**Note to students:** this “public” syllabus is designed to give you a glimpse into this course and instructor. If you have further questions about our courses or curriculum, please contact the Writers’ Program at (310) 825-9415 or via email at writers@uclaextension.edu. We are happy to answer any questions and to help you find the best class to achieve your writing goals.

As UCLA’s principal provider of continuing education, the majority of UCLA Extension courses are designed for the post-baccalaureate professional-level student. Enrollment is therefore normally reserved for adult students 18 years of age and older. The Writers’ Program may consent to enroll younger students based on special academic competence and approval of the instructor. Students under 18 who enroll in a Writers’ Program course without first receiving permission of the instructor are subject to withdrawal. To request instructor approval, please contact the Writers’ Program at (310) 825-9415.

**THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY: ADVANCED WORKSHOP**
Course # X461

Syllabus – UCLA Extension Writers’ Program

Instructor: Colette Sartor

**Course Description:** The short story is one of the most challenging of all literary forms, requiring the precision and imagistic intensity of poetry combined with such novelistic elements as structure, setting, and characterization. This workshop helps you to realize your fictional intentions through intensive discussion and detailed written critiques. Attention also is given to preparing stories for publication in targeted markets.

**Required Texts:** Various short stories and articles posted on Blackboard. **Optional Texts:** The Eleventh Draft, edited by Frank Conroy; Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within, by Natalie Goldberg; Naming the World: And Other Exercises for the Creative Writer, edited by Bret Anthony Johnston; On Writing, by Stephen King; Bird by Bird: Some Instructions of Writing and Life, by Anne Lamott; Forest for the Trees (Revised and Updated): An Editor’s Advice to Writers, by Betsy Lerner; The Writer’s Portable Mentor: A Guide to Art, Craft, and the Writing Life, by Pricilla Long; 12 Stories and Their Making, edited by Paul Mandelbaum; This is the Year You Write Your Novel, by Walter Mosley; Reading Like a Writer, by Francine Prose.

Note: To order textbooks through UCLA, visit www.uclastore.com (click on Textbooks>UCLA Extension) or phone UCLA LuValle Commons at (310) 823-7283. Many textbooks are also available for purchase online through such sites as Amazon.com.

**Administrative Matters:** For refunds and other administrative matters, please contact the Writers’ Program at (310) 825-9415 or at writers@uclaextension.edu.

**Grading Criteria:** Students decide whether to receive a letter grade or take this class on a Pass/Fail or No Grade basis. You do NOT need a letter grade to receive close attention. You may call the Records office at (310) 794-7361 and request No Grade or change your status online at www.uclaextension.edu (click on My Extension). Grades will be based on helpfulness of in-class and written criticism (25 %), timely completion of all exercises (25 %), and your contribution of two short stories (25% each) to be workshopped on dates mutually agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. If you miss a workshop for any reason (a) your final grade will be decreased by two (2) full grades or will result in a Fail for Pass/Fail students and (b) the missed workshop can only be made up if the class schedule allows, as determined solely by the instructor.

**At-Home Assignments:** Each week you will have an at-home assignment (listed on the Class Schedule below). At-home assignments will be discussed in class the week they are assigned. Please bring the readings and written critiques of students’ work to class the week they are to be discussed.
**Manuscripts:** Workshops of students’ short stories will be held during Weeks 3 through 10. Each student will workshop two stories. All stories should be typed Word documents (.doc extension), double-spaced, 12 point, 1 inch margins, page-numbered, and no more than 5,000 words. You may submit a novel chapter as long as it functions as a self-contained short story. You must post a thread with your story to the appropriate Blackboard Submission Forum one week before your workshop date (no later than 10 a.m.). To familiarize yourself with how to post your work to a Submission Forum, please review the following Blackboard tutorial video: http://ondemand.blackboard.com/r91/movies/bb91_student_creating_new_thread.htm

I will prepare written comments to all workshop stories submitted by the applicable submission deadline. I **will not** prepare written comments for stories submitted after the deadline.

**Written Critiques:** You will prepare written critiques of your classmates’ stories. When critiquing the work of others, write margin notes on the story itself that express your most significant reactions (empathy for a character, confusion or satisfaction about a plot point, etc.) and try to articulate why. In addition, include a typed cover letter between 200-300 words that strives to analyze the story’s main intentions, the ways in which it most successfully meets them, and the opportunities where it might achieve them further. Please see the Appendix attached to the Syllabus regarding issues to consider when preparing critiques.

