

## Writing Workshop

English 129a.1  
on-campus section  
Room: Olin-Sang 124  
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Prof. Joseph Coroniti  
Summer (I), 2008  
Brandeis University

**Texts (to be chosen from the following). Essential titles are marked with an \*. Fiction books are for fiction writers and Poetry books are for poets. Some are for all members.**

### *Craft:*

\* *Building Fiction: How to Develop Plot and Structure.* Jesse Lee Kercheval.  
University of Wisconsin Press (3/24/03). ISBN: 0299187241

\* (for all writers) *Room to Write.* Bonni Goldberg. Tarcher (1996). ISBN-10:  
0874778255 ISBN-13: 978-0874778250. (\$12.95/10.36)

\* (Fiction) *Bird By Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life.* Anne Lamott.  
Anchor. ISBN: 0385480016

*The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry.*  
Kim Addonizio & Dorianne Laux. Norton. ISBN: 0393316548

*Making Shapely Fiction.* Jerome Stern. Norton, 2000. \$15.95/10.85.

### *Short Stories:*

\* *Interpreter of Maladies.* Jhumpa Lahiri. Mariner Books. ISBN: 039592720X

*Where I'm Calling From: Selected Stories.* Raymond Carver. Vintage, 1989.  
ISBN-10: 0679722319. ISBN-13: 978-0679722311. \$15.95/10.85.

*The Things They Carried.* Tim O'Brien. Penguin. ISBN: 0 14 014773 X

### **Poetry:**

*Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems.* Billy Collins. Random  
House. ISBN: 0375755195.

**Memoir, only if students have an interest in this genre (not ordered through bookstore):**

\* *Eat, Pray, Love*. Elizabeth Gilbert. Penguin.

See <http://www.elizabethgilbert.com/index.htm>

*The Liar's Club*. Mary Karr. Penguin.

### **Additional Texts Only for Graduate Students Seeking Graduate Credit:**

*On Becoming a Novelist*. John Gardner. Norton, 1999.

*Sudden Fiction International*. Eds. R. Shapard & J. Thomas. Norton.  
ISBN: 0 393 30613 5

### **Course Objective:**

Upon satisfactory completion of this workshop, fiction writers and poets will be able to write with a heightened understanding of form, metaphor, voice, style, sound (the "music of what happens"), humor, and ritual. From our workshop sessions and our readings of master works of fiction and poetry, students will finally come to believe that in writing, as in many things, "less is more."

Fiction writers will write persuasive dialogue, build believable characters the reader will care about, and create settings that reflect the conflict in a scene. They will also draw on the "unresolved conflict" between characters.

Poets will create sonorous, vivid poetry making good use of imagery, repetition, rhythm, revision, and additional elements of poetry listed below under "The Poet's Craft."

Members of the workshop should plan on submitting their work to a magazine or literary journal. We will discuss submission strategies. *The Poet's Companion* discusses how to submit your work for publication.

## Coursework and out-of-class preparation

**Portfolio:** This includes all of your fiction and/or poetry along with the assigned exercises. Not counting any in-class exercises, the portfolio will include

**1.) Monday Pieces:** Bring in copies of your prose/poetry every Monday for each member of the workshop. We will then “workshop” your work on Monday and, if needed, online. There will be 4 “Monday Pieces,” weeks 1-4 (minimum 1,500 words). Also, please Post Online. If you are writing poetry, we will discuss how much poetry you should write for each Monday.

**2.) Reading Like a Writer [RLW] (Tuesday):** Short Essays on the Readings: Post, for each Thursday, a short discussion (250 words minimum) on some structural or stylistic point from the readings. Post Online. Weeks 1-4.

**3.) Two Exercises per Week (Wednesday):**

9 Exercises (2 due each Wednesday online, Weeks 1-4; 1 due Monday, Week 5) from  
*Building Fiction, Room to Write, or The Poet’s Companion.*

**4.) Thursday Feedback:** Post Feedback/Critiques on each other’s Monday Pieces by Thursday.

**5.) Friday Revisions:** Each Friday, post your Revisions of your Monday Piece, after taking into consideration our Feedback and your reading.

**6.) Final Project:** Your Final Short Story, Creative Nonfiction Piece, or Portfolio of Poems. This is the culmination of your Monday Pieces and Friday Revisions.

**PLEASE LABEL AND NUMBER THE ENTRIES:** Your Name.Wk

3.Monday/RLW 2/Exs/Thurs FB/Friday Rev/etc..

When giving FB, label as follows: Your Name.Wk 2.FB for Name of Colleague.

**Workshop Participation/Attendance:** Regular involvement in the workshop. This includes your contribution to the development of others’ work as well as the presentation of your own work.

This is a Workshop, not a “normal” university course. In order to work together you have to be here – on time. If you do miss a class, you still must complete your critiques of other writers’ work and deliver them by the next meeting.

**Final Grade Determination:**

Workshop Participation (giving, as well as receiving, constructive criticism; attendance): 20%

Monday Pieces and Exercises: 20%

RLW Essays: 10%

Thursday Feedback: 20%

Friday Revisions: 10%

Final Project, 5000 words min. (20 pp.): 20%. DUE: Monday, June 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Graduate Student Requirements:** Thursday Pieces will run 2,000 words minimum.

Graduate students will lead some small group work.

Final Project 7500 + words (approx. 30 pp.), accompanied by a short essay on narrative strategies employed.

**Please Note: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in a class, please see me immediately.**

## TOPICAL OUTLINE

### **Fiction**

Read all of *Building Fiction: How to Develop Plot and Structure*. Exercises from *Building Fiction* should be 500 words minimum, typed. Do these exercises for some of your Monday and Tuesday exercises.

### **THE ELEMENTS OF STRUCTURE**

Do the exercises from this book if you are writing Fiction:

#### **Week 1:**

Chapter 1: Sources for Fiction page 5

Chapter 2: Openings in Fiction 12

#### **Week 2:**

Chapter 3: Third-Person Point of View 22

Chapter 4: First- and Second-Person Points of View 44

#### **Week 3:**

Chapter 5: Constructing Characters 62

Chapter 6: Conflict in Fiction 82

#### **Week 4:**

Chapter 7: Continuing Conflict 95

Chapter 8: Endings in Fiction 111

#### **Week 5:**

Chapter 9: Revision (due Mon of Wk 5) 130

As time allows:

## FORMS AND STRUCTURES (as time allows):

Chapter 11: Short Shorts, Novellas, Novels-in-Stories 160

Chapter 12: Experimental Fiction 176

## Poetry

*The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*

If you write poetry, choose two exercises per week from this section:

### The Poet's Craft:

#### Week 1:

Images

Simile and Metaphor

#### Week 2:

The Music of the Line

Voice and Style

#### Week 3:

Stop Making Sense: Dreams and Experiments

Meter, Rhyme, and Form

#### Week 4:

Repetition, Rhythm, and Blues

More Repetition: Villanelle, Pantoum, Sestina

#### Week 5:

A Grammatical Excursion

The Energy of Revision

Also, read the other two sections of the book:

I. Subjects for Writing and III. The Writing Life

**We will choose together readings from the following books. We may base some assignments on these texts:**

### Craft:

*Bird By Bird* Anne Lamott.

*Making Shapely Fiction.* Jerome Stern.

*Room to Write.* Bonni Goldberg.

**Short Stories:**

*Interpreter of Maladies.* Jhumpa Lahiri.

*The Things They Carried.* Tim O'Brien.

*Where I'm Calling From: Selected Stories.* Raymond Carver.

**Poetry:**

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**Memoir:**

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