Course Description:

This is a course in revision. All of the exercises we will do in it are designed to expand stories that you have already begun or drafted to the end. We will use published stories, writing exercises, and discussion of fictional craft to discover new possibilities in our stories and to learn how to shape them.

At the beginning of The Odyssey, Homer invokes Calliope, the Epic Muse, to help him tell his story: “Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell that story of that man skilled in all ways of contending….” In ancient cultures, poetic inspiration – or love, or madness – arrived from a divine world outside the human one.

Now we are more likely to believe in the realm of the subconscious, or perhaps the human will, or our culture itself, as the source of our art. For the purposes of this course, one answer is just as valid as any other. What’s relevant is that Homer is asking a source outside himself to guide his work, and that he does so by invoking what he already knows about Odysseus, who was a stock figure in Greek mythology – he is listening to what his material has to tell him.

We should also keep in mind that while Homer seems to have been a real person, his work – the masterworks of ancient Greek literature – were most likely collective, developed and embellished over decades of oral transmission. The Odyssey and The Iliad were, it seems, going through a continuous shaping and revision by their audiences. The contemporary workshop is only another manifestation of this collective tradition.

In this workshop, we will follow this tradition of listening to our stories. We will begin with the premise that our stories have lives independent of us, and that in order to bring that life to the page, we must be open to their demands.

We will also listen to our peers in workshop, who can often see our stories more clearly than we, and carry with them lightning bolts of inspiration.

Required Text:

Deepening Fiction: A Practical Guide for Intermediate and Advanced Fiction Writers,
Sarah Stone and Ron Nyren, ISBN 032119537X

This book is an excellent resource for revision – the title says it all! Due to scheduling considerations, I have had to omit many readings from it that I would otherwise have assigned – I encourage you to read the whole book.

Writing and Reading Assignments: Throughout the quarter, there will be short writing exercises (500 words) and reading responses (250 words) from Deepening Fiction, plus a couple of additional exercises in Week Eight, which I will discuss below. You will post both the writing and reading assignments in our Canvas weekly forums, and we will discuss only the reading responses during our weekly chats – again, with the exception of
your Week Eight exercises. Though you may solicit feedback from me on the writing exercises, and I will offer brief comments on them, because you will be writing the creative exercises in response to stories you have already written, you should not expect in-depth commentary – your peers and I will comment in depth on your workshop submissions – both your draft and your revision.

You will post your reading and writing responses in the appropriate weekly Canvas forum by Thursday afternoon of the week it is due, so your classmates and I will have the opportunity to read and offer comments on them. Although your comments on these exercises won’t be as in-depth as your comments on the full-length pieces in the second half of the quarter, it’s critical that we all become comfortable with reading and discussing one another’s work, and I’ll be giving explicit instructions on what you should be looking for each week. To get the most out of these exercises, it is best to read the whole sections in Deepening Fiction from which they are selected (e.g., “Developing and Complicating Characters”) as well as the stories for the reading responses.

However, if at any time during the quarter you find yourself pressed for time, always choose the writing exercises, rather than the instructional sections in Deepening Fiction, the stories, and reading responses. I want you to use these exercises in the way that supports your creative endeavors, not to feel trapped by them.

**The Workshops:** At the beginning of Week Four, each student will turn in one full-length (2000-8000 word) short story, to be workshopped that weekend. You will also submit either a revision of your first story or a new story at the beginning of Week Nine. I strongly suggest that, no matter what your feelings are toward your first story, you follow through with a revision, rather than a new story. The entire class and I will read and offer in-depth, detailed comments on both submissions, though our comments will be longer on the first version than the revision.

The workshop is the most important part of this course, and my goal is to simulate a traditional workshop environment as much we can. In addition to posting my own comments, I’ll be moderating the discussion, and will expect that every student participate in these conversations.

**Chat:** Near the end of each week, I’ll be hosting an hour-long live Zoom Chat session. This session is an online “office hour” of sorts, but in a group context. Attendance is optional—you’re all busy people, with very different schedules/responsibilities—and the session will be recorded if you can’t make it. This chat session is where we will discuss the week’s published stories from Deepening Fiction, the weekly reading responses and the instructional sections of Deepening Fiction. In every OWS class I have taught, both students and I have found these Zoom Chat sessions to be invaluable forums. We discuss issues of craft and process, simulating the live give-and-take you’d find in a traditional classroom. We discuss the readings, answer one another’s questions in regard to writing technique, and continue the conversations about student work posted in the forum. In the second half of the quarter, chat will continue our discussions of your full-length stories.
**Your Weekly Responsibilities**

- Log onto Canvas, and read through the entire “Schedule” page. This page includes my “lecture” for the week, as well as assignments, and other reminders.

