



## ENGLISH 90

# Fiction writing

**Tues/Thurs 11:30-1:20**  
**260-007**

Shannon Pufahl  
[srpufahl@stanford.edu](mailto:srpufahl@stanford.edu)  
460-330

office hours:

Tuesdays 1:45-2:45 p.m.

Thursdays 5:30-6:30 p.m.

and by appointment

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will explore the myriad ways in which writers of fiction have used language to examine the world, to make compelling statements, and to move readers. We will begin by studying a selection of stories that demonstrate the many techniques writers use to create fictional worlds; we'll use these stories as models for our own writing. We will read for content, but more importantly we will study figurative language, character and setting development, and dramatic structure. We'll also practice close-reading techniques with writing in mind. I want students to see writing as an act, not as a product. To that end, we will conduct workshops in which ideas and critiques are thoughtfully offered. Then, part of your final grade will rely on a revision of the longer story you offer to the workshop. It is through revision that students begin to imagine a world outside our classroom, a reader who is not simply a teacher or member of their class.

Students come to writing classes with many different concerns, backgrounds, and talents. But even those who will not go on to make writing a career learn essential things in writing courses. To facilitate communication of the highest order is to engage with others, to empathize deeply. To me, in the best writing of any kind there is a palpable gratitude for the possibilities of language. Our goals in this course will focus on clarity, revision, and style, in the service of quality writing and communication with others.

### REQUIRED MATERIALS

**The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories** edited by Tobias Wolff

& **Making Shapely Fiction** by Jerome Stern

(both available at the Stanford Bookstore)

**Copies of draft for workshop** (usually around 12-15 copies, due a week before your workshop date)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Class Participation (25%)** This includes attendance, punctuality and involvement in class discussions (including on the course blog), as well as a presentation on a story from our reader.

*Absences:* Attendance is required and essential to your experience of the course. Individual workshops are especially affected by absences and are impossible to recreate. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, please arrange this in advance; otherwise unexcused absence will reduce your overall grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. Chronic absences will affect your grade significantly.

### GRADING

Participation	25%
Assignments	20%
Written critiques	15%
Readings attendance	15%
<b>Final story</b>	<b>25%</b>
A 90-100%	B 80-89%
C 70-79%	D 60-69%
NP 0-59%	

*Leading discussion:* In the first half of the quarter, you will lead a discussion on a story from our reader. We'll choose stories and set a schedule during the second week of class. Preparation for this discussion will include a brief introduction and a set of questions designed to prompt class input and illuminate the week's theme. More instructions to follow.

*Course site:* We'll be posting some of the work for class on our class site, including annotations on the published stories we read and responses to classmates' work. I'll ask that you post a short comment on our class blog about some of our readings. We'll also produce and respond to some short writing assignments. The site content will be entirely private to our class. We'll use Canvas, Stanford's simple and functional site for academic coursework.

**Assignments (20%)** This includes all writing exercises you've completed in class and for homework, and a longer essay or chapter submitted for the traditional workshop. We'll conduct mini workshops and/or cold reads (reading the assignment aloud to the class and then inviting response) for many of these assignments, as well as sharing assignments on the course blog.

**Written critiques (15%)** One of the most valuable elements of a writing class is the opportunity to have your work seriously critiqued both by your instructor and your peers. It will be as beneficial to your fiction to think critically and generously about your classmates' work as it will be to have your own writing discussed. It isn't necessary to write pages and pages of comments to your classmates, but make sure your letter is carefully thought-out and both critical and kind. It's important to remember that we won't be discussing polished essays but early drafts.

**Attendance at Readings (15%)** Attendance at three readings in the Creative Writing program is required. A list of readings this quarter can be found at <http://creativewriting.stanford.edu> and <http://events.stanford.edu/>.

## ENGLISH 90: FICTION WRITING

### Provisional Schedule (subject to change & expansion)

Tues Jan 5	Intro to course: invention & delight	Intro to course
Thurs Jan 7		"On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl" Haruki Murakami "Happy Endings" Margaret Atwood
Tues Jan 12	Character as beginning: heroes, villains, and the rest of us	"Gold Boy, Emerald Girl" Yiyun Li (handout)
Thurs Jan 14		"Cathedral" Raymond Carver Selections from <i>Making Shapely Fiction</i>
Tues Jan 19	Who knows, who wants: point of view & narration	"Rock Springs" Richard Ford "The Things They Carried" Tim O'Brien
Thurs Jan 21		Selections from <i>Making Shapely Fiction</i>
Tues Jan 26	The end rises up: tension & suspense	"A Good Man is Hard to Find" Flannery O'Connor (handout)
Thurs Jan 28		"The Behavior of the Hawkweeds" Andrea Barrett (handout) Selections from <i>Making Shapely Fiction</i>
Tues Feb 2	World-building: history & place	"The First Day" Edward P. Jones "Wickedness" Ron Hansen
Thurs Feb 4		Selections from <i>Making Shapely Fiction</i>
Tues Feb 9	What makes a story	"The Balloon" Donald Bartheleme (handout) "Girl" Jamaica Kincaid
Thurs Feb 11 - Thurs March 3		Workshops & craft review
Tues March 8	The power of veto: On revision	
Thurs March 10	No exit: Moving forward	
Friday March 18	Final stories due by 5 p.m.	

### THE LIFE OF THE MIND,

is, despite some appalling frustrations, the happiest life on earth. And one day, in the thick of this, approaching some partial vision, you will (I swear) find yourself on the receiving end of -- of all things -- an "idea for a story," and you will, God save you, start thinking about writing some fiction of your own.

Then you will understand, in what I fancy might be a blinding flash, that all this passionate thinking is what fiction is about, that all those other fiction writers started as you did, and are laborers in the same vineyard.

-- ANNIE DILLARD  
*LIVING BY FICTION*

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## Stanford Honor Code

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The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

### Accommodation

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodation.

### DUE DATES

Failure to turn in work on assigned dates will result in a half letter grade for each day submitted late. For more information on how to make up missed courses or readings, please see "Make-up Work" on page 3 of this syllabus.

In some cases, extensions may be granted. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you anticipate not being able to meet a deadline.

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you. What I want is to have the reader come out just 6 percent more awake to the world.

– George Saunders