

CW 3200 — Intermediate Fiction Workshop (formerly ENG 383)

Oakland University

College of Arts and Sciences — Department of English

FALL 2018

MWF 8:00-9:07 — Room 269 SFH

Professor: Jeff Chapman

E-Mail: chapman4@oakland.edu

Office Hours: M & F, 11:00-12:00, or by appointment

Coffee Klatsch: W 10:45-12:00, at Oakland Center (Exact Place TBD)

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Course Introduction

My goals in teaching this class are twofold. One, we are going to focus on developing good habits of writing (ie. writing daily). Two, we will really focus on the fundamentals of storytelling and try to understand how stories work. We will write daily, do many exercises, and generate new material; we will not spend much (if any) time focusing on things you've already written before this semester. You should be writing new stories.

Texts

Brooks, Larry, Story Engineering (ISBN: 978-1582979984)

Fox, Chris, Lifelong Writing Habit (ISBN: 978-1548183288)

In addition to any books I assign, I will also put assigned readings (mostly short stories) on Moodle. It is mandatory that you print these readings out, read them, and bring them to class. I hope you find short story authors and collections you love and want to read on your own. Ask me for suggestions!

Prerequisites

CW 2100 (formerly ENG 216) and **completion of the university writing foundation requirement.**

Course Objectives

These are my goals for this class:

- That we strengthen our writing abilities.
- That we explore how we can make our prose and our stories unique to us.
- That we use an investigation of other authors' fiction to enrich our understanding of our craft.

One-on-one meetings and Coffee Klatch

I would love to have one-on-one conferences with everyone as the semester goes on. Please, come and talk to me anytime.

Every Wednesday, at 10:45, I'll be over in the café in the OC for an informal chat about writing that I like to call Coffee Klatch. Everyone's welcome and I hope everyone will bring questions she or he wants answered (or answers that she or he wants questioned). If you can't make the post-class scrum, book a time with me.

On Grading

It should be clear that this is a 3000-level, graded course. Some of you may have had creative writing classes where the instructor didn't believe in grading creative work. Maybe you don't feel like short stories should be graded. The truth is that as you progress as a writer, your work will always be graded. We might not call it grading, but your life as an

author will be defined by grading or judging. A magazine editor grades your stories when she decides to publish or not publish. An agent grades your collection when he decides whether to represent you. And readers will be grading your novels (quite harshly) and reporting their grades on Amazon.

You will find my grading rubric later on in the syllabus. I've designed this rubric around the way I approached stories when I was fiction editor at *Quarterly West*. There were things that would make me eliminate a story from consideration. First, if a story had any kind of formatting errors—weird font, multiple spelling errors, copy editing errors—I would dismiss the story immediately. After that I would pay attention to the language. Amateurish language and certain linguistic clichés would be the next thing that made me dismiss a story. Only then would I give the narrative a chance (and if it didn't grab me within a page, it was gone). Ultimately, the final factor would be whether the story lingered with me, moved me.

I suspect that most editors have a similar approach. Some will flip the priority of language and plot/characterization. I tend to think this is one of the things that differentiate genre fiction and literary fiction: genre privileges plot (and conventions) while literary fiction privileges language.

Grades

Six elements that will also help determine final grades:

Stories (40% total: 20% for the first, 20% for the second) — Two original short stories are due in this class. These should be work created during this class. A creative writing class should be a generative process, not just a chance to look at old work.

Revision (10%) — A substantial revision of one of the stories you submit this semester. Your grade will be determined by how significantly you address the questions raised about the first draft.

Exercises (10%) — Throughout the semester, I will assign you multiple exercises to do.

Daily Writing Log (10%) — See below

Responses to Workshop Stories (20%) — See below

Participation (10%)— A workshop usually lives and dies by its discussion. I will do my best to teach where I can and facilitate conversation, but you will learn just as much from each other and from yourself. Come to class having read the material and thought of questions you might use to stimulate a discussion. I fully expect you to read ALL of the material that is assigned; failure to do so will lead to a poor participation grade.

Daily Writing Log

One of my biggest goals is to help you develop a daily writing habit. Becoming a great writer takes a huge amount of time and practice. The more we write, the faster we reach our goals. Much like training for a marathon, it is better if you do at least a little work every day rather than a lot of work every couple weeks. Consistency is one of the biggest secrets to success at writing. To this end, I am asking you to try to write every day this semester (or as close to it as is possible). Even if it's just five minutes of writing, that's better than no minutes.

