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**ENGLISH 350**

**INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING**

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INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

ENGLISH 350

Five Credits

Instructor: Nancy Pagh

**COURSE OVERVIEW & OUTCOMES**

This course introduces you to the practice of appreciating, drafting, revising, and polishing imaginative writing. It is designed for new creative writers and for future K-12 teachers of language arts. No prior experience as an imaginative writer is expected; however, college-level skill with expression in English is necessary to comprehend and execute the challenges ahead.

Students in English 350 read and create poems, stories, and personal essays intended for a literary audience, developing a more complex and thoughtful relationship with language. This relationship can lead to all sorts of side benefits. You can become a more attentive reader, able to perceive meaningful nuances and to understand how the writer created them. Through practice, you will develop more control of your grammar and expression skills—useful in academic, corporate, and "real life" circumstances.

But those are the side benefits of English 350. ***The power to name and define the world, and to define yourself in it, is the essential benefit of an imaginative writing class***. Gloria Anzaldúa answered the question "Why write?" this way:

By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy.

This is a class about studying and practicing creative writing; but, more than that, this is a class—as Anzaldúa stresses—about how we use language to define and change our understanding of the world and who we are in it.

**TEXTBOOK**

The required textbook is *Write Moves: A Creative Writing Guide & Anthology,* by Nancy Pagh (ISBN#978-1-55481-226-4). This book is usually available from your favorite online bookseller but is more reliably available through the publisher, Broadview Press: <https://broadviewpress.com/product/write-moves-a-creative-writing-guide-and-anthology/#tab-description>. Customer service (705) 743-8990.

**REQUIRED WORK**

**Reading Assignments**

Lessons 1-7 require you to closely read instructional chapters and literary texts from *Write Moves* then respond to specific questions or prompts about the readings. Expect that you may need to re-read or “sit with” some readings to understand and form your thoughts about them. Some prompts ask you to express and build upon personal response to readings; other prompts ask you to assess and comment on specific elements of craft (for example, imagery or sonic devices) manifest in example texts.

Read the prompts carefully. Make sure you answer them fully. It is usually best to weave quotation from the assigned readings into your responses about them; this shows that you can connect your ideas to specific examples or moments from the text. You will be graded not only on your creative writing, but on the evidence of your learning through reading and response.

**Creative Writing Drafts**

This course does not ask you to produce publishable literature. But it does require you to try your hand at literary art, learning by studying and by doing. You will try some poems and stories and essays, using the tools and techniques you discover as we move from lesson to lesson.

 With each lesson, you will get feedback about specific skills evidenced (or not evidenced) in your work. You are expected to apply what you learn from this feedback to your writing for the next lesson, then the next.

 The last two lessons require you to revise, edit, and polish a portfolio of work that you select as your best or most significant. This is an opportunity to use what you have learned across the whole course—and in this way your evaluation is weighted toward your end-point, rather than start-point, in the course.

**Writer’s Memos**

You will include half-page memos (reflective notes) with most of your creative writing. The memo’s purpose is to help me understand what you know about your craft and to help you reflect on your learning. Instructions for the memos are the same in each lesson: **Describe the process of writing this piece, the difficulties and joys you experienced, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.** You can also use the memo to ask your instructor questions about your writing. Be concise but be explicit in each memo; these reflective notes are required and are assessed toward your overall grade for each lesson.

**Portfolio**

When you reach lesson 7 you will review then select drafts from lessons 1-6 to create an **8- to 12-page double-spaced portfolio**. Revisions to the portfolio are made in both Lessons 7 and 8: in lesson 7 you select the material and revise it with respect to your intentions and instructor feedback provided in lessons 1-6. Lesson 7 requires you to compose several writer’s memos, spelling out your intentions for each piece in the portfolio and pointing to the specific features you want your instructor to attend to in reading this work. In Lesson 8 you focus on editing and polishing your portfolio—in light of the instructor’s response to Lesson 7—and you compose a final reflection on learning in the course overall.

Please be aware that it will likely take the instructor longer than usual to assess Lesson 7, and that it will probably take you longer to work on these last two lessons.

