

**WR241**

**Creative Writing: Fiction**

**Spring 2019**

**Instructor:** Damien Weaver **Location:** Lebanon Center 222

**Email:** weaverd@linnbenton.edu **Meeting time:** Tuesday, 6:00-8:50 PM

**CRN:** 43975 **Credit Hours:** 3

**Office:** Lebanon Center **Office Hours:** Tuesday, 8:50 – 9:20 PM

**Prerequisites:** Successful completion of WR 121 with a grade of C or better.

**Course Description**

In a 1955 essay on Russian author Isaac Babel, Lionel Trilling gives fiction writers a unique job description: “To reveal the human fact within the veil of circumstances.” In describing the effect of Babel’s remarkable manipulation of voice and structure in fictional narrative, Trilling summons James Joyce’s notion of “the epiphany, a showing forth. Joyce had the ‘theory’ that suddenly, almost miraculously, by a phrase or a gesture, a life would thrust itself through the veil of things and for an instant show itself forth, startling us by its existence.”

This course proceeds on the basis of such a notion. Here, we will read and write short fiction with the aim of cultivating an awareness of writerly craft and “the human fact” it seeks ever to convey. The format will be based on the workshop model. Together we will study the elements of short fiction—dialogue, setting, character, conflict, et. al.—as they are manifest in the writings of published authors as well as your fellow classmates—all of whom comprise our “peers” as writers. These readings and discussions will serve as a springboard for your own writing. As you proceed, emphasis will be placed on two fundamental precepts regarding writing: 1. Writing is a *PROCESS* with discrete stages that should be followed—generative, drafting, revision, copy editing, and final—and 2. Writing is an inherently *social* act that always occurs within a particular context. Thus, you will produce multiple drafts of multiple texts over the course of the term, and bring these in to class to be workshopped and *constructively* critiqued by your peers. Everyone’s work will be read and commented on by every other member of the class.

**Course objectives**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize how short fiction helps in understanding the human condition.
2. Interpret short fiction through critical evaluation.
3. Demonstrate how fiction enhances personal awareness and creativity.
4. Write and speak confidently about their own and others’ ideas.
5. Understand and implement the skills of short story writing to produce at least one short story.

**Required Texts and Resources**

* Internet access and Moodle access to view and complete homework assignments.
* Access to a printer / copier to print out assigned readings and make copies of your work for in-class discussion and peer review.
* Writing and editing utensils to include: a pen/pencil, a spiral notebook, a red pen, and a highlighter.
* A standard slim, two-pocket folder to house your work.
* A disposition toward reading and writing fiction as often as possible. Repetition and volume is the secret to the game. **In order to improve, writers read and write … a lot!**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**The Basics:** To do well in this class, you must:

• Attend all class sessions, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class.

• Complete homework, assigned readings, and all major writing assignments.

• Submit work that is entirely your own and that you have written specifically for this class that fulfills the minimum requirements of the assignment and bears evidence of honest effort.

• Engage respectfully with fellow students, in-class activities, and discussions.

• Provide ample oral and written feedback to your peers’ writing.

• Ask for help and clarification if you need it.

**Major Assignments:** During this course we will be engaged in two major enterprises: reading and writing. Accordingly, the writing products you produce will essentially be split into two distinct types: Creative Writing and Literary Commentary. Here’s what each of those will entail.

**Creative Writing**

**“The Perfect Sentence” Writing Exercise (1 page)**

Drawing from writer Donald Barthelme’s classic writing exercise, and considering examples from other writers, you will attempt to create at least three “perfect” sentences in fiction. Your document should be properly formatted according to MLA guidelines. **Post your sentences to Moodle 24 hours before the start of class time**, and print out hard copies for each member of the class (including myself).

**Showing, Not Telling Scene (1-2 pages)**

With this writing exercise, you will engage with the perennial writer’s dictum, “Show, don’t (just) tell” and write a scene involving at least two characters. Your document should be properly formatted according to MLA guidelines. **Post your scene to Moodle 24 hours before the start of class time**, and bring hard copies for each member of the class (including myself).

