Policy Statement
ENGLISH 261 – Intro to Creative Writing
MWF 10-10:50
Instructor: James A. Clark
SFASU Department of English and Creative Writing
Fall 2018/Ferguson 177

“One the first day, the professor laid down the rules, and saw that they were good.

This is not a Bible, exactly, but it’s a set of rules you’ll want to be familiar with; believe me when I say this packet will save you a great deal of trouble later on. Should you have any questions about absences, expectations, grade point values, assignments, or any other aspect of the class, this packet will be your reference. If you lose it, ask for a replacement. If you choose to disregard this policy statement, you do so at your peril.

Contact Information:
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Office: Ferguson 279
Office Hours: MW 11:00 – 12:30, TR 9:30 – 10:30, and by appointment

Official Course Description:
An introduction to the writing of poetry, fiction and non-fiction with opportunities for practice and peer workshop.

Required Materials
- Access to a quality printer and enough money to make copies of your work
- Reading materials (provided by me)
- A folder to keep up with the numerous handouts you’ll receive in class
- Professionalism and dedication to improving not only yourself but your colleagues
- A stapler, or uninterrupted access to a stapler
- A journal of some type for your creative ideas

Additional Materials (not required, but strongly suggested)
- A flash drive for storing backup copies of your work
- A dictionary

“‘The writer must believe that what he is doing is the most important thing in the world. And he must hold to this illusion even when he knows it is not true.’

(John Steinbeck, New York Times, 2 June 1969)
Program Learning Outcomes
Since this class counts for both the Creative Writing major (the BFA) and the minor, our official learning outcomes are as follows:

- The student will demonstrate close reading skills and recognize strategies used by professional creative writers.
- The student will employ techniques and strategies for crafting carefully composed, competent creative work in a variety of genres (for this course, that means fiction and poetry).
- The student will articulate useful, critical editorial advice for peer writers.
- The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.

Course Goals
- To introduce you to the elements of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.
- To introduce you to the work of professional, contemporary writers.
- To show you how to use the elements as part of your own creative “toolbox”
- To help you produce a body of work (poems, short story, and short-short story) that you can be proud of.
- To get you accustomed to working in a workshop setting, which will benefit you should you pursue a major or minor in the field
- To improve your editing skills
- To get you accustomed to thinking and behaving professionally

The Relationship between Reading and Writing
Reading and writing are interconnected. Perhaps there is such a thing as a writer who does not read regularly, but I challenge you to find one—just one—who writes successfully. Part of your development as a creative artist is reading the works of published writers. As with any field, from professional sports to filmmaking, it’s important to watch how the pros do it, and to develop your own techniques based on what you observe. As a writing course, this is also a reading course.
Grade Breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and In-Class Assignments</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop Editing</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poetry Paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiction Paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collected Poetry</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flash Fiction</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Portfolio</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Important Notes

Your workshop experience is a three-part process: draft, group discussion, and revision. You must turn in your draft on time, you must participate in small group workshop, and you must revise your work and resubmit it in the final portfolio. You cannot miss any part of this process. If you do not turn in your work on time, at the beginning of class, it will not be accepted; you will receive a grade of 0 and cannot workshop and/or revise that work.

Failure of two major assignments (rough drafts, poem packets, or portfolio), either by not turning them in or trying to turn them in late, will result in failure of the course regardless of other grades or previous class standing.

Attendance (5%)
0-2 absences = 5
3 absences = 4%
4 absences = 3%
5 absences = 2%
6 absences = 1%
7 absences = fail the course, regardless of other grades or previous class standing

sleeping in class = 1 absence
coming in late/leaving early = 1/2 absence
texting in class = 1 absence

Being absent is not an excuse for missed information or assignments. You should e-mail a colleague (or me) to find out what went on in class any time you are unable to attend. You should pick up any missed packets or material. You must be responsible for all the material discussed in class on the days you were absent—and for the material for the next class period. There are no excused absences. If you aren’t here—for whatever reason—I count you as absent. Please plan your absences wisely.
Phones should be kept in pockets, purses, or backpacks. If there is some emergency that requires you to have your phone nearby (a family emergency, for example), please let me know before class. If I catch you texting in class, I will count you as absent and you will receive 0s on your participation/quiz grades.

