

**GENERAL STUDIES COURSE PROPOSAL COVER FORM**

**Course information:**

Copy and paste **current** course information from Class Search/Course Catalog.

College/School College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Department/School Department of English  
 Prefix: **Eng** Number: **288** Title: Beginning Fiction Workshop Units: 3

Course description:

Is this a cross-listed course? No If yes, please identify course(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Is this a shared course? No If so, list all academic units offering this course: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note- For courses that are crosslisted and/or shared, a letter of support from the chair/director of **each** department that offers the course is required for **each** designation requested. By submitting this letter of support, the chair/director agrees to ensure that all faculty teaching the course are aware of the General Studies designation(s) and will teach the course in a manner that meets the criteria for each approved designation.*

Is this a permanent-numbered course with topics? No

If yes, all topics under this permanent-numbered course must be taught in a manner that meets the criteria for the approved designation(s). It is the responsibility of the chair/director to ensure that all faculty teaching the course are aware of the General Studies designation(s) and adhere to the above guidelines. \_\_\_\_\_ (Required)

**Requested designation:** Literacy and Critical Inquiry-L **Mandatory Review:** (Choose one)

*Note- a **separate** proposal is required for each designation.*

**Eligibility:** Permanent numbered courses **must** have completed the university's review and approval process. For the rules governing approval of omnibus courses, contact [Phyllis.Lucic@asu.edu](mailto:Phyllis.Lucic@asu.edu).

**Submission deadlines dates are as follow:**

For Fall 2018 Effective Date: October 1, 2017

For Spring 2019 Effective Date: March 10, 2018

**Area(s) proposed course will serve:**

A single course may be proposed for more than one core or awareness area. A course may satisfy a core area requirement and more than one awareness area requirements concurrently, but may not satisfy requirements in two core areas simultaneously, even if approved for those areas. With departmental consent, an approved General Studies course may be counted toward both the General Studies requirement and the major program of study.

**Checklists for general studies designations:**

Complete and attach the appropriate checklist

- Literacy and Critical Inquiry core courses (L)
- Mathematics core courses (MA)
- Computer/statistics/quantitative applications core courses (CS)
- Humanities, Arts and Design core courses (HU)
- Social-Behavioral Sciences core courses (SB)
- Natural Sciences core courses (SQ/SG)
- Cultural Diversity in the United States courses (C)
- Global Awareness courses (G)
- Historical Awareness courses (H)

**A complete proposal should include:**

- Signed course proposal cover form
- Criteria checklist for General Studies designation being requested
- Course catalog description
- Sample syllabus for the course
- Copy of table of contents from the textbook and list of required readings/books

It is respectfully requested that proposals are submitted electronically with all files compiled into one PDF.

**Contact information:**

Name Jenny Irish E-mail jennifer.irish@asu.edu Phone 480-727-9130

**Department Chair/Director approval: (Required)**

Chair/Director name (Typed): Professor Krista Ratcliffe Date: March 6, 2018

Chair/Director (Signature): 

**Arizona State University Criteria Checklist for**  
**LITERACY AND CRITICAL INQUIRY - [L]**

**Rationale and Objectives**

Literacy is here defined broadly as communicative competence—that is, competence in written and oral discourse. **Critical inquiry** involves the gathering, interpretation, and evaluation of evidence. Any field of university study may require unique critical skills that have little to do with language in the usual sense (words), but the analysis of written and spoken evidence pervades university study and everyday life. Thus, the General Studies requirements assume that all undergraduates should develop the ability to reason critically and communicate using the medium of language.

The requirement in Literacy and Critical Inquiry presumes, first, that training in literacy and critical inquiry must be sustained beyond traditional First Year English in order to create a habitual skill in every student; and, second, that the skill levels become more advanced, as well as more secure, as the student learns challenging subject matter. Thus, two courses beyond First Year English are required in order for students to meet the Literacy and Critical Inquiry requirement.

Most lower-level [L] courses are devoted primarily to the further development of critical skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, or analysis of discourse. Upper-division [L] courses generally are courses in a particular discipline into which writing and critical thinking have been fully integrated as means of learning the content and, in most cases, demonstrating that it has been learned.

Notes:

1. ENG 101, 107 or ENG 105 must be prerequisites
2. Honors theses, XXX 493 meet [L] requirements
3. The list of criteria that must be satisfied for designation as a Literacy and Critical Inquiry [L] course is presented on the following page. This list will help you determine whether the current version of your course meets all of these requirements. If you decide to apply, please attach a current syllabus, or handouts, or other documentation that will provide sufficient information for the General Studies Council to make an informed decision regarding the status of your proposal.

Revised April 2014

Proposer: Please complete the following section and attach appropriate documentation.