Any time you want to develop a habit, it helps to track that habit. So this semester I want you to keep a log of your daily writing, including the date, the time spent writing, and the number of words written. This will give you an idea of whether you are progressing as the semester goes on. Every Sunday, you will post your weekly results on a Moodle forum and respond to one or more of your classmates' posts. If you don't write every day, that's not a problem. Even if you didn't write a word, tell us why and let us encourage you in the following week. This is entirely an exercise in support and encouragement. You get credit each week that you post and respond, no matter how much you wrote.

Stories

You will turn in two stories for workshop this semester; in addition, you will turn in a revision of one of these stories at the end of the semester. This revision should be a polished, finished story—something you could submit to a literary journal if you wanted.

The stories you turn in for this course should be work that you write during the semester. The point of a workshop is not just to review old work, but to generate new work in response to the pressure placed upon your work during class discussions.

Moreover, I want you to be trying different things. Actively. When you try new things (especially things outside of your comfort zone) you develop new tools that you can later hone. So if you normally write in 1st person, and your first story is in 1st person, deliberately write your second story in 3rd person. If you tend to write fantasy narratives (more on that in a second), write a contemporary realist narrative. If you tend to write character-driven New Yorker-style stories, try writing something that is plot-driven. If you always write stories about 20-year-old women, write a story about a 60-year-old man. Write a story that is based on formal experiment instead of story. Write a series of short language-based flash fictions instead of a 30-page introspective character study. If you always use an omniscient narrator, write a story with a drastically limited, dramatic narrative position. If you never write dialogue, write a dialogue-heavy story. And so on and so forth.

Of your two stories, only one is allowed to be genre fiction (fantasy, sci fi, horror, urban fantasy, detective, romance, etc). I don't mind if you write genre fiction because if that's what you want to write, then that's probably what you should be writing. But again, I want you to push yourself into new writing spaces. I will have the same expectations for genre fiction that I do for any other fiction. It has to be a good story. And the problem with genre fiction, in my experience, is that it's much easier to be derivative and clichéd with genre fiction. The rules of genre fiction are much more firmly developed, so it's easy to make a story adhere to those rules. In turn, it's much easier to fall into traps. It's very, very hard to write a vampire story that doesn't repeat all the conventions of vampire narratives. You can write one genre story, but I expect it to be personal and unique and well-developed. Your characters should be well thought out, not generic. Ask yourself what you—an Oakland University student from Detroit suburbs—bring to your genre. What about your experiences of life come out in a fantasy or science fiction or romance story?

Formatting

On my rubric, formatting is an all or nothing proposal. If you do everything right, editors will know you are serious. If you don't, they will automatically chalk you up as an amateur. So on the rubric, you either get the formatting right, or you get no points. This means that stories need to be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. **Every page needs to have page numbers. You will get zero (0) points on formatting if your story doesn't have page numbers.** The font should be Times New Roman 12 pt (or something comparable). Paper should be standard white printer paper. **Every story needs to be stapled. You will get zero (0) points on formatting if your story isn't stapled.** On top of that, there should not be any spelling errors and few grammatical errors. This means that, if this is a problem, you should have someone read your work before you submit it (which means you have to finish it a few days before it's due). The Writing Center in Kresge Library is a really good resource for that.

I am including a short-short story of mine in the syllabus. I want you to copy that formatting *exactly*, including the header/page number.

Revision

Your revision should be a serious, substantial revision, not just a few fixed spelling errors and changed sentences. I want you to address the big issues of the story, not the copy editing issues (though those are important too).

As part of the revision assignment, you will have to highlight all the changes you made in the final draft and write a 2-page explanation of what you changed and why. You will staple this to your revision and include it in your portfolio.

Workshops

Much of this class will concentrate on developing our prose through peer discussion of the work. You have two responsibilities in a workshop. When you are turning in work to be reviewed, you need to have copies of it the Thursday before. It must be typed, double-spaced, with enough copies for everyone in the class.

When we are discussing other people's work you have to come to class prepared to discuss and with a well thought-out response to the piece. In addition to any comments you might write on your colleagues' stories, you will also type up a response (300-word minimum) that you will staple to the stories when you hand them back to the author.

In order to guarantee that people are in fact writing up responses in a responsible manner, you will also turn each response in on Moodle. The submission deadline for each response will be before the class when we are discussing that story. If you miss more than one response in the semester (or if a response displays a lack of thoughtfulness or effort) you will lose 1/10th of your "Responses to Workshop Stories" grade for each missed response. If you don't seem to be taking time to write thoughtful responses, I will chat with you. It isn't fair to be that person who gets good feedback from everyone else but never puts out the same effort for others. And ultimately, you're cheating yourself. The workshop process works best because you have to learn from each story by grappling with them.

