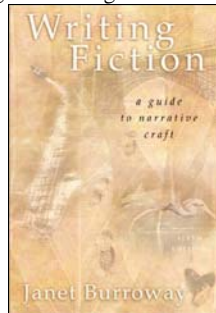


**ENGLISH 3368:**  
**CREATIVE WRITING: COMMERCIAL FICTION**  
***TENTATIVE SYLLABUS, SEMESTER 2003***

**PROFESSOR:** Lex Williford  
**SECTION:** ENGL 3368, Section 001  
**ROOM:** Hudspeth Hall 313  
**OFFICE:** HUDS 309  
**E-MAIL:** [lex@utep.edu](mailto:lex@utep.edu)  
**OFFICE PHONE:** 747-8806, 747-5731 (English office).  
**HOME PHONE:** 351-7144 (home), 433-1931 (mobile). I write mornings. Best times to call me at home are around noon and after five pm.  
**OFFICE HOURS:** 11-12:30 and 3-4 TR. *Also by appointment.*  
**CATALOGUE:** **3368 Creative Writing: Commercial Fiction (3-0)** Emphasis on writing contemporary fiction for commercial publication. Attention is given to the techniques necessary for the freelance writer to meet the requirements at various levels of the ever-changing literary marketplace. **Prerequisite:** ENGL 3362.  
**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This advanced fiction writing course for undergraduate writers will focus on the techniques of writing literary fiction as the best grounding for writing fiction in any genre, commercial or otherwise.  
**TEXTS:**

*Writing Fiction*  
(6th Edition)  
by Janet Burroway,  
Susan Weinberg  
Paperback  
Publisher: Longman  
ISBN: 0321117956



*The Longman Journal for  
Creative Writing*  
By Sibyl Johnson  
Paperback (shrink-wrapped  
with *Writing Fiction*)  
Publisher: Longman  
ISBN: 0-321-09540-5

**GRADES:**

Your grades will be determined by your completion of:

1. Three to five pages of freewriting per week in the *Longman Journal for Creative Writing*; bring these to every class and be prepared for me to pick them up anytime. Also turn them in with your final portfolio at the end of the semester. I won't be grading these but may occasionally check to see that you're keeping up with any of the freewriting exercises or journals of your choosing.
2. Three fifteen-minute fictions a week for the first five weeks of the semester. We may do several in-class exercises, which you can include in the total. You may also use your freewriting from the *Longman Journal for Creative Writing* as a starting point.
3. At least two oral critiques of another student's story, *each due the week your own story's up on the worksheet, one critique before and one after mid-semester.*
4. Oral discussions of *at least* two stories in *Writing Fiction*. Essentially, you'll lead the discussion of the story you've chosen to critique (listed in the syllabus below), focusing on whatever you'd like to talk about so long as you also discuss some matter of narrative craft along the way, preferably some observation about the topic Burroway discusses in each chapter.
5. Using the fiction coversheet, the "Workshop Symbol Code" and "A Workshop Guide for Creative Writing" at the end of this handout, mark up each workshop story, writing marginal commentary throughout the manuscript and using the abbreviated symbols at the end of this syllabus. Then write a one to two-paragraph critique. For these critiques, please focus on one fictional technique the author has used and cite specific examples from the text. Depending upon what kind of critique the author requests, please do a descriptive and/or prescriptive critical analysis of the story *as written* (not necessarily as you might have written it), discussing its themes, characterization, imagery, etc. (Helpful prescriptions include problems with accident, coincidence, or verisimilitude—when you found a character's actions or dialogue less than credible, for example. Unhelpful prescriptions abound, including nit-picky discussions of typos or suggestions about writing the story you'd write rather than the author.) Cite specific examples from the text to illustrate your points and suggest concrete suggestions for changes.
6. Drafts of at least two *new* stories or novel chapters (or, if you wish, a series of four or five short-short stories), due at the times you sign up for at the beginning of the semester—all to be revised for your end-of-the-semester portfolio.
7. A final portfolio: a standard manila folder (with your name and the class section on the tab) including no fewer than about 30 pages (two revised stories of eight to fifteen pages in length, one story and three or four short-shorts, one long story of no more than thirty to thirty five pages, or two