**CALENDAR/PROGRESS**

Some students wish to complete Self-paced courses within a single quarter at Western Washington University and, in some instances,—such as those mandated by financial aid—this must be done. **IT IS, HOWEVER, NOT POSSIBLE TO COMPLETE THE COURSE WITHIN A QUARTER IF YOU HAVE NOT SUBMITTED LESSON 1 BY WEEK 3. Please do not ask your instructor to “rush” you through or make an exception.** Everyone’s work is read in the order received, and it is not fair to delay feedback to others, or to stress your instructor, due to poor planning.

It is best to wait for the instructor’s evaluation of one assignment before submitting another. However, **you may, at a maximum, submit up to two lessons at one time for lessons 1-6**. Be aware, though, that you cannot complete lesson 7 and **cannot *begin* lesson 8 until receiving and taking time to reflect on instructor feedback on lesson 7**.

To assist students planning to complete the course within an average ten-week quarter, here is an optional outline of what could be done during each week of the term to meet such a schedule:

Week of term

1 Register before the term; complete & submit lesson 1 by week’s end

2 Begin lesson 2 while awaiting feedback on 1; send 2 late this week *or*

3 send 2 early this week after reading and applying feedback from 1

4 Complete and send lesson 3

5 Complete and send lesson 4

6 Complete and send lesson 5

7 Complete and send lesson 6

8 After receiving feedback on 6, complete and send lesson 7 in late week 8

9 *or* early in week 9. Read feedback carefully and send lesson 8 in week 9 *or*

10 by the end of week 10

**FORMATTING YOUR WORK**

Work that is improperly formatted will be returned unread. You will be asked to revise and resubmit it, delaying your progress through the course (your resubmission is now at the bottom of the pile). Please note the following requirements:

* Put your **name, course number, lesson number, and date** on the top of page one of your lesson.
* Arrange your work into the **assigned sequence** (not out of order).
* Unless otherwise noted, each lesson is **ONE document**.
* All your work must be **typed** using clearly readable 12-point text.
* All creative writing, including poems, must be **double spaced**. Memos can be double or single spaced, as you prefer. Memo length is about a paragraph or a half page, if double spaced.
* All drafts within each lesson must have a **title** to be considered complete for credit.
* There is room to play with fonts, margins, and spacing if you choose an experimental form for a specific piece.
* Please change the **settings** on your computer so that it does not automatically capitalize the first word of every new poetry line you write (in MS Word, click "tools," click "auto correct," click OFF the "capitalize first letters of sentences" feature, click "OK").
* Always **save drafts** of various stages of your work in multiple systems (hard drive + flash drive, or flash drive + cloud, etc.). You will need your original lesson files (without feedback embedded) to create lesson 7.

**ASSESSMENT**

You will receive one grade for each lesson (eight total): each assignment grade reflects your work on every component of the assignment sequence. Each lesson carries equal weight (a maximum of 10 points) toward the course grade, as follows:

A 10

1. 9.5

B+ 9

B 8.5

1. 8

C+ 7.5

C 7

1. 6.5

D+ 6

D 5.5

1. 5

F below 5

**Complete lessons are graded according to the following rubric**

“A” -- Both the imaginative writing and the analytical writing in response to reading assignments demonstrate advanced understanding and practice.

* Uses original and insightful examples and details; observations note features that novice creative writers would infrequently recognize; analytical commentary extends beyond the requirements in its depth and precision
* Writing demonstrates advanced understanding of concepts and techniques taught in the lesson; takes more risks and is more polished than required
* Responses and memos are detailed and specific
* Terms/vocabulary are used correctly and professionally

“B” -- Both the imaginative writing and the analytical writing in response to reading assignments demonstrates good and developing understanding and practice.

* Uses “safe” and relatively obvious examples and details; observations note features that novice creative writers would generally recognize; analytical commentary fully meets the requirements
* Writing demonstrates general or adequate understanding of concepts and techniques taught in the lesson
* Responses and memos are general but adequate to demonstrate learning
* Terms/vocabulary are used in a cursory but correct manner

“C” -- Both the imaginative writing and the analytical writing in response to reading assignments demonstrates emerging understanding or practice.

* Uses few examples or details; observations miss features that novice creative writers would usually recognize; analytical commentary is cursory or may focus on summary rather than ideas
* Writing demonstrates basic or superficial understanding of concepts and techniques taught in the lesson; takes fewer risks and is less polished than expected
* Responses and memos are sketchy, general, or partially executed
* Terms/vocabulary are avoided or used incorrectly

**Your final course grade is based on total points on all lessons, as follows**

77-80 = A 53-56 = C

73-76 = A- 49-52 = C-

69-72 = B+ 45-48 = D+

65-68 = B 41-44 = D

61-64 = B- 37-40 = D-

57-60 = C+ 0-36 = F

**SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS**

All work must be submitted to the **Western Online office**, which marks it received and forwards to your instructor. You can submit work by email, in person (hard copy), by snail mail, or by fax. Please contact the Western office (360 650-3308) if you have questions about these options.