## ASU - [L] CRITERIA

**TO QUALIFY FOR [L] DESIGNATION, THE COURSE DESIGN MUST PLACE A MAJOR EMPHASIS ON COMPLETING CRITICAL DISCOURSE--AS EVIDENCED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

YES	NO		Identify Documentation Submitted
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>CRITERION 1:</b> At least 50 percent of the grade in the course should depend upon writing assignments (see Criterion 3). Group projects are acceptable only if each student gathers, interprets, and evaluates evidence, and prepares a summary report. <i>In-class essay exams may not be used for [L] designation.</i></p>	Attached are the syllabus for the English 288 and a list of writing assignments for the workshop component of the course.
<p>1. Please describe the assignments that are considered in the computation of course grades--and indicate the proportion of the final grade that is determined by each assignment.</p>			
<p>2. <b>Also:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 20px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p>Please <b>circle, underline, or otherwise mark</b> the information presented in the most recent course syllabus (or other material you have submitted) that verifies <b>this description</b> of the grading process--and label this information "<b>C-1</b>".</p> </div> <p><b>C-1</b></p>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>CRITERION 2:</b> The writing assignments should involve gathering, interpreting, and evaluating evidence. They should reflect critical inquiry, extending beyond opinion and/or reflection.</p>	Attached are the syllabus for the English 288 and a list of writing assignments for the workshop component of the course.
<p>1. Please describe the way(s) in which this criterion is addressed in the course design.</p>			
<p>2. <b>Also:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 20px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p>Please <b>circle, underline, or otherwise mark</b> the information presented in the most recent course syllabus (or other material you have submitted) that verifies <b>this description</b> of the grading process--and label this information "<b>C-2</b>".</p> </div> <p><b>C-2</b></p>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>CRITERION 3:</b> The syllabus should include a minimum of two writing and/or speaking assignments that are substantial in depth, quality, and quantity. Substantial writing assignments entail sustained in-depth engagement with the material. Examples include research papers, reports, articles, essays, or speeches that reflect critical inquiry and evaluation. Assignments such as brief reaction papers, opinion pieces, reflections, discussion posts, and impromptu presentations are not considered substantial writing/speaking assignments.</p>	Attached are the syllabus for the English 288 and a list of writing assignments for the workshop component of the course.
<p>1. Please provide relatively detailed descriptions of two or more substantial writing or speaking tasks that are included in the course requirements</p>			

## ASU - [L] CRITERIA

2. **Also:**

Please **circle, underline, or otherwise mark** the information presented in the most recent course syllabus (or other material you have submitted) that verifies **this description** of the grading process--and label this information "**C-3**".

**C-3**

## ASU - [L] CRITERIA

YES	NO		Identify Documentation Submitted
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>CRITERION 4:</b> These substantial writing or speaking assignments should be arranged so that the students will get timely feedback from the instructor on each assignment in time to help them do better on subsequent assignments. <i>Intervention at earlier stages in the writing process is especially welcomed.</i></p>	<p>Attached are the syllabus for the English 288 and a list of writing assignments for the workshop component of the course, as well as, in the criteria, a explanation of student conference policies.</p>

1. Please describe the sequence of course assignments--and the nature of the feedback the current (or most recent) course instructor provides to help students do better on subsequent assignments

2. **Also:**

Please **circle, underline, or otherwise mark** the information presented in the most recent course syllabus (or other material you have submitted) that verifies **this description** of the grading process--and label this information "C-4".

C-4

Course Prefix	Number	Title	General Studies Designation
ENG	288	Beginning Fiction Workshop	Literacy and Critical Inquiry

Explain in detail which student activities correspond to the specific designation criteria. Please use the following organizer to explain how the criteria are being met.

Criteria (from checklist)	How course meets spirit (contextualize specific examples in next column)	Please provide detailed evidence of how course meets criteria (i.e., where in syllabus)
<p>C-1. A. 70% of the students' grades are based on writing assignments</p> <p>B. The workshop</p>	<p>A. Students in English 288: Beginning Fiction Workshop will complete a series of creative exercises inspired by specific elements of craft identified and discussed in lecture. As a first step, the instructor will identify these craft elements and guide a discussion about where these are found and how they are used in the work of a published author. As a second step, students will complete a creative exercise where they apply the specific craft element in their own work. These multi-step exercises serve to teach students fundamental aspects of fiction and craft through reading, discussion, and application. Critical inquiry is active at each step of this process: students must gather information about specific elements of craft, interpret how the goals of the work they are examining are supported by the craft elements they identify, evaluate how these elements can be best applied to their own work, and then practice the application of craft elements adapted to best suit their writing. In addition, students will write a full length short story, and an analytical paper based on an instructor approved text about the craft of literary writing.</p> <p>B. The workshop environment calls on all students to be a participant. Each students is asked to read the work of their peers and articulate--verbally and</p>	<p>Please see C-1 marked on the attached syllabus and and the critiques handout</p>

