

Texts: *Three Genres*, Eighth Edition, Minot (you MUST get the 8th edition)

Overview:

"If it blows the top of your head off, that is poetry." –Emily Dickinson

"Little said, much meant, is what poetry is all about." –Charles Simic

"Character is the very life of fiction. Setting exists so that the character has someplace to stand, something that can help define him, something he can pick up and throw, if necessary, or eat, or give to his girlfriend. Plot exists so the character can discover for himself (and in the process reveal to the reader) what he, the character, is really like: plot forces the character to choice and action, transforms him from a static construct to a lifelike human being making choices and paying for them or reaping the rewards. And theme exists only to make the character stand up and be somebody: theme is elevated critical language for what the character's main problem is." ~John Gardner

This course is designed to introduce students to the world of contemporary creative writing, particularly to the genres of literary prose fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry. This will be accomplished through discussions, readings, writing assignments, and workshops. All students will compose original works of creative non-fiction, prose fiction and poetry, culminating in three final, **polished** portfolios (one poetry portfolio of *at least* 3 poems, one fiction portfolio of 8-10 pages and one creative non-fiction portfolio of 8-10 pages). We will practice the art of writing poetry, creative non-fiction and fiction critically as well as creatively. The primary focus of this class will be on student work. We will not hold one person's work against another's—there is no corner on good, and there is enough excellence to go around—but against the light of the finest that has been—is being—written, and we will encourage one another to reach beyond our current grasps, remembering that we are here not in the service of ego, but of art. We will also read and discuss some of the best contemporary poetry, non-fiction essays and short stories to see what we can steal. By "Steal" I don't mean plagiarize (more on this as the term progresses). Unlike literature courses, where the discussions focus mainly on subject and theme, we will discuss these works in terms of craft. We will be architects of language, and will learn the best ways to deliver meaning to an audience. Specifically, we will concentrate on the three "S's" of good writing: style, structure, and specifics. Most importantly, we will learn that writing is work, but an enjoyable (and quite rewarding) form of work. This is an introductory course, and assumes that you have had no previous writing experience (although some of you may have). The course is designed to appeal to a wide range of writing histories, and no matter what level of experience you have, if you complete all of the reading and writing assignments you will leave this class a stronger writer (and reader). **Please note that this is both a reading and writing intensive course. Please consider this when evaluating your course load for the semester. If you are taking this class as an easy elective you should choose another course.**

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

At the end of the term, students should be able to:

- Develop critical understanding of one's own writing and writing process.
- Respond critically not only to one's own work but to fellow students' work.
- Create and edit documents using word processing or other computer programs.
- Identify characteristics of literary genres.
- Identify major literary or rhetorical terms and figures.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

****Class attendance is required.** This is not a lecture course—this is a seminar that relies on active student discussion and participation. Attendance is, therefore, mandatory, and cutting classes will lower your final grade. If you have a legitimate excuse (medical, with documentation) I will work with you to make up whatever work was missed in class and provide extra assignments to make up for the discussions missed. For those of you who are slow-witted and still don't grasp the intent of my message, let me rephrase it so there is no misunderstanding: More than 3 absences (excused, unexcused, doesn't matter), your final course grade is lowered by one letter. More than 5 absences will result in a failing grade for the course. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to make up the work. You should contact me via e-mail as soon as possible to see what you've missed. **If you do miss class, I will always leave handouts, workshop stories and poems, etc. in the folder on my office door. It is your responsibility to pick these up and complete any work before the next class session. Even if you are absent, all assignments are due to me on the assigned date.**

****I will not accept late papers or assignments unless you have made arrangements with me in advance.** Because our workshops will run like a finely oiled machine, it is imperative that you have your drafts of poems and short stories ready and copied to hand out to the class on your assigned workshop date. If you do not have your rough drafts with you in class on the assigned day (photocopied and ready to distribute) you will not participate in the workshop and your final portfolio grade for that genre will be lowered by a letter grade. In case of illness or emergency, please contact me as soon as possible. **There will be no make-up quizzes offered, late workshop responses accepted, etc. unless there is a documented medical emergency. When you miss points due to a missed assignment, you miss the points. No exceptions.**

****All short stories and essays (both drafts and final versions) must be typed and double-spaced.** Poems must also be typed, but single-spaced is allowed. Please don't use fancy fonts or colored inks. Use 12-point font, Times New Roman or Courier. Always, always keep an extra hard copy of your work. All assignments turned in (unless instructed otherwise) must be typed.

