

Introduction to Creative Writing

Professor Merrill Cole
M-Cole@wiu.edu / 298-1410

English 285, Section 002
Fall Semester 2013

Office: Simpkins 109

TTh, 2:00-3:15 p.m.

Hours: TTh, 12:30-2:00; W, 1:00-2:00

Simpkins 308

Texts

There will be materials to download on my website, faculty.wiu.edu/M-Cole/

The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. Shorter Seventh Edition. ISBN: 0393926125
Schaefer, Candace and Rick Diamond. The Creative Writing Guide. ISBN: 0321011236

Course Objectives

This course offers the opportunity to begin exploring the limits of the imagination in the context of words. Becoming a writer concerns more than learning to craft a compelling story, to spell out convincing dialogue, or to fashion a vibrant poetic image: it also means developing critical awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. Creative writing can help us to live up to the potential of who we are and to explore who we might become.

The best writers are the best readers, for contrary to popular belief, writers must carefully study other writers to excel at their art. We will read poems, non-fiction pieces, and short stories, as well as the helpful writer's advice of Schaefer and Diamond. The poems and narratives will serve to increase the understanding of literary language, to widen the vocabulary, to cultivate the appreciation of diverse styles, and to inspire our own experiments.

This course is also a writing workshop, where participants will regularly submit writing in progress. Writers need practice—and then more practice. Accordingly, we will also have routine homework exercises, in addition to occasional classroom writing exercises.

There will be focused writing assignments; but at other times, students will be able to write as they please. Discipline alone is the death of creativity. Freedom without discipline leads nowhere interesting. In balancing the two, the course is designed to produce better writers.

Requirements

This is a portfolio course, meaning that each student will present a final portfolio of twenty pages, or a little more, at the end of the course. The portfolio may consist of poems (no more than one per page), short stories, non-fiction prose, a combination of the above, one longer short prose piece, or one long poem. Around midterm, there will be a mini-portfolio assignment consisting of five pages of poetry.

This course also involves a journal. There should be two entries every day, each of at least a paragraph: one on the interior life—feelings, thoughts, moods—and the other observing the outside world—people, places, events. I will not read the journals, but I will scan them at the end of the semester to give students credit (or not). Journal entries can serve as the launching point of more developed creative work.

Everyone *must* actively participate. Lack of participation will damage your grade. This means doing the homework, completing the readings, and *joining in the workshop of other students' writing*. It also means submitting writing to the class on a regular basis.

You will need to photocopy your own writing for *all* of your classmates. Not doing so will affect the participation grade. Please see <<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>> for student rights and responsibilities.

Grading

Homework :	10%
Class Participation:	25%
Mini-Portfolio:	5%
Journal:	10%
Portfolio:	50%

Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade. *More than three unexcused absences means automatic failure for the course.*

Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or your writing. *I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course.*

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

Schedule

Week 1: August 20 & 22

Introduction to the course. Haiku.

Week 2: August 27 & 29

Classes Canceled. Personal Essay Assignment.

Week 3: September 3 & 5

General techniques. Concrete detail. Selected readings: short poetry.
Beginning of poetry workshop.

Week 4: September 10 & 12

Imagery, word choice, figurative language, allusion & symbolism. Sound & rhyme.
Selected readings.
Poetry workshop.

Week 5: September 17 & 19

Poetic Meter. Poetic forms. Selected readings. Imitation poem assignment.
Poetry workshop.

Week 6: September 24 & 26

Selected readings.
Poetry workshop.

Week 7: October 1 & 3

Literary non-fiction. Selected readings.
Short non-fiction assignment.

Mini-Portfolio due October 3

Week 8: October 8 & 10

Introduction to fiction: short short fiction. Jamaica Kincaid. Kate Chopin.

Short short story assignment. Character in conflict assignment.
Non-fiction workshop.

Week 9: October 15 & 17

Eudora Welty. Flannery O'Connor.
Plot assignment & point of view assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 10: October 22 & 24

Flannery O'Connor. Willa Cather.
Unreliable narrator assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 11: October 29 & 31

D. H. Lawrence. Franz Kafka.
Fantasy assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 12: November 5 & 7

James Baldwin. Katherine Mansfield.
Fiction workshop.

Week 13: November 12 & 14

Edwidge Danticat. William Faulkner.
Fiction workshop.

Week 14: November 19 & 21

Selected readings.
Fiction workshop.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15: December 3 & 5

Open workshop (poems, non-fiction and/or fiction).
Portfolios due in class on Thursday, December 5.

Final Exam Week

Student reading. Time & place to be arranged.