	<p>in writing--what the piece is doing, which requires attention to technical aspects of the writing and the language used. Workshop engages students in active listening, thoughtful forms of communication, and analytic discussion in each meeting. It also aids students in understanding the need for different approaches in face-to-face versus written communication.</p>	
<p>C-2</p> <p>A. Creative Writing Exercises</p> <p>B. Short Story</p> <p>C. 2-3 Page Response to Craft Essay</p>	<p>A. The creative writing exercises students complete in English 288 provide an opportunity to apply the information about craft they have gathered through reading, active listening, lecture, and discussion.</p> <p>B. The short story that students write for workshop is an opportunity to receive detailed feedback on their work both verbally and in writing. When a student is workshopped, they must take the role of an active listener. After the workshop, students have the opportunity to evaluate the written feedback provided by their peers. Based on their analysis of what feedback is most useful to the goals of their piece, the students will then critically apply some feedback, while identifying other feedback as not productive to their project. Listening, evaluating, interpreting, and applying verbal and written feedback are at the core of the revision exercise.</p> <p>C. The 2-3 page craft response paper requires students to analyze a published essay and synthesize that information with what they have learned during the course lectures and workshops.</p>	<p>Please see C-2 marked on the attached syllabus, the critiques handout, and exercise handouts</p>
<p>C-3</p> <p>A. Short Story</p> <p>B. 3 Page Craft Essay Response</p>	<p>A. Interpreting and applying what they have learned through reading, lecture, discussion and creative exercises, each student in English 288 will produce a 8-12 page short story to be workshopped by their peers. This assignments requires careful attention to language and form.</p>	<p>Please see C-3 marked on the attached syllabus</p>

	<p>During the workshop process, students must be active listeners, following the discussion of their peers and identifying key points of constructive criticism. Post workshop, students will take home written critiques from 17 classmates, which they will have to read with care and attention, interpreting and then evaluating the information in each response to determine what to apply in their revision.</p> <p>B. In English 288 students will read between 12 and 18 pieces of contemporary literary fiction. The craft response provides students with an opportunity to discuss how technical craft elements of writing support the intentions of a work. The relationship between content and form is a foundational, but complex concept for student-writers. Looking at creative examples--works of fiction--in conjunction with essays on technique and form challenge students to articulate this relationship by identifying an aspect of craft, where it is present, and how, specifically, it is being used in a work of fiction. Through this assignment, students demonstrate their understanding of the content of the course.</p>	
<p>C-4 A. Workshop B. Student/Teacher Conferences</p>	<p>A. Timely response to student work is built into the design of English 288: Beginning Fiction Workshop. Students provide their workshop instructor and peers with their materials the class period prior to their workshop. In workshop students will listen as peers dedicate 35-40 minutes of discussion to their work. This is followed by peers and the instructor handing back the student's work with annotations and an end note.</p> <p>B. In all beginning workshops in Creative Writing, students are also encouraged to meet with both the professor and their TA at least one time across the semester. These initial meetings</p>	



	are usually scheduled after a student's first workshop.	

Jenny Irish

### ENG 288: Beginning Workshop in Fiction

Instructor: Jenny Irish  
Office: Ross Blakley Hall, 152  
Email: jennifer.irish@asu.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 10:00 a.m. to Noon, Thursday, 12:30-2:30, and by appointment

Remember that you will often be expected to share your writing with others, so avoid writing about things that you may not be prepared to subject to public scrutiny, or things you feel so strongly about that you are unwilling to listen to perspectives other than your own. This does not mean that you are not entitled to an opinion, or to expression, but that you adopt positions responsibly, contemplating the possible effect on others. This course may contain content (assigned readings, in-class discussions, etc.) deemed offensive by some students. If you have concerns about any course content, please bring these concerns to my attention. It is a student's responsibility to examine the syllabus, ask questions, and determine if the course is appropriate for them.

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#### Course Overview:

English 288 is the first course in a series of creative writing workshops that offer an introduction to contemporary short fiction and a foundation in the language of craft. In Beginning Fiction Workshop, we will be reading a small range of short stories, and participate in discussions with the goal of developing analysis, criticism, editing, and writing skills through an engagement with others' and your own creative writing. You will also all have the opportunity to give and receive feedback in a supportive workshop environment.

#### Course Structure:

This course will meet as a lecture on Thursdays and in smaller recitation sections with your assigned TA on Tuesdays. The workshop component of the course will be completed in your recitation sections.

Jenny Irish

**Course Goals:**

- Engage with stories on a macro and micro level, with an awareness of the functions of story, plot, structure, character, theme, and language
- Develop vocabulary relevant to the discussion of fiction
- Learn to recognize and practice the use of a contemporary voice
- Embrace the challenges of various writing exercises and discussions
- Give and receive constructive criticism
- Develop your creative writing skills
- Have fun!

**Required Text:**

For the lecture portion of our class, you will receive two packets of contemporary, literary stories. These are your textbook. Please don't lose them! **You are required to bring your packets to lecture on the days that we are discussing the stories in them.**

**Workshop Component, Exercises, and Story Responses:**

**Always be respectful of your peers and their work.**

In workshop it is appropriate to be critical in a way that is supportive of your peer's growth; constructive criticism helps us to improve in ways that compliments cannot. **Criticism should always be constructive, presented and received in that spirit.**

Though you may be asked to draw on personal experience for certain exercises, author and story are not to be conflated. All workshop exercises and stories are fiction, even if they contain elements drawn from real life. No author should take offense on

Jenny Irish

behalf of a character/story because, "That really happened to me!" No critique should assume that the fiction being commented on is in any way about the author.

