

Intro to Fiction Workshop CRWR 210A.03 73762 Fall 2019

Course Information

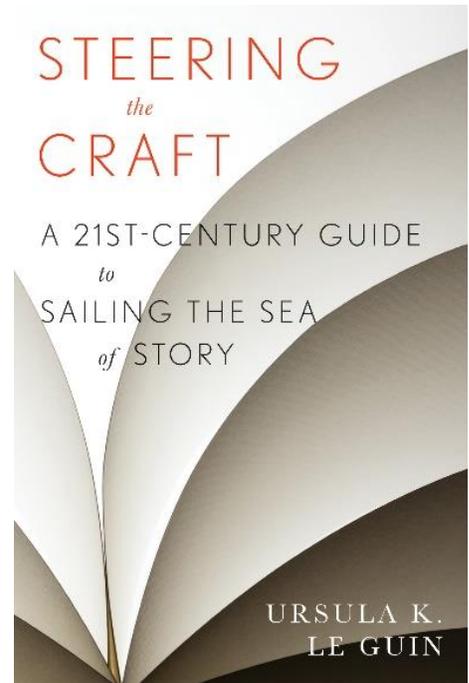
- M & W 1:00-2:20 pm
- Classroom: LA 103B

Contact Information

- Instructor: Barry Maxwell
- Email: barry.maxwell@umontana.edu
- Web: <http://barrymaxwell.net>
- Campus Mailbox: LA 129
- Office: Corbin Hall #339
- Office Hours: Mondays 11:45-12:45, Tuesdays 4:00-5:00, & by appointment.

Required text

Ursula K Le Guin's *Steering the Craft: A Twenty-First-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story* (ISBN 978-0-544-61161-0). Fact & Fiction Books at 220 N. Higgins Ave will have copies for us during the first weeks of the semester. [Fact & Fiction Website](#)



Learning Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing and writing short fiction.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to fiction.
- Practice the art of writing and revising short fiction.
- Learn to critique the effectiveness of one's own work and that of others.

Course description

Expect an awesome semester exploring the nuts and bolts of short fiction while creating and



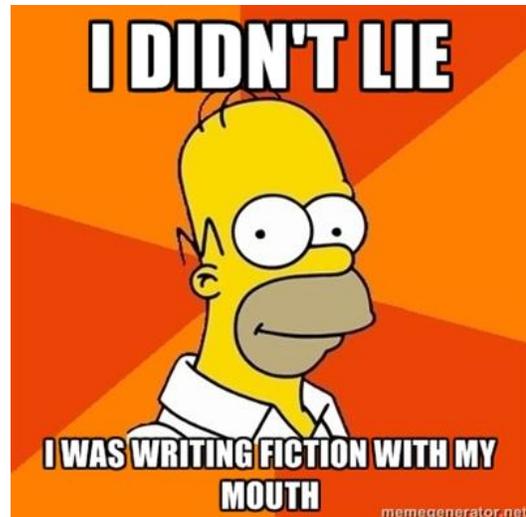
polishing your own. It'll take study, a lot of practice, and a whole lot of reading, all of which we'll do together in an atmosphere of support and encouragement. A writing workshop is exactly what it sounds like: a place to make things out of words. This class is—we are—a team of writers manifesting a safe haven to envision and build and create, to try and fail and try again and glue and hammer and polish until we can step back and be proud of what we've made. We will be one another's admirers and emulators, editors and assistants, critics and champions.

- We'll read widely throughout the entire semester, dipping into many genres, all contributing to your

fictioneer's skill set. The reading list is specifically skewed away from your standard "patriarchal old white dude" line of cultural blindness, intolerance, gender bias, and misogyny. We will look instead to an emerging canon of diversity and inclusivity, a canon you will help define and create.

- We'll review grammar and the mechanics of presentation, including software and submission formats. We'll learn literary terms and explore fiction as a living art form.

- We'll establish a mindset allowing our writing be a process, not a problem.
- Interiority will get its proper, specifically for owning your thoughts about writing in general, and writing fiction in particular. We'll dig into our headspaces via journal entries and roundtable chats.
- There will be tons of practice time in class and at home for developing technique, craft, and directed self-expression. Le Guin's *STC* will provide many exercises, we'll gather some from outside sources, and we'll supplement those with ones we fashion ourselves. The cool thing is that we'll be putting these practices to work in our own original fiction.
- We'll learn to workshop our friends' writing, and to evaluate their thoughts on ours. And after, we'll get comfortable with revision and self-editing.
- You'll meet Missoula's lit community by attending at least one event and sharing the experience.
- When it's all over, it won't be over at all. We'll leave this class more accepting of ourselves as authors and artists, proudly and comfortably inhabiting that identity. Not to mention you'll have a stockpile of ideas and finished pieces.