 Before submitting your work, please read back through the instructions in the lesson and check that all assigned parts are included in your work. Your grade will be penalized if the lesson is partially incomplete, and you will not have a do-over. Before sending it, make sure it is correctly formatted. Otherwise it could be returned ungraded after a week, delaying your progress.

 When your lesson has been evaluated, your instructor sends it back to the Western Online office where the staff records your credit and forwards the feedback to you. If you have not heard back after one full week after sending your lesson, then check with Western Online whether a grade was recorded. If no grade has been recorded in over one week, please check directly with your instructor to make sure your lesson is in line to be read soon.

ALWAYS make a hard copy of your work BEFORE submitting it, and back up your work on one or more flash drives. If lessons are lost, it is far easier to resubmit a copy than to rewrite an entire assignment. All assignments must be completed in order to receive credit for the course. Under no circumstances may you submit all, or even most, lessons at one time, as each lesson builds upon the previous one.

**Time Considerations** – To ensure timely completion of this course you are wise to organize your time so that you spread your work out over 10-12 weeks, just like a regular academic quarter. Students most often run into difficulty when they try to rush through a large part of their work just before a personal deadline.

Remember that learning, especially in a writing class, takes time – time for reading, time for reflection, time for writing and rewriting. Also, keep in mind that instructors have many demands on their time and are often unable to grade assignments immediately, no matter how compelling a student’s problem may be. Be certain to allow for mailing time to and from the Western Online office, and between the instructor and Western Online. During summer months, and between quarters, some instructors travel and may only be available to grade once every week or two. At the end of the quarter, your instructor is likely to have many finals and others projects in line to grade. Plan accordingly.

**ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR**



**Nancy Pagh** is the author of three collections of poetry (*No Sweeter Fat,* *After,* and *Once Removed*), one book of nonfiction (*At Home Afloat*), and the textbook *Write Moves: A Creative Writing Guide & Anthology*. She earned a Ph.D. at the University of British Columbia in Canada, Master’s degrees in literature and creative writing at the University of New Hampshire, and an undergraduate degree in English with a concentration in Publishing & Printing Arts at Pacific Lutheran University.

Nancy teaches at Western Washington University in Bellingham. In addition to beginning, intermediate, and advanced writing classes, she has taught courses on food literature, literature of the wild, Victorian women’s travel writing, women and literature, Canadian literature, and literature of the cross-border Salish Sea bioregion. More at [www.nancypagh.com](http://www.nancypagh.com)

LESSON 1

Image, Detail, and Figurative Language

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson introduces you to imagery—the most elemental and necessary aspect of all creative writing—and its extension, figurative language—which adds meaning through comparison.

 “Show don’t tell” is perhaps the most commonly repeated advice in creative writing. The difference between *showing* and *telling* is the difference between relating to a friend that you are sad because your grandmother has died (telling) and conveying a moment so vividly that it makes it possible for your friend to feel a sense of who your grandmother was and to experience your sadness with you (showing).

 In this multi-genre lesson, you will think about and communicate why you are taking the course (helping your instructor understand your goals), then study and attempt image-rich creative writing to move an audience.

**SEQUENCE**

1. In *Write Moves*, read the “Why Write?” chapter (pages 19-24) then compose a paragraph or so A) giving an overview of your previous experience (if any) as a creative writer, and B) responding to the questions in “Your Moves” prompt #5 (24). Do this to clarify your reasons for taking the class now and as an introduction to your instructor. **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read “Image, Detail, and Figurative Language” (67-79). Look at the list of suggested readings on page 77, then skip around in the anthology at the back of the textbook, reading the poems, stories, or essays that interest you from this list (note that you can find readings by using the Index at the back of the book, or just by flipping through the anthology—authors are named on all the right-hand anthology pages, at the top).

Choose *one* that you particularly like, then write a 1-full-page reflection on the use of imagery and detail in that one piece. Quote the imagery that strikes you as most important and interesting; comment on how these details shape the meaning of this piece and your experience of reading it. A strong reflection will make use of vocabulary from the “Image, Detail, and Figurative Language” reading. **Include this with your submission**.