C-2  
2,

When giving a written response to your peers, it is expected that you will:

- identify aspects of the writing that are working well
- identify aspects of the writing where you, as a reader, experience confusion, see a need for development, or see a benefit in excising an included element
- be specific in your discussion (what is working well, what could be improved, areas of confusion, areas of disbelief)
- offer at least one specific and detailed suggestions for revision

### Grading:

Your grade will be based on your performance in both the lecture and recitation section of the course.

20% of your grade will be based on 4 quizzes worth 5 points a piece taken in our lecture\*

15% of your grade will be based on a story written for your recitation section workshop **C-3**

C-1  
1

10% of your grade will be based on your written responses to your peers

15% of your grade will be based on completion of writing exercises in your recitation section

15% of your grade will be based on a revision of the story that you workshop in your recitation section **C-3**

15% of your grade will be based on a 2 1/2-3 page response to a literary craft essay from one of the books listed at the end of this document **C-3**

10% of your grade will be based on participation in the lecture and your recitation section

\*You will be allowed to make-up 1 missed quiz, and will be responsible for arranging to make the quiz up yourself

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The following represent **numeric equivalent** designated in Blackboard of the standard **letter grades** of A through E:

A	4.0
B	3.0
C	2.0
D	1.0
E	0.0

#### **Attendance**

**Attendance is mandatory.** If you **miss more than 4 classes** (lecture, recitation section, or a combination of the two, your grade will be dropped by 5 points. It will continue to be dropped by 5 points for each additional absence.

You are responsible for contacting your TA—ideally before you are absent—to let them know that you will be absent and request the assignment(s) you are missing.

#### **Late Work**

Late assignments will be accepted after an absence. They will be due in the class following the class meeting that was missed.

**STORIES FOR WORKSHOP MUST BE HANDED OUT ON TIME and WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE. IF YOU ARE NOT PREPARED TO HANDOUT A PIECE FOR WORKSHOP ON YOUR PRE-ASSIGNED DATE, YOU MAY LOSE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE YOUR PIECE WORKSHOPPED.**

**The public nature of class writing and discussions**

Jenny Irish

Please consider every piece of writing you do for this class to be "public property." Remember that you will be expected to share your writing and receive feedback, so consider all writing in this course subject to the ideas and criticisms of others. Avoid writing about things that you may not be prepared to subject to public scrutiny, or things you feel so strongly about that you are unwilling to listen to perspectives other than your own.

### **Assignment Responsibility**

To pass this class all major writing assignments must be submitted. Assignments must be completed and turned in by the end of the last class. **It's a good idea to keep either a hard copy or an electronic version of your work until the end of the semester.**

### **All writing for this class must be written for this class**

All writing for this class must be written for this class. Reusing written work from another class or elsewhere constitutes academic dishonesty.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Academic honesty is expected of all students in this course. Plagiarism is to present as your own any work that is not your own. Plagiarism of all or a portion of any assignment will be strictly penalized. Penalties include course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

### **Sexual Violence and Harassment Based on Sex**

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs/students>.

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### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Qualified students with disabilities who will require disability accommodations in this class are encouraged to make their requests to me at the beginning of the semester. Prior to receiving disability accommodations, verification of eligibility from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is required. Disability information is confidential. Qualified students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability should contact the DRC by going to <https://eoss.asu.edu/drc>, calling (480) 965-1234 or emailing [DRC@asu.edu](mailto:DRC@asu.edu). To speak with a specific office, please use the following information:

### **Drop and Add Dates/Withdrawals**

This course adheres to a compressed schedule and may be part of a sequenced program, therefore, there is a limited timeline to **drop or add the course**. Consult with your advisor and notify your instructor to add or drop this course. If you are considering a withdrawal, review the following ASU policies: **Withdrawal from Classes**, **Medical/Compassionate Withdrawal**, and a **Grade of Incomplete**.

### **Grade Appeals or Complaints**

Grade disputes must first be addressed by discussing the situation with the instructor. If the dispute is not resolved with the instructor, the student may appeal to the department chair per the **University Policy for Student Appeal Procedures on Grades**. If you have a problem with me or another student, it's imperative that you contact me directly.

### **Email and Internet**

ASU email is an **official means of communication** among students, faculty, and staff. Students are expected to read and act upon email in a timely fashion. Students bear the responsibility of missed messages and should check their ASU-assigned email regularly.

### **ENG 288: Beginning Workshop, Fiction**

Remember that you will often be expected to share your writing with others, so avoid writing about things that you may not be prepared to subject to public scrutiny, or things you feel so strongly about that you are unwilling to listen to perspectives other than your own. This does not mean that you are not entitled to an opinion, or to expression, but that you adopt positions responsibly, contemplating the possible effect on others. This course may contain content (assigned readings, in-class discussions, etc.) deemed offensive by some students. If you have concerns about any course content, please bring these concerns to my attention. It is a student's responsibility to examine the syllabus, ask questions, and determine if the course is appropriate for them.

