

Camosun College, Fall 2009

English 154, Section 01
Creative Writing: Fiction 1
Mon & Wed 11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m.
Classroom: Wilna Thomas 226

*“Read, read, read. And write every day. Never compare yourself to anyone but yourself.
The question you ask of yourself each evening is: Did I write, did I spend time?
Show up for work every day, like any good citizen.” --Richard Bausch*

Instructor: Dr. Jodi Lundgren
Office: Paul 332
Office phone: 250-370-3355
Email: lundgrenj@camosun.bc.ca (best way to reach me)
Office hours: Mon. 2:45-3:45 p.m; Thurs. 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and by appointment

Calendar Description

This course offers students with strong writing ability a chance to explore and develop their skills and possible goals in writing prose fiction, especially short stories. Students study such elements as characterization, plot, dialogue, setting, point of view, openings and endings, and theme.

Course Description

Writing for its own sake, developmental exercises, craft-focused readings, and in-class story workshopping are at the heart of this course. To develop as a creative writer involves 1) tapping your creativity and 2) learning technique. These projects involve *practice*, in both senses. When you practice writing, you perform exercises, acquire skills, and build towards a larger goal, such as creating a successful short story. When you make writing your practice, you write as a daily habit that forms an end in itself. Such process-oriented writing prevents writer’s block by releasing a verbal flow and by strengthening your relationship to the page. Both kinds of practice thus form crucial components of this class. A willingness to engage in them is primary; a close second is active participation in discussions and in-class assignments.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students should be able to

- Appreciate, at the beginner’s level, what it means to write fiction.
- Practice the writing process appropriate to fiction.
- Produce plots, settings, characters and appropriately nuanced language with effective use of figures of speech.
- Compose a journal for the purpose of experiencing the effectiveness of journal keeping.
- Practice appropriate research for giving fiction credibility.
- Identify the various resources available for writers.
- Prepare a story for submission for publication.

Required Materials

Schoen, Steven. *The Truth About Fiction*.

Course Pack entitled **English 154, Fall 2009, Instructor: Jodi Lundgren**

A good dictionary and thesaurus.

\$15 or so set aside to make copies of your work for distributing in class.

An active email account (for class announcements).

A 8 1/2 X 11 notebook or binder for the morning pages—bring this to each class for spot checks.

Make sure you have access to a stapler for when you hand in your assignments.

Class Operation

Each Monday, we will discuss a section from Schoen’s *The Truth About Fiction* together with stories from the course pack, generally focusing on one aspect of storytelling. At the end of class, four designated “early birds” will distribute copies to everyone of the assignment due that Wednesday. (You will sign up for your turn in advance.)

For Wednesday, all students will read the four student writings and be assigned to write a typed, 1-page response to **one** of the four pieces. As well, all students must themselves complete the assignment. (You may skip **TWO** of these weekly exercises so that you have completed **FIVE** short exercises by Nov. 4. If you choose to complete more than five, I will count only your 5 highest marks.) In class on Wednesday, we will workshop four student writings. I will collect the written responses at the end of the session (so bring two copies: one for me, and one for the writer). Following the workshop, we may discuss further stories from the course pack. On either day of class, we will sometimes do spontaneous in-class exercises, often in groups.

A note on workshopping:

We will operate on the assumption that it is most useful first to identify what is working well in a piece of writing. To pinpoint where a text excels—where it is distinctive, fresh, engaging or compelling—helps the writer to build on inherent strengths rather than striving to meet externally imposed ideals. In revision, the writer can aim to raise less realized parts of the writing to the level already attained in the strongest passages. This method encourages the development of the student’s own voice and channels readers’ critical energies in productive directions. In this class, you will learn a lot about collegiality—giving feedback and helping each other become better readers and more imaginative writers. As a side-benefit, you may well find that your tastes as a reader of fiction expand.

Assignments and Evaluation

1. Morning pages	10%
2. Writing Exercises & Story Proposal (7 X 5%)	35%
3. Written peer critiques	15%
4. Participation (includes reading quizzes, group work, in-class writing, discussion)	10%
5. Final story (draft + revision) (8 pages, but no more than 20)	30%

Grading creative writing is, to say the least, very subjective and very difficult. Therefore, I privilege effort over achievement, so be warned: the less-talented hard worker will do better in my class than the semi-enthused genius. I certainly don’t do this privately as a reader, but I do as a creative writing instructor giving grades.

