

# Introduction to Creative Writing

Professor Merrill Cole  
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English 285, Section Q01  
Spring Semester 2012

Th, 12:30-3:00 p.m.  
Office hours 3:00-3:30

QC River A 229

## Texts

*There will be materials to download on my website, [faculty.wiu.edu/M-Cole/](http://faculty.wiu.edu/M-Cole/)*

*The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. Shorter Seventh Edition. ISBN: 0393926125*  
Shaefer, 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 on a 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 involves a journal. There should be two entries every day, each of at least a paragraph: one on the student's interior life—feelings, thoughts, moods—and the other consisting of observations of 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 class discussion, *particularly when we review someone else's writing*. It also means submitting writing to the class on a regular basis. There will be a required one-on-one conference during the semester.

You will need to photocopy your own writing for *all* of your classmates. Please see <<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>> for student rights and responsibilities.

## Grading

Participation:		30%
Homework:	10%	
Class Participation:	20%	
Mini-Portfolio:		10%
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

*Please note that what appears below is neither exhaustive nor unchangeable. You need to pay attention to each week's homework assignment and to contact me if you miss a session.*

Week 1: January 17

Introduction to the course. Introduction to poetry. Haiku.

Week 2: January 24

General techniques. Concrete detail.

Selected poetry readings.

Beginning of poetry workshop.

Week 3: January 31

Poetic imagery, word choice, figurative language, allusion and symbolism. Sound and rhyme.

Selected poetry readings.

Poetry workshop.

Week 4: February 7

Poetic Meter. Poetic forms.

Selected poetry readings.

Imitation poem assignment.

Poetry workshop.

Week 5: February 14

Selected poetry readings.

Poetry workshop.

Week 6: February 21

Selected poetry readings.

Poetry workshop.

Week 7: February 28

Literary non-fiction.

Selected non-fiction readings.

Short non-fiction assignment.

Week 8: March 7

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

Short short story assignment.

Character in conflict assignment.

Non-fiction workshop.

*Mini-Portfolio due.*

*Spring Break*

Week 9: March 21

Eudora Welty. Flannery O'Connor.

Plot assignment & point of view assignment.

Fiction workshop.

Week 10: March 28

Flannery O'Connor. Willa Cather.

Unreliable narrator assignment.

Fiction workshop.

Week 11: April 4

D. H. Lawrence. Franz Kafka.

Fantasy assignment.

Fiction workshop.

Week 12: April 11

James Baldwin. Katherine Mansfield.

Fiction workshop.

Week 13: April 18

Edwidge Danticat. William Faulkner.

Fiction workshop.

Week 14: April 25

Selected readings.

Portfolio workshop.

Week 15: May 2

Conclusion.

*Portfolios & journals due.*

Final Exam Week

Student reading. Time & place to be arranged.