ENGL 4330: Topics in Creative Writing

Crafting the Flash Narrative

Term

Spring 2024

Instructor

Christen Barron

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Office: Classroom Hall Room 318

Office Hours: Schedule a virtual meeting or drop by for an in-person meeting

Thursdays 2:00pm-3:00pm

Course Delivery

This synchronous course meets on Zoom twice a week. Scheduled meeting times are required.

Meeting Times and Location

- Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 PM - 01:45 PM on Zoom

Catalog Description

This course examines "flash" narratives (nonfiction or fictional stories under 1500 words). Through textual analysis and generative in-class writing exercises, students will gain familiarity with techniques and strategies for crafting brief and impactful stories. Course assignments include writing, workshopping, and revising a series of flash pieces for submission to a literary magazine or journal.

Course Learning Objectives

After successful completion of the course, students will…

- Develop a personal understanding and definition of flash narrative
- Demonstrate ability to analyze and produce flash narratives grounded in craft techniques
- Experiment with writing through a consistent writing practice
- Use the collaborative workshop space to develop and revise creative works
- Explore the submission process for literary magazines/journals

Required Materials/Technology

- Phone, tablet, or laptop/desktop computer with internet access
- Webcam with a working microphone
- Zoom Account
- Google Account
- Assigned readings linked in the course calendar

What to Expect in Class

In general, there are two types of class sessions listed in the course calendar:

"Craft" classes are hands-on and collaborative. Many "Craft" classes include a short lecture on a craft technique followed by 15-30 minutes of guided writing time. Some "Craft" classes include breakout sessions where you'll analyze examples of flash stories and discuss/share writing exercises with a small group of classmates.

"Workshop" classes are discussion-based. During your group's assigned workshop day, you'll share a story draft with the class for feedback and provide written and verbal feedback to other members of your group.

What's Expected of You in Class

Because this is a workshop/discussion-based class, the success of this class hinges on everyone's active participation and regular attendance. Zoom makes the course flexible for those balancing work and personal/family obligations, but you'll still need to participate in most class discussions and breakout rooms when Zoom class is in session. If that's not possible, this class isn't for you.

Given the nature of the course, we may cover some challenging subject matter. There may be situations when you disagree with the assigned readings, your instructor, or a classmate. I ask that you arrive at each class with an open mind and use respect when communicating with me and your classmates.

Course Communication

Important course updates and announcements will be posted regularly on the Blackboard announcements page. You will also receive copies of Blackboard announcements through your campus email account. If you need to contact your instructor directly, please email christen.barron@tamusa.edu through your campus email account. You can expect a response in 1-24 hours during campus business hours.

Labor-Based Grading Agreement

By remaining this course, you agree to be graded on your labor instead of the quality of your writing. This means you'll be graded on the overall work you put towards strengthening your writing skills instead of the quality of a specific piece of your writing. Each assignment in this class is an invitation to practice and strengthen your writing skills. Thus, the more times you practice writing by completing an assignment, the higher your final grade. You'll still receive constructive feedback on your writing from both myself and your peers, but that feedback won't impact your final course grade.

Labor-Based Grading Breakdown

How is labor measured?

It can be difficult to "measure" labor, so I keep track of your writing practice/labor in the class by awarding you points for each assignment you submit. Obviously, not all writing assignments are created equal, so each assignment receives a point value based on how much time and effort I imagine students will need to complete the assignment. Because I'm grading you on the labor you put into the assignment, you won't earn full credit on any assignments that appear incomplete or unfinished.

How will I know how many points I need to earn a specific final letter grade?

Below is a breakdown of the point ranges for final letter grades

A Range: 450+ points points

C Range: 350 – 399 points

F: Below 300

B Range: 400 - 449 points

D Range: 300 – 349 points

Assignments

Writing Exercises (50 points)

These exercises are informal opportunities for you to practice craft techniques discussed in class. Spelling and grammar aren't important. Don't be afraid to get messy and try something new. For each exercise, you're expected to write between 50 and 250 words, depending on the prompt.

Flash Piece 1 (50 points)

For this assignment, you'll write a narrative between 100 and 1500 words that incorporates craft techniques you practiced during our in-class exercises. You can build on something you wrote for an exercise or try something new. Refer to the assignment sheet for more detailed instructions. Your instructor and classmates will provide formal feedback on this piece during your assigned workshop.

Flash Piece 2 (100 points)

For this assignment, you'll write a second narrative between 100 and 1500 words that incorporates craft techniques you practiced during our in-class exercises. You can build on something you wrote for an exercise or try something new. Refer to the assignment sheet for more detailed instructions. Your instructor and classmates will provide formal feedback on this piece during your assigned workshop.

Workshop Participation/Peer Responses (100 points)

You earn points for participating in two writing workshops this semester. To earn full credit for participating in a workshop, you must

- post your Flash Piece for class review by the deadline in the course calendar
- attend your scheduled workshop date (sign up for a date during class)
- submit your peer responses by the deadline in the course calendar

Revision/Flash Piece 3 (100 points)

At the end of the term, you'll take insight gained from class workshops and revise/rework the flash piece of your choice for future submission to a literary magazine or write a third flash piece. Details will be provided after midterms.

Attendance (100 points)

You earn points for attending each scheduled class session. You can also earn points by attending office hours or midterm conference appointments with me. You have two free absences this semester. No questions asked. However, I understand that emergencies and illnesses happen. If you find yourself unable to attend class due to an emergency or illness, please contact me so we can brainstorm accommodations.

Late Work Policy

I'm not a fan of rigid due dates, but they do help to keep coursework manageable. Plan to submit assigned coursework each Sunday to avoid falling behind in the course. I also recognize that everyone in this class is human. We get sick, we have emergencies, and "off" weeks. **As a result, I offer a seven-day "no questions asked" grace period on writing exercises.**

To ensure everyone gets an opportunity to workshop their writing with the class, please make every effort to meet the deadline for your Flash Fiction Pieces and scheduled workshop dates. If you must miss your scheduled workshop date due to illness or emergency, it's your responsibility to request a makeup workshop or coordinate with a classmate to trade workshop groups. **We'll have limited slots for makeup workshops at the end of semester, so try your best to avoid missing a workshop.**

If you find yourself struggling to meet deadlines, please let me know so we can work together to find a solution.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy

Artificial intelligence is a rapidly evolving technology relevant to anyone who writes. In this class, we may experiment with generative artificial intelligence (GAI) writing tools such as ChatGPT. In general, you're expected to write your own responses to assignments in this class. I'll let you know on the assignment sheet if and when you may use ChatGPT (or similar GAI tools) as a resource for completing an assignment. Please contact me for approval if you would like to use ChatGPT or similar tools outside the parameters described above.

University Policies and Resources

University Policies and Resources

Course Calendar
Calendar of topics, due dates, and required reading (subject to change)