Even with this policy, grading creative writing is still subjective and difficult, so if you receive a grade with which you are unhappy, you may turn in a revision within one week of getting it back. Your grade is guaranteed not to go down: if by chance the revision does not receive an equal or better mark, your initial grade will hold; otherwise, the new grade supersedes the old. Then, if you are still unhappy, you may turn in another revision within one week of getting that draft back. Then, if you are *still* unhappy...etc. This process is constrained only by time as we approach the end of semester, and by the necessity to keep up with all of your subsequent assignments. I hope that this policy will allow you to work toward whatever grade you set for yourself.

A note on the morning pages: you receive credit for the morning pages strictly on quantity. I won't read them but I *will* check the page count sporadically. See assignment sheet for details, and bring your notebooks to each class for spot checks.

Requirements

* Out-of-class assignments must be **stapled, typed and double-spaced** using a **standard 12 point font**. Use **one-inch margins** all around. **Number** the pages, and use your last name as a header on each page. In the top left hand corner of the assignment, provide the following (each item on a separate line, double spaced): your name, my name, the course name and number, and date. For the title, use "Assignment 1" (or 2, 3, etc.), followed by your own interesting and relevant title. **I cannot accept papers by email unless otherwise stated.**

* A significant portion of your grade for this class is based on **participation and peer critiques**. Note that the time we spend in class doing exercises, discussing readings, and workshopping your assignments is as important to your education as the time you spend alone working on your writing. Regular attendance is therefore vital. **In-class work depends on interaction with your fellow students in the classroom and cannot be made up.** Each missed class activity will thus have a detrimental effect on your participation grade.

Policies

*It is our shared responsibility to develop and maintain a positive learning environment for everyone. As a fellow learner, you are asked to respect the learning needs of your classmates and assist your instructor in achieving this critical goal.

* **Assignments are due** at the beginning of class on the due date. Because your classmates' participation grades depend in part on their peer reviews of your work, it is doubly crucial to submit your drafts on time. **Once** during the semester, you may hand in an out-of-class assignment up to three days late with no excuse. After this cut off point, you will forfeit the assignment. No further late assignments will be accepted. **However, there is no such thing as a late early-bird submission:** anyone who misses an early bird deadline forfeits the assignment. In the event that illness or emergency affects your ability to meet a deadline, contact me *as early as possible* and obtain documentation.

* **Disability Resource Centre** provides support services to students with a broad range of disabilities to ensure equitable access to post-secondary opportunities. Students with documented disabilities requiring academic and/or exam accommodation should schedule an appointment with Disability Resource Centre as early as possible. Lansdowne Campus: ID 202. Phone: 250-370-3312. TTY/TDD: 250-370-3311.

* **Plagiarism**, the act of presenting the words, ideas, or data of another as if they were your own, is an **academic and/or artistic crime**. Camosun College's Student Conduct Policy covers both academic honesty and student behaviour and is outlined on pages 35-37 of the 2009/2010 Camosun College Calendar. Unfortunately, most cases of plagiarism happen as a result of an inaccurate understanding of the rules or repercussions or out of panic when a due date is looming. Please contact me at any point if you are unsure about an assignment, or if you are having so much difficulty writing that you are tempted to use someone else's work.

A Final Word

A smoothly functioning class depends on clear communication all around. Please get in touch with me whenever you want to discuss your ideas, the assignments, my comments, the classroom dynamics, or any other subject related to the class or your writing generally. I check email regularly and am on campus four days a week. I encourage you to visit me in my office hours (it's always a good idea to let me know ahead of time in case other students have booked appointments), and I am happy to schedule an alternate time to meet with you if my office hours conflict with other commitments.

Tentative Schedule

The following outline will give you a general overview of the class. I will distribute detailed handouts in class as the course progresses. If you are ever in doubt as to what I expect of you, *please ask*. The need to adjust the schedule will almost certainly arise, so pay attention to announcements in class and over email.

- *TF* = *The Truth About Fiction* by Steven Schoen.
- *CP* = Course pack of readings.
- You are not responsible for the Exercises and Assignments contained within the readings unless specifically noted.
- Readings and assignments are **due** for the dates listed.

