

# Fiction Writing Workshop Section 01 ENGL 241

Spring 2025 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/23/2025 to 05/12/2025 Modified 01/22/2025

## 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

Classroom: [FO 104](#)

or by appointment

Telephone: (408) 924-4449

## Course Information

In this workshop, students will study a wide range of styles and structures to discover what excites them as readers and transforms them as writers. Style, defined broadly, is the unique way an author presents a story, that which is closely linked to the meaning of the work itself. Structure, as we understand it, is the arrangement of the elements that make up a story and how it shapes meaning. We will examine a variety of sensibilities and aesthetic possibilities, reading authors who work across various traditions—as well as those who take care to buck convention—and we will thus explore the many ways that literature can stir, fascinate, and level us—both magically and irrevocably so. 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 first class meeting, students will sign-up for workshop, choosing two dates to hand in their work. Your story must be between 25 pages maximum, double-spaced, 12 point font, and paginated. Your classmates will read your story, make comments in the margins, and type a 2-page written commentary of constructive criticism. Post your work and peer commentaries on Canvas in the [Discussion](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/discussion_topics) ([https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/discussion\\_topics](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/discussion_topics))s section.

## Peer Commentaries

Your typed commentary on each student story will address:

- a. your interpretation of the work (what the piece is about, what the author is trying to accomplish)
- b. comments and analysis of what is working well
- c. suggestions for improvement.

Submit your commentary on Canvas in Discussions as a reply to each student's workshop submission. A portion of your final grade will be determined by the quality of your 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 you 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 address craft issues and aesthetic concerns. Groups will consist of 3-4 students each, and presentations will run 15 minutes in length. One group member should submit the visual component of the presentation [here](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments/7230377) (<https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments/7230377>), on the day you're scheduled to lead discussion.

## Late Work

**Late work will not be accepted.** As a writer, you must become very disciplined about setting your own deadlines and sticking to them. Turning in your work when you will is the most important responsibility you have in the course. If you need to change your workshop date, it is on you to find a classmate willing to swap. It is also your 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 following the absence.

## 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.

## 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.

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/>.

## Program Information

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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.

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## Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: [www.sjsu.edu/english](http://www.sjsu.edu/english) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>).

Department email: [english@sjsu.edu](mailto:english@sjsu.edu) (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>).

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

## Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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### Course Learning Outcomes (CLO):

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

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### Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative

Author: Jane Alison

ISBN: 9781948226134

### Art of Fiction

Author: John Gardner

ISBN: 9780679734031

### Making Shapely Fiction

Author: Jerome Stern

ISBN: 9780393321241

### Elements of Style Illustrated

Author: William Strunk

ISBN: 9780143112723

# How Fiction Works (Tenth Anniversary Edition): Updated and Expanded

Author: James Wood

ISBN: 9781250183927

- [Digital reader \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/files/folder/Readings\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/files/folder/Readings), of published literary short fiction (available on Canvas)
- Other reading materials, including student work, craft essays, and published short stories (also available on Canvas)

## Course Requirements and Assignments

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### 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

During the semester, you are required to attend two fiction readings by published authors (who have published at least one book) in the greater Bay area. The Center for Literary Arts here at SJSU is the premiere reading series of Silicon Valley. The 2024-2025 season presents some of the most vibrant voices in contemporary American literature including Tommy Orange, Carvell Wallace, Lauren Groff, Natalie Diaz, and Ted Chiang among others.

[Announcements \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/announcements\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/announcements), will be posted on Canvas and on [clasanjose.org](http://clasanjose.org).

You are to write a short response essay (1,000 – 1,500 words) about each of the readings you attended, analyzing language, structure of at least two specific story collections or novels that the author read (giving the titles and quoting specific lines/passages). Turn in each review within one week of attending said readings on Canvas in the [Assignments \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments) section.

You may include secondary sources or commentaries the author has published about their work (documented in conventional MLA-format for research papers). Look for examples of the author's work you heard read by getting their books, or finding their work on reputable websites. Should you be unable to attend two readings live in-person, you can find live streamed readings given through [UC Berkeley, Stanford University \(https://creativewriting.stanford.edu/events/lane-lecture-series\)](https://creativewriting.stanford.edu/events/lane-lecture-series), and book stores throughout the Bay Area as well as local arts organizations like [City Arts & Lectures](#).

## Participation

Class participation takes a number of forms from listening to your peers, contributing to discussion, completing in class assignments to workshopping. I expect you to participate in ALL these ways. Learning to express your 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 I hope to see improvements in this skill over the course – as hard as it might feel to speak up, I expect you to try. Remember: 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, skip it.

## 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. They 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 your practice, and to keep writing and making art out of whatever time and resources you have at your disposal. The hope is that some of the material generated in class may become useful to you during workshop as the basis for a later submission or somewhere else in your 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 of the first draft. To earn a high score on the Final Revision, you must transform the story in a significant way. The Final Revision is due [here \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments/7229193\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1601320/assignments/7229193), on the last day of the course, 5/14.

# ✓ Grading Information

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## 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.

### **Determination of Grades**

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").

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- 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.

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%

## 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 2025, Course Schedule

The Graduate Fiction Workshop meets every Wednesday of the Spring 2025 semester, starting on January 29. The last day class meets is May 7. Class will not be held on March 26 (AWP Conference) and April 2 (Spring Recess). For the final project, you will submit the Final Revision on the last day of the course May 14. 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	1/29	Welcome & Introduction
3-8	2/12-3/19	First Round of Workshop



9 & 10	3/26-4/2	Revision
11-15	4/9-5/7	Second Round of Workshop
16	5/14	Final Revision Due