

**Course Title: Short Story Writing: Making Fiction Out of Experience**  
**Course Code: FICT 57 W**  
**Instructor: Brenden Willey**

### **Course Summary:**

As this is a short story workshop, the course's main goal is to help you generate a draft of a short story, and by giving you feedback and asking you to give feedback to others, to prepare you for the inevitable revision. Each student will complete a couple of short writing exercises to get warmed up, and will draft and workshop one new short story, 8-15 pages in length. By the end of the term, students should expect to sharpen their vision, expand their knowledge of the craft, and increase their capabilities to make stories as from the stuff of life.

Weeks 1-4 will focus on readings of exemplary texts and craft essays, three or four per week, and on responding to a couple of short writing prompts in weeks 1 and 2. (By weeks 3 and 4, you should be hard at work on the draft of your workshop manuscript.) On our discussion forum, you'll post responses and deep insights to the exemplary stories and, in small groups, to your peers' exercises. Weeks 5-10, we will workshop your stories, and may read a supplementary story or two. During these weeks, the writers up for workshop will collect our responses to their manuscripts, and our video gatherings will focus on giving each writer time to ask us questions about our responses to his or her draft. In week 10, we'll share the ideas we're excited about for revision.

There is no assigned textbook or anthology. Readings will be sourced from free texts online. Occasionally they will require free registration with a website, but no more than that. That said, I highly recommend tracking down and reading, as a useful accompaniment to our workshop, *The Modern Library Writer's Workshop: A Guide to the Craft of Fiction*, by Stephen Koch.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

### **Grade Options and Requirements:**

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
  
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Score will be determined by student attendance and participation. Credit is given at 70% completion of requirements.

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- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Please note that you will not receive graded work throughout the term, but you are welcome at any time to inquire about your standing in the course.
    - Workshop participation (including workshop letters) 45%
    - Workshop submission (story or excerpt) 40%
    - Writing exercises 15%

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

### **A Note on Workshop Letters, or “Peer Critiques”:**

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. The critiques you write will be as valuable as those you receive. You will engage, therefore, in the traditional workshop ritual of writing a short letter to the writer of each story up for workshop. Writing such

letters encourages us to take the critical step of articulating and beginning to form fully our own personal literary philosophies. In other words, a good letter might benefit you more than it will benefit the writer of the draft you’re responding to. Make sure your letters are carefully thought-out, both critical and kind. It’s important to remember that we won’t be discussing polished stories but early drafts.

### **Tentative Weekly Outline:**

#### Week 1: An introduction, or our “ground situation”

Introductions

Isaac Babel, “Crossing into Poland”

Isaac Babel, “My First Goose”

John Barth, “Incremental Perturbation”

Writing exercise #1: Exposition

#### Week 2: “The longer you look at one object, the more of the world you see in it”

Flannery O’Connor, “The Nature and Aim of Fiction”

Flannery O’Connor, “Writing Short Stories”

Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People”

Raymond Carver, “Chef’s House”

Writing exercise #2: Object in motion

Week 3: “I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes”

Alice Munro, “What Is Real?”  
James Joyce, “Araby”  
James Joyce, “An Encounter”  
James Baldwin, “The Rockpile”

Week 4: “the nature of our perceptive apparatus”

James Agee, “Near a Church”  
James Agee, excerpt from *A Death in the Family*  
Elizabeth Tallent, “The Wilderness”

Week 5:

Workshop 1

Week 6:

Workshop 2

Week 7:

Workshop 3

Week 8:

Workshop 4

Week 9:

Workshop 5

Week 10: “daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark”

Workshop 6  
What’s next?  
Writing exercise #3: Statement of revision plans