

Course Title: Writing Short Fiction: Where to Begin?

Course Code: FICT 87 W

Instructor Name and Bio

Amy Silverberg holds a PhD in Literature & Creative Writing from USC, where she currently teaches. Her short fiction has appeared in *Best American Short Stories*, *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, *The Southern Review*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. Her debut novel *First Time, Long Time* is forthcoming from Hachette/Grand Central Publishing in 2024. She also writes television, most recently *The Movie Show* on the SYFY network. She lives in Los Angeles. For more information, please visit www.amysilverberg.com

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Wednesdays 5 pm PT / 8 pm ET

Meeting location: Zoom

The class sessions will be recorded.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, and Q&A
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Guest speakers
 - An informal drop-in time for student Q&A
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Students will submit various “beginnings,” culminating in a longer piece
 - Instructor will provide feedback on assignments
- Individual conferences available by request

Course Summary

This course has two main goals: to examine how other authors have approached writing their short stories, and then using those approaches to help write our own. In every class, we will study a different short story and discuss the way in which the writer “began.” We will read broadly across the literary fiction genre, including but not limited to Jennifer Egan, Ben Percy, Alice Munro, Danielle Evans, Charles Yu, Jamaica Kincaid, Lorrie Moore, Wells Tower, and Aimee Bender. A few of these authors will guest speak in our class to further elaborate on their experiences of

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

“beginning.” Did they enter the story through a setting, an autobiographical memory, an exchange of dialogue, a narrative voice, a question, a fear, a list, etc? Then, we’ll experiment in using these elements to begin our own short stories.

By the second half of the course, you will have a collection of “beginnings,” and an idea of what works best for you depending on what you’re trying to write. We will continue to study published work, while you further develop one (or more) of your own “beginnings.” To that end, students will have the opportunity to participate in in-class workshops in order to get feedback on their own work from the instructor and their peers. By the end of the course, you will be well on your way to a completed short story, and a toolbox with which to begin again and again.

This course is open to writers of all experience levels.

**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)
 - Students must attend and/or watch at least 7 class sessions; participate in discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; offer considerate and useful feedback on their peers’ short story installments; and complete their own work in a somewhat timely and thoughtful manner.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - A: Students must attend and/or watch at least 9 class sessions; participate in at least four discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; offer considerate and useful feedback on their peers’ story in progress; and complete their own work in a timely and thoughtful manner.
 - B: Students must attend and/or watch at least 8 class sessions; participate in at least three discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; offer considerate and useful feedback on their peers’ story in progress; and complete their work in a timely and thoughtful manner.
 - C: Students must attend and/or watch at least 7 class sessions; participate occasionally in discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; occasionally respond to their fellow students’ Reading & Discussion posts; offer considerate and useful feedback on their peers’ story in progress; and complete their own work in a timely and thoughtful manner.

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

- D: Students must attend and/or watch at least 6 class sessions; occasionally engage in discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; offer intermittent but considerate feedback on their peers' story in progress; and complete their own work.
- No Pass: Students attend and/or watch fewer than 6 class sessions; fail participate in discussions about published short stories we study in and out of class; fail to offer considerate and thoughtful commentary on their peers' work; fail to complete their own work.

**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.*

Textbooks/Required Materials

I will provide all readings as web links or scans on Canvas.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1. Introduction: A Survey of Beginnings

Assignments: Alice Munro's "Fiction" and Kevin Moffett's "Buzzers" + discussion questions; Writing Assignment 1.

Week 2. Entering through an Autobiographical Moment

Assignments: Ben Percy's "Refresh, Refresh" and Lorrie Moore's "People Like this Are the Only People Here" + discussion questions; Writing Assignment 2.

Week 3. Entering through Setting

Assignments: Jennifer Egan's "Why China?" and "Safari" + discussion questions; Writing Assignment 3.

Week 4. Entering through a Strong Narrative Voice

Assignments: Aimee Bender's "Off" and Miranda July's "Roy Spivey" + discussion questions; Writing Assignment 4.

Week 5. Entering through a Question

Assignments: Danielle Evan's "Virgins" and "Charles Yu's "Fable" + discussion questions; Writing Assignment #5.

Week 6. Entering through a List

Assignments: Dean Bakopoulos's "Too Few to Mention" and Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" and Amy Hempel's "In the Cemetery where Al Johnson is Buried"; Writing Assignment #6.

Week 7. Entering through a Fear

Assignments: Kevin Wilson's "A Birth in the Woods" and Carmen Maria Machado's "The Husband Stitch"; Writing Assignment #7.

Week 8. Entering through Dialogue

Assignments: Pete Orner's "Spokane" and Salley Rooney's "Color and Light"; Writing Assignment #8.

Week 9. Entering through a Joke

Assignments: Wells Tower's "Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned" and Aimee Bender's "The Motherfucker"; Writing Assignment #9.

Week 10. Entering through Research / Pop Culture

Assignments: Jim Shepard's "The World to Come" and Maggie Shipstead's "You have a Friend in 10a"; Final Submission Due.