**MANUSCRIPT  
GUIDELINES:**

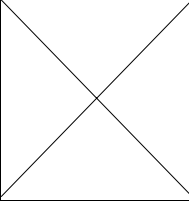
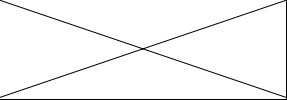
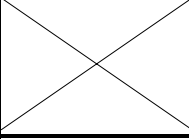
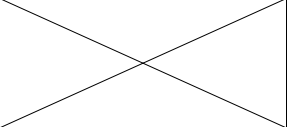
- to three novel chapters, for example). Also include a cover-page with a couple of paragraphs describing your revisions for each story/chapter and a self-evaluation of your work for the semester. Assign yourself a grade for your semester's work.
1. All manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins, and well photocopied on white paper. If you use a computer/printer, make copies in letter-quality. **Number all pages** and (if your word processor has the capability to do so) include a heading on each page with your name and the story title on each page (use the heading of this syllabus as a guide). **Please use a copy of this syllabus's last page as a cover page, and fill it out, describing the kind of critique you'd like.** If you wish to have concrete feedback about problems with your story, or problems you had in writing it, write a series of specific questions on the story coversheet at the end of this handout.
  2. Carefully collating and stapling your story, make a copy for each member of the workshop and one copy for me. **Turn in copies of your stories in class the week before they're due.** If you're unable to meet this deadline, follow the instructions on the Workshop Coversheet at the end of this syllabus. Failure to turn the story in by this deadline may result in a lowering of your final grade. If you submit a chapter from a novel-in-progress, make a clear note of that fact on the manuscript and summarize briefly what has come before in the longer manuscript.
  3. Carefully revise all worksheet manuscripts, making them free of grammatical errors and typos. Think of the workshop as submitting the manuscript for publication and present your work as professionally as you would submit it to an editor.

**SYLLABUS:**

The reading assignments listed reflect the dates they're *due*, not the dates they were assigned. We may choose to do in-class exercises or other activities instead of discussing assigned stories for particular days, but please read the assigned stories anyway, closely enough so that you can discuss them insightfully.

<b>CLASS DATE, DEADLINES</b>	<b>VIDEO SCREENINGS, DUE DATES</b>	<b>READINGS, DISCUSSION</b>	<b>WRITING FICTION STORY REPORTS, EXERCISES</b>	<b>WORKSHOP THESE WRITERS' STORIES</b>
<b>WEEK 1</b> Tuesday, January 14	Scheduled for the following Saturdays, 8:00 p.m., in Fox D- 071. <sup>1</sup>	Discuss this syllabus.	In-class Fifteen-Minute-Fiction. <u>Sign up below for WF story reports, only one per slot.</u> ↕↕	A reading of short-short stories, including "Girl," 67, JAMAICA KINCAID and "Snow," 302, JULIA ALVAREZ. <u>Sign up below for days to workshop your stories.</u> ↕
Thursday, January 16		Preface: <i>To Students: About the Writing Workshop</i> , xiv; 1 WHATEVER WORKS: The Writing Process, 1; Get Started, 2; Journal Keeping, 4; Freewriting, 4; Clustering, 6; The Computer, 8; The Critic: A Caution, 9; Choosing a Subject, 9; Keep Going, 14; A Word about Theme, 17; "Shitty First Drafts," 18, ANNE LAMOTT; "American History," 21, JUDITH ORTIZ COFER; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 27. Also read: <i>Appendix A: Kinds of Fiction</i> , 411.		Short-short stories due: We'll read from these in class.
<b>WEEK 2</b> Tuesday, January 21	<b>Three Fifteen- Minute Fictions Due.</b>	2 THE TOWER AND THE NET: Story Form, Plot, and Structure, 30; Conflict, Crisis, and Resolution, 32; The Arc of the Story, 35; Patterns of Power, 36; Connection and Disconnection, 37; Story Form as a Check Mark, 40; Story and Plot, 44; The Short Story and the Novel, 47; Reading as Writers, 48; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 71.	"The Use of Force," 48, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS.  "How Far She Went," 51, MARY HOOD.  "Silver Water," 57, AMY BLOOM.	<b><u>Begin signing up for workshop slots here and below, only one per slot.</u></b>

<sup>1</sup> Fox D-071 is in the basement of the Fox Fine Arts, but we'll have to meet and enter at the entrance on the 3rd floor, up the ramp from the parking lots.

