Introduction to Fiction:  
Learning Fiction Fundamentals  
Spring 2011

Instructor: Charles Wyatt

Course Manager:
Wayne Wong

Description and goals:

This is a course for readers who would like to try their hand at writing fiction. You needn't have written a line before, but if you've been writing for years and would like guidance and encouragement, this is a good place to begin.

This course has five primary goals:

- We'll learn to make beginnings, to get words on the page.

- We'll make a study of the fundamental techniques of writing fiction.

- We'll practice with weekly assignments, one of which should be a draft of a story or novel chapter (8 to 12 double-spaced pages).

- We'll practice editing and revising.

- We'll use the discussion forum to share our thoughts about
our writing - the work itself, and perhaps more importantly, the process, how we get the job done.

**Course Procedure**

Each Wednesday, I will post lectures and reading assignments by 12 noon Pacific Standard Time. Please read the lectures and complete all written, reading, critiquing and discussion assignments no later than 12 midnight Pacific Standard Time on the following Tuesday. I may not be able to read or comment upon work that arrives after that time.

To recapitulate: Each week you will have reading and writing assignments. Beginning in week two, you will begin participating in the ongoing workshop.

**Where to Post Your Writing Assignments:**

- Go to the Discussion Board.
- Find the Discussion Forum with your name; click on it.
- Click the tab that says "New Thread."
- In the "Subject" line, type: "Week 1 Writing Assignment."
- In the "Message" box, type or paste your writing assignment.
- You will follow this procedure and create a New Thread for each week's writing assignment.

I have been advised to remind you that it is a good idea for you to compose (and save often) your written assignments on a word processor, then copy and paste.

**Grades:**

a. Discussion of Readings: 20%

b. Writing Assignments: 40%

c. Participation in the workshop 20%
d. Overall participation/cooperation 20%

I believe the most important quality we can bring to our writing is effort, and this will be my main criterion in establishing grades. I'm not here to wield my subjective sense of the quality of students' work - I'll try to make this figure as little as possible. I do believe it is important that you be willing to try some of my suggestions for revising and improving your work. Even if you don't agree with a suggestion, the undertaking may be worthwhile as practice (and might apply to a future need). The good news is that you get to make the final decision about what goes into (and what doesn't) the final version of your work. I only ask that you treat my suggestions as practice, in the same way a musician looks at scales and arpeggios.

At the end of the last week of the course, I will ask you to provide me with an inventory of your reading responses and workshop comments. I'll also ask you to provide examples of three of your best reading forum and workshop comments.

Reading:

We'll use one textbook and one anthology of short fiction for this course. I'll post a list of recommended further reading under Course Documents. I hope that all of you will make suggestions concerning reading. I never teach a class without learning about new books to read. In my college classes, I ask the students to subscribe to a literary magazine, to make a research project out of it. We won't make that a requirement, but I'll post a list of magazines with some comments.

Required Texts:

*The Best American Short Stories 2010* (Richard Russo, Editor)

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

Week 1 March 30
Burroway Chapter 1
**The Writing Process**
"Childhood" Charles Wyatt
Best: Steve Almond, "Donkey Greedy, Donkey Gets Punched"

Week 2 April 6
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 2
**Showing and Telling**
“We Didn’t” Stuart Dybek
“Big Me” Dan Chaon
“The Red Fox Fur Coat” Teolinda Gersao
(translated by Margaret Jull Costa)

Week 3 April 13
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 3
**Characterization, Part I**
“Fiesta 1980” Junot Diaz
“Every Tongue Shall Confess” ZZ Packer
“Following the Notes” Pia Z Ehrhardt

Week 4 April 20
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 4
**Characterization, Part II**
“Mule Killers” Lydia Peelle
“Bullet in the Brain” Tobias Wolff
“Tandolfo the Great” Richard Bausch
Best: Charles Baxter, “The Cousins”

Week 5 April 27
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 5
**Fictional Place**
“The Sea Fairies” Maura Stanton
“Love and Hydrogen” Jim Shepherd
“A Visit of Charity” Eudora Welty
Best: Jennifer Egan, Safari

Week 6 May 4
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 6
**Fictional Time**
“Hominids” Jill McCorkle
“Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter” Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni
“Feelers” John Gould
Best: Joshua Ferris, “The Valetudinarian”

Week 7 May 11
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 7
**Story Form, Plot and Structure**
“What You Pawn I Will Redeem” Sherman Alexie
“My Kid’s Dog” Ron Hansen
“Everything That Rises Must Converge” Flannery O’Connor
Best: James Lasdun, “The Hollow”

Week 8 May 18
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 8
**Point of View**
“Missing Women” June Spence
“Who’s Irish” Gish Jen
“Reply All” Robin Hemley
Best: Jill McCorkle, “PS 213”

Week 9 May 25
Workshop
Burroway Chapter 9 -10

**Revision**
Notes on “Keith” Ron Carlson
“Keith” Ron Carlson
Best: Tea Obreht, “The Laugh”

Class ends June 1