

## English 2700: Creative Writing Fall 2013

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Office Hours: MWF 8-10AM and by appointment at other times

### Catalog Description

EN 2700 - Creative Writing / Credits: 3 / Offered: Fall and Spring.

Students study and practice introductory-level craft and technique associated with the major genres of imaginative writing: poetry and prose fiction. Other genres, such as nonfiction prose and drama, may also be covered. Students read in the genres and practice various specific elements of writerly craft through drafting, revision, reflection, and discussion. Falls and Springs. Prerequisite(s): EN 1200 (may be concurrent).

### Further Description & Philosophy

In this course, you will write. You will write and write and write. You will write fiction, a little bit of drama, and poetry. Maybe even some nonfiction. You will write author's notes. You will write in class and you will write at home. You will revise. You will share your works in progress with others. You will offer and receive feedback on works in progress. You will also read and respond to what you have read. You will talk and listen and think critically about what you are reading and writing and saying.

Many of the writing exercises we do will not necessarily restrict themselves to one genre. For instance, if our in-class poetry writing exercise is focusing on making concrete images to convey abstractions, you may find that such work would really help a piece of fiction or nonfiction you started earlier in the semester. I encourage you to follow these impulses, and to cross genre lines as needed.

However, for your final portfolio, you will include examples of prose and poetry and drama. You may, of course, have a preferred genre, which you would discuss in your introduction, but it should represent your work in all three genres. During this semester, you will gain/create:

- new ideas about why to write imaginatively, what to write about, and how to write
- an understanding of the distinct characteristics of drama, fiction, and poetry
- an appreciation for the blurring and distinction between and among these genres
- an understanding of, and some practice in, specific craft elements of these genres
- the ability to read critically the work of others and to write about that work
- the understanding that a writer must read extensively
- the ability to write critically and self-reflexively about your own writing
- the habit of making writing about writing a part of your process
- the ability to constructively and thoughtfully critique the writing of others
- approximately 20 polished pages of revised work you feel proud of

In this class, unlike some others you may have taken or be taking, class participation isn't just requested -- it's required. Our class *will not succeed* without your active, courageous, good-natured participation in the collective and individual processes of creative writing. You need to take on some of the responsibility for the success of this course for yourself and your peers -- not all of it, just your share. Here are some ways to make that happen:

- Work on being as creative as you can -- this means being open to all kinds of possibilities, trying new things, stretching your imagination to meet writing challenges, and not giving up prematurely!
- Complete all work on time and according to assignment guidelines. If you have to bend the guidelines, have a really good reason and discuss it in your author's notes ("It was too hard" or "I was not inspired" are *not* good reasons.) No recycling old work because you're too chicken to try something new. Complete all in-class writings -- don't give up on them or just go for the minimum.
- Be ready to share your work with others. Participate generously in peer response as author and critic -- give useful feedback and ask for useful feedback. This is key to taking yourselves and one another seriously as writers.
- Read assigned texts thoroughly and completely; bring them to class when required. No whining about having to read closely and intelligently -- writers read. Period. You don't have to "like" everything you read -- but you DO have to be ready to learn from everything you read.
- Writing is revision. No whining or pig-headed resistance to revision. If you don't take revision seriously, you're not a serious writer. If you only want praise, only show your work to your mom.

The reward for your hard work in this class, for your good effort, for your active participation (not passive desk-warming), will be an emerging sense of possibility for yourself as a young writer. Those who pitch in will leave with a feeling of having been fully immersed in an experience of writing, revision, reading and conversation -- a solid foundation from which to further explore (in classes and/or outside of classes) the art and craft of creative writing in different genres. You'll feel smart, capable, and ready to take on all kinds of creative writing challenges.

## Different Kinds of Writing

***\*You are responsible for saving all drafts, copies of drafts, commentary, freewrites, et cetera, until the course is over.***

**Freewriting:** Occasionally we will spend 5-10 minutes "freewriting" together, in class. In the same way that musicians practice scales, or marathon runners run daily to stay in shape, writers must also stay in shape by writing. This is one method to keep your mind flexible and to push yourself creatively. For some people, freewriting in class is difficult -- it feels like too much pressure, and most beginning writers aren't used to writing on command. That's normal. Just do it anyway. It's five minutes of your life -- you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. You will never be *required* to share freewrites. Sometimes, volunteers may share some or all of what they have written.