Extras I'll make available

- [The New Yorker](#) archives. The traditional gold standard for short stories.
- [The Paris Review](#) archives. The author interviews are more than gold, they're platinum.
- Barry's Lending Library. I've got piles of craft books to lend on a "return it intact or die" basis. A list is forthcoming.
- Full [Grammarly](#) access.
- Full [ProWritingAid](#) access.
- A ton of suggested readings and links to craft sites.

Notes on triggers

We will be awash in a tsunami of triggering material, since fiction often dips into life's deep well of trauma and misery. Talk to me privately and soon if you're worried about what you might encounter. We'll work it out. I want us all to feel safe in this creative world of ours.

Notes on appropriate language

Beware of cursing. Or rather, be prepared for some. I let loose an f-bomb now and then, and plenty of shits and damns and oh hells, too, but I try to be cool about it. We're all adults, and I certainly won't condemn you if you let slip some saucy language. Our readings and stories will not be limited to those with genteel diction. Far from it, in fact. Our first readings include Cheryl Strayed's Dear Sugar column "[Write Like a Motherfucker,](#)" and Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts."

Notes on being cool

- Respect for one another is a condition of staying in this class. Disrespect for another's work, for their beliefs, for their abilities, or for their personhood, will result in a reprimand at least, or, at worst, a request for your resignation from the course.

- Politics. Let's not even go there. I'll do my best to keep my mouth shut and I ask that you do the same. (Be warned: I lean so far left I'm surprised I don't walk in circles.)
- Religion. Ditto on the whole not even-ing.
- Bigotry. Intolerance. Racism. Abusiveness. Hatred. They have no place in any classroom, ever, and wherever I'm in charge, they will get you kicked out without hesitation. Leave those attitudes at the curb before you walk on campus.

Notes on genre fiction

This course aims at our producing “literary fiction” rather than “genre fiction.” (If you're not sure of the difference, read [“What is Literary Fiction?” at the NY Book Editors site.](#)) To my thinking, the literary and the genre fields are not mutually exclusive, though not an easy mix. We'll discuss it as a group, but I'm willing to read what you'd consider genre pieces if it isn't centered around the fact of its genre alone, and focuses on the humanity at work within the characters driving the story. Romance, sci-fi, zombies, vampires, wizards, witches, mermaids, and ghosts... stories created within any of these parameters can be literary in the right hands, treated with the right care. The article [“12 Books That Prove the Literary/Genre Distinction Is Bogus”](#) stands in defense of blurring genre lines.

Notes on email etiquette--it matters!

An example:

Hi, Barry,

Good morning!

Please accept this assignment early. The prompt is so exciting I simply *had* to get into the writing, and there's a chance I may be absent on the due day. I will let you know, I promise. (I may be going to a writer's retreat that week, on a scholarship!)

Thank you,

Awesome Student

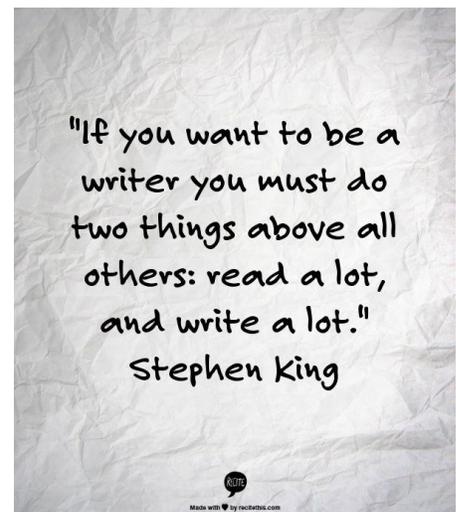
The details of what we're all about, one by one, and at great length:

1) UM Email & Moodle.

You will be *required* to check your UM email and visit our Moodle page regularly and often.

1) Reading, reading, and more reading.

