ADVANCED FICTION WORKSHOP
SYLLABUS

If you are writing without zest, without gusto, without love, without fun, you are only half a writer. This first thing a writer should be is—excited. Don’t use anything as an excuse.

Ray Bradbury, Zen in the Art of Writing

Get excited! This class is a celebration of the written word and an affirmation of the craft of writing. The class is a journey, a quest for the heart of what you see in the world and inside yourself. The class is demanding, requiring that you imagine, envision, take risks, write from the gut, expose yourself and have fun. As an advanced fiction course, it assumes that you love to write and have spent time dedicating yourself to that task. You have experimented with the fundamentals and are willing to learn more. The class is based on the premise that while writing is a solitary act, coming together with other writers can create sparks. Together we will build a writing community where everyone’s vision is taken seriously and supported. What you create, make into flesh and bone through words, will be the root and breath of our class.
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES/COURSE GOALS

Here’s what you should be able to do by the end of this course:

- Write short stories and other fictional prose demonstrating consistent control over the use of description, characterization, dialogue, plotting, point of view, voice, tone, and other fiction elements and stylistic techniques.
- Critically assess one’s own work and the work of others.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

- Have fun.
- Never apologize for your own writing, by word, look or deed.
- Feel free to change or alter any assignment I give you to suit your writing needs. You are in charge of getting what you need from the class.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

You will need the following:

- Something to write on in class each week (notebook, lap top etc)
- Access to the internet to look at things posted on Marcy’s web site
- Plenty of patience with yourself and your writing.
- Enthusiasm for the writing of your classmates.
- A willingness to read your work aloud to the class.
- The discipline and commitment to write for at least 6 hours per week and produce one piece of prose to share each week. This can be a scene, a chapter from a novel you are writing or a short story. The point is to write each and every week. Except for a list of assignment suggestions at the end of this syllabus, I will give no specific homework writing assignments. If you can’t think of something to write, ask your instructor for more ideas. My fertile mind can always come up with something.
CLASS STRUCTURE
There are five main activities in this course:

**Read-Arounds:** We’ll sometimes begin each class with a short read around that will provide everyone with an opportunity to read work aloud. This is not a time to offer each other feedback. We’re simply listening, creating a bowl to hold each other’s words.

**Craft-Focused In-class Writing Exercises:** These in-class writing exercises will focus on the craft of writing. During the first class, you’ll fill out a questionnaire about which specific issues you’d like to work on this semester. I’ll design the craft sessions based on the results. Sometimes, you’ll be asked to bring a piece-in-progress to work on. Other times, the exercises may involve group or paired activities.

**In-class Feedback Sessions:** We will often end class with sharing your homework writings in small groups, getting feedback on a specific craft issue that we’ve worked on during class. You’ll be asked to bring 2 copies of your homework writing to class on those days. You can also use that time to get feedback on something you’ve just written in class.

**Small Group Workshops:** During these three sessions during the semester, you’ll work in groups of four to provide detailed feedback on each other’s fiction. See the Guide to Workshops in this syllabus which explains these workshops in detail.

**Homework Writings:** In order to keep folks disciplined and working, I ask that you please turn in a piece of work to me each week. I will not give you detailed feedback, but will instead make a few pithy comments. If the class size is huge, I reserve the right to only comments on half the pieces turned in each week, but will give you credit for your work, even if I don’t get to read it. If turning in a piece of work each week won’t work for you, please negotiate a difference structure on your grade contract. I’ve made a few suggestions for exercises, if you’re not sure what to write, but remember to ignore them if they don’t ring your bells. If you want other suggestions, take a look at the list on my website and/or don’t hesitate to ask me. My creative brain can always think of something!
GRADING REQUIREMENTS

I highly recommend that you take this class for credit/no credit! I hate grading creative writing and feel that the creative process should be free of the pressure of grades. Since I am required to give you grades, here is my compromise with the system:

1. No one’s work will be compared to others as the basis for a grade.
2. The production of writing will determine your grade.

I know that you may taking this class for a variety of reasons. Below you will find a list of requirements, which everyone must fulfill, and then a list of optional ones that you may choose from. See the Description of Assignments page in this syllabus for more details. By the second class, I’ll ask you to complete a contract which will tell me what work you’ve chosen to have count as part of your grade.

Minimum Requirements (for a C or Credit):
- One piece of writing for each of the three small group workshops.
- 75% of the homework writing assignments turned in to me for feedback.
- A Writing Portfolio.
- Completion of Take-Home Final.