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#### **Class Schedule for Lecture**

##### *SUBJECT TO CHANGE*

**SAVE THE DATE: YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO ATTEND A READING WITH ASU ALUM, AUTHOR, BONNIE NADZAM, ON THURSDAY, MARCH 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.**

1/11: TH – WELCOME – Discussion of syllabus and course goals  
Homework: Read “Pool Night” by Amy Hempel and “Little Things” by Raymond Carver

1/18: TH – Discussion of “Pool Night” and “Little Things” – Minimalism, Iceberg Theory, Theory of Omission, Thematic Driven Narrative, Elliptical Narrative



Homework: Read “Ysrael” by Junot Diaz

1/25: TH – **QUIZ!** – Discussion of “Ysrael” – Plot Driven Narrative, Management of Details, Character Motivation  
Homework: Read “Strays” by Mark Richard and “The Tears of Squonk and What Happened Thereafter” by Glen David Gold

2/1: TH – Discussion of “Stays” and “The Tears of Squonk” – Point of View  
Homework: Read “Stone Animals” by Kelly Link

2/8: TH – **QUIZ!** – Discussion of “Stone Animals” – Atmosphere, Point of View, Creating Tension  
Homework: Read “Anna” by Andre Dubus

2/15: TH – Discussion of “Anna” – Character Development  
Homework: Read “Lust” by Susan Minot

2/22: TH – Discussion of “Lust”  
Homework: Read “Fall River Axe Murders” by Angela Carter

3/1: TH – No Class Meeting

**SPRING BREAK:** March 4<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>

3/15: TH – **QUIZ!** – Discussion of “Fall River Axe Murders” – The Meandering Unsolved Mystery,

Jenny Irish

### Use of Sensory Details

Homework: Read “White Angel” by Michael Cunningham

3/22: TH – Discussion of “White Angel” – Forces in Opposition  
Homework: Read Excerpt from *Lamb* and the Electric Literature Interview found here:  
<https://electricliterature.com/the-failure-of-language-and-a-dream-of-the-west-an-interview-with-bonnie-nadzam-8e8a3c3d8c7f>

3/29: TH – NO CLASS MEETING – Attend Bonnie Nadzam Reading in the Memorial Union  
at 7:00 p.m. – Attendance will be taken\*

\*Student who have an unavoidable conflict may attend another literary across the semester; Jenny will provide you all with a list of on campus and local events for Spring 2018

4/5: TH – QUIZ!

Homework: Read Revision Handouts

4/12: TH – Revision Discussion

Homework: TBA

4/19: TBA

4/26: Revisions Due in Lecture

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Craft Books

Mystery and Manners by Flannery O'Connor

Burning Down the House by Charles Baxter

A Kite in the Wind: Fiction Writers on Craft edited by Andrea Barrett and Peter Turchi

The Art of Fiction by John Gardner

Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction by Benjamin Percy

On Imagination by Mary Ruefle

Bird by Bird by Ann Lamont

Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White

Eats, Shoots & Leaves by Lynne Truss

The Art of Time in Fiction by Joan Silber

The Art of Description: World into Word by Mark Doty

## Story Critiques

### Critiques:

You are responsible for providing each of the peers in your group with a detailed critique of their short story. Responding to your peers' exercises is an opportunity to help others with their writing, but also to develop your ability to identify and articulate strengths and areas for improvement in writing -- basic, essential skills for any writer.

1. Read each story carefully!
2. Write a summary of the story. Your summary should include what happens in the story *and* what the story is about. (This is to help the person writing the critique organize their thoughts, and it is also for the author. If a reader cannot articulate what happens in the story (plot, external actions), or what the story is about (psychological motivations and thematic concerns), that's important information for the author to have. It could suggest there are issues with clarity and perhaps not enough grounding information/details.)
3. Identify **two** things in the exercise/story that are working well. Use specifics to explain why the aspect of the exercise you have identified are successful/strong. Make sure to annotate this on the copy of the work that you return to the author.
4. Identify **two** specific things in the exercise/story that aren't working well. (This could be anything: a lack of clarity at the level of plot, unrealistic dialogue, word choice that is tonally off from the rest of the piece, issues with pacing, an overuse of descriptive detail that becomes distracting...). Please make sure that you annotate these areas of concern on the copy of the exercise/story that you return to the author. In your end note, use specifics to explain why what you have identified isn't working well. Do not summarize, but engage the content, explain what it is doing or failing to do. Offer a specific, detailed suggestion of how each of the weaknesses in the writing *could* be addressed (*could* because you are an external party making valuable suggestions to the author, though not in a position to tell the author what they *should* do. It is the author's job to read all feedback they receive with an open mind, interpret the data that the feedback from a diverse group of readers provides, evaluate suggestions against their goals, and then determine what suggestions to take and how to best apply them to their work.)

**Responses should be thorough and detailed, and they must always be respectful. Remember, tone and presentation matter!**

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## On Beginnings

Every time you begin a story, you are creating a new world, and as a writer, you need to establish the rules of that world. Need to help the reader make some sense of the world you are creating, or else you lose them. The best beginning are so well-written, fresh, and compelling that the reader wants to keep going.

