

## WRITING WORKSHOP: FICTION (386)

Writing Workshop: Fiction  
Tuesday, 5:30- 8:00, Simpkins 308  
Professor Erika Wurth ([et-wurth@wiu.edu](mailto:et-wurth@wiu.edu))  
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The texts required for this course are *Creating Fiction* which is available as a packet in the bookstore and *The Game We Play* by Susan Lanier.

My office is located in Simpkins 109 and my office hours are Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday, 12:00-2:00. 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.

For our first day, I'm going to go over the syllabus & answer any questions. After that, we'll read from *Creating Fiction* (the packet you bought in the bookstore) and *The Game We Play*. I will quiz on each of these.

Then, we'll workshop. Everyone will have a chance to workshop at least two stories. Basic Workshop format: The class date **before** your work is to be workshopped, please bring in enough copies for everyone. Read a small section of the story & then be silent while the class workshops the piece (& class, don't ask the writer any questions during this time). After the class has finished critiquing, the writer can then ask or be asked questions.

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 with each other in class, 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). 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. 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. Your feedback should address plot, P.O.V and characterization, and additionally any issues with language you see in the story. 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 in Times New Roman, 12 font, and they should be double-spaced. They should also be 6-10 pages long and cannot be genre fiction (in other words, anything that fits easily into a genre – detective/mystery, romance, sci-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 attention to language. Your work needs to be edited for basic grammar issues before you turn it in.

Please bring in at least half a page of typed comments, one copy for me, and the author for the author, clearly demonstrating that you have read the entire story for each author. If you don't, this will result in an F for the course.

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.

I do take attendance and after missing two classes your grade will lower with each subsequent absence. I do not need or want any doctor's notices, stories or excuses of any kind if you have not missed two classes (simply email me or talk to me if you need to get the missed assignment). And if you have missed more than three, I still don't want them because that is what they're there for. If you have a truly special problem and still want to attend, please talk to me and maybe there's something we could work out. As concerns tardiness, basically, if you're late so much that I begin to notice it, your grade will lower (I would say after three). Also, please do not ever get up and leave before I've dismissed class. I never keep people over the assigned time limit, so if you need to leave early, tell me before class begins. Please respect me and other members of the class. And don't talk continually to somebody else while I'm talking or while the class is having a discussion (if I have to tell you not to talk, this will effect your participation grade).

Your grades are mainly dependent upon your work but attendance, feedback 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 raise your hand and speak. Participation can change your grade and it's also a way to make up for missing over the allotted amount of classes or if you've messed up on a quiz. If your only goal in my class is to receive an "A" – you may want to drop. There are only 2 ways to earn an A in my class; the first is to do very well on quizzes and attendance & receive an A on your work, the second is to do well on quizzes and attendance & participate nearly EVERY DAY & more than once per class period. A grade of A is supposed to reflect excellence, therefore, I must reflect that in my grading policies. The great majority of my students receive a grade somewhere in neighborhood of a B & very few receive an A.

Your final will be turning in a portfolio containing the original stories you workshopped in class and the revision of those stories. 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 & 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). 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*