Class Discussion (10%)
Writing workshops should be open forum discussions of our own creative endeavors and those of published authors. In a typical class period, I will ask questions about the material, then the class will be asked carry the conversation forward. I hope that you will respond not only to me but also to others in the class. Be prepared to talk about the assigned material on discussion days. If you do not understand the material, feel free to ask questions about what it means. Feel free to guess as well (oftentimes you won’t be as off base as you might think). There may be no “right” answers, but it is imperative that each of you actively engage in class discussions. Just tell me what you think. The way to understand writing is to talk about it. I like the classroom to be lively, so don’t hold back. If you choose not to participate in class discussions, your participation grade will be no higher than a C.

Quizzes/In-Class Assignments (10%):
Quizzes relate to the reading, and may occur any day a reading is assigned. A quiz may appear in a typical multi-question form, or as a single question which requires a short paragraph response. Quizzes are generally worth 10 points each. Grading scale: 10-9=A; 8=B; 7=C; 6=D; 5 or less=F. Quizzes are always given at the beginning of class, before class discussion. If you do poorly on a quiz, I will assume you have not read the assignment on that day and this will affect your participation grade as well. There are NO make-up quizzes. Please note that I do not like to administer quizzes, and I won’t do so unless I have to. As long as the class is reading and discussing the assigned works, I won’t have to.

Assignments (both in-class and take-home) will be graded on how well you meet the criteria of the assignment. Most of the assignments are geared to help you perfect your skills in one of the genres or in editing.

Craft Analysis (5% X2)
During the course of the semester, you will be tasked with producing two short papers (2-3 pages each) which analyze the techniques applied in a professional, published work. The first will be over a poem* of your choice; the second will be over a short story of your choice. These analysis papers will be formal in tone and will require a close reading of the text under analysis.

Group Workshop (20%)
Workshop makes up a large portion of the class. Your job as peer editors is to write significant, astute notes on each and every piece in your small group (10%) and then to speak about that work in class in your small group (10%). I will check to see if you have written remarks prior to workshop beginning and I will grade you on your in-class comments. The time to write comments on a peer’s work is not during the open workshop. Poetry comments will be handwritten; fiction will require handwritten line by line edits and typed end comments. If you do not write quality comments on the work, you will be graded accordingly.
Your comments will be included into the final packet the writer turns in. Grades for this will be focused on:

- The quality of line edits on peers’ work for small group workshop.
- The quality of end notes on peers’ work for small group workshop.
- The quality of oral comments (thoughtful/constructive) in small group workshop.
- Promptness, neatness of getting work to me and peers.
- Attendance in group is expected.

**PROFESSIONALISM (10%)**
A portion of your grade is devoted to your ability to be professional and turn in all materials neatly and on time. This includes rough drafts, final drafts, assignments, and portfolios. Your professionalism grade will be computed based on:

- Having copies are ready for presentation when due (copies for each group member, plus 1 for me). You **must have hard copies** for your group on rough draft exchange days.
- First and final drafts are submitted on time (at the beginning of class; I don’t accept late work)
- Every required element is included and all requirements are met
- All assignments are neat and readable, complete, in the correct order and stapled.
- All formatting (heading, font, poetic form) is correct
- Assignments are taken seriously (not approached halfheartedly or “phoned in”)

This grade also includes any e-mail correspondence.

Rough drafts can’t be late because other people rely on them to complete workshops.

**Grading of Rough Drafts:**

- You **must** have 4 hard copies the day the assignment is due. Three of these will be turned into your group members; the fourth will be submitted to me for grading.
- After you turn in your rough draft, I will read it and make comments on it. All creative work will be graded on its professional format, spelling, etc. The bulk of my comments will focus on how well you employ the elements of the genre and will be geared to helping you make it the best piece it can be. I will include a benchmark grade to give you an idea of where the work can go. With revision most work can be improved and/or tightened. Our goal is to make your work as professional as possible.