Optional Requirements for an A or B
- All homework assignments except one (for an A) or two (for a B) AND (choose one)
- A story or book critique, or a paper on a writer you admire, or an interview with local writer AND a ten-minute presentation to the entire class about what you’ve learned.
- Any of the written material for option #2 AND attendance at two local poetry or prose readings that you will describe in writing. Note that this option does not involve any public presentations to the entire class.

For the sanity of your classmates and your teacher, I ask that you not turn in anything longer than 10 pages double spaced!!
FULL-DISCLOSURE: THINGS THAT MAKE MARCY GROWL

I believe that it is only fair to warn you about my quirks. I’m usually a very kind and happy person, but I can get grumpy about:

• No Visitors during my Office Hours. This is a time when we can talk about anything. Come see me! I get lonely up there in my little room.

• Not Completing the Work. I snarl if I feel that you aren’t trying or that you’re slacking on writing time per week—but what do I know? Please come see me if your life goes wacko and you’re not able to do the work for the class.

• Being Tardy! We have so much to do in here and there’s never enough time. But I know that some of you just can’t help being late. Anyone arriving ten minutes late will be asked to bring food for everyone the next class. This is known as a “Tardy Party.” Yummy!

• Okay, here’s a true confession. I have been teaching writing for going on 30 years now, so I suffer from “English Teachers Disease.” That means that I get grumpy about bad grammar. I hate reading wonderful stories in which there are terrible errors. It’s like listening to a CD with scratches in it. I’m not talking about when you deliberately choose to create a character who speaks without correct grammar. I mean the kinds of errors you make when you forget how to use commas or periods or the spell check. Please proof-read and correct your errors before you turn in a piece.

• Flaking on your Small Group Workshop preparation. I get really steamed if you “forget” to read and comment on the work assigned to you as part of the workshops. Writers in the class are counting on you to feedback their work. Please treat their work seriously and courteously. When you flake on me, it’s only between the two of us. When you flake on everyone else, you’re letting down the entire class. Please, don’t.

• Not attending the final. This year, it will be **Tuesday, June 1**. Please make your vacation plans beginning the next day!
Consider this a preview of coming attractions. On the second night of class, you will receive a more detailed schedule with the craft topics that the class has selected to explore. For now, here’s the program.

The work listed below each date is due by that class.

Feb 16  Focus on Craft Issues
Begin your writing practice of writing at least 6 hours a week. If you are not sure what to write this first week, try this: Create a character who is facing an unwelcome choice. Show how the stress of this choice is present in the character’s body. Use the body to show the moment the character finally makes a decision and show us what it is. Remember that this is an optional assignment. If you don’t like it, do something else. If you’re stuck, look at the list of possible assignments on Marcy’s website. Bring newly generated writing that you are willing to share to class.

Feb 23  Story #1 due
Focus on Craft Issues
Prepare a piece of writing that you would like feedbacked for our first Small Group Workshop. This can be a complete story, part of one or a part of a novel. Prepare a list of three questions for your readers, focusing on whatever you need for this stage of the story’s development. Be sure to let your readers know if this is a rough, second draft or polished draft. Read Marcy’s discussion of the qualities of different drafts and the types of feedback that can most help on her website. Make four copies of this piece, three for the members of your feedback group and one for Marcy.

Mar 2  Small Group Workshop
Read and comment on the three stories for the small group workshop. Write detailed comments in the margins, plus a lengthy end comment that answers each writer’s questions. Be sure to sign
your copy and be ready to share your opinions about each piece to
the group. Remember; your job is to help the writer keep going
with this piece. Be a mirror, not a judge.

Mar 9  Revision Workshop
Focus on Craft Issues
Revise the piece you presented in the small group workshop,
utilizing the useful feedback you received and disregarding the
rest. Bring three copies of the revision to class and be prepared to
show it to last week’s group.

Mar 16  Focus on Craft Issues
Continue writing for 6 hours per week. If you’re not sure what to
write about, consider extending one of your in-class writing
exercises or try writing a piece from the point of view of an
inanimate object that is the only witness to something important.
Bring two copies of whatever you will be handing in to Marcy as
homework to share in a small group at the end of class.

Mar 23  Focus on Craft Issues
Story #2 due
Prepare another piece you would like feedbacked in the Small
Group workshops. Remember that this can be an excerpt from
something longer. Give your readers at least three questions to
consider about the piece. Be sure to also tell them whether this is a
rough, second or polished draft. Make the four usual copies.