**"Try This":** Burroway's book has all kinds of fun exercises under the heading, "Try This." Each week, we'll probably do at least one together in class; many of your homework assignments, especially during the first part of the semester, will stem from the "Try This" exercises.

**Drafts:** As we move into the second half of the semester, we'll be focusing on producing and revising work in three genres. You will hand in one essay draft, four poem drafts, two microfiction drafts, and one or two drafts of a fictional short story.

**Final Portfolio:** Near the end of the term, you will look back over the many pages of work you've produced during the semester and select approximately twenty pages to further revise, polish, and hand in to represent your progress as a writer of prose and poetry. Accompanying the polished pages will be the earliest rough drafts which you received feedback on (remember when I said to save everything?), and an author's introduction of at least four typed pages, discussing your work as a writer, reader, and responder during this semester. Brand new work may not be included in the portfolio. More specifics for this assignment are forthcoming.

## Course Requirements & Policies

**Required Text:** Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2011)  
*This document*  
*Other handouts, TBD*

If the bookstore is out of the text you are looking for, *speak to the staff immediately* about ordering a copy. Bring texts to class on the day readings are due. Having and using texts accounts for part of your class participation grade. A copy of our textbook is on reserve (1 hour limit) in Lamson Library, should you need it.

**Attendance:** Come on time. Bring all the stuff you're supposed to bring. Stay the whole time. (Take care of personal needs before/after class.) Don't sleep. Don't leave during class unless you're having a health emergency. You can expect all of this from me, and I expect it from you. Beyond three absences you may use for whatever reason, all absences must be adequately documented according to the PSU attendance policy in order to be excused. If you miss class, you are responsible for staying up-to-date on class work missed. Just because you miss a class doesn't mean you can't hand in work that's due that day -- you can e-mail it to me. Similarly, if you miss a class, you are still responsible for keeping up with the reading and whatever assignments are due on the syllabus. More than three unexcused absences may adversely affect your grade. If you are chronically ill over many weeks, it may be to your advantage (scholastically and physiologically) to withdraw from the course. In all cases, *early and frequent communication with me regarding attendance/absence can only help*. Chronic lateness to class will adversely affect your overall class participation grade. For more information/context, you can check out the PSU attendance policy here:

<https://www.plymouth.edu/undergraduate/files/2010/11/Class-Attendance-Policy.pdf>

**Weather:** If you aren't sure whether or not class will be held because of inclement weather, please call the PSU Storm Line (535-3535) first to see whether the college has taken any action to that end. For further clarity, you may call Mary Petz, English Department administrative assistant (535-2746). I will make every effort to e-mail and/or post any delay or cancellation on Moodle as well. I rarely cancel classes.

**Class Participation:** Because this is a small class, and because so much of the learning in this class will take place as a part of talking and writing together, your attentive and generous participation is crucial. This includes preparedness for class, completing all writing assignments, all assigned readings and all reading responses in a timely manner, remembering to write author's notes, bringing texts to class, making good use of conferences, listening as well as talking, having the correct number of copies ready for workshops, and participating thoughtfully and with a good attitude in large and small group conversations. You should always be fully prepared for class discussion of any texts we are reading; if you have read attentively, the open-note quizzes (which count towards your class participation grade) won't be a problem for you.

**Technology, Part 1:** You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the technology involved in drafting, saving, transmitting, and printing your work for this course. Ask for help/tutorials if you need them. You are responsible for making contingency plans regarding possible technical snafus – do your work early, keep multiple backups of files, keep an eye on your print quota, contact ITS

when you experience a problem, maintain your email account, etc. ***Technological failure is rarely an acceptable excuse for late or missing work***

**Technology, Part 2:** Disable/silence/stash all electronic devices (cell phones, iPods, etc.) before class commences. Suppress all urges you might have to fondle, flip open and closed, check, or in any way handle these devices during class. If you can't sit still and focus for 50 minutes without playing with your phone, consider seeking psychological help. ***Compulsive and distracting electronic device related behavior will negatively impact your class participation grade. And it will drive me insane.***

**Moodle:** This document, along with most assignment sheets, useful links, and other resources will be accessible to you via Moodle. Please make sure you know how to log onto our class site and let ITS know if you are experiencing any technical difficulties.

**Submitting Writing:** All writing assignments, be they "Try This" exercises, discussion questions, drafts, author's notes, etc., must be submitted electronically to me before the beginning of class on the day they are due. You can do this by attaching a Word document or PDF document to an e-mail and sending it to me at [eahl@plymouth.edu](mailto:eahl@plymouth.edu).

