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Office Hours:  
by appointment

### **ENG 318-2-A: Advanced Fiction Writing**

This course is an advanced fiction workshop; hours of independent work are required each day for your writing to progress. This workshop will be generative (you will be producing on a daily basis, both in and out of class) as well as reflective (you will be studying published writing and essays on craft and applying what you observe to your own writing and revisions). In addition to daily assignments that include reading and writing, you will be expected to be working on your individual projects on a regular basis throughout the block.

Several assumptions guide this workshop:

- Good reading makes good writing. Your creative work can never be separated from what you have learned from other authors.
- We are a community of writers who learn from one another. Your vision of your own work will be tied to the amount of engagement you have with your classmates' work. Commenting on others' writing will improve your own by training you in revision and in applying an editor's eye.
- Writing can be, however, a lonely act. This class aims to train you to work independently so that you will continue to generate and craft work once class ends. You will be responsible not only for your work habits but for identifying some key areas in your own writing you need to work on.
- Language will be a primary focus. Fiction is not just about "what happens." Fiction is the art of words. Mark Twain reminds us that "the difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." The same goes for such aspects of writing as punctuation and sentence structure: each word, comma, etc., you put on the page should be chosen thoughtfully (if not in the first draft, then in the second, third, fourth...). You should also *read* carefully enough to notice word choice, punctuation use, etc., in others' work. (Strong proofreading skills will be required; I encourage you to seek help from me and from the Writing Studio if this is a weaker area for you.)
- There is no secret to becoming a fabulous writer. We will subscribe to Frank Conroy's philosophy of "butt-in-chair" time: writing doesn't occur through lightning strikes of inspiration but through the daily grind of forcing yourself to write on a regular basis (in this case, daily); you want to be in that chair when inspiration may choose to come! Your writer's notebook will keep you writing on a daily basis.
- The block system is ideal for focusing solely on your writing for a chunk of time; the block system is not ideal for the kind of revision and development that occurs over time (sometimes years) in the work of writing. We will consider all of your writing this block to be works-in-progress that will call for your attention long after our course ends.

In our study of a range of texts, our exploration of the process of writing and the writing life, and our collaborative workshop as a class, this course will support the college's educational priorities in the areas of knowledge, reasoning, communication, intercultural literacy, citizenship, and vocation.

#### **Required Texts:**

Karen Joy Fowler, *We are All Completely Beside Ourselves*  
Alice LaPlante, *Method and Madness: The Making of a Story*  
George Saunders, *Tenth of December*  
Ed. Elizabeth Strout, *The Best American Short Stories 2013*  
Readings on Moodle (must be printed and brought to class)

**Classroom:** South Hall 100

**Schedule:**

- We will meet at 1:00 p.m. in South Hall 100 *unless otherwise noted*. In addition to class time, you are required to schedule one hour of writing time (five days a week) separate from your assignments for the day; (see assignment for writer's notebook.)
- Readings are to be completed by the days they are listed; assigned exercises are due to Moodle an hour before class and, when specified, in printed copy at the start of class.
- Note our special 4:00 p.m. event with visiting writers on October 16<sup>th</sup>; if this time is absolutely not feasible for you, speak with me during the first week to discuss alternate arrangements.

**WEEK ONE**

**M 9/29 Class meets at 9:00 a.m.**

Introduction

**T 9/30**

O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" and "Writing Short Stories" (Moodle)

LaPlante, Chapter One (1-13 and 21-28)

Saunders, "Escape from Spiderhead" and "Sticks"

DUE (to Moodle and in class): Exercise #1 *or* #2 (in LaPlante 11-13)

**W 10/1**

LaPlante, Chapter Four (96-118) and "Ralph the Duck" (406-417)

Saunders, "Tenth of December"

Bell, chapter on "Signs of Life" (Moodle)

**Th 10/2**

Goodman, "In the Beginning" (Moodle)

Johnston, "Encounters..." (in Strout 93-96 and 330-331)

Rivecca, "Philanthropy" (in Strout 203-220 and 334-335)

Wink, "Breatharians" (in Strout 308-325 and 338)