### Intro (character introduction)

- Sets the tone for the rest of the novel
- Creates a storytelling voice and reveals character—class, education, sass, values. Can even introduce themes

“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.” –J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*

“Call me Ishmael.” –Hermann Melville, *Moby Dick*

“Here is the first thing you need to know about me: I’m a barefoot girl from red-dirt Oklahoma, and all the marble floors in the world will never change that. Here is the second thing: that young woman they pulled from the Arabian shore, her hair tangled with mangrove—my husband didn’t kill her, not the way they say he did.” –Kim Barnes, *In the Kingdom of Men*

### An Old Saw

- Sets the tone of the work, alludes to older stories or classics, and when used well, can make something fresh out of a beginning that seems cliché.

“It was a dark and stormy night. In her attic bedroom Margaret Murry, wrapped in an old patchwork quilt, sat on the foot of her bed and watched the trees tossing in the frenzied lashing of the wind.” –Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

“Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo” –James Joyce, *Portrait of an Artist As a Young Man*

### Character Description

- Sends a signal to readers that the person is going to be important; we are supposed to pay attention to the character’s actions, the way he or she looks, talks, or thinks

“124 was spiteful.” –Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

## Setting

- Has a cinematic effect, like we are looking through the lens of a camera the writer is pointing
- Can introduce metaphors and themes

“See the body of the plant, one hundred years of patriots’ history, fifty years an American wreck.” –Matt Bell, *Scrapper*

## In Media Res

- Means to start in the middle of things.
- Good way to get the story moving for any writers because it puts the reader in the middle of the action; catches their attention. Possibly the most common example.

“Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.” –Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

“Lydia is dead. But they don’t know that yet.” –Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

## Facts

- Seemingly simple technique, but it can carry a lot of weight because it must be the most important detail of the story. Must inform the reader, reveal character or plot, suggest something large and vital.

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.” –Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

“The bombing, for which Mr. and Mrs. Khurana were not present, was a flat, percussive event that began under the bonnet of a parked white Maruti 800, though of course that detail, the detail about the car, could only be confirmed later.” –Karan Mahajan, *The Association of Small Bombs*

“Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge.” –Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*

“Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.” –Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

## Truism or Philosophical Idea:

- Similar to beginning with a fact, but relies on generalities instead of specific details. Means that the story must prove the idea to be true; theme is laid out at beginning and the implicit promise is that by the end of the story it will be clear why it’s true

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” –Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” –Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

“The idea of eternal return is a mysterious one, and Nietzsche has often perplexed other philosopher with it: to think that everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs ad infinitum! What does this made myth signify?” –Milan Kundera, *The Unbreakable Lightness of Being*

### **Dialogue**

- One of the most difficult ways to start successfully because it must be compelling enough to draw the reader in before they know anything about the character or context

### **Overture**

- The word connotes an introduction to something more substantial, as well as music
- Lyrical, musical writing

### **Otherworld**

- Tells the reader that he/she is entering a different world



## Minimalist Imitation Exercise

- Minimalist writing is (comparatively) spare or stripped down in style, and not heavily descriptive
- Minimalist writing often employs iceberg theory (or theory of omission) using carefully chosen details that aid readers in the construction of elements of the story that are not on the page
- Rather than being plot driven (progressing because of external action), minimalist pieces may be theme driven (a progression of ideas or concepts rather than action)
- Minimalist writing trusts readers to engage with the work and be participant in the construction of the full narrative (I would argue this is an inherent gesture of respect and trust from author to reader)

For your exercise, I would like you to work with the theory of omission.

**Theory of Omission**, has its roots in reporting. The reporter's job is to provide the pertinent facts and cut extraneous detail. In fiction, the image of an iceberg (a small portion visible above the water, a vast portion unseen underneath) is used to illustrate the concept that an author need only put certain essential details on the page for the story to be understood at a deeper level. Stories that use the Theory of Omission include *surface details* (the visible part of the iceberg), but not, explicitly, *the meaning of these details* (the ice under the water).

First, read the story below, often attributed to Ernest Hemingway:

*For sale: baby shoes, never worn.*

Then consider the following questions:

- What are the essential elements of a story?
- From these six words, are you able to create a full narrative?
- What details allow you to create this narrative?

Working with the theory of omission, write **a complete story** in under 100 words. (A recommended approach would be make the piece whatever length it needs to be initially—maybe it starts as something that is 250-500 words—and then trim it down through multiple rounds of careful, thoughtful editing.)

Happy writing!

Examples of minimalist writing which are recommended, but not required:

“The Harvest” by Amy Hempel

<http://www.pifmagazine.com/1998/09/the-harvest/>

“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway

<https://www.gvsd.org/cms/lib/PA01001045/Centricity/Domain/765/HillsPDFText.pdf>

## Verisimilitude Exercise

*Verisimilitude: a likeness to the real; the appearance or semblance of truth*

As a first assignment after our discussion about *showing versus telling*, you'll draft a piece (maximum length of 500 words) that is verisimilar—one that has the appearance of truth.

According to John Gardner, "everywhere in good fiction it's physical detail that pulls us into the story, makes us believe or forget not to believe or accept the lie even as we laugh at it. The importance of the physical details is that it creates for us a kind of dream, a rich and vivid play in the mind."

