



ENGLISH 303  
**SHORT STORY WRITING**  
WINTER 2009

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### Course Description

English 303 is designed to develop students' skills in writing the short story. This includes extended works (500 – 2,000 words) and shorter pieces (less than 500 words), the latter of which has been referred to as flash fiction, sudden fiction, quiction, microfiction, short shorts and prose poetry, among other terms. Students will study a range of readings and experiment with the elements of fiction such as narration, point of view, style, characterization, story and plot, setting, figurative language, genre and theme. The course focuses on the processes of reading, writing and editing through the following activities: 1) the study of a diversity of short stories which will be used as models for students' own creative explorations; 2) the study of criticism on fiction writing and authorial techniques and advice; 3) writing exercises designed to develop students' imaginative and stylistic skills; 4) constructive criticism of fiction in an online workshop setting.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is an online course with clear deadlines for all assignments; as long as you are attentive to these deadlines, you may work at your own pace. I am available by email and during office hours for personal consultation. I am also happy to schedule appointments at other times. Needless to say, accessing and using computer technology on a regular basis is a crucial requirement for the course. If you do not own a computer at home, make use of the computer labs on campus.

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### Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to do the following:

- ✓ Prepare and submit a piece of fiction for professional publication.

- ✓ Respond critically and creatively to a wide variety of short fiction.
  - ✓ Assess the aesthetic of a particular genre of fiction.
  - ✓ Compare literary works to distinguish differences in style and/or theme.
  - ✓ Analyze devices that help construct meanings in literary texts.
  - ✓ Actively and effectively edit and revise short stories.
  - ✓ Identify the literary conventions and elements of fiction writing.
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### Texts

Thomas, Denise & James, eds. *Flash Fiction: 72 Very Short Stories*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Bernays, Anne & Pamela Painter, eds. *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004.

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### Grading Scale

Course grades will be based on the following percentages:

Assignments	30%
Journal	20%
Fiction	50%

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### Assignments

Regular assignments, exercises and writing prompts will be given to you throughout the quarter. All work has specific due dates and must be submitted via WebCT. WebCT will not accept work submitted after its due date. Major writing assignments will receive letter grades. Minor assignments will receive one of three marks: **CR** (CREDIT), **PC** (PARTIAL CREDIT), or **NC** (NO CREDIT). **CR** denotes work that is complete and follows directions. **PC** denotes work that is only partially complete and/or diverges from the directions. **NC** denotes work that is illegible or, in most cases, simply not turned in.

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### Fiction

The fiction you produce in this course will vary in length and genre. You will be asked to model some of your fiction after our readings, mimicking the style, voice, characterization, etc. of other authors; you will also be asked to devise fiction from scratch as well as journal entries and writing prompts. There are FIVE major writing assignments, each of which must be submitted via WebCT as MS-Word documents. I will provide constructive criticism and return them to you via WebCT with a letter grade.

## Journals

Journals are valuable tools for developing and refining your creative writing and thinking skills. You are required to keep a regular journal in which you address issues and topics posed to you in class as well as record ideas of your own. You should form the habit of writing in your journal on a daily basis, if only briefly, detailing your thoughts, observations, dreams, insights, experiences—anything you might draw on for your writing. Completed journals must be submitted at the end of the course via WebCT. You may compose your journals by hand, if necessary, but they must be submitted electronically and hence typed out and saved as MS-Word documents.

Unless specified otherwise, each assigned journal topic should be addressed in no less than 250 words. Entries that you produce on your own impetus may vary in length—from, say, 50 to 1,000 words. If self-guided entries are all only a few sentences long, you are not writing enough.

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## Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when a writer: (1) copies verbatim from an author without quotation or attempts to disguise the act by selective omissions or alterations; (2) paraphrases from an author without naming the source in the text or providing a list of references at the end; (3) turns in a story or essay written by somebody else. As a point of academic integrity, you are required to submit original material of your own creation. Plagiarism of any material is a serious offense and, if established with sufficient evidence, can result in failure of the course or dismissal from the university.

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## Class Calendar

Week	Schedule
1	<i>What If?</i> – PART 1: Beginnings <i>What If?</i> – PART 2: Notebooks, Journals & Memory <i>Flash Fiction</i> – Introduction
2	<b>DUE:</b> Fiction #1 <i>What If?</i> – PART 14: Sudden, Flash & Microfiction DISCUSSION FORUM: Russell Edson, "Dinner Time" *
3	<i>What If?</i> – PART 8: The Elements of Style DISCUSSION FORUM: Margaret Atwood, "Bread" *
4	<b>DUE:</b> Fiction #2 <i>What If?</i> – PART 9: A Writer's Tools <i>What If?</i> – PART 11: Revision: Rewriting Is Writing DISCUSSION FORUM: D. Harlan Wilson, "Hovercraft" †
5	<i>What If?</i> – PART 3: Characterization DISCUSSION FORUM: Charles Baxter, "Gryphon" (in <i>What If?</i> )

- 6     **DUE:** Fiction #3  
      *What If?*: PART 4: Perspective, Distance & Point of View  
      DISCUSSION FORUM: Francine Prose, "Pumpkins" \*
- 7     *What If?* – PART 5: Dialogue  
      DISCUSSION FORUM: Ronald Wallace, "Yogurt" \*
- 8     **DUE:** Fiction #4  
      *What If?* – PART 7: Plot  
      DISCUSSION FORUM: Stephen King, "Children of the Corn" †
- 9     *What If?* – PART 10: Invention & Transformation  
      DISCUSSION FORUM: Diane Williams, "Here's Another Ending"\*
- 10    **DUE:** Fiction #5  
      *What If?* – PART 13: Learning from the Greats

\* Denotes stories that appear in *Flash Fiction*.

† Denotes stories that are available online.