Mar 30  Spring Break

Apr 6  Small Group Workshop
Read and comment on the three stories for the small group
workshop. Write detailed comments in the margins, plus a lengthy
end comment that answers each writer’s questions. Be sure to sign
your copy and be ready to share your opinions about each piece to
the group. Remember; your job is to help the writer keep going
with this piece. Be a mirror, not a judge.
Apr 13  Focus on Craft Issues  
Revision Workshop  
Revise the piece you presented in the small group workshop, utilizing the useful feedback you received. Bring three copies of the revision to class; be prepared to show it to last week’s group.

Apr 20  Focus on Craft Issues  
Write for the usual six hours per week. I’m assuming you can make up your own assignments by now. If not, take a look at the ones listed on my website or see me. Bring two copies of whatever you plan to turn in to Marcy for homework.

Apr 27  Story #3 Due  
Focus on Craft Issues  
Prepare the final piece you’d like feedbacked in the small group workshop. You know what to do by now. Make 4 copies.

May 4  Small Group Workshop  
Read and comment on the three stories for the small group workshop. Write detailed comments in the margins, plus a lengthy end comment that answers each writer’s questions. Be sure to sign your copy and be ready to share your opinions about each piece to the group. Remember; your job is to help the writer keep going with this piece. Be a mirror, not a judge.

May 11  Revision Workshop  
Focus on Craft Issues  
Revise the piece you presented in the small group workshop, utilizing the useful feedback you received. Bring three copies of the revision to class; be prepared to show it to last week’s group.

May 22  Focus on Craft Issues  
Portfolios due  
Prepare your portfolio according to the directions in your syllabus.

June 1  Final 6-9 PM – Public Reading  
Take Home Final due  
Complete your take-home Final, bring some food to share and prepare for our public reading.
Description of Assignments

Fiction Pieces
Anything goes here, as long as it’s no longer than 10 pages double spaced and is appropriate for a college class (no porn, please). If you are working on a long work such as a novel, present it in 10 page increments. Follow the “For the Writer” section on the Guide to Workshops sheet for directions for submissions to each of the workshops.

Paper on a Writer
Write a 4-6 page paper on a writer you adore and/or one you want to explore, including biographical information, information about their written work, and their writing process. Stress what you learned as a writer from reading their work. Include a bibliography.

Interview with a Local Writer
Focus on a local writer, including the information listed above but gathered from an interview. Write up your findings in a 4-6 page paper. If you have trouble connecting with a local writer, your instructor may be able to help you. However, she is not available as a subject for this assignment.

Book or Story Critique
Write a 3-4 page paper on a story or novel that has inspired and taught you something about writing. Include biographical information about the author and quotes from passages that taught you craft skills. Show why you are passionate about this particular work. What did it inspire in you? What techniques do you want to steal?

Local Reading Write-up
After attending two local poetry or prose readings around town (at local bookstores or the University etc.), describe them both in a 4 page paper. Compare the atmosphere, the audience, the readers, and the quality of writing that you found at each reading. Stress what the experiences taught you as a writer.

Portfolio
See detailed instructions in this syllabus.

Class Presentation
Share the information you have found on a writer or your short story or book critique with the class in a short ten-minute presentation. Stress what you learned as a writer. Engage us in a creative, innovative or stimulating way!
Preparing your Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, assemble a portfolio of written work. Include in it the following:

1) One long letter that analyzes the work included. See details on what to include in the letter below.

2) Two homework pieces that you like, but haven’t developed.

3) Three pieces that you worked on and liked, including at least one revision.

4) A query letter for a piece you intend to send out for publication.

The letter that begins the portfolio should:

- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each piece included, and ending with what you plan to do to take the piece to the next step.

- For each revised piece included, the letter should describe the original version, the feedback you received on it and then changes you made and why you chose to make them.

- Describe the process of writing the query letter and analyze the results.

- Describe your growth as a writer over the course of the semester. Where have you been stretched? What are the particular issues that came up for you as you worked? How did you deal with them?

- End with a discussion of where you want to go from here, describing your goals and the plan of action you’ve created to get you there.

Before you write the letter, read the Portfolio Letter Grading Rubric and take a look at the grading sheet to see what I’m looking for. Use the rubric as a check list for what you need to include. Before you turn in your portfolio, use the rubric to fill out the Portfolio Grading sheet. I’ll fill it out after you do and we’ll have a conversation about where we agree and disagree.
Wow! Bravo! Whoopee!