Flannery O'Connor expresses similar thoughts in her book of essays, *Mystery and Manners*, writing, "the first and most obvious characteristic of fiction is that it deals with reality through what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched." In her own writing, O'Connor draws on the world around her to create concrete details that allow readers to enter into what John Gardner calls "the dream on fiction."

Within the "the dream of fiction," the reader is able to believe that the fictional account, the story on the page, is possible. The experience of fiction as truth—as representation of Truth (with a capital T!)—is its singular most impressive goal.

To achieve this an author, O'Connor says in her essay, "Writing Short Fiction," must "convince through the senses." Sensory details are at the core of writer's ability to **show versus tell**. O'Connor suggests that acquiring the skill of showing versus telling comes from first learning to observe and then recognizing that literal events and physical objects carry **thematic (or symbolic) associations** that may be fitted into a **network of relationships** to create greater meaning.

Each of you has, through your life experiences, access to unique, specific sensory details. I'm going to ask you to draw on your experiences as a starting place for this assignment.

Select one of the two following things: a scar or a nickname. How did you get it? What were the specific circumstances? What could see, smell, hear, touch, taste?

In beginning to write, select a specific sensory element of your experience. It may be a sensation (flame against skin), a smell (a damp sidewalk on a humid summer morning) a taste (the grainy, melting sweetness of cotton candy), a sound, or sounds (teenage girls screaming on a ride at an amusement park as it spins and the change in someone's pocket goes flying)...

... so though I'm asking you to begin by thinking of a scar or nickname, the exercise you write may not have a scar or nickname in it. **We are using personal experience only as a starting point. No personal experience needs to appear in the exercise.** Pluck a sensory detail from the experience, try to capture it on the page, then go from there. See where it takes you!

As you think about this exercise, you may also want to consider the thematic implications

of scars and nicknames. I would like to suggest that these are transformative, or representative of transformative periods/events in our lives. A scar is a physical keepsake of an event, time, or place: a life history in the flesh. Nicknames, similarly, are often attached to a specific group of people (family, summer camp friends, teammates, co-workers), place, or time. As children, we often have nicknames that we outgrow. As various stages of our life, we are often given new ones. The decision to reject a nickname, or the earning of another (positive or negative) can be an indicator of a change in identity.)

Happy writing!

To support you in this exercise, please look at the excerpts from *The House of R Street* by Sheila Kohler and *Ablutions* by Patrick DeWitt.

## Dialogue Exercise

One way to think of dialogue between two characters is as a kind of negotiation. One character wants something from the other so they engage them. The goal of the conversation may be something substantial or something very small. The conversation cannot stop until one party achieves their goal.

Watch this clip from the movie *Up in the Air*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyL7TG6SzDU>

George Clooney's character, over the course of a conversation, is able to convince the character played by J.K. Simmons that losing his job is an opportunity to pursue his dreams.

Watch how the conversation unfolds.

For your exercise, write a scene between two characters where one is trying to convince the other of something. Again, this can be something substantial (Run away with me!) or something very small (Get the dressing on the side of your salad).

The exercise does not need to be ALL dialogue, but must include dialogue.

The conversation cannot end until the first character is able to **believably** convince the second to agree with their position (I will run away with you! You're right; the lettuce *does* get soggy.)

Happy Writing!

## Koala Fight: The Body Speaks Dialogue Exercise Two

As writers, we want to achieve a balance between dialogue and physicality in character interactions. Pairing dialogue with physical action, or using physical action to illustrate what a character would like to say but is unable to, can help to create authenticity in scenes as well as add nuance.

This exercise is to help you think about the role that the body—physicality—has in communication.

Watch this video of two koalas [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djK\\_ucSYpaw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djK_ucSYpaw)

The koalas will illustrate “dialogue” paired with physical interaction. Watching their heated “conversation” will help us think about a balance between dialogue and how the body “speaks”— how a gesture or action paired with dialogue can provide context and nuance.

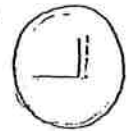
The koalas “talk,” but you’ll see much of their interaction is physical. The physical is as much a part of the “conversation” as the “spoken.”

Here is your exercise: pretend these koalas are people. Write the scene of their exchange. Use dialogue paired with the physical.

When one koala chirps softly at the end of the video are they saying *yes*? Are they saying *no*? Are they saying *please*? Look at the other koala’s physical response: they look away and then they look down. They will not meet the first koala’s eyes. It’s an evocative gesture—part of the “dialogue” between the two, though no “words” are being spoken.

# REVISION

0. READ FEEDBACK WITH AN OPEN MIND WHEN YOU ARE READY TO CONSIDER CRITICISM AND SUGGESTIONS. IF TWO OR MORE READERS COMMENT ON THE SAME THING, BE SURE TO TAKE A LOOK.



## ADD A CLOCK

GIVE YOUR STORY A SET AMOUNT OF TIME IN WHICH SOMETHING MUST BE DONE - THIS CREATES TENSION AND ADDS A STRUCTURING ELEMENT...