When you save these documents on your M Drive (the best place to save them!), you can help keep yourself organized (and help me rifle through lots of electronic texts) by titling your documents in descriptive and identifying ways. For instance:

AhlTryThis3.5.doc

AhlDuckStory.doc

AhlFirstEssay.doc

Note that I use my last name as the first part of each name – please do the same!

Double-space prose; single-space and left-justify poetry. Single-space scripts/monologues according to the instructions in our textbook. Standard one-inch margins.

Some days, I will ask you to print out and bring to class one or more copies of the writing due that day – this is in addition to submitting it electronically. If you like, you may certainly print on recycled paper (using the blank side of already-used paper), and it's even okay if that paper is colored.

Once we make it past the first 6 chapters of the text and move into specific genres, all writing should be accompanied by an author's note (see sample posted on Moodle) discussing your piece. Failure to hand in thorough author's notes when requested will have a detrimental effect on your homework grade.

Work submitted late will not receive credit, though it may, at my discretion, receive feedback. If the work is late due to an excused absence, it must be submitted *immediately* upon your return. Given the fact that work is submitted electronically, getting work in on time shouldn't be a problem.

**Conferences:** I encourage you to meet with me outside of class during the semester. I really enjoy talking with students one-on-one about their writing and reading; past students have found that conferences really enhance their overall class experience. You may also want to share your work

with a tutor at the PSU Writing Center -- they're VERY helpful and friendly, and they like working with creative writers.

**E-mail:** PSU email is a helpful way for us to communicate, and there may be occasion for me to make an announcement of some kind (a change in the syllabus, for instance) over e-mail. Read your email. This course will also have a small Moodle element: a copy of this document and other materials will be available online.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism, or the presenting of someone else's words or ideas as your own, is grounds for failure of an assignment. In compliance with the PSU Academic Integrity Policy (see catalog for details), I will forward any suspected case of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty to the English Department. If you are found guilty of a violation of academic integrity, you may fail the assignment and/or the course; on a repeat offense, you may be expelled from the University. You can read the full PSU Academic Integrity Policy here:

<https://www.plymouth.edu/undergraduate/files/2010/11/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

**Students with Disabilities:** Plymouth State University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you should immediately contact the PASS Office in Lamson Library (535-2270) to determine whether you are eligible for such accommodations. Academic accommodations will only be considered for students who have registered with the PASS Office. If you have a Letter of Accommodation for this course from the PASS Office, please provide the instructor with that information privately so that you and the instructor can review those accommodations.

<b>Final Grade (attendance factored in per policy above)</b>	<b>1000 points</b>
Final Portfolio of Revised and Polished Work	250 points (25%)
Final Course Narrative Describing Your Learning and Introducing Your Portfolio	100 points (10%)
Class Participation	250 points (25%)
Homework	250 points (25%)
Midterm Exam	100 points (10%)
Final Reading Participation	50 points (5%)

For further context/information about grades at PSU, please see the PSU Fair Grading Policy here: <https://www.plymouth.edu/undergraduate/files/2010/11/Fair-Grading-Policy.pdf>

## Course Outline

WEEK 1:

Introductions, introductory writing assignment, gaining familiarity with required technology

WEEK 2:

Chapter 2: Image

WEEK 3:

Chapter 3: Voice

WEEK 4:

Chapter 4: Character

WEEK 5:

Chapter 5: Setting

WEEK 6:

Chapter 6: Story

WEEK 7:

Chapter 6, continued; Midterm Exam on Image, Voice, Character, Setting and Story

WEEK 8:

Chapter 9: Fiction; Dialogue exercises

WEEK 9:

Dialogue exercises and in-class workshops of dialogue exercises

WEEK 10:

Chapter 10: Poetry; sestinas

WEEK 11:

Poetry, continued; Sestina workshop; Sound poems

WEEK 12:

Finish poetry; start Drama (Chapter 10)

WEEK 13:

Drama, continued

Thanksgiving Break

WEEK 14:

Drama, continued

Workshop of short plays

WEEK 15:

Workshop of short plays, continued

**FINAL EXAM PERIOD (for Fall 2013):**

10:10AM Class: Wednesday, December 18, 8-10:30AM

11:15-12:05 Class: Friday, December 20, 11-1:30

Final: Reading of a revised piece (or excerpt of a revised piece) to class & listening to others read  
Final Portfolios due on Final Exam Day