

**Course Title: Writing Electric Short Stories**

**Course Code: FICT 70**

**Instructor Name and Bio:** Ron Nyren is the author of the novel *The Book of Lost Light*, which won Black Lawrence Press’s 2019 Big Moose Prize and was the finalist for the 2020 David J. Langum, Sr. Prize in American Historical Fiction. His fiction has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The North American Review*, *Glimmer Train Stories*, *Mississippi Review*, and *100 Word Story*, among others, and his stories have been shortlisted for the O. Henry Awards and the Pushcart Prize. He is the coauthor, with his spouse and writing partner Sarah Stone, of *Deepening Fiction: A Practical Guide for Intermediate and Advanced Writers*. A former Stegner Fellow, Ron earned his MFA in creative writing from the University of Michigan. Find out more at [www.ronnyren.com](http://www.ronnyren.com).

**Class Sessions and Recording**

Meeting days and times: Tuesdays, 6:30 - 9:20 pm (PT), April 4 - June 6

Meeting location: Zoom

These class sessions will be recorded, but because this class is highly interactive, and much of the learning comes from our discussions and the feedback we give on others’ stories, regular live attendance is required for those wanting to have a story workshopped. If your schedule doesn’t let you to attend live class sessions, there is a non-workshop option to take this class. See “Attendance” below for details.

**Course Features:**

- Live session
  - Lecture, discussion, in-class writing exercises, Q&A, workshop
  - Requires interaction and active participation
- Assignments & Coursework
  - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
  - Students can submit one 5,000-word workshop piece
  - Instructor will provide feedback on writing exercises as well
- Optional 25-minute individual conference for each class participant by appointment

**Course Summary**

A short story is like a flare sent up into the nighttime sky, illuminating the characters and their actions. Some stories focus on a significant turning point in the characters’ lives, others pick out a meaningful pattern over a longer period of time, but in either case, a short story offers an intense experience that, done well, lingers like an afterimage long after the flare has gone out.

Whether you're writing literary or genre fiction, whether you consider yourself a beginner or have been writing fiction for a long time, this course will give you tools for making short stories more memorable, compelling, and authentic. We'll glean ideas from published stories and have writing exercises designed to help you generate new material or deepen a story in progress.

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.\*\*
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Attend and participate in at least 7 class sessions and provide workshop feedback to all of your peers to receive credit.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Attend and participate in at least 7 class sessions, submit a story/novel excerpt for workshop, and give workshop responses to all of your peers.
  - 25% of your grade will come from turning in your workshop piece.
  - 25% will come from attending and participating.
  - 50% will come from responding to the work of your peers.

**\*\*Please Note:** *If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## Attendance

If an emergency prevents you from coming to class, please email me as soon as you can, before class if possible. If you can't make a session, watch the recording before the next class meeting. If the missed session included workshop, send me and the workshoppee(s) written workshop comments to receive credit. If you miss a session or two and make up the work, your grade won't be affected.

If you know you won't be able to attend at least 7 full class meetings live, let me know before the first class meeting—you are totally welcome to take the course without attending any Zooms if you choose No Grade Requested, but because you'd be missing the live workshop sessions, you wouldn't be eligible to turn in a piece for group workshop. You can submit your workshop piece to me, however, and I'd be happy to provide comments.

## Format for Turning in Work for Workshop:

When you turn in your short story or novel chapter (up to 5,000 words) for workshop, make sure it is double-spaced, page-numbered, with margins of one inch, in a typeface that's easy to read (like 12 point Times Roman). Indicate if it's a short story or novel excerpt.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions  
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305  
continuingstudies@stanford.edu  
650-725-2650

## Textbooks/Required Materials

All of the published short stories we'll read and discuss together are available online. As of the time I compiled the syllabus, none of them were behind a paywall, but you may have to register at some of the websites in order to gain free access.

## Writing Exercises:

Each class meeting will include an in-class writing exercise designed to help you explore concepts from each week's topic. If you like, you can revise your in-class writing exercise and email it to me (up to 800 words) by Monday of the following week for my feedback.

## First Assignment

Before the first class, please read "Leaving Maverly" by Alice Munro, found at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/28/leaving-maverley>, and consider these questions:

1. Which character in the story struck you as most memorable, and why?
2. What changes over the course of the story, or what is revealed by the end?

(Note: this is not a writing assignment, but thinking about these questions ahead of time will make our class discussion more fruitful.)

## Tentative Weekly Outline

### Week One: Creating Electric Characters

"Leaving Maverly" by Alice Munro

In-class writing exercise: The Five Things

### Week Two: Plotting—Interruptions, Obstacles, and Reversals

"The Era" by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

In-class writing exercise: Curveballs

### Week Three: Fabricators and Witnesses—First Person Point of View

"The Pilot's Instructions" by Karen Bender

In-class writing exercise: The Confession

Workshop

### Week Four: The Art of Mind Reading—Third Person Point of View

"The Disappeared" by Charles Baxter

In-class writing exercise: Degrees of Psychic Distance

Workshop

### Week Five: Rendering Vivid Scenes and Writing Dramatic Dialogue

"Wild" by Lesley Nneka Arimah

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In-class writing exercise: The Balance of Power  
Workshop

**Week Six: Structuring the Story—Causality and Disruption**

“The Long Black Line” by John L’Heureux

In-class writing exercise: List Story  
Workshop

**Week Seven: Style and Voice**

“King of Chains” by Micah Perks

In-class writing exercise: Inhabiting Prose  
Workshop

**Week Eight: The River of Time**

“Sweeping Past” by Yiyun Li

In-class writing exercise: A Hidden Side  
Workshop

**Week Nine: Creating the Virtual World—Setting and Sense of Place**

“Once in a Lifetime” by Jhumpa Lahiri

In-class writing exercise: The Familiar Unfamiliar  
Workshop

**Week Ten: Revising**

“Anyone Can Do It” by Manuel Muñoz

In-class writing exercise: Revising Boldly