I. Course Objectives
To complete ENG 131 successfully, students should be able to demonstrate that they can:

Fiction and/or Drama
1. Translate their experiences into narrative and/or drama in either traditional or experimental forms.
2. Develop skills in creating character: active/passive, flat/round character.
3. Establish point of view and the need to remain consistent in applying point of view, and vary point of view whenever the demands of the story call for such a technique.
4. Control the pace of narration, to both show and tell, to keep the story moving ahead to its resolution.
5. Create coherent and significant scenes, establishing some as focal points, others as sources of conflict.
6. Create effective dialogue, interior monologue, and stream of consciousness.
7. Fine-tune craft by studying models, both professional and student.
8. Give and take constructive criticism that encourages one to develop and grow as a writer.
9. Develop the skill of self-editing, the notion that the piece is born in the revision.

Poetry
1. Find appropriators for emotion, demonstrate that poetry is not raw emotion, but emotion compressed, held in form.
2. Write in both open and closed forms, free verse and traditional forms, such as the sonnet, that require adherence to meter and rhyme.
3. Develop skills in the understanding and writing of imagery.
4. Experiment with typographical arrangement, vary the position of the poem on the page.
5. Read closely both professional and student poems, culling from such readings just how a poem means.
6. Develop a critical sense by critiquing the poems of colleagues and responding to constructive criticism of one's own poems.

Course’s Approach to Writing
1. Everyone is a writer, whether or not he or she has realized it.
2. Everyone is an expert on his / her own experience, which is a richer mine of material for writing than we at first realize. For the writer to concentrate fully on writing, subject matter must be left open to the writer’s choice and experiment, eliminating the confusion of a writer wrestling with alien subject matter.
3. To be successful as creative writers, people must construct — put themselves into — what happens in them to trigger off writing. Active projection and internal rehearsal are very important in creative writing, and writing is a very active process. As we re-encounter events and people, we grow in imagination, empathy, and understanding.
Writing starts with looking at what's there in us — the "felt sense" that yet has no words, that mysterious underlying element which we can't yet put into words, like a "tip of the tongue" sense, something we might call "inner speech" or the wisdom that's stored in our bodies.
4. Creative writing is a learning process, a process of growth. We learn to mine the richness of reality by immersing ourselves into it and then purging that into writing that carries alive the impact of events, people, moments of recognition or understanding —
Creative writing is a form of serious thinking, digging out the fundamental meaning of people and events. Through creative writing, we become fuller, possibly even larger and more generous.

Because writers vary in temperament, past experience, and fertile creative areas, individuals must be free to pursue the subjects and genres of preference. However, learning what subjects and genres are most native to the individual may require some productive trial and error. In this way, the course hopes to promote creative personal discovery. Through practice, the writer also needs to identify fertile imaginative areas and to develop criteria for self-evaluation.

In subject or approach, this course does not aim to make any student any particular type of writer — for instance a sentimental romantic novelist, an orthodox realist, a cartoonist in prose, a surrealist, a caustic satirist, etc. Creative writing must be taught in a disciplined but open-ended way, must help the writer to be aware of the wide range of possibilities in writing, and must help the writer to struggle to become what he or she must be. Forcing the student to become a particular type of writer in attitude or subject matter is destructive teaching.

Successful writing comes through effort and applied common sense. For success, the writer does not need muted incantations, mystical vapors, and the full moon shining down through the garret window.

II. Methods

1. Presentations form a framework for approaching creative writing — introductory material on the nature of prose fiction and poetry, on the writing process (prewriting, writing, revision), on common errors of creative writers, on diverse options of style and technique in fiction and poetry, and on marketing. The course approaches creative writing by analyzing areas of artistic decision and possibility.

2. Class discussion centers on writing as a discovery process, on samples of writing as case studies of artists seeking a unity of effect and means, and on style and technique as they relate to purpose. There are specific classroom editorial exercises on samples of student fiction, drama, and poetry of varying quality.