- Each of the pieces is analyzed thoroughly, with an articulate discussion of the writing’s strengths and weaknesses, including what you plan to do to take it to the next step.
- The analyses of the revised piece(s) includes a thorough discussion of the original version, a well-developed critical assessment of the feedback received and an articulate explanation of how the piece was changed and why.
- The process of writing the query letter is described in delicious detail and the results are elegantly analyzed to assess its conciseness, thoroughness and its ability to capture what’s unique in your voice.
- The analysis of your growth as a writer over the course of the semester thoroughly details the skills you began with and gracefully describes how and if those skills have developed or been strengthened.
- The analysis of your writing progress also insightfully articulates the issues and challenges that came up for you during the semester and critically assesses your success in problem-solving to overcome those stumbling blocks.
- The letter ends with a detailed and engaging discussion of where you hope to go next in your writing, eloquently describing your goals and the thorough plan of action you have created to help you achieve them.
- Throughout the letter, you demonstrate mastery of the grammar and usage conventions of Standard English.
- Your writing uses phrasing, tone, and expression that reflects a unique worldview and personal voice.

Good Job! Almost There!

- Most of the pieces are analyzed in some detail, with a somewhat thorough discussion of the writing’s strengths and weaknesses, including what you plan to do to take it to the next step.
- The analysis of the revised piece discusses the original version and includes a somewhat developed critical assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and an explanation of how you addressed them in the revision.
- The process of writing the query letter is fairly well described and the results are analyzed to assess the letter’s conciseness, thoroughness and its ability to capture what’s unique in your voice.
- The analysis of your growth as a writer over the course of the semester details the skills you began with and describes how and if those skills have developed or been strengthened.
- The analysis of your writing progress also discusses the issues and challenges that came up for you during the semester and assesses your success in problem-solving to overcome those stumbling blocks.
- The letter ends with a somewhat detailed discussion of where you hope to go next with your writing, describing your goals and the plan of action you have created to help you achieve them.
- Throughout the letter you competently use the conventions of written English, containing few, if any, errors in sentence structure, punctuation and capitalization or usage.
- Your writing uses mostly consistent phrasing, tone and expression that reflects a personal world view and style

**Just Getting By**
- Some of the pieces are analyzed, with a discussion of the writing’s strengths and weaknesses, including what you plan to do to take it to the next step.
- The analysis of the revised piece(s) mentions the original version and includes an assessment of the feedback received and a brief discussion of how the piece was changed and why.
- The process of writing the query letter is minimally described and the results are briefly analyzed to assess its conciseness, thoroughness and its ability to capture what’s unique in your voice.
- The analysis of your growth as a writer over the course of the semester mentions the skills you began with and briefly describes how and if those skills have developed or been strengthened.
- The analysis of your writing progress also mentions a few of the issues and challenges that came up for you during the semester and discusses your success in problem-solving to overcome those stumbling blocks.
- The letter ends with a mention of where you hope to go next with your writing, briefly describing your goals and the plan of action you have created to help you achieve them.
- The letter may contain minor errors in mechanics and usage, and perhaps one or two more distracting errors in sentence structure.
- Your writing uses fairly consistent phrasing, tone and expression that reflect a personal world view and style with occasional inconsistencies.

**Try Again – You Blew It!**
- A few of the pieces are discussed.
- You briefly analyze or forget to analyze any revised work.
- The query letter may be mentioned but not analyzed.
- The analysis of your growth as a writer over the course of the semester is mentioned very briefly or not at all.
PORTFOLIO GRADING SHEET

Name: ____________________________________  Total Grade: _________

Portfolio Checklist:
This portfolio includes:
 One long cover letter that analyzes each of the pieces and describes your growth over the semester.
 Two homework pieces that you like, but haven’t developed
 Three pieces that you worked on and liked, including at least one revised piece
 One query letter for a piece that you’re planning to send out for publication

Your grade on the cover letter is divided into the elements listed in the chart below.

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<th>Writing analysis</th>
<th>Almost There</th>
<th>Just getting by</th>
<th>Try Again</th>
<th>Let’s not go there</th>
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<td>Revised pieces analysis</td>
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<td>Description of Query letter</td>
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<td>Analysis of your writing growth</td>
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Comments on Portfolio as a whole: