Policy Statement

ENGLISH 261 – Intro to Creative Writing

MWF 10-10:50

Instructor: Dr. Christine Butterworth-McDermott

SFASU English Department
Spring 2018/Ferguson 177

Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade, just as painting does or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself.
–Truman Capote

The packet of paper you are now holding is essentially your rulebook for my class. All of the rules are laid out here. Get to know them. If you do, you will save yourself a lot of trouble. Trust me. Refer to this sheet if you have any questions about how much something counts, anything about absences, expectations, assignments. If you lose your copy, come get another.

WHERE TO REACH ME:

✦ E-mail: mcdermotc@sfasu.edu; cmcdsfaclass@gmail.com
✦ Phone: 936-468-2059; leave a message.
✦ Office: Liberal Arts North 227/Office Hours: M-F 11-12 & by appointment

PREREQUISITE:
None

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION:
An introduction to the writing of poetry, fiction and non-fiction with opportunities for practice and peer workshop.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:
✦ All reading material will be provided to you.
✦ Money for photocopying
✦ Plenty of paper
✦ Quality ink jets
✦ Patience & professionalism
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.

My GOALS for you:

☞ 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, creative nonfiction essay) that you can be proud of.
☞ To get you used to working in a workshop setting as most of our advanced classes are workshops.
☞ To help you become a better editor and develop professionalism.

READING, WRITING, THE CONNECTION:
Reading and writing are inter-connected. If you do not read, you will not be able to write to the best of your ability. Reading the work of professional writers—both that you like and don’t like—(& reflecting on it) will help you build an incredible base to know what you are capable of as a creative artist. It’s a bit like basketball; you watch the pros to learn their moves and adapt them to your game. Although this is primarily a writing course, I will be asking you to read a lot as well, so please expect it as part of the curriculum.

GRADING:
Attendance 5%
Class Discussion 10%
Assignments/Quizzes 10%
Group Workshop
  Oral Comments 10%
  Written Comments 10%
Professionalism 10%
Poetry Portfolio 15%
Creative Nonfiction Portfolio 15%
Fiction Portfolio 15%

Scale: 100-90=A; 89-80=B; 79-70=C; 69-60=D; 59-00=F
**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- Workshop is a **3 part process:** you must turn in your draft on time, you must participate in small group workshop, and you must revise it and turn it in by the revision date. If you miss any part of the process, you receive a “0” on that 5%. 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, tests, or portfolios), either by not turning them or trying to turn them in late, results in failure of the class. This is regardless of other numerics.
- **YOU ARE ALLOWED TO TURN IN ONE FINAL PACKET/PORTFOLIO LATE BY 24 HOURS.** (Rough drafts must be turned in on time).

**ATTENDANCE (5%)**

- 0-2 absences = A (5% of grade)
- 3 absences = B (5% of grade)
- 4 absences = C (5% of grade)
- 5 absences = D (5% of grade)
- 6 absences = F (5% of grade)
- **7 absences = fail the course (100%)**
- 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 either e-mail a classmate (or me) to find out what went on in class if you are not able 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.

**CELL PHONE POLICY:**

- **Phones should be kept in pockets, purses, or backpacks**—unless you are waiting for a notification during a family emergency (please tell me before class begins). If I catch you texting in class, I will count you as absent and you will receive 0s on your participation/quiz grades. Clearly this would affect your overall grade. Repeat offenders will be dropped a letter grade.

**CLASS DISCUSSION (10%)**

I prefer to conduct my classes in a reader-response style. I will ask a question about the material then the class will be asked to respond. 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). Once again, let me stress that I'm not looking for “right” answers, but active engagement. 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 do not wish to talk in class, your participation grade will be no higher than a C.

**QUIZZES/ASSIGNMENTS (10%)**:  
Quizzes relate to the reading, are given every day fiction/nonfiction reading is assigned & will either be structured as ten questions (true-false, fill in the blank, multiple choice or one word or short phrase answers) or as one question on the reading material which requires a short paragraph response. You'll be expected to be able to name any of these: the author, when the story was written/published, when the story is set, the characters (their names, personal traits), aspects of the setting, important objects and events. You may also be asked to apply some element of craft to the work at hand (how does dialogue function in the story, for example). 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.