1. Read “Among the Blossoms” (368) by Mallory Opel and “Snapshot, Harvey Cedars: 1948” (311) by Paul Lisicky. Find your own photograph to use as a prompt for drafting a short (less than a page), image-rich piece. You might use a family photo, an historical image, an image from an art gallery web page or from a current news site. If you wish, paste the image into your lesson, right before or after your draft.

Your draft can be autobiographical, or you can invent a fictional speaker/narrator. It must, however, be clear that the speaker is describing this photo, and in your piece you must use *at least four vocabulary words from the field of photography* in a figurative manner (Opel uses “expose,” “viewer,” “focus,” and “composition”; Lisicky uses “camera,” “shut”ter, “developing” and “pose”).

Once you have drafted your short project, go through and underline all the imagery; leave un-underlined every word that does not cause the reader to imagine using sight, touch, taste, sound, or smell. Then cut, shrink, and reduce all the language that is not underlined, and add imagery that you can underline, until at least 50% of the text is underlined. Title this draft. Keep the underlines, so your instructor can see your understanding of what is and is not imagery. **Include this titled draft, with underlines, in your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.

**CHECK**

Before submitting this lesson to Western Online, please take a moment to re-read the sequence instructions above, making sure you have completed all work as instructed. Make sure you’ve formatted your work according to the instructions in the course syllabus overview (for example, all work—including poems—are double spaced). Make sure your name, course number, lesson number, and date are on page 1 of your work. Incomplete work will be penalized, and you will not have an opportunity to complete and re-submit it for a revised grade.

LESSON 2

Sound and Poetry

**OVERVIEW**

The first genre or type of creative writing that you will explore is poetry. Poetry is a compressed form; it has an economy of size that helps focus on detail and imagery—the foundation of all genres of imaginative writing.

Poetry asks us to attend to sound and silence—not just to *what* we say, but to *how* we say. Careful attention to sonic devices helps us know how to hone and distill our expression in creative nonfiction and storytelling, as well as in poems.

**SEQUENCE**

1. In *Write Moves*, read the “Sound” chapter (80-92) then look at the list of suggested readings on page 90. Read around among the prose (not verse) works on this list—that’s the material by Crace, Foster Wallace, Queyras, Shumaker, Sutin, and Yeager. Choose *one* of these pieces that you feel uses sound in meaningful or interesting ways, then write a 1-full-page reflection on the use of sound in that piece. Quote the language that strikes you as most important in terms of sonic expression; comment on how these parts shape the meaning of this piece and your experience of reading it. A strong reflection will make use of vocabulary from the “Sound” chapter. **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read “Writing Poems” (139-155) then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or feel about poetry? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about this genre of writing? **Include this with your submission.**
3. Try any *one* of the “Your Moves” prompts #5-11 (152-153) after reading the poems each prompt recommends. After creating your initial draft, notice how many of the devices named on pages 84-89 you have employed. Can you add some—and how does changing the sonic atmosphere change how your poem means? Which of these sonic devices do you think work well in your draft, and why? **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece (including naming which kind of poem it is—such as “poem of social conscience” or “list poem”), the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.
4. Draft one image-rich, sonically rich poem by doing *one* of the following:
5. Read Natalie Diaz, “My Brother at 3 a.m.;” Patricia Smith, “Hip-Hop Ghazal;” and Elizabeth Bachinsky, “For the Pageant Girls” then create your own poem that uses *refrain* (a repeated phrase or repeated phrases). You need not follow any given shape or pattern—use refrain where you feel it works.
6. Search YouTube for the spoken-word poems recommended on page 90/“Your Moves” #1, then create your own spoken-word poem for your voice. This is a poem meant to be HEARD, not read on the page. Make a brief video or voice recording of yourself performing this draft—BUT it needs to be recorded in a format that can be opened with MS Windows 10. Indicate in your written lesson that you will attach it to your submission.
7. Read Kathleen Halme’s “A Study in O” then write your own “study in—” poem, exploring all the repetitive possibilities of your favorite sound, letter, or phrase. It can be a surreal poem.
8. Copy and paste your image-rich draft from Lesson 1/Sequence 3, then revise it into a poem that uses at least four additional instances of any of the following: assonance, consonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, anaphora, true rhyme, slant rhyme, or meter.