**I will FAIL the following:**

- Late work
- Failure to provide hard copies on the due date
- Incomplete work
- Assignments/creative work not typed in standard format
- Work with an abundance of spelling/grammatical errors
- Plagiarized papers (also will result in failure of the class)
If you HAVE to be absent (funeral, court, illness, etc.), let me know before class time and I will distribute your work for you.

Genres

Poetry

You will write 6 poems this semester. These will be discussed in small group workshops, and will be revised for the final portfolio based on my comments as well as those of your peers.

Poetry Grading:

A  exceptional use of imagery, language, placement, line length, and sound to highlight a specific message/idea. If rhyme is used it does not lean toward verse. Presented professionally. Poem is original in imagery & idea as well as sophisticated in use of craft.

B  well-defined use of imagery, language, placement, line length, and sound to highlight a specific message/idea. If rhyme is used it does not lean toward verse. Poem is original in imagery & idea as well as sophisticated in use of craft, professionally presented in correct format. Not as original/sophisticated as an A but could get there with revision.

C  simplistic or derivative use of imagery, language, placement, line length, and sound to highlight a specific message/idea, but presented in correct format. Rhyme leans toward verse. Revision would improve poem.

D  poorly developed use of imagery, language, placement, line length, and sound to highlight a specific message/idea OR incorrect format, simplistic rhyme, errors in terms of grammar or presentation.

F  plagiarized, not submitted, unreadable, incomplete or does not meet guidelines

Revisions may include: Verb changes; images developed, extended, changed; eliminations, block-outs; sound/rhythm development or changes; structural changes (i.e. line breaks, spacing), etc.

Fiction

You will write one story this semester of 1500-3000 words. These will be discussed in small group workshops, and will be revised for the final portfolio based on my comments as well as those of your peers.

Fiction Grading:

A  compelling plot with well-drawn characters, consistent point of view and well-established conflict, well written dialogue and excellent details, professionally presented in correct format.
B well-defined plot with good characters, consistent point of view and good conflict, well written dialogue and good details, professionally presented in correct format. Not as exceptional as an A but could get there with revision.

C simplistic or derivative plot, flat characters, conflict needs to be developed or point of view is inconsistent, professionally presented in correct format.

D poorly developed plot, characters, conflict or dialogue, minimal details OR incorrect format, errors in terms of grammar or in terms of meeting assignment requirements

F plagiarized, grammatically unreadable, incomplete, does not fulfill assignment, not handed in.

Revisions may include: Plot enhancement, logical problems fixed; details/description developed, extended, changed; eliminations, block-outs; characterization developed; structural changes (moving key scene around, changing an end); dialogue added or made more realistic; POV fixes or changes (moving from first to third)

Portfolios (25%)
At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio which will include:

1) A title page with your name, my name, the class name, and date.
2) An semi-formal “introduction,” in which you will detail what you have learned about your own writing process from reading (professionals & peers), writing, revising, and listening throughout the semester. Please also include your evaluation of the workshop experience. This section should be 1-2 pages long and must be typed (double-spaced). All rules of spelling and grammar apply.
3) Final drafts of the work you have written. This work should be revised to the point where you see it as representing your best possible work. “Revised” means considerable cutting, developing, rearranging and all-around toying with each piece through a series of drafts.
4) Graded draft copies of all creative assignments (poems, short story, short-short)
5) Your peer copies of all creative assignments

The portfolio should be turned in a folder or binder, secured.

And a Few More Rules:

✈ You should be constructive in your criticism, but there is absolutely no need to be intentionally unkind. Harsh criticism can hurt. Try to be honest, but fair.
✈ Point out the strengths of a work, not just its negatives. At the same time, don’t just say “it’s good”—come up with concrete ways to discuss how the story could be improved, or why it should remain as-is.
✈ Always remember that as artists, none of us are exactly the same. We each are trying to achieve different things for different reasons. Never try to make someone else’s work into your own; let it exist by its own rules.
In writing, our egos sometimes get in the way of someone else's. Don't give up. There will be times when communication will fail, but keep trying. Eventually there will be a breakthrough.