Attendance Policy

In a class like this where so much of the learning happens in the classroom, attendance is vital. Your participation grade will go down by 1 point for every day you miss over 2 days, excused or unexcused. This includes illness and basically everything except decapitation (in which case I suppose you're not so worried about your grade any more). Don't miss days when you really don't have to because then later in the semester if you get swine flu, there won't be any wiggle room.

Academic Conduct Policy

Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, falsifying reports/records, and unauthorized collaboration, access, or modifying of computer programs are considered serious breaches of academic conduct that may lead to expulsion. Suspect cases are referred to the Office of the Dean of Students. The Oakland University policy on academic conduct will be strictly followed with no exceptions. See catalog under Academic Policies and Procedures.

Other Policies and Requests

There will be no text messaging or computers in this class.

Text messaging in class is increasingly common but in the end it's rude to your classmates and your professor. It is no different than picking up your phone. It conveys the basic message that you care less about being in class than what is going on outside of class, and to be honest, when I notice it (and I do notice it) I can't help but feel self-conscious about my teaching. If you have a really important phone call or message that you know you're going to have to respond to, step out into the hallway and take it. Otherwise, it might be easier just to turn off your phones.

I've found it's almost impossible to have a computer in front of oneself and resist the temptation to email, update Facebook, instant message, check Lions scores (What? They didn't make the playoffs?!), etc. It's better to take notes by hand, or perhaps even better, just focus on the conversation and what you might add to it, than worry about using a computer to take notes. And knowing how much of a temptation computers can be, I don't want to be wondering what you're doing. It takes me off my game. It's much easier just to bar computers completely.

Jeff Chapman's Grading Scale

Course Percent	0-59	60-66	67-69	70-72	73-76	77-79	80-82	83-86	87-89	90-92	93-100
Letter Grade	F	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
Honor Points Equivalent	0.0	1.0	1.3	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.7	4.0

Note about schedule: Readings refer to the day we will discuss the reading. You are responsible for it on the day it's listed.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

Sep. 5 *Course Introduction*
Sep. 7 Reading: Fox, *Lifelong Writing Habit*, Ch.1-4 (4-33) Exercise #2 & 3

WEEK TWO

Sep. 10 Reading: Fox, *Lifelong Writing Habit*, Ch.5-8 (34-61) Exercise #6 & 8
Sep. 12 Reading: Fox, *Lifelong Writing Habit*, Ch.9-12 (62-90) Exercise #11 & 12
Sep. 14 Reading: Nelson, "Short Story: a Process of Revision" (on Moodle)

WEEK THREE

Sep.. 17 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 1-52 (Intro & Concept)
 Due: Exercise #1
Sep.. 19 Reading: Bolander, "Tornado's Siren"
 Last day to drop the class for 100% tuition refund.
Sep.. 121 Reading: Carver, "The Bath"

WEEK FOUR

Sep.. 24 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 53-115 (Character)
 Due: 1st Workshop Short Story Proposal
Sep.. 26 Reading: Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado"
Sep.. 28 Reading: Heynan, "What Happened During the Ice Storm"

WEEK FIVE

Oct. 1 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 130-172 (Structure)
 Due: Exercise #2
Oct. 3 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 173-225 (Structure)
Oct. 5 Movie Viewing: *Stand by Me*

WEEK SIX

Oct. 8 Movie Viewing: *Stand by Me*
Oct. 10 Reading: King, "The Body"
Oct. 12 Reading: Chopin, "The Story of an Hour"

WEEK SEVEN

Oct. 15 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 116-129 (Theme)
 Due: Exercise #3
Oct. 17 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 226-244 (Scene)
Oct. 19 Reading: Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

WEEK EIGHT

Oct. 22 Reading: Brooks, *Story Engineering*, 245-278 (Voice)
Oct. 24 Reading: Updike, "A&P"
Oct. 26 Reading: Orozco, "Orientation"

WEEK NINE

Oct. 29 *Workshop 1.1*
Oct. 31 *Workshop 1.2*
Nov. 2 *Workshop 1.3*

WEEK TEN

Nov. 5	<i>Workshop 1.4</i>
Nov. 7	<i>Workshop 1.5</i>
Nov. 9	<i>Workshop 1.6</i>

WEEK ELEVEN

Nov. 12	<i>Workshop 1.7</i>
Nov. 14	<i>Workshop 1.8</i>
Nov. 16	<i>Extra Writing Day</i>