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.

**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. If you are writing your commentary during class, your assignment is incomplete. Poetry comments will be handwritten, fiction/nonfiction 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. I will give you guidelines about each genre before you do this, so you should have something to follow as an example. 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, Portfolios. I will grade you on whether:

a) you have emailed a copy to mcdermotc@sfasu.edu in a doc or docx file. This email needs to have a subject & a short note: “Hi, Dr. C., here’s my poem #3.”
b) you turned in all your copies to small group workshop (4 are due each time; 3 for group; 1 for me). You **must have hard copies** for your group on rough draft exchange days.
c) you turned things in on time (at the beginning of class, I don’t accept late work)
d) everything is included and all requirements are met  
e) everything is neat, easily readable (i.e. no faded printing), complete, ordered correctly and stapled.
f) everything is in the correct format (heading, correct genre format, correct font).
g) you have taken your assignment seriously (rather than phoning it in).

This grade also includes email correspondence and ability to send work via email in a timely manner.

You are allowed to turn in one final draft or portfolio late. Rough drafts can’t be late because other people rely on them to complete SGW. However, everyone messes up on occasion and this will not be held against you. The late assignment must be turned in before the next class period.

Grading of Rough Drafts

- You **must email your work** in an attached word doc. file to mcdermotc@sfasu.edu or cmcdsfaclass@gmail.com
- You must also have 3 hard copies the day the assignment is due. These will be turned into your group members.

After you turn in your rough draft, via hardcopy and email, 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 (except your one exception)
- If you only email your work, it won’t count. You MUST have 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 will result in failure of the assignment & course

*If you HAVE to be absent (funeral, court, illness, etc.), let me know **before the class time** and I will distribute your work for you.
GENRE SECTIONS

POETRY

You will write 4 poems this semester. For the poetry section, I will be grading your second drafts (after you’ve made revisions from small group workshop), not the rough drafts.

The final “packets” you turn in to be graded will include: a) the revised poem; b) a note from you on how your small group workshop went; c) your peer comments. I will then make comments which you will use later in your portfolio.

Grading on Poetry:

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

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.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

You will write one CNF piece this semester up to 1500 words. For this section, I will be commenting on your rough draft. You will make edits for your portfolio based on your peers and my comments of your story.

Grading on Fiction:

A compelling voice, with active narrative arc, well-drawn descriptions, well researched if need be, consistent point of view, well-established conflict/driving force, excellent details, professionally presented in correct format.
B well-defined voice, with active narrative arc, well-drawn descriptions, well
researched if need be, consistent point of view, well-established conflict/driving force, excellent details, professionally presented in correct format. Not as exceptional as an A but could get there with revision.

C  simplistic, derivative, flat, without resonance, needs to be developed or point of view is inconsistent, professionally presented in correct format.

D  poorly developed, 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:** enhancement of flow, voice, narrative arc, 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)

**FICTION**

You will write one story this semester of 2000-3500 words. For the fiction section, I will be commenting on your rough draft. You will make edits for your portfolio based on your peers and my comments of your story.

**Grading on Fiction:**

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 (45%)
At the end of each section, you will hand in a portfolio which will include:

1) A title page with “Poetry Portfolio” (or whichever portfolio it is), 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 during the section, from the reading (professionals & peers), writing & revising, and listening you have done. Please also include your evaluation of workshop (nonfiction & fiction portfolio only). This section should be about 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) My graded copy
5) Your peer copies

The portfolio should be turned in a folder, binder, fastened together.

*For the poetry portfolio, each poem will have the final & my graded copy. You do not have include your peer notes unless it is convenient for you.