NOTE: The interwebs abound with tips on this subject. Here is a good one from The Writing Cooperative. <https://writingcooperative.com/my-golden-rules-to-show-dont-tell-f4d030eca8c9>

**“Starting with the News” Writing Exercise (2 pages)**

Adapting an exercise out of writer Chuck Watchel’s playbook, you will locate a news article and flesh out the “human fact” by way of creative riffing, producing the beginnings of what may ultimately become a longer work. You will workshop this piece as an initial draft, and then again as a revised draft. Your document should be properly formatted according to MLA guidelines. **Post your writing to Moodle 24 hours before the start of class time**, and print out hard copies for each member of the class (including myself).

**Your Own Short Story (7-10 pages)**

You will write your own short story! The subject may be any of your choosing. You can extend and/or combine any the previous writing you have done for this class, or you can concoct something entirely new. Regardless of what or how you choose to write this, your story should demonstrate an awareness of literary elements considered fundamental to proper fiction writing: dialogue, “showing,” and not just “telling,” character development, etc. You write this story in three stages: as an initial draft, a revised draft, and a final draft—the first two of which will be workshopped in class. Instead of MLA, this document should be properly formatted according to industry convention (just as would when submitting for publication). See here for details and examples: <https://www.shunn.net/format/story.html>

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** In order for us to be able to workshop your story, we must be able to read it and make comments on it before coming to class.This means that **you must submit electronic and hard copies of your short story draft to all class members by the class meeting BEFORE your scheduled workshop.** I will circulate a sign-up sheet for you to schedule your workshop day. Make sure you sign up! Also make sure to submit an electronic copy to me via Moodle.

**Literary Commentary**

**Weekly Responses to Assigned Readings (1 page per week) in paragraph or notes format.**

A one-page summary/response of at least one of the assigned fiction readings for every class meeting. You can choose any of the readings assigned for that day’s homework (or write about multiple readings). **Remember, we are now reading as writers with an eye for craft, not just content.** In these you will summarize one or two aspects of the story that you found striking (no need to summarize the entire story). Include direct quotations of key lines and provide the context in which they appeared (what scene/moment in the story). Be sure to also comment on the writer’s technique, and explain how you found this applicable to your writerly sensibilities. Feel free also to provide constructive criticism of the writer’s story. Just because it’s published doesn’t mean it can’t still be improved! Document should be properly formatted according to MLA guidelines. Post your summaries to Moodle before the start of class time, and print out a hard-copy to bring in to class.

**Peer Feedback (1 page minimum per draft) in the form of both prose form and marginal notes.**

The writing workshop is a longstanding and common practice in the writing community. Even professional writers frequently do it. As such, in order for you to grow as a writer, to develop your writerly instincts for what ideas and techniques work (or don’t work) well on the page, it is essential that all members of the class receive ample and detailed feedback from their peers. The earlier, shorter writing assignments of this course will be workshopped in class with no prior presentation. Here, your feedback will be handwritten on a hardcopy of the draft in the form of mark-ups and marginal notes as it is read aloud and discussed. You should also include a final hand-written note on the back of the last page, at least half a page in length. In the second half of the class, drafts of the longer short story will be submitted beforehand. In these cases, you should come to class with a typed, one-page response to your peer’s submission as well as a marked-up hardcopy of the draft.

**General Notes on Feedback:** We will discuss the workshop process at length in class, but the general protocol is this: You first take time to address the work’s strengths—intriguing opening, lucid exposition, strong narrative voice, skillful wordplay, etc. Be detailed and “point” to specific moments in the text. After a healthy interval of this, you then move on to the work’s weaknesses—what you see as aspects that are holding this piece back. Again, be thorough and constructive. Commentary should reflect a respect for the writer and their work. No unnecessarily rude or denigrating comments will be tolerated. On the flip side of that, you do your peer a great disservice by holding back. Remember, writers enjoy hearing what you liked about their work, but they really thrive on learning what you *didn’t* like about the piece. That’s how you grow!

