

ADVANCED FICTION (486 001)

Wednesday 5:30--8:00 Simpkins 308
Professor Erika Wurth (et-wurth@wiu.edu)

The texts for this course are: *On Writing Fiction* (David Jauss), *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America* (Kiese Laymon) and *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (David Foster Wallace).

This class will be run as a hybrid online/physical course.

My office is located in Simpkins 109 and my office hours are Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 online or in person. When we're holding physical class (day by day schedule below) I will be extending my physical office hours and will be available Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 and sometimes those same hours on Monday & Friday. Please feel free to come in (or email) with any questions or if you just want to chat – also try to reserve this time for any questions pertaining to your grade or questions specific to your particular projects. I'm also available via Skype or email me if you'd like to make a phone appointment, during the time when the course is online.

As this course is the most advanced that you can take in fiction workshop as an undergraduate, the primary focus is on your work. However, we will be reading material for advanced students, to ready you for the possibility of applying to an MFA. Additionally, it is required that you go to the Austin Case and Lola Case Writer-in-Residence readings and it is required that you submit your work to Elements for possible publication. In this class, it's important that our focus go towards language and form and the refining of your language and form so that you begin to evolve a unique voice. It's also important to start to really pay attention to the way in which the language of each piece effects the content of the piece, how the form and/or the way they deal with time, effect the content as well.

We will be reading one advanced (in terms of form) collection of short stories, and two very different collections of essays on writing. During the two week blocks we're having physical class, I'll have you read these, and we'll have a lengthy discussion on the texts. During the online portion of the course is when you'll be workshoping, via email.

Ask yourself, when we're looking at either the work of others in the class or of the selected writers, not only what do these stories mean but what are they doing & how are they doing it? What's appealing/not appealing & how are they achieving the effects that make them (hopefully) pleasurable to read? How do they sound? What is their form? What is the content & why?

Specifically, as to when we workshop remember, you want to be honest, but it's important that you're not a jerk. Be specific – when you make a comment, show

evidence for that comment in the text (don't use generalizations). It is important that we develop a community in this class that fosters the ability to be comfortable enough to risk with one another in our work and in our feedback. Keep in mind that feedback is not to be taken as a personal attack. It's to be taken as a way to improve your work. Think about what the story wants – rather than what you think it ought to be & aid in that vision. As to when your work is being workshopped, be open. Don't explain or apologize. Remember, you're the ultimate judge of your own work but you can't be your own audience so listen carefully to what others have to say.

Your stories must be 8-12 pages long and, as in your previous classes, you must pay attention to the basics of Plot, POV and Characterization. Your stories must be in Times New Roman, 12 font, and they should be double-spaced. They cannot be genre fiction (in other words, anything that fits easily into a genre – detective/mystery, romance, science-fiction – nor should you try to fit into what you think is overly LITERARY i.e. don't try to copy Hemmingway – just write about life – made up or real). Make sure that attention to the three basic elements of fiction are paid adequate attention: character, plot and voice/point of view in addition to language. Your work needs to be edited for basic grammar issues before you turn it in. When it is your turn to workshop, your stories need to be emailed to me by midnight the day it is due. Then, I will email it to the rest of the class by the next day, and I will expect everyone to email me and the person who is workshoping their story their feedback by the next class date. You must email AT LEAST a page of typed comments speaking to issues of plot, characterization, language, style and form, clearly demonstrating that you have read the entire story. I also want you to briefly discuss whether the story is more traditional or post-modern and why. During the two week blocks that we hold physical class, I will meet with everyone one on one, to discuss the work that you're going to do, or have done, and during the beginning of finals week, your final portfolio. Physical class dates will be reserved for the advanced reading material, and I will require you to bring in four questions for class discussion, based on the reading material. I will also quiz.

We will be discussing some of the history and biography behind the texts and we will also explore issues of gender, race and sexuality. If this is uncomfortable for you, you may consider taking the course at another time.