Criticism should be given in the same supportive spirit of constructive honesty that you would like your own work to receive. Be sure to include your name so that the author can approach you with follow-up questions. Please **email me a copy of your cover letter for each of your classmate's stories prior to the workshop date.**

**In-Class Workshopping Guidelines:** Reading and discussing each other’s work in writing workshops requires a respectful environment; therefore, please abide by the following guidelines when workshopping each other’s work:

- Please refrain from speaking when your work is being discussed. As soon as you explain or justify your work, the reader is lost to you as a critic. You will be allowed to ask and answer questions at the end of our discussion.

- We will start each workshop by each briefly commenting on the positive points of the work. What was special about this piece? What did the writer do particularly well? Let the writer know her or his strengths. Next, we will discuss areas in the work that could be improved. During part of the discussion, focus on the piece’s technical aspects and not on your evaluation of the writer’s psychology. Of course, your feedback should avoid personal attacks, insults, or harassment of any kind. Your stance should be that of a careful and interested reader. Try to make suggestions or observations that the writer can take into the next draft or into other pieces, and try to be specific rather than general. For example:

**Example 1**
"Your piece is great."
"I really didn't like this. It just didn't work for me."

These comments aren’t helpful because they offer no specific observations of the piece that could help guide the writer’s revisions.

**Example 2**
"I like the way you used point of view."
"Seems like the point of view changes throughout the piece."

These comments are more helpful because they help the writer focus on a specific aspect of the piece.

**Example 3**
"I couldn't figure out whose point of view we're seeing in Paragraph 4."
"I liked the way you shifted from the dog's point of view to your brother's in Paragraph 3. That helped me understand the conflict between them—how the dog thought the brother was stealing its food, but the brother thought he was just saving the dog from a bad case of indigestion."
These comments are useful because they specify which aspect of the piece is working (at least for one reader) and give some idea where the writer might best spend time revising.

Notice that useful feedback doesn't necessarily have to offer suggestions. It can merely observe, leaving the writer to work out solutions. Your feedback can build on the responses of others.
CLASS SCHEDULE
(subject to change)

Week One: Housekeeping and Introductions
In Class:
- Syllabus/Class Overview/Introductions.
- Sign up for workshops.
- Discuss constructive workshopping methods.
- Do in-class exercises.

Week Two: Voice and Theft
In Class:
- Discuss creating a distinctive voice and stealing material from real life.
- Do in-class exercises.
At-Home Assignment:
- Workshop Prep: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

Week Three: Get Them Going
In Class:
- Discuss creating unexpected moments by putting your characters into action.
- Workshop student stories.
At-Home Assignment:
- Reading (Unexpected Moments): “Basic Plot Brainstorming” by Annie Evett; “Wenlock Edge” by Alice Munro.
- Workshop Prep: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

Week Four: Playing With Structure
In Class:
- Discuss experimenting with structure.
- Workshop student stories.
At-Home Assignment:
- Reading (Structure): “The Rememberer” by Aimee Bender; “Black Box” by Jennifer Egan; “Me and Miss Mandible” by Donald Barthelme.
- Workshop Prep: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

Week Five: Heavy Duty Dialogue
In Class:
- Discuss writing vital, multipurpose dialogue.
- Workshop student stories.
At-Home Assignment:
- Workshop Prep: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

Week Six: Powerful Openings
In Class:
- Discuss the importance of strong openings.
- Workshop students stories.
At-Home Assignment:
- Reading (Openings): Reread the first two paragraphs of “The Man Who Knew Belle Starr” by Richard Bausch; “Me and Miss Mandible” by Donald Barthelme; “In the Land of Men” by Antonya Nelson.
- **Workshop Prep**: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

**Week 7: The End**  
**In Class:**  
- Discuss creating surprising yet inevitable endings.  
- Workshop student stories.  
**At-Home Assignment:**  
- **Reading (Endings)**: “Don’t Leave Me Hanging” by Taylor Houston; “How to Write Successful Endings” by Nancy Kress.  
- **Workshop Prep**: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