**CLASS POLICIES AND GRADES**

**COURSE GRADE:** Your final grade for the term will be based on the following breakdown:

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Percentage** | **Criteria** |
| Creative Writing Assignments | 40% of total grade | Completion and evidence of sincere effort. There should be substantial revision across drafts. |
| Literary Commentary  (on peers’ writing) | 30% of total grade | Completion and evidence of sincere investment in aiding your peers’ development as writers. |
| Literary Commentary  (on published works) | 20% of total grade | Completion and evidence of sincere and thoughtful engagement with the assigned readings. |
| Attendance and Participation | 10% of total grade | Active in discussions and workshops. Maximum one absence. |

**Attendance and Participation:** In writing courses in general, attendance and participation are absolutely essential to enjoying the full benefits of the course. Such is doubly so in our case, as we are a small group that meets only once a week. It is expected that you will arrive on time, with assignments completed, and ready to engage enthusiastically in discussion. The maximum allowed absence for this course is one class meeting (I do not differentiate between excused or unexcused absences). Excessive absences (2 or more) will significantly impact your grade and may affect your ability to pass the course. Tardiness beyond 15 minutes into class time or failure to submit your work for your scheduled workshop will constitute an absence for that day.

**Late Work:** Assignments are due at the assigned dates and times, otherwise they are considered late. Literary commentary assignments may be submitted late at grade penalty of 10 percent per day. **Creative writing assignments cannot be submitted late and workshops cannot be made up.** In the case of extenuating circumstances causing you to miss a creative writing assignment, contact me asap and we’ll see what/if allowances can be made.

**Classroom Courtesy Statement:** Linn-Benton is committed to providing a quality learning environment. Please come to class ready to engage in thoughtful and respectful discussion and to participate in classroom activities that will enhance your learning experience. It is important to me that each student feels welcome to contribute to our classroom conversations. I ask that you contribute to a welcoming environment by coming to class on time and prepared to make the most out of our time together. **Silence phones and other devices and refrain from texting during class.** Most in-class writing will be done longhand in order to help you manage and slow down your thought process, so laptops will not be necessary. Please bring your laptop only if we are conducting in-class research or if you cannot learn effectively without it. If you need to leave the room for any reason, please do so discretely or otherwise use the break provided during the middle of our class meeting.

**Academic Honesty Policy:** When using ideas, words, and short passages from other people’s writing in your own writing, you are *required to acknowledge the source*. Failure to acknowledge the contribution of others is considered plagiarism, a serious academic offense; fabrication of sources is another form of academic dishonesty. We’ll discuss academic honesty more in class, but note that suspect papers (e.g., those without drafts or works cited pages, papers which make large departures in style from your other work) may be submitted to Turnitin.com as part of the grading process.

**WRITING RESOURCES**

**Office Hours** You’re welcome to come to office hours any time you’d like to discuss questions or concerns related to this course. If you have a time conflict with my office hours, please schedule an appointment.

**LBCC Writing Center**

From initial ideas to final drafts, the LBCC Writing Center can help you take your writing to the

next level. Please feel free to drop in during regular hours to work one-on-one with one of the

supportive Writing Assistants. In addition to your draft, please bring your assignment and any

questions you have. You may also submit your writing online at lbcc.writingcenteronline.net

where you will receive a personalized response within 1-2 business days. For more information,

visit the Writing Center online at http://www.linnbenton.edu/go/learning-center/writing-help

**SCHOOL POLICIES**

**Disability Services**  
If you have a documented disability, I will help you in any way I can.  Talk to me during the first week of class.  If you think you might have a disability, but you are not sure, contact Disability Services, 917-4789. [Here is a lot more useful information about Disability Services and LBCC's disability policies.](http://www.linnbenton.edu/go/disability-services)

**LBCC Non-Discrimination Policy**  
Everyone is welcome at LBCC, regardless of whether they are black, white, Latino, native, gay, straight, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, atheist, male, female, transgendered, married, disabled, a veteran, a non-English speaker, an immigrant, or any number of other categories not listed here. [For the official nondiscrimination policy click here.](http://www.linnbenton.edu/go/about-lbcc/policies/equal-opportunity)     What is more, LBCC sees our differences as a source of strength and an important part of education. [Click here to see what the LBCC board has to say about diversity.](http://po.linnbenton.edu/BPsandARs/1015%20-%20Nondiscrimination%20Policy.pdf)