

Fall 9-1-2000

ENCR 310.03: Creative Writing - Fiction

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SYLLABUS

ENCR 310, section 03

Instructor: Deirdre McNamer

Office: LA 116

Office telephone: 243-6975

Office hours: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays: 2 p.m.-5 p.m.

Class time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3: 40 to 5 p.m.

Classroom: LA 207 (Note: this is a change)

Course description: This course for upper-level undergraduates is intended to help you develop your skills as writers of short fiction. We will discuss both published work and the fiction you write this semester. Exercises will address technical problems that arise in writing fiction. Considerable emphasis will be placed on the process of revision.

Requirements: 1) Two stories and two revisions.

Your stories are due on SEPT. 19 and OCT. 17. A revision of one of those stories is due NOV. 30. A revision of your second story is due DEC. 19. These dates are firm. Your grade will be lowered if you miss a deadline for any reason. Bring 16 copies of your first two stories and your first revision to class on the due dates. Those pieces will be discussed in class. Your second revision goes only to me.

- 2) Exercises and outside readings, as assigned. Outside readings will be placed on reserve in the library. Copy them and bring them to class.
- 3) One-page, typewritten critiques of each student story and revision discussed in class. Make two copies. One goes to the writer; one to me. The critiques are due on the day the story is discussed.

Attendance: This is a course that depends upon avid student participation for its vitality. Three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by a letter. If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining any student stories or revisions that were passed out.

Grading criteria: No grades will be given until the end of the semester, though you are welcome, at any time, to ask for my opinion about how you are doing. Your final grade will be based on my assessment of both your writing and critical skills, and the degree to which you have improved in each of those realms. It will also be based on your class participation, your attention to deadlines and your attendance.

Goals for the course: 1) That you leave the course writing far better fiction than you were able to write when you arrived 2) That you leave as more perceptive readers than you were when you arrived.

Please note: Class will NOT be held on the following days: Nov. 7 and Nov. 23

ENCR 310

Sept. 5

Sept. 7

Sept. 12 Readings, discussion, exercises

Sept. 14

Sept. 19 (Tuesday) STORY 1 DUE

Sept. 21

Sept. 26

Sept. 28

Oct. 3 Workshops

Oct. 5

Oct. 10

Oct. 12

Oct. 17 (Tuesday) STORY 2 DUE --Discussion, exercises

Oct. 19

Oct. 24

Oct. 26

Oct. 31 Workshops

Nov. 2

Nov. 9

Nov. 14

Nov. 16

Nov. 21 Discussion, technical problems

Nov. 28

Nov. 30 (Thursday) REVISION 1 DUE

Dec. 5

Dec. 7

Dec. 12 Workshops (revisions)

Dec. 14

Dec. 19 (Tuesday) REVISION 2 DUE

Grading Criteria

A Paper: Perhaps the principle characteristic of the A paper is its rich content. Some people describe that content as "meaty," others as "dense," still others as "packed." Whatever, the information delivered is such that one feels significantly taught by the author, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. The A paper is also marked by stylistic finesse; the title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; the tone enhances the purpose of the paper. Finally, the A paper, because of its careful organization and development, imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity. Not surprisingly, then, it leaves the reader feeling bright, thoroughly satisfied, and eager to reread the piece.

B Paper It is significantly more than competent. Besides being almost free of mechanical errors, the B paper delivers substantial information—that is, substantial in both quantity and interest-value. Its specific points are logically ordered, well developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in; the closing paragraph is both conclusive and thematically related to the opening. The transitions between paragraphs are for the most part smooth, the sentence structures pleasingly varied. The direction of the B paper is typically much more concise and precise than that found in the C paper. Occasionally, it even shows distinctiveness—i.e., finesse and memorability. On the whole, then, a B paper makes the reading experience a pleasurable one, for it offers substantial information with few distractions.

C Paper It is generally competent—it meets the assignment, has few mechanical errors, and is reasonably well organized and developed. The actual information it delivers, however, seems thin and commonplace. One reason for that impression is that the ideas are typically cast in the form of vague generalities—generalities that prompt the confused reader to ask marginally: "In every case?" "Exactly how large?" "Why?" "But how many?" Stylistically, the C paper has other shortcomings as well: the opening paragraph does little to draw the reader in; the final paragraph offers only a perfunctory wrap-up; the transitions between the paragraphs are bumpy; the sentences, besides being a bit choppy, tend to follow a predictable (hence monotonous) subject-verb-object; and the diction is occasionally marred by unconscious repetitions, redundancy, and imprecision. The C paper, then, while it gets the job done, lacks both imagination and intellectual rigor, and hence does not invite a rereading.

D Paper: Its treatment and development of the subject are as yet only rudimentary. While organization is present, it is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are frequently awkward, ambiguous, and marred by serious mechanical errors. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty, if nonexistent. The whole piece, in fact, often gives the impression of having been conceived and written in haste.

E Paper: Its treatment of the subject is superficial; its theme lacks discernible organization; its prose is garbled or stylistically primitive. Mechanical errors are frequent. In short, the ideas, organization, and style fall far below what is acceptable in college writing.