- Read the assigned texts, and post your Reading Responses to the discussion section in the appropriate weekly Canvas forum.

- Respond to the Writing Exercises, post your response in the appropriate forum, and read/comment on one other student piece as described below.

- During Workshop Weeks, provide in-depth (roughly a page) of comments for the first full-length student piece in workshop, half a page for the revisions, checking back later in the week to continue your involvement in the conversation.

- Participate in an hour-long “live” chat session, hosted by me. (Optional)

**What I’ll Be Doing:**

- Sending out a weekly e-mail containing general class info and the upcoming reading and writing assignments.

- Setting up the forums and moderating the discussion within. I generally check in at least once every weekday, although I don’t generally post on weekends.

- Reading and commenting on all student work in a positive and helpful manner. For short exercises, my responses will be a couple of paragraphs long, perhaps with a few lines of nitty-gritty technical stuff (showing you how you could rewrite a few sentences to better achieve the intended effect, for example). For the full-length pieces, I’ll provide a page or so of comments, plus make some line-by-line suggestions on the attached word document itself.

- Hosting the weekly online chat sessions.

**One VERY IMPORTANT Note:** All of the above is essentially optional, with the exception of providing comments for the full-length piece. Although many students take online courses with the absolute best intentions of doing every last little assignment, "real life"--family, illness, professional obligations, etc--often has a way of making that impossible. Sometimes, the frustration this prompts students to drop completely out of the class. **Rather than adopting an "all-or-nothing" approach to your participation in this course, I recommend simply doing what you can, when you can.** If there are a couple of weeks in which you don't get to the reading, that's no problem. If you have to skip a couple exercises, this is also okay. As long as you both hand in a full-length piece and participate fully in the workshop, you’ll be fine. And remember, if you DO have to take a couple of weeks completely away from the class, **you can always come back!" The door is always open," as they say.**

**Grading:** For those of you who are taking this course for a grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.
Reading and Writing Exercises: 20%
Full-Length Piece: 20%
Revision 20%
Forum/Workshop Participation: 40%

Schedule:

**Week One: Discovering Your Characters**

Reading Response: From “Character Exercises,” p. 27, choose 4, 5, or 6 (250 words)
Writing Exercise: From “Character Exercises,” p. 26, choose 1, 2, or 3 (500 words)

**Week Two: Discovering The World of the Story**

Read: “Macrosetting, Microsetting, Detail;” “The Fence Party;” and “Pilgrims,” *DF*
Reading Response: From “Setting Exercises,” p. 150, respond to #6 (250 words)
Writing Exercise: From “Setting Exercises,” p. 149, respond to #1 (500 words)

**Week Three: Discovering Point of View**

Read: “Reintroducing Third-Person POVs;” “Gooseberries;” “The Uses of First and Second Person;” and “Trauma Plate,” *DF*
Reading Response: From “POV Exercises,” p. 50, respond to #5; OR from “POV Exercises,” p. 70, respond to #5 (250 words)
Writing Exercises: Choose: From “POV Exercises,” p. 50, #2; OR, John Gardner on psychic distance (see Week Three Lecture); OR from “POV Exercises,” pp. 69-70, choose 1, 2, or 3 (500 words)

**Week Four: How to Workshop a Story**

Workshop, Round One, Week One - stories due this Monday
Written comments on workshop stories due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday

**Week Five: Shaping the Story: Scene, Summary, Flashbacks, Backstory**

Workshop, Round One, Week Two
Read: “Time in Fiction: Scene, Summary, Flashbacks, Backstory, and Transitions,” *DF*
Written comments on workshop stories due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday

**Week Six: Shaping the Story: Plot, Narrative Drive, and Alternate Story Structures**

Workshop, Round One, Week Three  
Read: “Plot, Narrative Drive, and Alternative Story Structures,” *DF*  
Written comments on workshop stories due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday

**Week Seven: Shaping the Story: Beginnings, Middles, and Endings**

Workshop, Round One, Week Four  
Read: “Revision: Beginnings, Middles, and Endings,” *DF*  
Written comments on workshop stories due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday

**Week Eight: Writing Outside the Story**

**Exercises:** Find the inner and outer story – write one infinitive phrase for each. Highlight the story’s most important sentences. Letters, diary entries, reports from your characters; cut up your stories – instructions in Week Eight Lecture.

**Week Nine: Revisions**

Workshop, Round Two, Week One  
Revisions due Monday; written comments due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday

**Week Ten: Revisions**

Workshop, Round Two, Week Two  
Written comments due Thursday; Zoom Chat workshop Saturday