).

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted. As a writer, one must become incredibly disciplined about setting personal deadlines and sticking to them. Turning in work on time is a student's single most important responsibility in this course. If a student needs to change the date of their workshop date, it is on them to find a classmate who is willing to swap. It is also the student's responsibility to notify the professor as soon as possible.

Absences

In the extremely rare case of a second absence, the student will be assigned a published short story for which they must compose a short 500-word analysis of the author's handling of an element of craft. The assignment will be due on the class meeting that follows the absence.

Punctuality

Given how distracting late arrivals are for the whole class, arrival on time is expected. If lateness is unavoidable (as with an absence), give the professor advance notice so as to allow for the least amount of disruption to the class community.

Academic Integrity

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. Students who would like to include in their assignment any material they have previously submitted or plan to submit for another class, should 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 any work will be treated as plagiarism.

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/>.

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

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;
 - c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 - d) write under time constraints.

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 MFA in Creative Writing:

- SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.

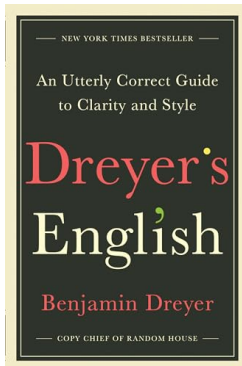
- SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
- SLO 5: Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 1. organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 2. formulate and defend original arguments;
 3. employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 4. write under time constraints.

Course Materials

Dryer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style

Author: Benjamin Dryer

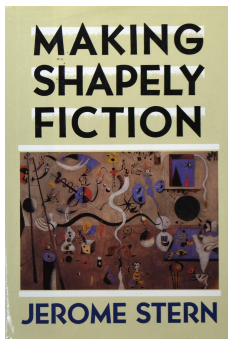
ISBN: 978-0812995701



Making Shapely Fiction

Author: Jerome Stern

ISBN: 978-0393321241

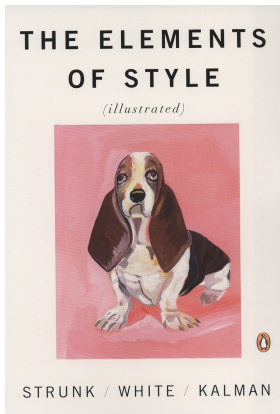


The Elements of Style Illustrated

Author: William Strunk

ISBN: 978-0143112723

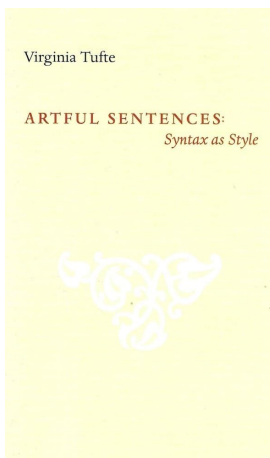
Optional



Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style

Author: Virginia Tufte

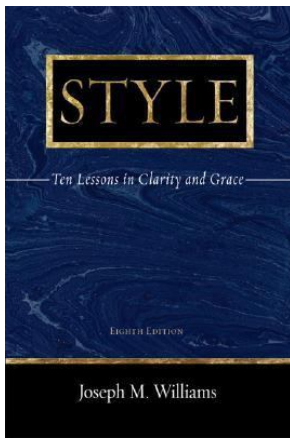
ISBN: 978-0961392185



Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace

Author: Joseph M. Williams

ISBN: 978-0321288318



- Other reading materials—including student work, craft essays, and published short stories—are available on Canvas.

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. Two new pieces of fiction. At the end of the semester, there may be an opportunity for students to turn in additional work. [SLO #5]
2. In place of a final exam, students will turn in a substantial revision of a piece previously discussed in workshop. [SLO #5]
3. Each week students will provide written comments to their classmates' work. [SLO #4]
4. Students will engage and participate in meaningful class discussions. [SLO #4]
5. Students will give a presentation on a published short story of their choice. [SLO #3]
6. Over the course of the semester, students will attend at least two literary readings and write 1,000-1,500 word responses to each. [SLO #3, #4, #5] (See 1-Unit Enhancement below)

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: Attendance at Literary Readings & Written Responses

Students are required to attend two literary fiction readings by published authors presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. Students will attend the reading and write a 1000-word response to it. The response should include a description of the event, a summary of what was read, and the student's reflection on their

experience.

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.

Should a student be unable to attend two readings live in-person, they can access live streamed readings hosted by UC Berkeley, Stanford University, and book stores throughout the Bay Area as well as through local arts organizations like City Arts & Lectures.

Participation

Class participation takes on a number of forms, from actively listening to classmates to meaningfully contributing to the class discussion to completing in-class assignments to workshopping. Students are expected to ALWAYS participate in ALL of these ways. Learning to express one's ideas in a public forum is an important life skill, and this class is a safe place to learn how to master this. It does not come easily to everyone, but everyone can improve. As hard as it might feel to speak up, try and do. Remember that participation in in-class activities (and on Canvas) are a key component of your grade. The more prepared you are before class, the easier this will feel: do the reading, complete your letters before class and any required written work so you don't have to "hide" in class—or worse—"pretend."

In-Class Writing

Students will be given time to generate writing in class. Usually these will come in the form of writing exercises or prompts related to the day's reading. Students will also bring in a piece to develop and/or revise in class. The idea is to allow the text/prompt to inspire you, to experiment as wildly and freely as possible. The intention will just become more disciplined in one's practice; students will learn to keep writing and making art out of whatever time and resources they have at their disposal. The hope is that some of the material generated in class may become useful during workshop as the basis for a later submission or somewhere else in the writing journey.

Final Examination or Evaluation

In lieu of a final exam, students will turn in a substantial revision of one of their workshop submissions. There are many possibilities for revision. Some examples of changes that might be included in a substantial revision include developing a metaphor, adding or deleting a character, reworking syntax and tone, changing the point of view, inserting a new scene, amplifying narrative voice, and altering the ending of the story. It is not enough simply to correct the spelling and grammatical errors on the first draft. To earn a high score on the [Final Revision](#), the writer must transform the story in a significant way. The Final Revision is due on [Canvas](#) on the last day of the course, 5/13.

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 workshops.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

Student Work 60%

- Workshop Submissions (2) 40%
- Final Revision 20%

Participation 20%

Group Presentations 10%

Literary Reading Responses (2) 10%

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 241 / MFA Fiction Workshop, Spring 2026, Course Schedule

The Graduate Fiction Workshop meets every Wednesday of the Spring 2025 semester, starting on January 28. The last day class takes place on May 6. Class will not meet on April 1 due to Spring Recess. 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.

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/28	Welcome & Introduction
3-8	2/11-3/18	First Round of Workshop
9 & 10	3/25-4/1	Revision
11-15	4/8-5/6	Second Round of Workshop
16	5/13	Final Revision Due