

MORAVIAN COLLEGE
Syllabus, Spring 2014

English 311: Fiction Writing

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:10-2:20 p.m.
Memorial Hall 301

Dr. Javier Ávila

E-mail: javila@moravian.edu

Office: Zinzendorf Hall 104

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:40-1:10 p.m.
and by appointment

The Course: English 311 is an in-depth study of fiction and a writing workshop on the genre, specifically the short story. I expect you to have the discipline to produce thoughtful imaginative writing. You should be prepared to thoroughly critique your own writing as well as your peers' writing. You should also be able to nurture your talent, whether it is vast or limited, to become the best writer your skills and your perseverance allow you to become. While talent cannot be taught, if you are a serious student of literature and the writing craft, this course will give you an opportunity to learn many techniques that may indeed improve your writing. We will spend considerable class time analyzing your peers' creative work as well as your own. Therefore, you must come to class having completed all reading and writing assignments so that you can participate in class discussion fruitfully. When it is time for you to submit your work for discussion, make sure that you make copies of it for everyone in the class. I recommend that you retain all drafts of your writing. If you do your best, and with enough hard work, you may exceed your expectations and produce your best writing.

Learning Outcomes: Successful students in this course will be able to: 1) Produce writing that shows mastery of the basic elements of creative writing: clarity, tone, effect, economy, specificity, correctness, and figurative language; 2) Demonstrate an understanding of fiction, including its conventions and renowned practitioners; 3) Become efficient critical readers of the texts chosen for class discussion, as well as of their classmates' writing; 4) Provide useful and thorough criticism of their peers' work; 5) Be receptive and critical of the criticism provided by their peers so that they can incorporate any suggestions/changes into their work in an effort to make it their best possible writing.

Required Text: LaPlante, Alice. *The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing*. New York: Norton, 2007.

Course Requirements & Grading: You are expected to attend every class, show up on time, and contribute to the proceedings. Absences (excused or unexcused) will be noted and will negatively affect your final grade. For the reading assignments, you should make annotations and look up any unfamiliar words. Poor preparation and minimal participation will lower your final grade. Late work will not be accepted. Missed in-class writing exercises cannot be made-up unless you promptly provide me with a valid, documented reason (a medical or family emergency or a college-related commitment approved by prior arrangement). In case you do miss an in-class writing exercise and you do have a valid, documented reason, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate, catch up, and hand in the exercise on or before the next class. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for any reading and writing assignments.

Your final grade will be determined by the following components, each worth 25%:

1. Portfolio #1 (personification, character profile, description & story, first-person p.o.v. story, third-person p.o.v story, critique, and self-assessment)
2. Portfolio #2 (ugly noBe, checkbook register, description & story, dialogue, opening, critique, and self-assessment)
3. Portfolio #3 (final story, analysis of peer's story, course and self-assessments)
4. Classroom Performance (includes class participation, attendance, and leadership)

Academic Honesty: Obviously, none of your work should be plagiarized; doing so would be unethical and disrespectful to me and your peers, and absolutely embarrassing to you. I will not tolerate plagiarism. If you cheat, you fail. That's it. Please refer to the college's statement on academic honesty, available online at: www.moravian.edu/StudentLife/handbook/academic2.htm

A Note to Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability and believe you may need accommodations in this class, you should contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible so that any accommodations may be implemented without delay.

Weekly Schedule: Due to the organic nature of the course, the schedule is subject to change as necessary. I will provide you with instructions for each writing exercise and assignment.

Week One (Jan 14, 16): Introduction; Syllabus; Personification Exercise; Selzer, "The Knife" (533-541); Chapter One (23-39)

Week Two (Jan 21, 23): Chapter Two (57-68); Chapter Three (107-124); Character Description Exercise

Week Three (Jan 28, 30): Workshop on Character Description; Twenty Questions about Your Character; Second Version of Character Description; Chapter Four (152-167); Prose's "What Makes a Short Story?" (167-178)

Week Four (Feb 4, 6): Chapter Five (204-222); Chapter Six (258-282); P.O.V. Exercise

Week Five (Feb 11, 13): Chapter Seven (318-328); Workshop on First-Person and Third-Person P.O.V. Stories

Week Six (Feb 18, 20): Portfolio #1 due; Chekhov, "The Lady with the Little Dog" (284-298)

Week Seven (Feb 25, 27): Chapter Eight (341-356); Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (356-360); Dialogue Workshop

Week Eight (Mar 4, 6): Spring Recess

Week Nine (Mar 11, 13): Chapter Nine (375-390): "By the Time You Read This" Workshop

Week Ten (Mar 18, 20): Chapter Ten (418-440): Character Exercises and Workshop

Week Eleven (Mar 25, 27): Chapter Eleven (465-478); Opening Workshop

Week Twelve (Apr 1, 3): Short Story Workshop

Week Thirteen (Apr 8, 10): Short Story Workshop; Portfolio #2 due; Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (72-87)

Week Fourteen (Apr 15, 17): Carver, "A Small, Good Thing" (597-618): Last Story Workshop

Week Fifteen (Apr 22, 24): Last Story Workshop; Portfolio #3 due; Final Business