Your grades are mainly dependent upon your work but attendance (in terms of showing up to physical classes and turning things in on time online) quizzes and especially participation affect your grade. Participation is why we're here and it's what makes a class effective. I don't expect you to be Shakespeare, just occasionally speak in class, and email the required feedback in a timely manner.

Your final will be turning in a portfolio containing the original stories you workshopped in class (turn in the copies with my notes on them) and the revisions that you've gone through after that piece has been workshopped. Because grading a creative piece is a truly sticky process, your grade will depend heavily on how much time you've put into the work before and especially after it's been workshopped - I

want to see that you've processed your work & thought about it carefully rather than wrote something down haphazardly & changed two words after workshop. Your grade will also be heavily weighted by your quiz scores, attendance physically and online, and as I said in the last paragraph, especially, by participation.

As for plagiarism, don't do it. I can't emphasize this enough. It isn't worth it as I don't expect that your work will be in the Hemingway category – at least at this point. It is so easy to spot plagiarism and the consequences are dire. At the least I have to fail you and in the worst case scenario you can be expelled. You must do your own work. Any act of plagiarism will result in at least an F grade in this course. If you have any doubts about whether or not you are using your own or others' writing ethically and legally, ask me. Work cannot be handed in for credit that is or was written for another class either here or elsewhere, even if it is much revised (say, for example, ENG 285 or 386). Work you did in high school is best left there. The whole idea is to give you new occasions to write, for you to discover fresh ways to imaginatively deal with the world around you. Please submit work written only during the current term. Western Illinois University's official Academic Integrity Policy is found at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>. Please read it, in its entirety. If you're having a problem, please come and see me.

** If you have a learning difference that requires accommodation or if, for any reason, you feel you need extra help in learning the material or demonstrating that you understand the material, please contact me.*

- **Recommended books:** *The Midnight Disease, On Writing, Letters to a Young Poet, Writing Down the Bones, Bird by Bird and Creating Fiction and The Art of Writing; Notes on Craft for Young Writers*

Schedule:

*Wednesday August 24. I'm going to go over the syllabus and our schedule, and answer any questions you might have about the class. I'd also like to have a short discussion about what creative writing and English classes you've taken and who you like to read. I'm also going to hand out a sign up sheet for workshop. Then, I'm going to lecture about leading through characterization, briefly about the history of aesthetics in American literature and traditional literature vs experimental/post-modern.

*Wednesday, Aug 31st: HAVE READ ALL of Jauss' *On Writing Fiction*. First set of workshoppers, email me your story by Monday Sept 5th. Make one on one appt with me.

*(PHYSICAL CLASS). Wednesday, Sept 7th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Wed Sept 14th, email me your story.

*Wednesday Sept 14th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Sept 21st, send me your story.

*Wednesday, Sept 21st, all send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, physical class – be prepared to have read the first half of *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America* by Sept 28th.

*Wednesday, Sept 28th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have read the first half of Laymon's *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz.

*Wednesday, Oct 5th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Finish Laymon's *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Those who are workshopping Oct 12th, send your story by Oct 10th. Make one on one appt with me.

*Wednesday Oct 12th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 19th, send me your story.

*Wednesday, Oct 19th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 26th, send me your story.

*Wednesday, Oct 26th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Be prepared to have read the first half of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* by Nov 2nd.

*Wednesday, Nov 2nd, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have read half of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz.

*Wednesday, Nov 9th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have finished *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Those who are workshopping Nov 16th, send me your story by Nov 14th.

*Wednesday, Nov 16th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Those who are workshopping Nov 30th, send me your story.

*Wednesday, Nov 23rd – Thanksgiving.

*Wednesday, Nov 30th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Dec 7th, send me your story.

*Finals week: Monday, Dec 12th, send those who workshopped Dec 7th your feedback. Make one on one appt with me for either Monday Dec 12th or 13th. Submit final portfolio by Thursday, Dec 15th.