Wed. Sept.9	Introduction to course, morning pages, and Assignment 1 Sign up for early bird date Mini-autobiography in class
Mon. Sept.14	<i>CP</i> Excerpts by Brande, Cameron, Goldberg <i>TF</i> Preface xv-xvii & Ch.1, Lying 101 (1-7) <i>CP</i> "Appendix A: Kinds of Fiction" (411-414) <i>CP</i> "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid
Wed. Sept.16	The student writings <i>CP</i> "Bannock and Dishes" by Richard Van Camp <i>CP</i> "Guidelines for Critique Groups" by Judith Barrington Assignment 1 due (2-3 pages): see handout
Mon. Sept.21	<i>TF</i> Chapter 4, Plot (42-50) <i>CP</i> "The Use of Force" by William Carlos Williams <i>CP</i> "Popular Mechanics" by Raymond Carver
Wed. Sept.23	The student writings Assignment 2 due (2-3 pages): see handout
Mon. Sept.28	<i>TF</i> Chapter 3, Character (18-34) <i>CP</i> "No One's a Mystery" by Elizabeth Tallent <i>CP</i> "The Custodian" by Brian Hinshaw
Wed. Sept.30	The student writings Assignment 3 due (2-3 pages): see handout
Mon. Oct.5	<i>TF</i> Chapter 7, Point of View 79-90 <i>CP</i> "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway <i>CP</i> "20/20" by Linda Brewer
Wed. Oct.7	<i>CP</i> "How to Become a Writer" by Lorrie Moore The student writings Assignment 4 due (2-3 pages): see handout

Mon. Oct.12	Thanksgiving Day—no class
Wed. Oct.14	<i>TF</i> Ch. 2 Details (9-12); Ch.3 Presentation (35-40) <i>CP</i> “Sock” by Lydia Davis
Mon. Oct.19	<i>TF</i> Ch.2, Details (12-15—setting) <i>CP</i> “Horst and Werner” by Grant Buday
Wed. Oct.21	The student writings Assignment 5 due (2-3 pages): see handout
Mon.Oct.26	<i>TF</i> Ch.6, Dialogue (67-78) <i>CP</i> “Why Don’t You Dance?” by Raymond Carver
Wed.Oct.28	<i>TF</i> Appendix: Research, 103-106 The student writings Assignment 6 due (2-3 pages): see handout
Mon.Nov.2	<i>TF</i> Ch.5, Story Structure (51-60) <i>CP</i> “Powder” by Tobias Wolff <i>CP</i> “Story” by Lydia Davis (<i>WF</i> 299-301)
Wed.Nov.4	The student writings <i>CP</i> “The First Survey” by Dorothea Brande Assignment 7 due (2-3 pages): see handout <i>Schedule an individual meeting with instructor to discuss story proposal (Nov.5-Nov.13)</i>
Mon. Nov.9	<i>TF</i> Ch.5, Story Structure (60-66); Ch.8, Style (91-94) <i>CP</i> “Bread” by Michael Crummey <i>CP</i> “Maria’s Older Brother” by Bill Gaston Final story proposal due
Wed. Nov.11	Remembrance Day—no class
Mon.Nov.16	<i>TF</i> Ch.8, Style 95-100 <i>CP</i> “Excuses I Have Already Used” by Antonia Clark <i>CP</i> “Souvlaki” by Jonathan Goldstein 8 or 29 copies of final story draft due (t.b.a) <i>CP</i> Revision questions
Wed.Nov.18	Full class workshops 3 stories 4 small groups workshop 1 story each
Mon.Nov.23	Full class workshops 3 stories 4 small groups workshop 1 story each
Wed.Nov.25	Full class workshops 3 stories 4 small groups workshop 1 story each
Mon.Nov.30	Full group workshops 3 stories 4 small groups workshop 1 story each
Wed. Dec.2	Revision. Final morning pages tally and discussion <i>TF</i> Appendix, 107-110: Publication and Market Research
Mon.Dec.7	Final revision of story due Also Assignment 8 due: Proposal for a fiction to be written somewhere, sometime before you die (2 pages). See handout for details.
Wed. Dec.9	Class Reading Class Reading