Course Title: Reading as a Writer: A One-Week Intensive  
Course Code: EGL 70  
Instructor: Jonah Willihnganz  
Days/Hours: Monday-Friday, July 18-22, 12:30-5:30 pm  
Office Hours: By appointment

"Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You’ll absorb it. If it is good, you’ll find out. If it’s not, throw it out the window."

—William Faulkner

“My advice to young writers? Read at least 1,000 pages a month. Every month.”

—Sherman Alexie

Course Summary:

This course will be valuable for the beginning or advanced writer alike. Our analysis of stories and essays in the course will be quite detailed and specific, focusing on particular craft elements. You will learn, for example, how to discover what makes a physical description effective, how to advance plot with dialogue, and how to map the development of a piece’s insight. You will also learn reading strategies that will help you identify on your own what makes great writing great.

Please see course page for full description and additional details.

Course Goals and Format:

This intensive seminar will immerse you deeply into story craft, giving you the chance to absorb a lot of strategies and craft in a way that will really stick. The goal of the course is to provide you with a new way of reading, a skill you can take with you to any text in the future, and an opportunity to try out techniques you uncover with that new way of reading.

The aim of skilled reading is skilled writing, but in contrast to traditional workshops, we will not critique student manuscripts in this class. Instead, we will do short, shared exercises every day that build on the techniques we have just encountered. These exercises will help not only explore the techniques but also help you practice adapting to your own work craft elements you admire.

The daily schedule is relatively simple: We will alternate between examining texts and the short writing exercises. Each day we will look at about four pieces very closely and concentrate on one or two elements of craft that they teach powerfully. Since this is a long class, we will take two short breaks, and everyone is encouraged to bring whatever beverages and snacks sustain you. We will begin and end class
promptly.

**Texts and First Assignment:**

As you will see from the schedule, readings will favor contemporary fiction and creative nonfiction since these blend so many writing techniques. Two books about reading and writing are required and can be purchased at the Stanford bookstore or from your favorite bookstore. The rest of the readings will be made available on an online course platform called Canvas. Enrolled students will be notified by e-mail when the Canvas page is accessible.

As you will also see from the schedule, there is a significant amount of reading for the course, the same as you’d expect from a course running six to eight weeks (like those courses, we meet for twenty hours, just compacted into five days). Since we meet just for the week, I strongly encourage you to plan for the reading and either read ahead or budget sufficient time to read the pieces each morning before we meet. We will not discuss every piece in depth, but we will touch on every piece in some way, through comparison, an exercise, or the like.

**Required Texts:**

- Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*
- Catherine Brady, *Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction*

**For the First Class, Please Read:**

1. Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*
   - Chapter 1, “Close Reading”
   - Chapter 2, “Words”

2. Catherine Brady, *Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction*
   - Chapter 1, “Story Logic”

3. In the online course reader, the following chapters from Madison Smartt Bell’s *Narrative Design* and stories (available in June):
   - Madison Smartt Bell, “Unconscious Mind” and “Linear Design”
   - Peter Taylor, “A Wife of Nashville” (including Bell’s notes)
   - Ernest Hemingway, “Indian Camp”
   - Joan Didion, “History Lesson”
   - Naomi Shihab Nye, “Someone I Love”