Welcome, Professional and Creative Writers, to magic-making lessons . . . I mean English 364, Fiction Writing, where we will examine how established writers make magic, and practice transporting our readers into our imagined worlds as well. As you can likely already tell, I love fiction—reading it, writing it, teaching it.

As a fiction writer you can use real life as a starting point, then go anywhere in service of the story without regard to ‘what really happened.’ You can go back in time, into the future, re-create the neighborhood where you grew up, or send your characters into places that only exist in the mind of writer and reader. Characters can be any ethnicity, gender, species -- limited only by the skill of the writer in bringing those characters to life on the page.

It is recognizing the technique and craft elements employed in the work of established writers and learning to implement those elements in our own work that will make up this course.

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Text


The text can be purchased new or used, or rented, however, we’ll only get through part of the book and if you plan on being a fiction writer, I highly recommend hanging on to it and working through the rest of the book on your own. Being a writer offers an opportunity to continually improve what you do and how well you do it; honing, refining, revising are an integral part of a writer’s life-long work.

Classmates stories will serve as our primary texts in the second half of the class.

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Journal

All students are to keep a writing journal where you will record overheard snippets of conversation, descriptions of people you see and places you go, word lists, interesting phrases, freestyle responses to whatever you read, story ideas, memories that pop up, quotes and inspiration—whatever serves your writing. The beautiful sentences, vivid descriptions, artful character sketches we admire in published works rarely come to us when needed in drafting our own stories. Events and observations we think are seared into memory evaporate when we call on them. Write everything down to serve you all your writing life.

Gorgeous bound blank-page books (I’ve been gifted many), Moleskin-style journals (I own several), spiral-bound notepads—are all fine—preferably bound in a way that can be kept together and flipped though (loose notes tend to disappear). I have discovered that the lovely bound journals induce writer paralysis in me—feels too much like what I write in such a beauty must be profound or at least interesting, and requires complete sentences, finished thoughts. I end up rarely journaling anything. Instead I’ve learned to use cheap-o spiral notebooks that look like
workbooks, not finished books, in order to capture thoughts, impressions, ideas, fragments as I should. Whatever you use, carry it with you always, fill it up, and save it forever. I have found inspiration countless times paging through years-old journals, (which makes paper versions more useful than digital ones.) We’ll employ our journals in a class assignment or two.

For a couple of ideas of how I make use of my journals in drafting stores (and more than you care to know about me), check out this interview in The Missouri Review’s Working Writer Series:

http://www.missourireview.com/tmr-blog/2013/06/working-writers-series-q-lindsey-barrett/

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Assignments

Points will be based on completion of reading and writing assignments as instructed. Grades will reflect the effort you put into each assignment; the thoughtful attention paid and response carefully crafted to the stories in the text and to your peers’ work; and your ability to learn from and improve your own work in response to peer/instructor feedback. Everyone starts with a “C” which is ‘average’ by definition. There are no fill-in-the-bubble tests for creative writing, therefore, the way to insure you get a grade lower than “C” is to fail to turn in all assignments. Note that late is the same as never done (see a couple paragraphs down).

It is up to each of you to demonstrate that your work product and effort is more than just going through the motions – is above average, “B,” or outstanding, “A.” Because each student will start at a different level of fiction writing experience and ability, where you end the quarter carries more weight than where you start. Being open and able to revise your work is of vital import. Being a professional writer requires passion, effort and dedication. It is my intention that all students will be engaged and inspired, and all will earn “A”s.

Assignments are due in Canvas every Wednesday and Sunday starting January 7th and ending March 15th, but can be turned in earlier. The submission window will close as midnight rolls the date due into the day after and no late acceptance will be possible. That means if you wait to turn in your work until the end of the day on the due date, be prepared to ask the ambulance driver to stop by a wifi hotspot on the way to the hospital, to postpone grandma’s funeral, and plan on mapping out the open-24-hours internet cafes near you in case your internet fails.

Procrastination is the enemy of all writers, and training yourself to work to deadlines will serve you well your entire career.

Because you have chosen an online program, I assume you have outside obligations and potential conflicts—family, employment, illness—but in order to earn credit for this class the work must be done on schedule. You have specifically chosen the “Professional Writer” track—know that reading and writing in addition to your other obligations is the world you will occupy for much (or all) of your career as a professional writer. This is the commitment and dedication required.
Each response to others’ stories is expected to be given in the spirit of expanding your own knowledge of how fiction works and of helping the writer to shape their work for the better. There is no room for demonstrating your superiority or demeaning the writer or their work. I’ll provide specific critique guidelines later in the quarter.

Each exercise, story fragment, or full story you submit is expected to be new work created specifically for this class. Recycling old work, or thinking of my or your peers’ feedback as an editing service for your existing stories (which it isn’t), rather than an opportunity for all to learn how craft and technique shapes stories (which it is) does little toward helping you become a professional, productive writer.

The final for this course will consist of a portfolio you will assemble from your assigned exercises, story drafts, and revised, finished stories, and will be due March 18, 2015.

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**Formatting Your Work**

Please submit your work in standard manuscript format, whether an assigned exercise, story fragment, or short story:

• create a header with your last name and page number so it appears at the top of every page
• double space and indent paragraphs, without extra lines between paragraphs, except to indicate scene breaks
• 12 point, Times New Roman font
• 1” margins all around
• spell-check AND proof-read – do not count on autocorrect or grammar checker to distinguish between there and their, your and you’re

It’s important when you go on to submit work to literary journals, and/or editors, to know and use standard manuscript format, (unless the publications’ guidelines specify otherwise). It is the mark of an amateur to submit work as though already typeset, or using creative fonts, or formatted the way stories appear in the print or online journal, (which often publish in sans-serif fonts, single-spaced block paragraphs, or without page numbers). Upon acceptance, a publication may ask the author to re-format using online-friendly formatting, but in the submission evaluation process the author should make it as easy as possible for an overworked submission reader to track whose story they’re reading, and to include specific page number references in their evaluation notes, whether they read your story in their online submission manager or print it out.

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Notice

Plagiarism
Will not be tolerated. Period.

ADA Statement
If you have a disability and wish to set up academic adjustments in this class, please email me a copy of your “Confirmation of Eligibility for Academic Adjustments” as soon as possible so we can discuss how to implement the approved adjustments. If you do not have this form, contact the Disability Support Services Office, Bouillon 140 or ds@cwu.edu or 509.963.1202.

Diversity
In my classroom, diversity is welcomed and celebrated. I will not tolerate any forms of prejudice or discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status. We are here to learn in a climate of civility and mutual respect.

In a writing workshop this applies to your discussion comments, peer critiques, as well as to your creative work. While you are absolutely free to write about any topic, or use any language, no matter how offensive, discriminatory, troubling, or inflammatory, outside our [virtual] classroom, please be mindful that your classmates come from many different backgrounds, life experiences, and sensitivities. Because your peers will be required to read your words, our workshop is not the place to try your hand at graphic descriptions of sexual assault, to test the limits of ethnically/racially tinged language, or to see if you can horrify your peers and/or freak out your instructor by the depravity, gore, or violence of your work. To restate the CWU policy, we all learn better in a climate of civility and mutual respect.