Group 1 exercise

**F 10/3 Class meets at 9 a.m.**

Baxter, "On Defamiliarization" (Moodle)

Saunders, "The Semplica-Girl Diaries" (and Strout 335)

DUE (in class): a draft of your short short story

Group 2 exercise

**Sunday 10/5 DUE (to Moodle by 3:00 p.m.): Short short story**

**WEEK TWO**

**M 10/6 Reading Day**

**T 10/7**

Fowler, prologue and parts 1-4

Group 3 exercise

W 10/8  
Fowler, parts 5-6  
“Endings” (Moodle)  
Groups 4 & 5 exercises

Th 10/9  
Fowler, cont.  
LaPlante, Chapter Eleven (366-376) and Chapter Nine (278-290)  
Group 6 exercise

F 10/10 **Class meets at 9 a.m.**  
DUE (to Moodle and in class): Exercise 1, 2, *or* 3 (in LaPlante 374-376): based on independent project

**Sunday 10/12 DUE (to Moodle by noon): Independent Project Draft for workshop**  
[Posted for you to read by 2:00 p.m.]

WEEK THREE  
M 10/13  
Workshop group A (4 drafts)

T 10/14  
**Class meets at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**  
Workshop groups B (4 drafts) and C (3 drafts)

W 10/15  
**Class meets at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**  
Workshop groups D (4 drafts) and E (3 drafts)

Th 10/16  
Excerpts from our visiting writers (Moodle)  
Class visit by Binayak Banarjee

**4:00 p.m.: Global Voices: International Writers Reading in the Van Etten-Lacey House**

F 10/17  
LaPlante, Chapter Thirteen (427-455)  
DUE (to Moodle and in class): *One* revision exercise (in LaPlante 436-439): based on your workshop piece  
DUE (to Moodle if typed/in class if handwritten): writer’s notebook

WEEK FOUR  
M 10/20  
LaPlante, Chapter Fourteen (481-487)  
Notes on Going Public with your Fiction (Moodle)

T 10/21  
**Class meets at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**  
Reading with both 318 classes (location TBA)

W 10/22  
DUE (to Moodle **by 10:00 a.m.**): Final independent projects (with contributor’s note)

## Assignments:

- **Exercises:** you will complete exercises out of class regularly throughout the block. These exercises should be uploaded to Moodle at least one hour before class on the days they are due. Bring a printed copy to class when specified in the syllabus (or announced in class). Exercises are not completed works of fiction, but the versions you turn in must be thoughtful and polished – *not first drafts*. While each individual exercise is not graded, you will receive an overall exercise grade; I will discuss the details further in class. Please use office hours to discuss any ungraded exercises you'd like additional feedback on (especially if they are feeding into your independent project). Due: see schedule.
- **Writer's Notebook:** This block you'll be working on honing your writerly habits, discipline, and concentration. You are assigned the task of finding one hour per weekday outside of class to write (separate from the work you do on exercises and other assignments, with the exception of your independent project). I encourage all of you to choose the same time each day if possible to develop a regular habit of writing at that time. Whatever you write during those hours should go into a writer's notebook that you'll turn in to me. This can be typed or you can write by hand – that's up to you. You should turn off your phone, disable your wireless capabilities, and eliminate any other distractions during the hour you are writing. Notebooks should include at least 14 entries; please date your entries. Due: October 17<sup>th</sup>.
- **Short Short story:** Your first graded piece of fiction will be a short short story (1000 words or less). The challenge of such a short piece is that you must make very careful choices and exercise strong fictional technique to create a complete story. (We will read two during week one as models.) Due: Sunday, October 5<sup>th</sup>.
- **Independent Project:** this project is a piece of fiction you will work on throughout the block, receiving feedback along the way from the entire class and from me. You may choose to work on short stories, a novella, or a novel. The number of pages you submit to the class for workshop is limited to 10 pages double-spaced, though your final version may be any length. You may continue working on a piece you began before the start of the block, however, you may *not* turn in any work you have not worked on since the start of the block. You are encouraged to meet with me in office hours about your independent work, especially after your class workshop. You will turn in the final version with a contributor's note, patterned after those found in Strout's edited collection. Polished draft due for workshop: Sunday, October 12<sup>th</sup>. Final version due: Wednesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- **Group Exercises and Annotations:** Working in groups of three, you will lead the last half hour of a class with a writing exercise, designed by your group, related to what we can learn from that day's reading. (You do not have to relate to *all* of the readings for that day; you may choose one.) Your group will decide how you want to divide the time for the introduction of the exercise (details, relevance, purpose), actually doing the exercise, and sharing/discussing the results. On the day of your presentation you'll also turn in to me: (a) a written version of the exercise; (b) an explanation of your exercise's relation to the reading and its purpose (about 500 words); (c) a list of at least 12 analytic annotations on the relevant reading modeled after Bell's chapter. Please note the annotations should be in formal sentences and should be as long as necessary to be clear. Be specific. Due: the day of your group's exercise.

**Course Policies:** Read these carefully; you will be held responsible for all policies.

**Grading:**

Discussion and workshopping: 20%

Exercises: 10%

Short short story (1000 words or less): 20%

Group exercise and annotations: 15%

Writer's Notebook: 10%

Final independent project with contributor's note: 25%

**Reading and writing in class:** Bring all of your readings for the day with you (whether in books or printed from Moodle); you'll need to refer to them in class. We will also be writing in class almost every day. You should have plenty of paper on which to write. I do *not* allow laptops, tablets, or any other devices in class unless you have a documented learning disability that requires you use such technology in class. This no-technology policy goes for reading in class as well as writing in class.

**What you can or can't write:** This course will be driven in many ways by what you, the writers, produce. While I will give you almost full freedom to define your independent project, I also expect your commitment to inventive creation and avoidance of any short-cuts such as clichés of language, structure, or plot. We will read literary fiction in this course and will approach our writing as literary writers; the boundaries between literary fiction and genre fiction can sometimes be blurry, however. As a recent article on the subject in the *Guardian* claimed, in genre fiction, “lots of decisions are already made” – and you should avoid such writing situations as a fiction writer (at least in this class). For example, you should not be relying on pre-determined characters or plots. If your work this block could fit into the genre fiction category – or if the distinction between literary and genre fiction is unclear to you – I urge you to discuss with me its appropriateness for assignments. In addition, because we will not be studying children's or young-adult literature, you will not be writing pieces for children or young adults.

**Attendance and Participation:** This class requires faithful attendance, attention, and participation from all of its members. Your participation grade will rest on whether you are doing your part as a productive and cooperative member of the class: coming to class fully prepared and contributing in ways that advance the discussion. The more you contribute and listen to one another, the more you will learn. Please make sure your phones are turned off and put away, that you refrain from talking with those around you during class, and that you eliminate any other distractions that may detract from the class atmosphere. Please speak with me during office hours if you are having any trouble participating or preparing for discussion.

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate, to make up assigned work, and to turn in anything that was due that day. Being late to class or not being prepared and engaged may all constitute absences; students who appear to be falling asleep in class will be asked to leave. Missing three classes will result in an “F” for your participation grade, regardless of class performance. Missing more than three classes will result in failure of the course. If you experience an illness that will keep you out of class for more than three days, you will need to seek a Health Withdrawal to avoid failure. Fifteen-day Drops will only be granted according to College policy, which specifies the student has completed all assignments and made a good-faith effort to pass the course. Keep in mind that once the workshop schedule is set, it cannot be revised.

**Keeping in touch:** Email is considered an official mode of communication at Cornell; you are expected to check your email at least once a day and to be attentive to any email you receive about our course. If you are having any problems with the course, I strongly encourage you to come talk to me. Not responding to emails or missing scheduled appointments with me will affect your grade. Please make use of office hours.

**Disabilities:** Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see [cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml](http://cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml) . Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the disabilities services coordinator as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. The student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

**Academic Honesty:** Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is his or her work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in *The Catalogue*, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

If you have any questions about your use of others' work this term, see me about citation guidelines and proper use of sources. Our librarians and the Writing Studio staff are also wonderful resources for questions about the use of sources.