Course Description

This course is designed to help writers of all levels learn strategies for that most basic element of writing: getting words on the page. We will explore ways to move beyond the urgency of inspiration to crafting a complete and compelling short story. For the first few weeks, we will focus on making beginnings approachable and on forming a writing habit. Then we will look at how to use perspective, setting, character, form and plot as lenses through which to see your ideas anew and as sources of momentum that can push you past page one. We will read an anthology—*The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*—as well as essays by Anne Lamott on practices and processes. By the second half of the quarter, we will develop writing assignments into short stories and workshop them with an eye towards whether the piece is achieving what the author intended and on ways to bring the next draft closer to that original inspiration.

Required Texts

- *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*, Edited by Lex Williford and Michael Martone
- *Bird by Bird*, by Anne Lamott

Grading

Students have three grade options for Continuing Studies courses:

- No Grade Requested (NGR) – No credit shall be received; No proof of attendance can be provided. (Not suitable for those requiring proof of attendance/completion.)
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass) - written work & evaluation is required
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) - participation as determined by the instructor is required

Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

If you decide to take the course for Credit or a Letter Grade, your grade will be equally based on participation, writing assignments, workshop critiques and your final workshop piece.
Class Participation

Your participation is absolutely essential to this course. You can participate from anywhere (at least anywhere with an internet connection) at anytime. I aim to make our discussions engaging, lively, and open, but this is impossible without each of your voices. Please make an effort to post to the discussion boards each week and to give your peers’ work the time and attention it deserves. **As you’re responding to discussion points and to each other’s work on the discussion board, don’t worry about making your responses too polished. Try to think of them less as written responses and more as part of a conversation. It’s absolutely fine to be casual in tone.**

Written Work

This course is designed to get you writing. With this goal in mind, you’ll be required to turn in writing exercises each week. These exercises are meant to help you find inspiration in unlikely places, push past writer’s block, and experiment with different ways to tell stories. They are designed to be fun and freeing, and many of them will, I hope, prove worth expanding into longer pieces. Each assignment will be less than 2 pages, and they shouldn’t take you more than 2 or 3 hours to complete (not counting mulling over time—and the great thing about mulling is that it can occur while you’re doing just about anything else in your life!). Each week you’ll post your exercise to the discussion board in small groups, and your classmates and I will read and respond to it.

In the final weeks of the quarter, you’ll turn in a short story (10-20 pages), which will be workshopped by the class (more on the workshop process below).

Readings

I believe wholeheartedly that the best writers are also the best readers and that in learning to recognize and express what does or doesn’t work in another’s writing you become a far better reader and editor of your own writing. Each week you’ll be reading a *Scribner* story, a chapter or two from *Bird by Bird*, and a few of your classmate’s writing exercises. I know many of you have limited time to devote to this class, but, if you can, please try to read the short stories and writing exercises twice. The first read is purely for pleasure, for seeing what happens. The aim of the second read is to figure out how the author accomplished what he accomplished or in what ways he fell short of his intentions.

Workshops

In weeks one through five, you’ll be reading and responding to each other’s work in small groups, and in weeks six through ten, you’ll be critiquing each other’s stories in full-class workshops. As you all know, writing is a personal and often terrifying endeavor, so please be respectful and do your best to critique each piece of writing on its own terms. In weeks six through ten of the course you’ll each turn in a short story for workshop, and you’ll write a half-page to full-page critique of your classmate’s stories. You’ll sign up for workshop dates in week three, and we’ll go into more detail about the workshop process and critique letters in week five of the course.
Etiquette and Acceptable Online Behavior

Students in this course are expected to behave with good academic citizenship. Good academic citizenship essentially means respect and honesty. It includes professionalism, fairness, and generosity to fellow students; openness to suggestions from fellow students and instructors; and reasonable expectations about the course and the instructor. Students are asked to treat both their instructor and their colleagues with the same respect that they would like to receive. The kinds of activities that will not be tolerated include repeatedly stirring controversy, insulting or broadly characterizing large groups of people (e.g. women, members of a particular race), fixating on another student whose views are different, seeking confrontation, being dismissive of other students’ comments or writing, seeking to undermine an instructor’s authority, and demanding an unreasonable or disproportionate amount of attention from the class or the instructor. Although this program takes place online, we are a very real group of people and it is important to be honest and respectful in our dealings with each other.

Weekly Routine

• Log onto Canvas and read the "Lecture" page. This will include my lecture to start the week as well as the writing and reading assignments and any optional material. All of my lectures will be posted by Friday afternoon so that you have the weekend to read the lecture and get started on your assignments.
• Complete writing assignment and post to discussion board by Wednesday at 5 p.m. (PST) at the latest.
• Do assigned readings and respond to discussion questions by Thursday at 5 p.m. (PST) at the latest.
• Read your classmates' writing assignments in your small group and respond on the discussion board by Friday at 5 p.m. (PST) at the latest. (This is done in groups of four—you do not have to read every writing assignment from every classmate.)
• Participate throughout the week -- check the discussion boards and contribute regularly. I've provided hard and fast deadlines for writing assignments, reading responses and discussion posts above, but remember that the sooner you post assignments, responses and critiques, the more time your classmates will have to respond. Try to think of your online posts as part of an ongoing discussion instead of simply an assignment to be completed.
• If your schedule allows, join in for the weekly office hour Zoom video chat.
• On Sunday evening the discussion boards for the week will be closed.

This weekly routine will make a lot more sense once you've familiarized yourself with Canvas and once we've gone through a week of posting assignments, reading responses, and small group discussions, but if you're confused about what's due when or how to post, please don't hesitate to contact me.
What You Can Expect From Me

I'll be on the course site and checking my email regularly during the week. I absolutely love to read other writers’ work (as I said above, I believe that no one can become a writer without being an avid reader!). I'll provide written comments on each and every one of your writing exercises as well as line edits and an in-depth, page-long response to your final workshop piece. I’ll facilitate and participate in all of the discussions on readings and craft elements, and I’ll offer all the advice I can about the writing life and writing habits. **I'm happy to respond to late work, but please keep in mind that it might take me up to a week to get to it.** If you finish an assignment after the week’s discussion board is closed, please feel free to email it to me because I won't be checking the discussion boards after they're closed for the week on Sunday evening. At the beginning of the course, I'll put up a thread on the discussion board reserved for any questions or suggestions you might have, and you can also feel free to email me with any questions or concerns. I mean this—if you’ve done a writing exercise in the past that you absolutely loved, tell me about it! If you’d like to share a short story that you think is a great example of first-person narration, send it my way!