

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 partially online, and partially physical. See day by day schedule below.

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 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/Facetime 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 suggested 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 workshopping, 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), though I will make exceptions on a case by case basis. 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 the week before it is to be workshopped. 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 workshopping their story their feedback by the next class date – the date you are technically workshopping. 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, at least twice, after you have workshopped your stories online, to discuss revision. 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 Jan 18th. Merrill Cole will come in ask you to check your email for the syllabus (it's also on Western Online). Please read it and email me with any questions you have about the class.

*Wednesday Jan 25th. PHYSICAL CLASS. Come in having read the first half of *On Writing Fiction*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. 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, Feb 1st. PHYSICAL CLASS. Come in having read the second half of Jauss' *On Writing Fiction*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. Folks who are workshopping Feb 8th, email me your story.

BEGIN FIRST SET OF ONLINE WORKSHOP

*Wednesday, Feb 8th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Feb 15th, email me your story.

*Wednesday Feb 15th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Feb 22nd, send me your story.

*Wednesday, Feb 22nd, 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 March 1st.

*Wednesday, March 1st, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have read the first half of Laymon's *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. If you've workshopped your story, make a one on one appointment with me.

*Wednesday, March 8th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Finish Laymon's *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. Those who are workshopping March 22nd, send me your stories.

BEGIN SECOND SET OF ONLINE WORKSHOP.

*Wednesday, March 15th, Spring Break.

*Wednesday March 22nd, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping March 29th, send me your story.

*Wednesday, March 29th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, physical class. Come having read the first half of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*.

*Wednesday April 5th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Come having read the first half of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. Make a one on one appointment with me if you have not met with me about a story you've workshopped.

*Wednesday, April 12th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Come having finished *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Come in with four questions for discussion – each from different chapters/essays, and be prepared to take a quiz. Folks who are workshopping April 19th, email me your stories.

BEGIN THIRD SET OF ONLINE WORKSHOP

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

*Wednesday, April 26th, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Those who are workshopping May 3rd, send me your story.

*Wednesday, May 3rd, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email.

* Wednesday, May 10th. Finals week: PHYSICAL CLASS. Come in at 5:30 and turn in final portfolio.