Thursday, January 23		"Happy Endings," 64, MARGARET ATWOOD.	"No One's a Mystery," 68, ELIZABETH TALLENT.	
		"20/20," 70, LINDA BREWER		
<b>WEEK 3</b> Tuesday, January 28	Three Fifteen- Minute Fictions Due.	3 SEEING IS BELIEVING: Showing and Telling, 74; Significant Detail, 75; Filtering, 81; The Active Voice, 83; Prose Rhythm, 85; Mechanics, 88; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 115. "Linoleum Roses," 89, SANDRA CISNEROS.	In-class Exercise and 15- Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, January 30		"The Things They Carried," 90, TIM O'BRIEN.	"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" 102, JOYCE CAROL OATES.	
<b>WEEK 4</b> Tuesday, February 4	Three Fifteen- Minute Fictions Due.	4 BUILDING CHARACTER: Characterization, Part I, 118; Credibility, 122; Purpose, 124; Complexity, 124; Change, 126; The Indirect Methods of Character Presentation, 127; Authorial Interpretation, 127; Interpretation by Another Character, 128; <i>Writing Exercises</i> 155.	In-class Exercise and 15- Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, February 6	Last day to select P/F Option: February 7, 2003	"Yours," 130, MARY ROBISON.	"Gryphon," 132, CHARLES BAXTER.	
		"The Visible Man," 144, ELIZABETH STUCKEY- FRENCH.		
<b>WEEK 5</b> Tuesday, February 11	Three Fifteen- Minute Fictions Due.	5 THE FLESH MADE WORD: Characterization, Part II, 157; The Direct Methods of Character Presentation, 158; Appearance 158; Action, 160; Dialogue, 162; Thought, 173; Conflict between Methods of Presentation, 175; Reinventing Character, 177; Creating a Group or Crowd, 179; Character: A Summary, 180; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 195.	In-class Exercise and 15- Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, February 13	John Huston's Adaptation of James Joyce' "The Dead" Saturday, February 15, 8 pm.	"Hills Like White Elephants," 181, ERNEST HEMINGWAY.	"Aren't You Happy for Me?" 185, RICHARD BAUSCH.	

<b>WEEK 6</b> Tuesday, February 18	Three Fifteen-Minute Fictions Due.	6 LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY: Fictional Place and Time, 198; Setting and Atmosphere, 199; Harmony and Conflict between Character and Background, 200; Setting and Character, 201; Setting and Emotion, 202; Symbolic and Suggestive, Setting 204; Alien and Familiar Setting, 207; An Exercise in Setting, 208; Some Aspects of Narrative Time, 209; Summary and Scene, 210; Revising Summary and Scene, 212; Flashback, 213; Slow Motion, 214; Further Thoughts on Openings and Endings, 216; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 252. "Mount Olive," 218, MONIFA A. LOVE.	In-class Exercise and 15-Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, February 20		"Dark Corner," 219, ROBERT MORGAN.	"Which Is More Than I Can Say About Some People," 236, LORRIE MOORE.	
		"Bullet in the Brain," 248, TOBIAS WOLFF.		
<b>WEEK 7</b> Tuesday, February 25		7 CALL ME ISHMAEL: Point of View, Part I, 254; Consistency: A Preliminary Caution, 255; Who Speaks? 256; Third Person, 256; Omniscience, 257; Limited Omniscience, 258; The Opaque Character, 259; The Objective Author, 259; Second Person, 260; First Person, 261; To Whom? 263; The Reader, 263; Another Character 263; The Self 264; Interior Monologue, 265; Stream of Consciousness, 265; In What Form? 267; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 285.	In-class Exercise and 15-Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, February 27	NOTE: We may have to cancel/reschedule class this day due to the AWP Conference in Baltimore.	"Orientation," 268, DANIEL OROZCO.	"The Comedian," 273, JOHN L'HEUREUX.	
		"Lectures on How You Never Lived Back Home," 282, M. EVELINA GALANG.		
<b>WEEK 8</b> Tuesday, March 4		ASSORTED LIARS: Point of View, Part II, 287; At What Distance? 287; Temporal Distance, 290; Spatial Distance, 290; Tone, 292; Irony, 293; With What Limitations? 294; The Unreliable Narrator, 295; An Exercise in Unreliability, 297; Unreliability in Other Viewpoints, 298; The Author's Viewpoint, 298; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 323.	In-class Exercise and 15-Minute Fiction.	
Thursday, March 6	Course Drop Deadline: March 7, 2003	"Story," 299, LYDIA DAVIS.	"Beautiful My Mane in the Wind," 303, CATHERINE PETROSKI.	