Le Guin supplies excerpts of many canonical classics, so we're going to take a different tack in our other selections. For the most part, the works we'll learn from and enjoy are modern—and by “modern” I mean this century, this decade, this year, and when great new stuff pops up online, we might read something the day it's published! Most of our reads will be short, and along with stories, craft articles, and author interviews, the list will include seemingly unrelated forms, such as poems, lyric essays, and creative nonfiction. Everything we look to will add depth to our fiction, and practice in any genre or form improves all your word workings. Most of our readings will be available online, and if not, I'll supply .pdf copies.



1) Tools of the trade.

You'll master the essentials of Microsoft Word (it's the industry standard, learn to love it), revisit grammar and punctuation, compose your own author bio, learn how to present yourself and your work to lit journals and other venues via [Submittable](#), hop into Lit Twitter (or your favorite social media milieu), and browse the wide world of today's online publications.

1) Writing exercises.

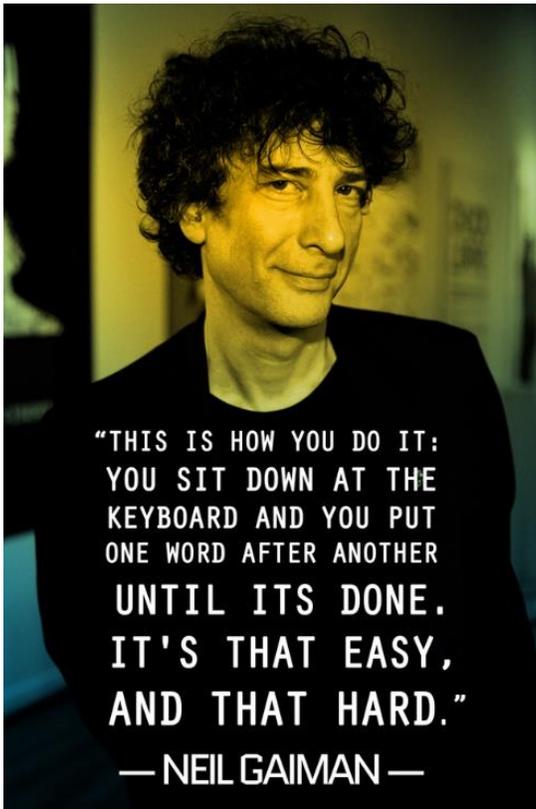
Steering the Craft offers exercises with each chapter, along with hints for evaluating and critiquing the results. We'll cover these in the first weeks of the semester, along with prompts, freewrites, and exercises from other sources. As we learn the techniques and tools of fiction, we'll be sharing these exercises in class in mini workshops, often immediately after we've written them.

1) Attitude check.

We'll enjoy readings and free discussion about our approaches to writing. We'll get encouragement from each other, as well as from Natalie Goldberg, Anne Lamott, Ira Glass, Neil Gaiman, and others. Our main goal will be to allow ourselves the freedom to suck, and then revise our way to glory.

1) Reading Responses and Reflections Journal.

This is your digital and analog scrapbook of your thoughts and interpretations of everything we encounter during the course: readings, exercises, workshops, craft insights, story ideas, random brain farts (Sometimes the best stories come from the uninvited, least expected thought bubbles!), questions, and anything relevant to you and your writing process. At a minimum, I'll expect a paragraph or so of reflection on required readings, and your gut reactions to each piece of writing you do—your thoughts on the *experience* of writing, even if it's only a cry of frustration, a yelp of unfettered joy, dirges of Eeyore-ish gloom, or peals of blustery, Tiggery excitement.

**1) Your original fiction!**

By semester's end, you will author at least one piece of flash fiction (1000 words or fewer), a second story of flash length or a bit longer, and one “full-length” story of 2500 words or more. You'll be workshopping, revising, and polishing these pieces, with the schedule determined as we settle into our routine.

1) Workshops!

The workshop is the soul of this course, and our clearest path to growing as writers. We'll set a foundation of respectful and thoughtful engagement with each other's work, and what I call a “defenseless” state of mind while our own stories are discussed. We'll go over specifics as workshop season approaches but expect that you'll be spending a great deal of time on critiques and comments, providing marked-up hard copies of your peers' work, and a page or so of thoughtful, supportive observations and suggestions for each story workshopped.

1) Participation.

We'll spend a lot of class time talking about writing: what-how-and-whys, comments on outside readings, reading aloud, and full-on workshopping, even of the short bits. Your voice is essential to not only the rest of us, but to your grade. We're having a conversation—be confident that your response to a written work or anything we discuss is valuable, valid, and essential to our process. You'll need to keep up with readings, take notes in class, engage your brain with the material. Most important is that we *pay attention to each other*. Draw on your good listener/good reader skills and keep an open mind.