To further skills in editing and revision, roundtable workshop and instructor commentary focus on evaluating strengths, weaknesses, and underdeveloped potential of student work.

3. Since the course assumes that writing leads not only to finished products but is also a learning process itself, there are exercises (e.g., on descriptive detail, plot design, character, points-of-view, dialogue writing, clear images, etc.) to help illuminate approaches to writing assignments.

4. Formal writing assignments and projects are assigned. These are subject to peer review before submission; individuals may present their projects to the class as well.

III. Student Requirements for Completing the Course

1. Regular submission of fiction, poetry, and/or drama. All drafts are examined via roundtable discussion before submission and are formally evaluated by the instructor after submission.

2. Satisfactory completion of at least four formal writing assignments involving prose fiction and poems and/or drama. There are three minor writing assignments and one major one.

3. Satisfactory participation in workshop, class discussion, and in-class editing and writing exercises. Workshop discussion combines intelligent praise, gentle criticism, and honest personal reaction to heighten the positive potential of revision.

Class discussion cumulatively leads to more effective self-evaluation of work in progress and an enlarged sense of artistic possibility. Classroom editorial exercises give students a sense of the range and variety of student writing and case studies of both excellent and flawed writing capable of significant improvement.

IV. Grading Practices

The final grade is determined through the instructor’s evaluation of:

1. Quality of completed writing assignments (the quality of work, variety of approaches, point-
of-view, and other artistic elements; one major assignment = two minor ones) — 80%

2. Quality of participation in classroom discussion on required readings and workshop exchange — 20%

Lateness Policy. Projects are expected on time. During the semester, the student may have one original draft up to one week late without penalty. No first drafts more than one week late will be accepted, which means that the student then cannot successfully finish the course. For paper due dates, absence does not excuse failure to deliver a paper on time.

Also, there is no option of being late on the final project.

Beyond one project late by one week, any further lateness on another project diminishes by one grade level the final grade that the project may get.

What If...

... you are absent on the due date but want to get the paper in on time? Submit the paper early. Or if you know you will be absent on that date, tell your instructor in advance and, before the due date, make approved arrangements for delivery. Otherwise, your late paper is — late.

... your computer has problems? Use another computer, either a free-access computer at the college or at a public library. Keep backups on disk of all your work.

... your printer doesn’t work? Bring in your paper on disk and print it at the college on the due date.

... you want to e-mail submissions? This can be done only in extraordinary circumstances and with prior permission, since providing printed copy is the student’s responsibility.

Rewrite Policy. This applies only to projects submitted on-time. Within two weeks of receiving the graded project, the student may rewrite and resubmit any two of the three minor writing assignments in the course. The resulting grade is based on the rewritten version.

√ The student must complete all written assignments to receive a passing grade in the course.

√ Any instance of plagiarism results in a failing grade in the course. See Section IX.

V. Student Absence, Lateness, General Behavior

1. Attendance is mandatory. If a student finds it absolutely necessary to be absent, he/she has a maximum of four absences. Absences are for emergencies. After four absences, the student is removed from the class roster with a final grade of W or F.

2. Students must commit themselves to be in class on time. Late students must assume personal responsibility to see that the record is altered at the end of the class. Two latenesses, or two early departures, may count as one full absence.

3. Students are responsible for all work missed and for all assignments given. A student returning after absence should be prepared with the assignment due on the date of return. For paper due dates, absence does not excuse failure to deliver a paper on time.


I expect you to:

Attend every class, to arrive at class on time, and to work until the class period has ended.

Bring in, and have with you, all needed in-class items — e.g., books, paper, pens.

Turn off all cell phones or messaging devices, etc. People playing with personal electronic devices during class will be dismissed from that class.

In class, refrain from wearing headphones. Students who wear headphones in class are considered absent.

Prepare reading and writing assignments on time.

Complete all the daily assignments and be prepared to respond in class.

Follow assignments in terms of content and format.