EXTRA RULES

☞ Be constructive in your criticism—which means offer helpful advice (not just this is great!) but also don’t crush someone either. There is a fine line between being constructive and being destructive. 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 to enjoy yourself, experiment, get enthused. Find a consuming passion. Be an artist. That’s what it’s all about.
PET PEEVES
In the effort of fairness—here’s some things that drive me crazy. Don’t do them and we’ll all have a happy semester! 😊

• People 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,” he/she is usually trying to make a worthwhile point. It will be in your interest to listen to them because it is polite and because it may help you on your poems.
• I try to be upfront about expectations and due dates. I write them down on the board, tell you in class and usually on the assignment sheet/syllabus. You shouldn’t have to ask me when the due date for something is. If you choose not to do something, you will be graded accordingly.
• Okay, here’s the weird one, I can’t stand it when people pack 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—when I say “that’s it for today” you can start closing your book, putting stuff away, or zipping/unzipping your backpacks.
• Please don’t ask me to read your creative work outside of class (“Please read my novel!”) or someone else’s (“My girlfriend is a great poet, can you read her stuff?”). I’d like to say yes, but my time is really limited due to the amount I teach, how much I have to grade, and my own creative & academic work.
• Meanness, prejudicial comments, arrogance, rudeness, general nastiness doesn’t fly here. Being mean isn’t cool, it’s mean and it’s bad karma. Kindness matters.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE:
When you write to a professor, an email is 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 359” in the subject line is helpful, or “Ryan Gosling from 261”
• Salutations are nice: “Hi, Dr. C.” is fine. “Dear Dr. McDermott” is nice, too. “Hey, Girl,” is only acceptable if you are Ryan Gosling.
• I don’t open any attachment without a clear note from you. “Dear Dr. C, here’s my third poem” is lovely.
• 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 abbreviations (“U r annoying,” for example).
• End with a signature: “Thanks, Ryan”
• Try to avoid writing last minute. If you write an email at 3 am, I won’t answer it before late morning. I usually don’t check or respond to non-personal email between the hours of 8 p.m.-9 a.m. Expect an answer in 12 hours. Do not expect an answer on Saturday.

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**Last Words**

College can be very demanding. So, while keeping your goals in mind, also take the time to take care of yourself. You won’t succeed if you spread yourself too thin. So be good to you, and when things get bleak remember to relax and have fun!

**Enjoy the semester.**

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**CALENDAR**

*(TENTATIVE, SUBJECT TO CHANGE)*

**English 261-Introduction to Creative Writing**

**Week One**

W 1/17 Intro to Course.
F 1/19 Introduction to WHY WRITERS WRITE.

**Week Two**

M 1/22 Discuss Elements of Poetry/IMAGE
W 1/24 Discuss Elements of Poetry/IMAGE—In-class exercise. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read assigned student poems.
F 1/26 Discuss student poems, discuss workshopping. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Write POEM #1 focused on IMAGE. Make 3 copies for workshop (3 for workshop members). Email poem to Dr. C.

**Week Three**

M 1/29 **RD POEM #1 DUE (4 copies).** Exchange for Small Group Workshop. Discuss Elements of Poetry/LINE LENGTH & PLACEMENT. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read & comment on peers’ poems.
W 1/31 Small Group Workshop Poem #1. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Revise Poem #1; Get packet ready to give to me (short note about group workshop, finished poem, group comment)
F 2/2 **PACKET 1 DUE** to me; PLACEMENT-In class exercise. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Write POEM #2 focused on placement. Make 3 copies for workshop (3 for workshop). Email poem to Dr. C.
Week Four
M 2/5  RD POEM #2 DUE (3 copies). Discussion of SOUND. FOR NEXT TIME: Read & comment on peers’ poems.
W 2/7  Small Group Workshop Poem #2. FOR NEXT TIME: Revise Poem #2; Get packet ready to give to me (short note about group workshop, finished poem, group comments)
F 2/9  PACKET 2 DUE to me. SOUND In-class exercise. FOR NEXT TIME: Write POEM #3, employing sound. Make 3 copies for workshop (3 for workshop). Email poem to Dr. C.