It's okay to be shy or quiet, but when you're present, please be present. Remember: We all need each other. You are safe. You are respected. You are appreciated.

1) Your final portfolio.

This will be the culmination of your work and 40% of your final grade. It's got lots of moving parts. Don't freak out—you've got this, especially if you collect and refine your material throughout the course. I'll make the details crystal clear as we near the end of the semester, but for now, here are the requirements:

- Cover sheet/title page. (Yes, you should give your portfolio a title.)
- Table of contents with page numbers
- An introductory “letter” discussing your work and your feelings about it, your experience of the semester and growth as a writer. Have you unearthed themes, patterns, or topics that might influence where you go next in your work?
- Your up-to-the-minute 3rd-person author bio. No more than half a page.
- Three writing exercises of your choice, each in 1st draft form and in revised and polished form. You may choose these from any of the exercises we do during the semester—it's your call.
- A selection of your favorite parts of your R&RJ work. Three pieces, minimum.
- A one to two-page report on a live-and-in-person literary event. Make it interesting, a polished piece, honest and personal.
- A critique of a classmate's work, your choice as to which. You can copy edit and proof this for polish, but don't alter the original thoughts, please.
- The most helpful (as judged by you) critique of your work by a classmate.
- Your 3 awesome pieces of original fiction, presented in this manner:
 - Your first “presentable” draft, as submitted for workshop.
 - A brief writeup of your thoughts on that workshop. For example, do you agree with some or most of the suggestions of your readers? Do you exercise your author's prerogative to hold your ground, keeping something as it is? Are you eager for suggestions or reticent? What helped? What aggravated you? What writery skill hills will you die on or surrender?
 - A final polished draft. Edited, copy edited and proofread, formatted properly as though for submission to your favorite publication.



ALMOST ALL GOOD
 WRITING BEGINS WITH TERRIBLE
 FIRST EFFORTS. YOU NEED TO
 START SOMEWHERE.

ANNE LAMOTT

A strong suggestion: Save Everything!

Keep a folder of hard copies, a cloud-based backup of *all* your work, and a backup of your backups. If you work mostly with pen and paper, take pictures and save them! The notes you lose to computer issues, backpack thefts, natural disasters, and unintentional carelessness may be the seeds of your Pulitzer-winning novel, or your first short story in *The New Yorker*. Take care of your words. Respect them. Show them some love!

“If I waited till I
felt like writing,
I'd never write at all.
– Anne Tyler

Policies and Procedures**Deadlines matter!**

For workshops, deadlines and due dates are critical. If you can't have material ready when it's scheduled, you'll need to work out a swap with a shopmate. It's your responsibility to keep up with readings and at-home work, show up prepared for class, and stay on top of the schedule. I'm not a monster, though, and if you fall behind, *talk to me!* I'm all about second chances, so there's nearly always hope. Communication is key when dealing with problems.

Attendance matters!

Students who are registered for a course but do not attend the first two class meetings may be required to drop the course. This rule allows for early identification of class vacancies to permit other students to add classes. Students not allowed to remain must complete a drop form or drop the course through CyberBear to avoid receiving a failing grade.

This class is designed to be interactive. Discussions are a major component of learning, and without attending class, you cannot perform your role as a fellow writer, as a student involved in learning, planning, inventing, and drafting, or collaborating with your instructor and classmates. As important as the standard policies expressed in the officialese text below are, I cannot stress enough how vital it is for you to attend and engage with all our workshops. Yours, of course, but everyone else's, as well. Your voice is essential and valued. Don't deprive us of your awesome presence!

Tardiness will hurt your grade, too. Three late entrances (however grand) add up to one unexcused absence. And if it becomes a habit, points will fall magically from your final grade.

If you know you're going to be absent, contact me in advance, and please, don't skip class because you've fallen behind on reading or homework. Your absence will only compound the problem, and you can still learn from and contribute to the class, regardless of readiness.

Here's the breakdown:

- 4th unexcused absence: final grade drops one full letter grade (A drops to B)
- 5th unexcused absence: final grade drops two full letter grades (A drops to C)
- 6th unexcused absence: final grade is an F

Remember, only three unexcused absences are allowed; please reserve those for emergencies!