**Week 8: Murder Your Darlings**  
**In Class:**  
- Discuss revision strategies.  
- Workshop student stories.  
**At-Home Assignment:**  
- **Reading (Revision)**: “Short Stories, Long Revisions” by Laura Alwan; “The Eleventh Draft” by Chris Offutt; “Love It or Hate It: The Art of Editing” by Katrin Schumann.  
- **Workshop Prep**: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

**Week 9: Find Them Homes**  
**In-Class:**  
- Discuss publication strategies.  
- Workshop student stories.  
**At-Home Assignment:**  
- **Reading (Publication)**: “On Rejection; or ‘Dear Author, After Careful Consideration” by Bret Anthony Johnston; “Go the Distance” by Benjamin Percy; “Versal’s Rejection Letters, or a Close Look at the Process of Our Enthusiasm;” review Publication Materials folder.  
- **Workshop Prep**: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.

**Week 10: Get Out There**  
**In Class:**  
- Discuss ways to become part of a writing community.  
- Workshop student stories.  
**At-Home Assignment:**  
- **Reading (Writing Communities)**: “Go Away” by Alexander Chee; “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, or How to Choose a Writers’ Group” by Holly Lisle; “Literary Boroughs #13: Los Angeles, California” by Andrea Martucci.  
- **Workshop Prep**: Read and prepare written critiques of student stories.
APPENDIX: PREPARING FOR WORKSHOP

Read each manuscript at least twice. The first time, read without making notes. Then, put the story aside—overnight, if you have time. Return to the piece, pen in hand, this time to read critically. As you read, make notes in the text or margin about what you liked (e.g., lines that sounded great, images you admire) or what you questioned (e.g., factual errors, confusing lines, characters you’d like to hear more from, implausibilities). Reflect on the following points (both for class discussion and when preparing your written critique):

- **Structure:**
  - Does the story proceed chronologically without flashbacks? Does it mix flashbacks with chronological events? Is it one long flashback or one long scene? Does it use scene breaks effectively? Does it use smooth transitions to get in and out of flashbacks or from scene to scene?
  - If the story uses flashbacks, is there a strong reason for interrupting the forward narrative momentum (with digressions or flashbacks, for example)? Is the present story as engaging as the flashbacks or back story?
  - Does the writer show when appropriate and “tell” when appropriate? Where could the writer have used exposition or habitual action to move the story forward? Where could the writer have dramatized, set up a scene to show an emotion, to characterize using dialogue, to fasten the reader to a setting?
  - Does the story have a consistent point of view? If the point of view is inconsistent, is there a good reason for it? Whose story is it? Is the point of view closely held or more distant? Are there ways the point of view could be clarified or deepened to help the reader better understand the central character?
  - Does the story reveal essential information early enough to help the reader understand the characters/conflicts/events or is essential information hidden for too long, resulting in confusion rather than intrigue?
  - Is the dialogue necessary? Does it accomplish several things at once (e.g., characterize, move story forward, give information, show relationships, reveal subtext)? Does the dialogue convey vital information that would be better conveyed in exposition? Are there places where dialogue is not used and should be?
  - Does the writer employ careful detail to drive the story? Has the writer exhausted every possible means to use sensory detail?
  - Are there places where the prose could be streamlined? Remember, three words are always better than four.

- **Character and Idea:**
  - Is every event and detail colored by the central character’s point of view? Would the central character tell the story in this particular order and notice each of these details?
  - What does the central character say s/he wants? What does s/he really want? Is there a contradiction between what is said and what is felt by the central character? If so, is there a compelling reason for the contradiction?
  - Are the central character’s actions and reactions consistent and believable throughout?
  - How do other people react to the central character? Do they think the same thing about that character’s behavior as the central character does or do they perceive the character differently? If their perceptions are different, does the difference reveal something important about the central character? Do other people like/dislike/understand/misunderstand the character?
  - Is the premise of the story important enough to drive the story? Does the reader care enough to keep reading or is the story predictable? Does something important happen to someone, i.e., are the characters moved by the story’s dramatic events? Also, is the idea for the story unique or has it been done this way before? Remember, there are only a few basic story ideas, so what matters is how that story is executed, the freshness that is brought to it from the writer’s unique perspective.