<b>WEEK 9</b> Tuesday, March 11		"Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot," 306, ROBERT OLEN BUTLER.	"Who's Irish?" 311, GISH JEN.	
		"Screentime," 319, STEPHEN JONES.		
Thursday, March 13		9 IS AND IS NOT: Comparison, 325; Types of Metaphor and Simile, 326; Metaphoric Faults to Avoid, 328; Allegory, 332; Symbol, 332; The Symbolic Mind, 334; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 355.	<b>In-class Exercise and 15-Minute Fiction.</b>	
<b>WEEK 10</b> Tuesday, March 18	<b><i>SPRING BREAK</i></b>			
Thursday, March 20				
<b>WEEK 11</b> Tuesday, March 25		"Sam," 336, LAN SAMANTHA CHANG.	"Menagerie," 344, CHARLES JOHNSON.	
		"Eyes of a Blue Dog," 351, GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ.		
Thursday, March 27		10 I GOTTA USE WORDS WHEN I TALK TO YOU: Theme, 357; Idea and Morality in Theme, 358; How Fictional Elements Contribute to Theme, 360; "A Man Told Me the Story of His Life," 361; GRACE PALEY; Developing Theme as You Write, 363; <i>Writing Exercises</i> , 393.	<b>In-class Exercise and 15-Minute Fiction.</b>	
<b>WEEK 12</b> Tuesday, April 1		"Ralph the Duck," 366, FREDERICK BUSCH.	"Wave," 377, JOHN HOLMAN.	
Thursday, April 3				
<b>WEEK 13</b> Tuesday, April 8				
Thursday, April 10				
<b>WEEK 14</b> Tuesday, April 15				

Thursday, April 17				
<b>WEEK 15</b> Tuesday, April 22				
Thursday, April 24				
<b>WEEK 16</b> Tuesday April 29				
Thursday, May 1	Final Discussion of Portfolio. Group exercise.			
Name	Phone Number	E-Mail Address		
Almendarez, Kyleen A.				
Andre, Jenny K.				
Famaligi, Ariel J.				
Gonzalez, Veronica				
Guerrero, Isaac D.				
Herrera, Amanda D.				
Huerta, Claudia				
Karpovage, Raymond J.				
Leftridge, Shane A.				
Marrufo, Silvia E.				
McCulley, Daniel L.				
Montes, Jennifer N.				
Otero, Karen M.				
Reyes, Ruben L.				
Rodriguez, Manuel H.				
Stolar, Arie				
Urrutia, Sunshine				
Wilson, John H.				

*A Note on My Workshop Philosophy:*

Only one rule applies to the critique of manuscripts in this class: *Kindness is the only wisdom*. The principal task of this workshop is to create a safe place for writers to be honest and authentic in their discussions and their work. Some writers may be struggling to find the courage to write stories of traumatic events that have occurred to them personally, or to people they know. The last thing we need to do as a class is to make the *discussion* of these stories traumatic, too; doing so may cause writers to withdraw and stop taking risks for fear of making mistakes or being emotionally honest. There are no mistakes in this workshop, only opportunities to see, understand, change and revise.

If a writer has troubles with his or her story, try to find a way to deliver that information in a non-personal, nonjudgmental way, with empathy and compassion and, if possible, without undo sarcasm. (*Irony, sarcasm's* more subtle and sophisticated sister, is, of course, what we're trying to use in our stories to great effect.) One approach is simply to describe how you read the story, what it meant to you, focusing on one or two fictional techniques (*irony* or *sarcasm*, for example) the author has used that have contributed to that effect. Focus on what poet John Ciardi says is most important: not just *what* a story means but *how* it means, specific techniques we've discussed in class which help us as writers make readers fall into the fictional dream.

The more I teach fiction writing, the less faith I have in giving advice, especially the whole notion that a story is something to find problems with and "fix." If the author discovers that she has been misinterpreted in a descriptive analysis, then it follows that she will have to revise. Avoid using such subjective judgments as *good* or *bad* or *I really like/dislike this story*. Each of us reads a story differently, and

that's what makes workshop such effective places to discuss our work. Take what you can use and forget the rest. We all have a right to tell our own stories in our own ways, and we all have a right to our own interpretations of others' stories so long as there's evidence from the text to support our views. We may interpret the image of a child's flying saucer toy lying upended in a bathtub as a hint that a story is about alien abduction, but if there's nothing else in the story to support that point then perhaps the story may be about something else, the death of a child, say, or the grief of a father.

We show our work to others to help us when we're too close to it to trust our instincts completely about whether what we've written does what we'd intended, whether what's in our head has gotten onto the page. Workshops should be both honest *and* supportive, writers telling other writers not necessarily what they want to hear but what they might need to hear to make their stories work better, meanwhile helping them through the sometimes painful task of revision: re-seeing their own stories clearly with some dispassionate distance, finding their stories in the process of rewriting them, making the unconscious more conscious. Workshops should also be open, generous, productive and tremendously fun, everyone feeling free to laugh a great deal—and not at others' expense—meanwhile recognizing that criticism must never be equated with cruelty or preoccupations with who's up or down but always with the shared difficulty of the work itself, always balancing a commitment to honesty about the work's effectiveness with mutual respect for those who create it and their individual creative processes and aesthetics.