The fine print on attendance:

I reserve the right to adjust the policy in cases of significant, documented illness or emergency. Please note that instances of poor time management on your part do not constitute extenuating circumstances. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class from a classmate. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

I may excuse brief and occasional absences for reasons of illness, injury, family emergency, religious observance, cultural or ceremonial events, or participation in a University sponsored activity. (University sponsored activities include for example, field trips, ASUM service, music or drama performances, and intercollegiate athletics.) I will excuse absences for reasons of military service or mandatory public service; please provide appropriate documentation.

Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.

Grading details.

Three components:

- Participation = 30%.
- Short bits, exercises, and other "smaller" written work (incl. Responses and Reflections Journal) = 30%.
- Portfolio = 40%.
- Plus, Attendance.

Your final portfolio grade will depend on many factors, often subjective, including the depth of your revisions. (Don't stress too much—honest effort counts for a lot.) For the other work of the semester, we'll keep it super simple. I will rely on comments and a check system to give you a sense of your progress in the class. A check meaning solid progress with sincere effort and intent, a check minus indicating a need for significant further work on a piece of writing (or similar pieces in the future), and a U stands for unsatisfactory work. Feel free to come chat with me at any point about your grade in the class.

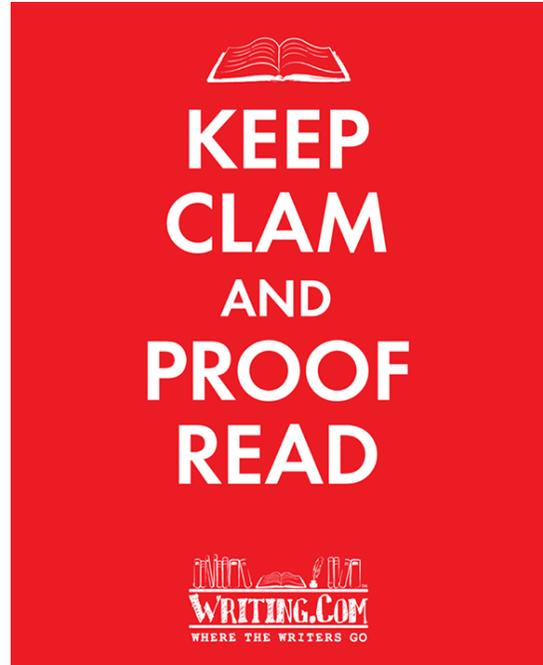
Letter grades to percentages:

- A = 92-100%
- A - = 90-91.9%
- B+ = 87-89.9%
- B = 82-86.9%
- B- = 80-81.9%
- C+ = 77-79.9%
- C = 72-76.9%
- C- = 70-71.9%
- D = 60-69.9 %
- F = 0-59.9%

Extra Help and Outside Meetings

Don't be shy about visiting during my office hours. I'm always glad to shoot the breeze about life in our writery little bubble. If you can't make my office hours and have something you want to discuss, reach out by email.

barry.maxwell@umontana.edu

**Academic Conduct**

You must abide by the rules for academic conduct described in the [Student Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions about when and how to avoid academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, please review the Conduct Code and talk with your instructor. Academic honesty is highly valued in the University community and acts of plagiarism will not be tolerated. A memo issued by the Provost's Office in 2005 asked that all syllabi contain the following: "All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#)."

Plagiarism Policy

According to the University of [Montana Student Conduct Code](#), plagiarism is "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, but I also understand that some misuse of information can occur in the process of learning information literacy skills. Therefore, if student writing appears to have been plagiarized, in full or in part, intentionally or unintentionally, or due to poor citation, the following will procedure will take place:

- The student will be made aware of areas in the text that are not properly integrated or cited.
- The student will receive no credit on the paper; it is up to him/her to prove that he/she turned in original work.
- The student will be asked to provide the teacher with copies of the research she/he used in writing the paper.
- The student and teacher will meet to discuss research integration.
- If the student cannot provide documentation of her/his research, further disciplinary action will be taken.

In the case of blatant or egregious offenses, or in the case of repeated plagiarism, the instructor will consult with department officials to determine further disciplinary action.

Students should review the [Student Conduct Code](#) so they understand their rights in academic disciplinary situations.

Students with Disabilities

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. DSS at UM encourages "...students to request modifications early in the semester. Students are also advised by Disability Services to make an appointment with the instructor in advance... Retroactive modification requests do not have to be honored." If you have questions, check the [DSS FAQ](#), please.

Weekly schedule & reading list will be provided separately.

