CRWR 210A – 50: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WORKSHOP (Online)
University of Montana – Spring 2016

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THOUGHTS ON THE INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP (aka “course outcomes”)

What are stories? Where do they come from? What are they made of? How do we find them? How are they organized and what makes them succeed or fail? This course is designed to be an introductory investigation of these and other questions. We will seek to find out what makes stories tick through reading and discussing them, asking them about their parts and rules, imitating and dissecting them.

We will also investigate our own proclivities, strengths, and weakness as writers. What kinds of exercises, activities, experiences, memories, sensations, or prompts make us want to write? Is our best writing even driven by “want”, or is it driven by need, fear, frustration, collaboration, confusion, hunger, encouragement, despair, or…?

Over the semester we will use a variety of tools in this investigation: limiting exercises and story prompts, published and peer-written readings, revision of the pieces drafted in this course, and reflection on the writing and revising process. But most importantly, we will use each other as, often, community is a writer’s best asset. Engaging in critical reflection and dialogue with each other on readings is at the core of our workshop community. Providing feedback on peers’ stories has dual advantages. First, it shows our peers how we see their work, and provides jumping off points for revision, expansion and future writings. Second, engaging with feedback has the (sometimes annoying) effect of showing us as writer-critics how we see and understand writing, what we like, and what challenges us -- how we attempt to understand those challenges and respond to them is often at the heart of our growth as writers.

GRADING, GRADING PHILOSOPHY & RELATED POLICIES

GRADING
Participation is 100% of your grade.

Well, what does that mean? Concretely it means you are responsible for turning in all of your assignments on time – your own creative pieces, responses to peer and published stories, and all the other discussions and activities we will do throughout the semester in the pursuit of understanding fiction a little better – or at least trying.
I find it helps to break this unusual policy down a little, so it may be useful to think of the work for this course as falling into two categories:

1. **50% of final grade: Your own creative writing**
   This includes stories you are responsible for submitting for workshop, shorter creative pieces not workshopped by the entire class, and your final portfolio.

2. **50% of final grade: Your responses to everything else**
   This includes feedback on peer stories in workshop, reflections on reading assignments, and engagement in all the other activities.

Since, despite the 100% participation criteria, assignments in this course are still not equally weighted, I find it useful to also include a list of **grading deal-breakers** so that students can prioritize. **To successfully complete the course you must:**

1. **Turn in both (2) of your workshop stories on-time.** Having workshop stories available on Moodle consistently and on time is crucial to the course functioning successfully. You must submit your workshop stories on time. **Failure to submit a single workshop story within 24 hours of the deadline, without explicitly working something out with me ahead of time, will seriously jeopardize your ability to pass the course.**

2. **Turn in all your critique letters.** We will go over what these are and how to do them later in the course, but they are basically feedback on peer stories. Without them a workshop isn’t a workshop, it’s just a story hanging out alone on Moodle, and that undermines our community. **You need to turn in at least 75% of these critique letters within 24 hours of deadline to pass the course. You will need to have completed 100% of them by the end of semester, even if some are more than 24 hours late, to pass.**

3. **Turn in your portfolio.** This is kind of an obvious one, but it bears mentioning here as, again, you can’t pass the course without it. Grading criteria for the portfolio as well as info on penalties for late work will be posted later in the semester.

**GRADING PHILOSOPHY**

Please look at the holistic participation grading as a good thing, rather than a frightening one. If you do what you are assigned, and work in earnest with your peers, you are doing your job and your grade, and our community, are secure. Note that none of the above grading criteria include my thoughts on your fiction: As long as you are trying I will never grade the value of your creative work. I am here to help you improve your writing, not to grade the worth of your ideas before we get to the task of workshopping them – that would undermine the whole point of a workshop, wouldn’t it?

**POLICIES RELATED TO GRADING**

“Attendance”

Attendance in this course is unavoidably bound up in participation in the online workshop. Failure to participate in two full weeks of coursework will result in automatic failure of the course.
**Deadlines**
Are very firm (and always at 5pm).

In any workshop course the students, in large part, are responsible for generating the course material. Failure to submit that material on time is a waste of your peers’ and instructor’s time as well as your own – as giving less time for responses will negatively impact the quality of those responses and the course as a whole. Contact me immediately and before your deadline has passed if you feel an assignment may be late. In some cases I will be able to work something out with you, this becomes less likely after deadlines have passed.

**Late work**
All late work will drop a full letter grade (10%) per day it is late. The below exceptions have additional restrictions on grading (see “deal-breakers” above):

Workshop stories – not accepted after 24 hours late

Critique letters – you need 75% of your letters to be on time or within 24 hours of deadline, 100% must be turned in by the end of the semester to pass. All letters submitted after 24 hours late will be taken down an additional letter grade per 24 hours/late down to a 50% top possible grade

**MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS**
This course has several units. Major assignments include: two workshop stories, one shorter (under 10 pages max) and one longer (greater than 15 pages min), and a final portfolio. The final portfolio will primarily be composed of revisions of previous coursework, though there will be a small amount of new work – less than 5 pages required. A detailed schedule of assignments for the semester, including their requirements, will be posted during the third week of the course.

**COURSE TEXTS**
All texts will be provided on Moodle or, the case of a Moodle breakdown, via university email until Moodle is back up

**PLAGIARISM**
See University Catalogue for UM’s plagiarism policy.

**DISABILITIES INFORMATION**
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. If you feel you need accommodations, please get in touch with me. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. If you need help with finding out to do that, email me and I can help.

**AND, OF COURSE, A DISCLAIMER**
This syllabus is subject to change.