Help your classmates learn by your responses to their writing and to writing samples that we examine as a class.

Spend about six hours a week out of class for writing and class preparation.
Be competent in basic matters of proper English sentence structure and usage. Deficiency in these skills will bring devastating results in a college writing course such as this one.

Out of respect for your classmates, your instructor, and the educational process, behave in class as a mature and responsible student. Behavior detrimental to education can result in expulsion from the class session; in repeated cases, it can result in expulsion from the course itself.

You may expect me to:

Be in class every day (or provide qualified substitute and assignment in case of emergency).

Expel disruptive students.

Have no headphones or cellphones.

Prepare each topic thoroughly.

Help you set writing goals by analyzing your strengths and needs.

Keep established office hours.

Read your written work promptly, thoughtfully, and objectively.

Be courteous and considerate.

VI. Texts


Supplementary Pamphlets

Hawkins, Jon. Approaches to Literature for Creative Writers, 2003. A general background for a critical approach to fiction, poetry, and drama, with comments on writing within each genre.


Photocopies of illustrative writings from both professionals and students.

Also useful and helpful are a solid dictionary (150,000 words or more), a thesaurus, and a spelling lookup. In part, word-processing software may provide some of these. No advance has been more helpful for making revision faster and easier. But word processing is only a help; the essential ingredient is the writer.

VII. Manuscript Format For Submissions

All submitted papers are typed or printed via computer (with an appropriately dark ribbon or adequate ink or laser cartridge). Use double space or space-and-a-half spacing. In all cases, write only on one side of the paper. Single-spaced submissions will not be accepted. Proofread and make manual corrections if necessary. All submitted papers are assumed to be proofread and correct according to the student’s judgment.

VIII. Weekly Outline of Topics:


September 6, 8: Sept. 6: No class — Labor Day. Student Writing Samples. Character and Plot or Pattern. Preliminary Writing Assignment Given.

13, 15: Character and Plot or Pattern. Student Writing Samples. First Graded Writing Assignment Given. Preliminary Writing Assignment Due (9/15).


October 4, 6: Discussion of Readings.


8, 10: Continuation of Poetry. Writing Drama.
22, 24: Third Assignment Due — Poetry or Drama (11/22). No class — 11/24 (Thanksgiving Recess).
December 6, 8: Released Time — Final Project.
13, 15: Roundtable Discussion: Work In Progress (12/13). Final Writing Assignment Due: Major Project (Genre of Choice — due 12/15).
20: No class: Friday classes meet. Final outcomes available in Orient-123.

IX. Plagiarism
SCCC catalog: “Students should realize that presenting the words and ideas of others as their own is dishonest. In writing, students must fully acknowledge the source of any paraphrased passages and any ideas which they have borrowed. Failure to conform to these academic standards is plagiarism and may result in a failing grade and/or serious disciplinary sanctions as outlined in the Code of Conduct...."
Any instance of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.

Grade Levels / Symptoms
The Threshold Principle: All completed assignments are graded on a composite of organization, development, and expression, as they fulfill the purpose of a specific work. In successfully carrying out any purpose, a competent work needs a basic threshold strength, a critical mass of strength in all three areas. Likewise, serious deficiency in any area can make a work significantly weak, like a hole in the hull of a large ship.

For this reason, a whole assignment is not graded simply as an average of three grades, one for organization, one for development, and one for expression. It is a grade for the work as it really is — an organic whole.

The following descriptions are based on English Department standards

A Paper: The subject and its treatment are fresh, imaginative, precise, and economical. There is no fat; everything in the work is directly related to fulfilling its artistic aim. The work is so clear, imaginatively realized, and precisely worded that it is understood fully on a first reading. In organization, development, and expression, it gets directly to the heart of its subject with crisp, precise control. In expression, there are very few mechanical problems.