**Include this titled draft, or attach this recording, with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece (including naming it as option A, B, C, or D), the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.

**CHECK**

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LESSON 3

Scene, Exposition, and Reflection

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson asks you to think actively about the practice of drafting, and about strategies and habits common to imaginative writers who face the blank page.

 This lesson also introduces you to three important modes of expression: scene, exposition, and reflection. It teaches you to distinguish between these modes and gain experience drafting with scene, exposition, and reflection. You end the lesson by considering “leads” or beginnings—how language invites and compels a reader to enter a piece of literature.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Read “Drafting” (36-47) then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or feel about how creative writing first happens in draft form, based on your work for lessons 1 and 2, or on earlier experience? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about drafting creative writing? **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read “Scene, Exposition, and Reflection” (106-118) then look at the list of suggested readings on page 117. Read around among the prose (not verse) works on this list—that’s the material by Alfred, Hemingway, Miller, Tan, and Winterson. Choose *one* of these pieces that you feel uses scene in meaningful or interesting ways, then write a 1-full-page reflection on the use of scene in that piece. Quote the language that strikes you as most important in terms of scene; comment on how scene shapes the meaning of this piece and your experience of reading it. A strong reflection will make use of vocabulary from the “Scene, Exposition, and Reflection” chapter. **Include this with your submission.**
3. Compose a passage written entirely as *scene* from your own life, about a paragraph to a page in length, using the following prompt: “Write about an ordinary few moments in your young life.” This can be an actual moment that you remember, or it can be *representative*—the *kind* of thing that happened several times and that truthfully depicts yourself then. It might be a memory of sitting cross-legged on the thick blue carpet in your bedroom, wearing headphones and singing loudly with your favorite song. Of standing on the concrete steps outside your middle school, in the rain, when your dad’s silver Honda pulls up. Of stirring chocolate chips into the cookie batter and noticing your own reflection in the darkened kitchen window at your mom’s house. Fill this scene with physical details to give your reader the sensation of experiencing this moment. Delete every word of abstraction or exposition from this example of scene. Feel free to use first- or third-person point of view, past- or present-tense. **Include this with your submission**.
4. Write a paragraph of *exposition* about the scene you just composed. In it, set up the context or background for that scene: How old were you? Where did you live? What was happening in your life at that time? Exposition will likely be significantly shorter than scene, because it is a form of summary. **Include this with your submission**.
5. Write a paragraph of *reflection* about that same memory. From your stance now, in the present moment, why do you think you still remember that moment—or that kind of moment? What do you understand now about who you were or what you needed then? What are you in the process of asking, wondering, or realizing about yourself, or about the experience of childhood or youth, through this memory? Write this passage of reflection in present tense, trying to “make meaning” from the memory you used for your scene. **Include this with your submission**.
6. Look at the list of essays included in the anthology, pages 193-194. Find and read the leads (the first sentence or two) of ten of these essays, noting how some begin with scene, some with exposition, and some with reflection. Which leads most attract you and compel you to keep reading?

Imagine that you are going to combine your Scene/Exposition/Reflection exercises (sequence 3, 4, 5) into one project, one essay. How would you lead that essay—how would you begin it in a way that will entice a reader to enter and continue reading? Would you start with a bit of scene, a statement of exposition, or a moment of reflection? Write your lead, then below it write a paragraph naming which mode you selected (scene, exposition, or reflection) and naming two other leads that you read for this sequence that begin in this same mode (name the authors and titles). Quote both example leads in your analysis, and describe how they impacted you as a reader. What did you notice and emulate in these two leads, to shape your own? **Include your lead, and include this analytical paragraph, with your submission**.

**CHECK**

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LESSON 4

Writing Personal Essays

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson introduces you to the conventions of creative nonfiction, as both a reader and as a writer of literary personal essays.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Read “Writing Personal Essays” (173-182) then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or understand about creative nonfiction and the personal essay? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about this genre of writing? **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read the following short personal essays from our anthology:

Jean-Dominique Bauby, “Bathtime”

Arlan Cashier, “Lost Sweater”

Brian Doyle, “Leap”

Joy Harjo, “Suspended”

Bhanu Kapil, “Three Voices”

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, “The Witching Hour”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these essays you found the most moving to read and why, and which two essays you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand what a personal essay can do, or how it can do it), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Read the following longer personal essays from our anthology:

Jo Ann Beard, “The Fourth State of Matter”

Ivan E. Coyote, “This, That, and the Other Thing”

Patricia Hampl, “Red Sky in the Morning”

Sonja Livingston, “The Ghetto Girls’ Guide to Dating and Romance”

Donald Murray, “War Stories Untold”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these essays you found the most moving to read and why, and which two essays you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand what a personal essay can do, or how it can do it), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Draft a short (1 to 3 pages) personal essay. Look to the “Your Moves” prompts on page 183 for a thematic starting place. **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.
2. Draft a longer (3½ to 6 pages) personal essay. Look to the “Your Moves” prompts on page 184-186 for a thematic starting place. **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.

**CHECK**

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LESSON 5

Character and Setting

**OVERVIEW**

This multi-genre lesson invites you to consider and practice two important elements of craft in creative writing: character and setting.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Read “Character and Setting” (93-105) then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or understand about bringing people and places alive on the page? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about these elements of craft? **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read the following portrait pieces from our anthology, attending to how both character and setting are written:

Reinaldo Arenas, “The Downpour”

Michael Crummy, “Bread”

Elise Partridge, “Edwin Partridge”

Brent Staples, “The Coroner’s Photographs”

Mark Spragg, “In Wyoming”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these readings you found the most moving to read and why, and which two you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand the craft of writing character and setting), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Read the following narratives from our anthology, attending to how both character and setting are written within stories:

Raymond Carver, “Chef’s House”

Kristiana Kahakauwila, “Thirty-Nine Rules for Making a Hawaiian Funeral into

a Drinking Game”

Howard Norman, from “I Hate to Leave this Beautiful Place”

Simon Rich, “Unprotected”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these readings you found the most moving to read and why, and which two you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand the craft of writing character and setting), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Draft a brief (½ page to 2 pages) nonfiction portrait, in poetry or prose. It might be a portrait of a place you know well (like Spragg), of your younger self (like Arenas), of a family member (like Crummey, Partridge, Staples), or of a friend or mentor. **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.
2. Draft a short (1 to 4 pages) narrative (a little story) about a character out of place in a setting OR a character at ease and at home in a setting. Whichever you select, consider: what is this character’s desire; what is this character’s conflict; and how does this character change by the end? Make both character and setting palpable and present in this short narrative. You may write nonfiction (about yourself, or based in personal experience) or fiction (an imagined character). **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.

**CHECK**

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LESSON 6

Writing Stories

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson introduces you to the purposes and methods of literary storytelling, in the contexts of both fiction and nonfiction.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Read “Writing Stories” (156-172) then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or understand about storytelling? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about this genre of writing? **Include this with your submission.**
2. Read the following “action plot” stories from our anthology:

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World”

B.J. Novak, “Julie & the Warlord”

David Sedaris, “The Drama Bug”

Luisa Valenzuela, “Vision out of the Corner of One Eye”

Jeanette Winterson, “The Three Friends”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these stories you found the most moving to read and why, and which two you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand what a story can do, or how it can do it), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Read the following “inner-life plot” stories from our anthology:

Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour”

Rachel Knudsen, “How to Enter the Ocean”

Lewis Nordan, “Owls”

Madeline Thien, “Simple Recipes”

Thomas S. Whitecloud III, “Blue Winds Dancing”

Compose a paragraph about which two of these stories you found the most moving to read and why, and which two you found to be the most instructive (“instructive” in the sense that they helped you better understand what a story can do, or how it can do it), and why. **Include this this with your submission.**

1. Draft a short (1 to 4 pages) “action plot story” from your own life (nonfiction) or from imagination (fiction). This story must feature a character experiencing a succession of incidents related to one another by a causal factor (every action is a reaction to or extension of the action before it); the story must include a climax and resolution or ending (no chapters or episodes from “a longer work”). **Include this titled draft with your submission. Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.
2. Draft a short (1 to 4 pages) “inner-life plot story” from your own life (nonfiction) or from imagination (fiction). This story must concentrate on a character’s internal or emotional journey, resolving with an extended moment of emotion that reveals something about the character and their identity or true self. No chapters or episodes from “a longer work.” **Include this titled draft with your submission.** **Add a ½-page writer’s memo** describing the process of creating this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in crafting it, and your sense of what this draft does and does not achieve.