****Students will be required to bring additional copies of their work for workshops.** Please come to class with materials ready to distribute. We are all relying on each other. If you miss your workshop date your grade will suffer (your final portfolio grade for that genre will be lowered by ten points and your class participation grade will suffer as well). Be sure to keep extra copies of your work in case of computer problems.

****Plagiarism will result in immediate failure.** I am more than happy to meet with you to work on your creative endeavors. No need to plagiarize.

****Three polished writing portfolios (one for poetry, one for fiction, one for creative non-fiction) will be produced during the course of the semester.** These portfolios will contain work that has been workshopped and **significantly** rewritten (in other words, no first drafts will be permitted in these final portfolios.)

GRADING:

The three final portfolios (one for poetry, one for fiction, one for creative non-fiction) will be the main focus of your final grade for this course. Although these grades are somewhat subjective, they are mainly given based on objective standards. In the text *Three Genres* we will read and learn about the elements of good poetry, creative non-fiction and fiction. Is the structure solid? Are there specific images? Is the language nicely written? Are the characters developed? Is the grammar solid? We will be discussing all of these elements during class discussions. You don't have to be a "good" writer coming into this class. If you do the reading, pay attention in class, and participate in class workshops your writing will improve. These portfolios will also be graded on improvement and the effort put into reworking and polishing the initial stories and poems turned in for workshop. You will also be graded on your written workshop responses to your fellow classmates, your class participation in discussions, and your participation in in-class writing assignments as well.

Portfolios will be graded A-E, defined for this course as follows:

“A”: An “A” portfolio is filled with poems or stories which are extremely well-written and take intellectual risks, going considerably beyond a merely adequate response. Your writing is challenging to present and your treatment is thorough and insightful. Your writing enhances the power of your topic by being smooth, cohesive, vigorous and fresh, and by omitting the distraction of grammatical errors and misspellings. For poetry, the poems must contain vivid, specific images, they must have a sense of structure, they must convey meaning clearly and well. There should be at least 3 significant drafts per poem. For stories, the characters must be well-rounded, the structure must be strong, the pacing right, and the language excellent. The page count also must be met.

“B”: A “B” portfolio does more than fulfill the assignment; the poems and stories go beyond a routine response and show evidence of thought and planning. They contain no major distracting errors in usage or mechanics, and are well developed. The writing is clear and free of grammatical errors.

“C”: A portfolio receiving a “C” is acceptable. The poems and stories carry out the assignment, though in a routine way. The poems and stories show evidence of engagement with the topics of the textbook and make at least a minimum response to those topics. The prose contains few distracting errors and no glaring platitudes or mistakes in word choice. I can follow and understand the poems and stories without difficulty, but also without much pleasure.

“D”: A portfolio earning a “D” is a weak portfolio: the poems and stories relate to the assignment but show no real evidence of engagement with the topic. Alternately, the pieces may be severely weakened by their awkward writing: a reader might not be able to follow the plot of a story or the development of a poem because of the frequent distraction of grammar and usage problems. Significant grammatical errors, such as comma splices, sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreements, and verb tense shifts will tend to put the paper in the “C” to “D” range, as will absence of a clear central purpose. Vague phrasing, ambiguous diction may also prevent the reader from understanding the point.

“E”: An “E” portfolio is a disaster. The poems and stories show little or no thought and are so poorly constructed that I cannot follow the sequence of ideas. This category may also include a stylistically adequate paper that does not fulfill the assignment, or that is plagiarized. If I do not receive all the course assignments from you by the end of the term, you will receive an “E” for this course.

These portfolios will also be graded on improvement and the effort put into reworking and polishing the initial stories and poems turned in for workshop. You will also be graded on your written workshop responses to your fellow classmates, your class participation in discussions, and your participation in in-class writing assignments as well. **A rough breakdown of how your final course grade will be given is:**

Each Final Portfolio: 25%

Typed Workshop responses and work turned in during workshop, assignments (both in class and out of class), oral class participation, attendance, etc. 25%

Feel free to see me at any time during the course of the semester if you are uncertain of how you are faring in this course. I am always eager and willing to meet with you during office hours to talk about your writing. My real goal for the semester is to help you to produce writing that, by the end of the term, you are extremely proud of. I will do whatever it takes to help you accomplish that goal.