B Paper: This is like the A version, but it is not quite so crisp, fresh, imaginative, economical, evenly or well-developed. A very clear main purpose shapes the assignment’s organization, development, and all details. There might be more mechanical defects than in the A version, or perhaps lack of full and even development. This is still a strong effort.

C Paper: This is less competent and sparkling than the items above, not so fully fresh or new, not so completely developed or controlled. The main idea might even be a cliché or near cliché, a commonplace idea only adequately developed. It is competent but not sparkling. Development is adequate, though perhaps not even throughout. There can be some mechanical trouble, but not really frequent and basic stuff (their / there, frequent run-ons, awkward sentence structure consistently, a surplus of sentence fragments, etc.). The reader is not decidedly put off by the work.

D Paper: Something clearly puts off the competent reader — terrible writing mechanics, inadequate development of subject, confused purpose, failure to meet the assignment’s requirements, etc. Since a creative writer must be mechanically competent too, the writer who commits frequent and basic mechanical errors without a supporting artistic purpose should not expect grades above this level. Naturally, the severity of these defects determines whether such a work gets this grade or the one below.

F Paper: Like the D version, only worse.

Note on Grammar, Writing Mechanics, Etc.
Unless there is some compelling artistic purpose, good grammar and proper writing mechanics are simply basic tools of the trade.
While some think that not following standard practices is a significant expression of freedom, this is usually a self-flattering delusion. Artistic freedom is for elevating general human awareness — for seeing sharply and freshly in a new light. Use that freedom purposefully and with the proper respect.

4 Relevance. In a narrative or drama, are there extraneous characters, actions, or unnecessarily repeated detail? Is there pointless rambling or wandering? A work should move toward its purpose clearly and straightforwardly along the curve of rising intensity, crisply enough to be understood readily as it moves.

4 Beginning, Ending. Does your beginning draw in the reader, arouse curiosity, act as an effective “hook”? Does the ending effectively draw your work to a close?

Development:

4 Restriction, Genre. Is the artistic purpose restricted enough to be well-developed within the length of the work? Is it appropriate for the genre (e.g., long probings of a person’s inner being work very clumsily in drama — via long soliloquies or asides — while only the external, objective point-of-view is possible).

4 Completeness of Supporting Detail. Is there enough supporting specific detail — characters, incidents, descriptions, images, dialogue, etc. — to carry out your overall purpose? Also, is there too much material, too much description, action, etc., which overburdens the progress of the work?

4 Dialogue. In a narrative, is dialogue used where needed? Is it clear to the reader who is saying what? Does the dialogue lead you purposefully to where you are trying to go?

4 Carrying It Alive. Does the work steadily carry your subject alive to your audience? Are characters developed enough to seem real? Remember that you may need some characters who are flat or static as well as some who are developing or changing. Your main purpose should help you decide what you need.

Expression:

4 Harmony of Expression and Purpose. The ideal in any work is a harmony of artistic expression and overall purpose. Naturally, there are many routes to this ideal. At the very least, avoid any conflict between what you express and how you express that.

4 Dialogue. Does your dialogue sound realistic, convincing, with an authentic tone and
rhythm for the characters speaking and for what you are trying to do?

4 **Sentences.** Are narrative or descriptive sentences choppy or clogged with too much material? Are they awkwardly strung together? Do they distribute the right amount of overall emphasis? Is there sentence variety, an effective overall rhythm extending through sentences and paragraphs, or are sentences strung out at length in the same monotonous form?

4 **Diction, Wordiness.** Is the line-by-line writing burdened by wordiness, clichés, or excessive passive voice? Is selection of diction appropriate, purposeful, and effective?

+ Many routinely lose one or two grade levels by not working on these last two —

4 **Editing.** Have you checked the following thoroughly: *usage, grammar, sentence structure, spelling?* Unintended poor writing mechanics can devastate an otherwise good work and, unfortunately, probably the writer as well. *Spare yourself from this!*

4 **Proofreading.** Has the work been proofread — and not with the bleary eyes after a long writing session? *And proofread again?*