FOR EXAMPLE:

A MAN HAS TO DECIDE WHETHER TO STAY WITH HIS WIFE OR RUN AWAY WITH HIS LOVER, WHO IS LEAVING, IN ONE DAY; TO DO RESEARCH IN ANTARCTICA FOR TWO YEARS; THIS GIVES THE MAIN ONE DAY TO EVALUATE HIS RELATIONSHIPS AND MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CHOICE. WILL HE STAY WITH HIS WIFE? WILL HE MAKE IT TO THE AIRPORT IN TIME TO MEET HIS LOVER? WHO WILL HE CHOOSE? HOW? SO TENSE! AND READERS WILL BE MOTIVATED TO READ BECAUSE THEY ARE PART OF THE EXPERIENCE OF TRYING TO MAKE A CHOICE, AND WHAT THE RELIEF/ SATISFACTION OF DISCOVERING WHAT THAT CHOICE WILL BE.

## 2. CONFLICT CREATES PROGRESS IN A PLOT

← BRING OPPOSING VIEWS TOGETHER, CHALLENGE

A CHARACTER'S BELIEF:

ABOUT A SITUATION, PERSONS TAKE OR PERSON, OR, SET THEMATIC OPPOSITIONS ALONG-SIDE ONE ANOTHER... THE CONFLICT OF THESE OPPOSITIONAL FORCES HEAD-ON WILL CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY (FORCE) PROGRESS IN THE PLOT

FOR EXAMPLE:

BOY'S GIRLFRIEND IS DEAD, BUT BOY LIVES IN A FANTASY WHERE SHE IS ALIVE, BUT HE BROKE UP WITH HER. HIS FAULTE BELIEF IS CONFRONTED; HE IS FORCED TO RECOGNIZE THAT SHE DIED. WHAT NOW? THIS MEETING OF OPPOSING BELIEFS OPENS THE STORY UP (HOW DOES HE RESPOND TO HIS SHATTERED FANTASY?)

## 4. STORY MOSAIC

TAKE A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER AND WRITE DOWN THE KEY SCENES, EVENTS, AND IMAGES FROM YOUR PIECE. LOOK FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND THEMATIC CONNECTIONS THAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED IN YOUR OWN WRITING. HOW DO YOU WANT TO WORK WITH THESE IN YOUR NEXT DRAFT?

5. READ THROUGH AND YOU FEEL FEEDBACK LOOKING FOR COMMON AREAS OF CONFUSION, OR SUGGESTIONS MAKE MULTIPLE TIMES. THIS INDICATES THAT THAT ELEMENT/ SECTION OF STORY NEEDS AUTHOR ATTENTION.

## 6. USE FORTAG'S PYRAMID OR AN ADAPTATION OF IT TO MAP YOUR STORY. INCLUDE ALL IMPORTANT SCENES AND PLT POINTS. USE THIS TO HELP YOU SEE YOUR "RELEASE OF INFORMATION" AND PACING OF THE STORY. IS ANYTHING COMING TOO LATE? DO YOU NEED TO BRING UP YOUR EXPOSITION/ BACKSTORY AND SPRINKLE IT THROUGHOUT THE PIECE, RATHER THAN PRESENT IT IN A CHUNK?

7. QUESTION YOUR CHARACTER'S MOTIVATION, AND YOUR OWN MOTIVATION.

1. WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER NEED? WHAT WILL THEY DO TO SATISFY THAT NEED?

2. WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS WITH THE STORY?

TO ACHIEVE THEM, YOU NEED TO HAVE A SENSE OF WHAT THEY ARE.

## 3. WRITE SCENES

IS THERE AN IMPORTANT SCENE THAT IS MISSING FROM YOUR STORY? IF SO, WRITE IT.

LOOK FOR MOMENTS/ PLACES IN YOUR STORY THAT WOULD BENEFIT FROM BEING IN SCENE. SOME OF THE THINGS SCENES CAN DO:

- \* ILLUSTRATE CHARACTER RELATIONS
- \* ALTER THE PACING OF THE WRITING
- \* ADD ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT FOR THE READER
- \* SHOW RATHER THAN TELL
- \* BE USED TO ACCESS BACKSTORY THROUGH DIALOGUE

## Reading List for English 288: Beginning Fiction Workshop

### Short Stories:

"Pool Night" by Amy Hempel

"Little Things" by Raymond Carver

"Ysrael" by Junot Diaz

"Strays" by Mark Richard

"The Tears of Squonk and What Happened Thereafter" Glen David Gold

"Stone Animals" by Kelly Link

"Anna" by Andre Dubus

"Lust" by Susan Minot

"The Fall River Axe Murders" by Angela Carter

"White Angel" by Michael Cunningham

### Selections from the following novels:

*Lamb* by Bonnie Nadzam

*The House on R Street* by Sheila Kohler

*Ablutions* by Patrick deWitt

### Supplemental stories:

"Reference #388475848-5" by Amy Hempel

"The Management of Grief" by Bharati Mukherjee

"Feathers" by Raymond Carver

"Fiesta, 1980" by Junot Diaz

"Sea Oak" by George Saunders

"Love and Hydrogen" by Jim Shephard

"Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" by ZZ Packer