Week Five
M 2/12  RD POEM #3 DUE (3 copies). Discussion of Ten Tips for Revision. FOR NEXT TIME: Read & comment on peers’ poems
W 2/14  Small Group Workshop Poem #3. FOR NEXT TIME: Revise Poem #3; Get packet ready to give to me (short note about group workshop, finished poem, group comments)
F 2/16  PACKET 3 DUE. Discussion of the complete poems, types of poetry (lyric vs. narrative, etc.) FOR NEXT TIME: Write Poem #4, employing all techniques. Make 3 copies for workshop (3 for workshop member). Email poem to Dr. C.

Week Six
M 2/19  RD POEM #4 DUE (3 copies). In class exercise. FOR NEXT TIME: Read & comment on peers’ poems.
W 2/21  Small Group Workshop Poem #4. FOR NEXT TIME: Revise Poem #4; Get packet ready to give to me (short note about group workshop, finished poem, group comment)
F 2/23  PACKET 4 DUE. FOR NEXT TIME: Start Revising.

Week Seven
M 2/26  Catch up Day.
W 2/28  Discussion of Poetry Portfolio. FOR NEXT TIME: Prepare portfolio
F 3/2  Office hours for Poetry Portfolio.

Week Eight
M 3/5  POETRY PORTFOLIO DUE. Introduction to Creative Nonfiction. FOR NEXT TIME: Rest.
W 3/7  Introduction to Creative Nonfiction. FOR NEXT TIME: Read assigned creative nonfiction (TBA).
F 3/9  Quiz, Discuss Creative Nonfiction. FOR NEXT TIME: Read assigned creative nonfiction (TBA).
**Week NINE**
SPRING BREAK

**Week Ten**
M 3/19  Quiz, Discuss Creative Nonfiction. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read assigned creative nonfiction (TBA).
W 3/21  Quiz, Discuss Creative Nonfiction. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Write CNF piece. Make 3 copies. Email piece to Dr. C.
F 3/23  ROUGH DRAFT OF ESSAY DUE. Exchange CNF pieces. Discuss workshopping Creative Nonfiction. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read & comment on peers’ CNF pieces.

**Week Eleven**
M 3/26  Small Group Workshop on CNF pieces. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read & comment on peers’ CNF pieces.
W 3/28  Small Group Workshop on CNF pieces.
F 3/30  EASTER BREAK

**Week Twelve**
M 4/2   Office hours for help.
W 4/4   **CREATIVE NONFICTION PORTFOLIO DUE.** Intro to Fiction.
F 4/6   Introduction to Fiction.

**Week Thirteen**
M 4/9   Discuss Fiction. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story #1 & Plot handout.
W 4/11  Quiz; Discuss Story 1 & Plot. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story 2 & Point of View (POV) handout.
F 4/13  Quiz; Discuss Story 2 & POV. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story 3 & Character handout

**Week Fourteen**
M 4/16  Quiz; Discuss Story 3 & Character. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story 4 & Conflict handout
W 4/18  Quiz; Discuss Story 4 & Conflict. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story 5 & Details handout.
F 4/20  Quiz; Discuss Story 5 & Details. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read Story 6 & Dialogue.

**Week Fifteen**
M 4/23  Discuss Story 6 & Dialogue. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Do Assignment F on student story
W 4/25  Turn in Assignment F, Discuss workshopping fiction. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Write short story. Make 4 copies (1 for me; 3 for workshop). Email story to Dr. C.

F 4/27  ROUGH DRAFT OF STORY DUE. Exchange short stories. Discuss fiction workshopping. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read & comment on peers’ stories. Type up end comments to turn in to me.

**Week Sixteen**

M 5/2  Small Group Workshop on Short Story. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Read & comment on peers’ stories. Type up end comments to turn in to me.

W 5/4  Small Group Workshop on Short Story. **FOR NEXT TIME:** Revise your short story.

F 5/6  Discussion of Fiction Portfolio.

**TURN in FICTION PORTFOLIO** during Finals Week.