WEEK TWELVE

Nov. 19	<i>Workshop 2.1</i>
Nov. 21	<i>Workshop 2.2</i>
Nov. 23	THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK THIRTEEN

Nov. 26	<i>Workshop 2.3</i>
Nov. 28	<i>Workshop 2.4</i>
Nov. 30	<i>Workshop 2.5</i>

WEEK FOURTEEN

Dec. 3	<i>Workshop 2.6</i>
Dec. 5	<i>Workshop 2.7</i>
Dec. 7	<i>Workshop 2.8</i>

Final Portfolio due Wednesday, Dec 12. Due by midnight on Moodle.

Example of Short Story Format

Jeffrey S. Chapman
Address
Phone Number
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886 words

The Quails

These late-July days the temperature was hitting 95 degrees easily, and often 100. We started eating dinner outside, not because it was cooler outside but because it wasn't much cooler inside either, and the inside felt oppressive. We had begun to dislike being inside together, trapped inside this home that had seemed like such a good idea just a year before. We'd both been so excited about having a yard and a garden.

As it turns out, Karen was the only one who really got into gardening. Her tomatoes were beginning to ripen, finally.

One evening, as we were sitting outside in silence, two quails – a female and a male – bobbed into the yard. They followed each other around, sometimes startled into a near run. In the middle of the garden, next to the leeks, the female quail gave herself a dirt bath. We both smiled to see her shaking and fluffing, dirt flying up over her. She left a small hole behind; Karen had found similar holes before and thought they were made by a cat digging; there were so many cats in the neighborhood. Karen told me that camping once in Canada she'd seen two quails with at least fifteen babies, maybe twenty, unbelievably small pecking machines the size of butter pats. So vulnerable because they were so bite-size.

We kept thinking that there would be relief from the heat at some point but the last week of July was hotter than ever. The thermometer reached 105 again and again. One day it rained and we thought that would improve things but it just became muggy and humid.

We didn't talk much while we ate. We were too hot to make small-talk. One of us would inevitably mention how good tomatoes were when they came directly out of the garden. If we were lucky, the quails would come and we were happy to watch them run around. They were obviously eating well; they were plump and opulent, the queen and king of the neighborhood.

The tenth straight day of 100-plus degree heat broke a record. In 1960 there had been nine straight days.

On the tenth day we sat outside under our large shade umbrella with gin and tonics and the male quail came into the yard without the female. It was the first time we'd seen them apart.

For the next week we only saw him alone.

—Maybe quails don't really pair up for very long, I said. Maybe they can only really be together for a while and then they get tired.

Karen thought cats had got her.

The heat dipped a little but didn't break. There were forest fires all around the country and sometimes the wind would bring a hint of them to us and the air would be orange and smoky. One night, while we were sitting outside with drinks, the phone rang. It was a policewoman from a police station. She asked who was speaking and I was happy to tell her. First there was a pause and then she asked me come to the station immediately because our son was being held there.

And that was odd because Karen and I didn't have any children, either together or apart. I told the police woman that I didn't know what she was talking about. We didn't have any sons.

—Mr. Seely, she said. And your wife is Karen Seely?

—Yes, I said. I suppose.

— You both should come down here immediately. She paused, seeming to consider her next words. And then she just said thank you curtly and hung up.

I told Karen; we agreed that we should go to the station to see this son we didn't have. She shrugged, as did I. It was the strangest — or at least the most mysterious — thing that had ever happened to me.

Karen got in the car, in the driver's seat, and I got in the passenger's side. We didn't talk while we drove, not even to talk about why we were going to the police station. We both just looked ahead and drove with some sense of urgency. The radio was on but we didn't turn it off. The moon was low on the horizon, right above the mountains, and orange in the smoky air.

And then a quail ran in front of the car. Karen braked — not fast enough to avoid hitting the quail — and we felt a gentle but jarring bump under the wheel. Karen pulled over and ran back.

When I got there she was kneeling by the quail and her head was bent forward, defeated; she was biting on a thumbnail as if holding back tears. I also knelt down by the quail. With my hands lifting as if lifting up through silk cloth, I picked it up and carried it to the car. The quail wasn't dead: it was just injured, and moving. If we got it somewhere quickly, a veterinarian or emergency clinic, there was the possibility it would live. But we had to go to the police station, to get our son. What was the life of this bird, compared to our son?

I looked in Karen's face. She was just staring straight out into the night and her eyes were so wide-open I could see white all around the irises.