COURSE BREAKDOWN:

This course will be divided into three parts. The first third of the semester will be devoted to poetry, the second third will be devoted to the close study of the short story and its elements, and the final third will be devoted to creative non-fiction. We will conduct workshops throughout the semester. Each student will have works of all genres reviewed and workshopped by small group (4 students per group in poetry, 3 per group in fiction and creative non-fiction).

This calendar will be followed as closely as possible; However, some changes during the course of the semester may be necessary. I will try to inform you of any necessary scheduling changes as soon as possible. **Please check your UTA e-mail account often. This is the only way I have of contacting you.**

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (please note: **unscheduled reading pop quizzes can—and will—take place. Often. Come to class having already read the chapters, poems, stories scheduled for discussion on each class day).**

I. Poetry

Aug 25 T	Course Introduction
Aug 27 TH	Poetry overview. Discuss ch. 25 and 198-201 in Ch. 26. And “The Gift,” (202), “On A Maine Beach” (208)
Sep 1 T	Discuss ch. 27 and ch. 28 in Minot and “Lizards and Snakes” (212) and “Mystery” (218) In class discussion of clichés and description.
Sep 3 TH	Discuss ch.29 (in-class rhyme scheme) in Minot and hand out take-home writing assign. on description.
Sep 8 T	Turn in description assignment (some read out loud). Discuss Ch. 30 and 31 (do in-class scansion).
Sep10 TH	Bring an interesting travel photo to class. In-class writing exercise on vacation photo (assignment on “Think of a Journey of a Loved One” to be handed out and to be finished at home). Discuss ch. 32.
Sep15 T	Turn in “Think of a Journey” assignment (some read out loud). Discuss ch. 33 and ch. 34.
Sep 17 TH	In-Class reading and discussion of form poems.
Sep 22 T	In-Class reading by visiting poet. Discuss poetry workshop procedures. In-class poetry workshop example (have two volunteers bring a copy of a poem for the class). Get put into groups for Group Workshops and exchange two poems with group members. Take home and write comments.
Sep 24 TH	Small group workshop of poems.

II. Short Fiction

Sep 29 T	Short Fiction overview. Discuss ch. 6, 7 and 8
Oct 1 TH	Discuss ch. 9. Character cluster writing assignment handed out.
Oct 6 T	Discuss ch. 10 and ch. 11. Turn in character cluster assignment (some read out loud). Final Poetry Portfolios Handed in to me.
Oct 8 TH	Discuss ch. 12 and 13. Hand out assignment on Narrative POV.
Oct 13 T	Discuss ch. 14 and 15. Turn in narrative POV assignment (some read out loud). Bring printout of interesting item for sale on ebay.
Oct 15 TH	Discuss ch. 16 and 17. In-class group assignment on sale items. Dialogue assignment handed out. Photocopy of short story to be distributed.
Oct 20 T	Discuss ch. 18 and story (photocopy). Handout dialogue exercise.
Oct 22 TH	Turn in dialogue assignment (some read out loud).
Oct 27 T	Discuss ch. 20 and 22. Distribute workshop stories next class (with copies for group). Need at Least 2 volunteers for full-class workshop example (bring copies for full class tomorrow).
Oct 29 TH	Do full-class example workshops. Break into small groups and exchange stories.
Nov 3 T	Exchange typed comments on workshop stories and workshop stories in small group. Last Fiction Class Day.

III. Creative Non-Fiction

Nov 5 TH	Discuss ch.1 and ch. 2
Nov 10 T	Discuss ch. 3 and 4. Final Fiction Portfolios Due
Nov 12 TH	Discuss ch. 5. In-class group exercise. Take-home writing assignment handed out.
Nov 17 T	Discuss writing assignment (some read out loud). In-Class essay topic discussion. Bring essays for group workshop next class. At least 1 volunteer to bring essay for the entire class.
Nov 19 TH	Discuss workshop procedures, Do in-class example workshop of one essay. Break into small groups and exchange essays.
Nov 24 T	Small group workshops (exchange typed letters to group authors).
Nov 26 TH	No Class--Thanksgiving
Dec 1 T	No Class—Writing Day
Dec 3 TH	Last Day of Class. In-class Reading. Final Non-Fiction Portfolios Handed in to me.