Remember that, above all, this is art; although it requires seriousness and professionalism, it should also be enjoyed. Have fun with the work.

**Things to Avoid**

- Coming in late. It is disruptive and rude. It affects both your attendance grade and your participation grade.
- Talking when others are talking. If someone has the floor, assume he/she is trying to make a worthwhile point. Listen, because you may hear something you can use and because it’s impolite *not* to listen.
- Packing up early. I will try to never hold class over the allotted time, but if I am talking or someone else is, don’t move. Sit and listen—I will make it very clear when it is time to start closing your books, putting stuff away, or zipping/unzipping your backpacks.
- Asking me to read your creative work outside of class or someone else’s. I really (honestly) wish I could, but between teaching, grading, my own creative endeavors, and my everyday stuff (professors have lives!), I just can’t do it.
- Meanness in any of its forms, including a whole host of “isms” and phobias. There is no place for rudeness in an environment designed to improve one’s craft. The writing community is a small community; the way you treat others can and does follow you in your writing career. Kindness matters.

**E-Mail Etiquette:**

When you write to a professor (any professor), an e-mail should be treated like a business letter. It is a good idea to put your best foot forward. Here are some tips.

- Make sure you have a subject line; I know I tend to ignore things that don’t have one. So, “English 261” in the subject line is helpful, or “Bob from Intro”
- Salutations are nice: “Hi, Mr. C.” is fine. “Dear Mr. Clark” is nice, too.
- I don’t open any attachment without a clear note from you. I also don’t accept assignments via e-mail, so there really should be no reason for an e-mail attachment.
- Be succinct and to the point about what you need: “Could we set up an appointment to talk about my poems?” or “Here is my assignment.”
- Make sure you have checked your email for spelling errors/typos.
- Don’t use text/internet-style abbreviations. If U do this U will get no reply thx.
- End with a signature.
- Avoid last-minute e-mails. If you send me an e-mail at 3 in the morning, I probably won’t answer it until at least 8, and possibly later (depending on my class schedule for that day). I seldom check e-mail between 8:00 at night and 9:00 in the morning. Don’t expect an answer in less than 12 hours. I don’t check or respond to student e-mails on Saturdays.

**And finally…**

Being a university student isn’t easy. Stress is your enemy here, and you’ll find it in forms you may not have encountered before. This stress, on top of the other challenges you’ll be facing as a
human being, makes more stress—which can be the beginning of a serious downward spiral. If you experience mental distress or emotional fatigue (or if you just need to see someone else’s perspective on any issues you may be having), schedule an appointment with SFA’s Counseling Services. These services are FREE to any student enrolled at SFA.

Counseling Services: http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/ 3rd floor, Rusk Building, (936) 468-2401

How to book an appointment: http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/104.asp  (936) 468-2401

Above all else, I hope you will enjoy the semester.
Week One
M 8/27  Introduction to course; go over syllabus, policy statement.  
   HOMEWORK: Review handouts. Go buy a journal and write first entry. Bring journal to class.

W 8/29  Get to know each other. Discuss journals and poetic terms.  
   HOMEWORK: Read handout on poetic terminology.

F 8/31  Quiz on terms  
   HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems.

Week Two
M 9/3  Discuss poems. Lecture on IMAGE.  
   HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems. Consider image.

W 9/5  Discuss poems.  
   HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems. Think about voice.

F 9/7  Discuss readings. Lecture on SOUND.  
   HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems. Think about sound.

Week Three
M 9/10  Discuss poems. Discuss workshopping/line editing.  
   HOMEWORK: Write a narrative image-based poem, Poem #1. Bring four copies to class to share.

W 9/12  Workshop Poem #1 (image poem)  
   HOMEWORK: Read sonnet handout.

F 9/14  Workshop #1 cont’d. Discuss sonnets.  
   HOMEWORK: Start work on your own sonnet.

Week Four
M 9/17  Discuss sonnets.  
   HOMEWORK: Finish Poem #2, a sonnet. Bring five copies to class.

