Advanced Creative Writing: Course Description.

It’s an advanced fiction workshop, so you should have taken intro and intermediate workshops to get here, and it’s an elective to boot; meaning should have some idea what you are getting into, and that, more importantly, you want to be here. Hooray! Welcome! In this class, we are going to devote ourselves to why and how fiction works. **We’ll build from the basics (because you can't break rules without knowing why you need to break them, and this requires knowing rules),** with an emphasis on craft, craft, craft, the technical matters that makes the art of fiction possible— how characters work, the way in which a story develops, uses of language, the ins and outs of story structure, symbolism, pacing, etc. Every class starts with a craft lecture, and includes a writing exercise related to the lecture. The second half of our class time is devoted to story workshops. Workshops are structured so every student will comment on a story, and participation is a big part of what we do. We care about improving stories and why they work and how they can be improved; we care about supporting our fellow students in their creative ventures and being daring and moving into uncharted narrative territories; however, please know, whether you like something matters to me not at all. In fact, during workshop, if someone says, "I liked..." the student (or teacher) will be responsible for bringing cupcakes to the next session (elements of a story either work or they don't work, we understand them or we don't, whereas all children blindly like a nice, sweet treat). If you don't care for this rule, or any of my other rules, I understand; there are other amazing teachers at NYU.

Of course, we'll have weekly reading assignments, particularly short stories, (mostly from contemporary authors). We'll have weekly one-page homework assignments based on part of the weekly lecture and/or short story. If I feel that students are not reading the homework assignments, I will quiz you and your grades will reflect the results. Also, students will be chained to one novel for the entirety of the term — each of you will write three essays on various aspects of your novel (for example, identifying and explaining how the beginning of the novel sets up the book and is directly connected to its end, for example). When you come out from the other side of this thrilling little amusement park ride, the matter inside your fused together skull is going to have a much better understanding of how fiction works. I hope you will be a better writer as well. Along the way we will have a lot of fun.

Schedule. (All assignments and readings are subject to change.)

**Week one:** introduction lecture, followed by class rules and a look over the syllabus. We determine workshop schedule. Hemingway’s *A Very Short Story* is diagrammed to give a basic overview of what a story does. This is followed by a lecture on Character. Homework: one page essay introducing me to a character you are going to write about this semester. Reading for next week: *Metamorphosis* (Kafka), How to Write Good (O’Donnell).
Week Two: plot lecture. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework essay: Using a short story you love, identify five important elements of a story, as listed from the lecture. Readings for next week: People Like That Are The Only People Here (Lorrie Moore), Incarnations of Burned Children (David Foster Wallace).

Week Three: Description lecture. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework: Describe a character in a sentence. Describe a street scene in a paragraph. Give me another paragraph putting that character in that paragraph. Try to make sure the character and the descriptions are at odds.) Reading for next week: Ysrael (Diaz), first half of Lyndon (DFW), A Primer… Heart Disease (Foer).

Week Four: Dialogue Lecture. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework essay on assigned novel #1: Why does your novel begin the way it does — how does this beginning impact, set up/influence the rest of the book? How is it directly connected to the end of the book?). Reading for next week: Symbols and Signs (Nabokov), PU-239 (Kalfus).

Week Five: Lecture on Theme, Symbols, and Motif. In class assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework: You are writing the climactic scene of an imaginary novel. Write a passage that uses three of the words from the list I give you. Your scene should illuminate or play out the theme of your imaginary novel. (Remember, the person reading this scene will have read along in your imaginary novel as well, so this passage and scene needs to be a climax, without already telling the reader what they, theoretically, have already read.) Reading for next week: The Grid (Moody), The Falls (Saunders).

Week Six (March 5/6) Lecture on Sentiment vs. Sentimentality. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework essay: Novel Assignment Two: How does your protagonist’s life complicate itself? Please explain the journey this character must undergo — both the physical journey and the psychological one. How are each portrayed? Write about at least two scenes that are important in complicating this journey. (Are you interested in the cause and effect escalation of drama? I hope so.) Reading for next week: Going to Meet the Man (Baldwin), Help Me Find my Spaceman Lover (Butler); Flaubert’s letters (excerpt).

Week Seven: (March 12/13): Lecture on POV. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework exercise: outline a short story you want to write: provide the following — grabber sentence; protagonist summary; inciting incident; symbol or imagery that might subtly illuminate yr theme; escalate drama; an important line of dialogue; act three/ conclusion of the piece (does it entwine with or use your symbol?). Reading for next week: The end of Firpo in the world (for voice); In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried (Hemgel).
Week Eight: Lecture on Voice. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework essay: Novel Assignment Three: Choose your favorite passage/paragraph of writing in your particular novel. Write an essay about this passage. If it is emotionally important to the novel this might be an explanation of how or why the emotion is delivered. If it’s a matter of language and rhythm, you can write about that. You can go sentence by sentence and explain how the passage has been constructed, why certain words are effective. I want you to be aware of how and why prose causes you to respond the way you do, what was the author’s intention for that passage in the larger picture of his book. Think about word choices, think about what the description does, what the segments of exposition do. I want good line readings. Readings for next week: The Prophet of Zongo Street (Ali), Emerald City (Egan).

Week Nine: Lecture on Setting. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Homework essay: Write about setting and its importance in the story you are working on, or are about to workshop, or outlined for me in a previous homework assignment. Defend your choices for your story. Included in your one page: —Why did you pick that specific city, town or locale? —If your conception of the story uses a generic unnamed place, how would this change if you did use a specific locale? Readings for next week: Opening chapter of The Hundred Brothers (Antrim), In the Fifties (Michaels), Old Boys Old Girls (Jones)

Week Ten: Lecture on Pacing. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. From this point on, no homework. All homework time should be spent reading, working on a workshop story, or revising your final manuscript. Readings for next week: The End of the Story (Barth), Because They Wanted to (Gaitskill), A Real Doll (Homes).

Week Eleven: Lecture: Experimental Fiction, the Intranets, and You. In-class writing assignment TBA. Workshops. Emergency Room (Johnson), The Christmas Miracle (Curtis).

Twelve: Where do I go from here? Grad School, Publishing, and The Writing Life. At the start of class you will turn in your final manuscripts. Student evaluations usually take place during class. In-class writing assignment TBA: Planning out your future. Statements of purpose for the next six months. Workshops. Pizza and refreshments usually on hand for final class.