W 9/19  Exchange sonnets with peer groups. Discuss editing.  
   HOMEWORK: Read classmates’ sonnets and write up editorial suggestions/comments.

F 9/21  Workshop Poem #2 (the sonnet).  
   HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems. Write Poetry Analysis paper.
WEEK FIVE
9/24  Turn in Poetry Analysis paper. Let’s talk about what you discovered.
      HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems.

9/26  Discuss poems.
      HOMEWORK: Bring your journals to next class. Have you been using it regularly?

9/28  Discuss journals.
      HOMEWORK: Write Poem #3 (freestyle). Bring five copies to class.

WEEK SIX
10/1  Exchange Poem #3. Let’s talk about process.
      HOMEWORK: Read and edit workshop poems.

10/3  Workshop Poem #3 (freestyle)
      HOMEWORK: Read sestina handout.

10/5  Discuss sestinas. Let’s talk about repetition and ritual.
      HOMEWORK: Write a sestina, Poem #4. This might take a while.
                  Bring in 5 copies for workshop.

WEEK SEVEN
10/8  Exchange Poem #4.
      HOMEWORK: Read assigned poems. Explore and write in your journal all possible ode topics.

10/10 Sestina Workshop.
      HOMEWORK: Begin an ode in any style, Poem #5. Read assigned poems.

10/12 Discuss poems and, in particular, odes.
      HOMEWORK: Finish ode. Bring in five copies for workshop.

WEEK EIGHT
10/15 Exchange odes.
      HOMEWORK: Read and comment on peer poems.

10/17 Last poetry workshop (Poem # 5).
      HOMEWORK: Read handout on fiction terminology.

10/19 Fiction lecture.
      HOMEWORK: Read assigned short story.

WEEK NINE
10/22 Discuss story.
      HOMEWORK: Read assigned short story.
10/24  Discuss story.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read assigned short story.

10/26  Discuss story.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read assigned short story.

**WEEK TEN**  
M 10/29  Discuss story.  
**HOMEWORK:** Begin Fiction Analysis essay.

W 10/31  Let’s talk about dialogue.  
**HOMEWORK:** Do some eavesdropping. Make some notes. Be prepared to share.

F 11/2  Let’s talk about your listening.  
**HOMEWORK:** Finish craft analysis.

**WEEK ELEVEN**  
M 11/5  **Turn in Fiction Analysis.** Let’s talk about what you wrote.  
**HOMEWORK:** Look at handout on first paragraphs.

W 11/7  Discuss openings.  
**HOMEWORK:** Write Story #1.

F 11/9  Discuss handout re: editing & workshopping.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read “Workshop is Not For You.”

**WEEK TWELVE**  
M 11/12  Bring in four copies of your story to exchange with your group. Discuss reading and consider the writer’s role in workshops.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read first two stories for workshop.

W 11/14  Workshop 1  
**HOMEWORK:** Read last two stories for workshop.

F 11/16  Workshop 1 continued  
**HOMEWORK:** Read “Boys” and “Pendergast’s Daughter.” Think about flash fiction: what can it do? Begin work on flash fiction.

**WEEK THIRTEEN**  
Thanksgiving Holiday. No school!

**WEEK FOURTEEN**  
M 11/26  Discuss flash fiction.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read stories for workshop.
**W 11/28**  Workshop flash fiction  
**HOMEWORK:** Continue reading and commenting on flash stories.

**F 11/30**  Workshop flash fiction continued.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read “How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore. Begin portfolio revisions and additions.

**WEEK FIFTEEN**  
**M 12/3**  Discuss Moore.  
**HOMEWORK:** Read “Address Unknown” by Kathrine Kressmann Taylor. Write and revise.

**W 12/5**  Discuss Taylor.  
**HOMEWORK:** Continue revising portfolios.

**F 12/7**  Questions about portfolios and last class day discussion  
**HOMEWORK:** Polish your portfolio.

There is no final exam for this course.  
Portfolios are due in my office on Wednesday, December 13th by noon.

**I do not accept late portfolios under any circumstances.**

Congratulations. You’re done. Have a wonderful winter break!