**CHECK**

Before submitting this lesson to Western Online, please take a moment to re-read the sequence instructions above, making sure you have completed all work as instructed. Make sure you’ve formatted your work according to the instructions in the course syllabus overview (for example, all work—including poems—are double spaced). Make sure your name, course number, lesson number, and date are on page 1 of your work. Incomplete work will be penalized, and you will not have an opportunity to complete and re-submit it for a revised grade.

LESSON 7

Portfolio Draft / Revision

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson requires you to engage with the feedback you have received throughout the course, selecting and revising what you consider to be some of your finest or most promising creative writing from English 350. In this sequence, you practice revision as a “real” writer, rather than as a student who must push out drafts near deadlines and “correct” them before a final submission. Lesson 7 culminates with your creation of an 8- to 12-page double-spaced portfolio and a separate document of writer’s memos about each piece in the portfolio.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Skim “Voice and Perspective” (119-129), paying particular attention to the elements of point of view and perspective covered on pages 122-125. Point of view and perspective are frequently changed in revision, so it is important to understand these options for the work ahead.
2. Read the “Revision” (48-61) chapter carefully, then write a 1-paragraph reflection: What did you already know or understand about the practice of revision? What did this chapter teach you or how did it surprise you? What question still lingers in your mind about revision? **Include this with your submission.**
3. Select your initial portfolio material. Look back through all your creative writing for this class, review feedback again, and select the projects that are the most important to you, that you are most interested in continuing to work with, that you think will hold the most interest for a reading audience. You can have any combination of poems, essays, or stories—and not every genre need be represented. You cannot create any new pieces for the portfolio though.

Copy and paste these drafts from your original documents (without Track Changes or other feedback embedded) into a new file. Double spaced, this file will be about 10 pages long—but the length will change a lot as you continue to work on it. Save and name this file, just as it is, so that you can always come back to it as a reference point later (for example: portfolio1.docx).

1. Make a second copy of your rough portfolio file with a different name (such as portfolio2.docx): this is your “working copy.” Save and re-name it several times during the process of revision, so that you have saved stages of your work and can “go back” if you want to un-do revision attempts that turn out not to work (expect some revision not to work!). You are able to take bigger and more productive risks with your working copy if you create this safety net.

Format your working copy:

* put your name, course #, lesson #, and date on the top four lines of the document (single spaced)
* double space the entire rest of the project, with *two* double spaces between individual works (don’t start each work on a new page); poems are double spaced too
* put titles of individual pieces in bold; just have *one* double-spaced line between the title and body of each piece
* check that you do not have any extra spacing between paragraphs: In MS Word, click Home, Paragraph arrow, then check that Spacing is set at 0.00” before and after
* check that your margins (Layout, Margins) are 1.00” on top, bottom, left, and right
* It is helpful, but not required, to insert page numbering (Insert, Page numbering)
1. Revise your working copy. Look at each poem, essay, and story, letting go of your original intention, the original assigned length. What can each project really be about? What is the necessary length? What complexity and depth can you bring to this material now, that you couldn’t execute earlier in the class? Follow the guidelines on pages 52-54 to:
* open to figurative possibilities
* cut deep
* experiment with shape and perspective
* tighten beginnings and endings
* play with your title
1. Edit your working copy. After you have re-shaped pieces in terms of “the big picture,” see if you are still at about ten double-spaced pages. You might have to eliminate some pieces now, or pick some more material created in lessons 1-6.

Continue forward by editing—turning your attention to language at the level of the line and sentence. Go through the whole portfolio file, line by line, reading with care and making your language as clear, fresh, and beautiful as possible. Don’t just *sharpen* what you mean to say—*discover* what the project needs to say. These discoveries may sometimes send you back to the revision stage, to re-work aspects of the whole piece. This is normal and good; it is the work a creative writer does, a sign that your writing is deepening and maturing. If you are only “correcting,” only fixing errors, you are not really editing—you’re proofreading.

Here is a checklist of some common editing considerations:

* add images and scenes that “show;” delete or condense exposition that “tells”
* add figurative language to carry your work beyond the literal plane
* tone down direct characterization—add indirect characterization and dialogue
* we so often forget our reader can’t “picture” the scene—add setting
* hunt out and eliminate cliché
* eliminate or replace 50% of the passive verbs (is, am, was, were, are, be)
* check that verb tense and point of view are consistent within pieces
* edit sentences so they are varied in length and type
* look for vague, abstract language; replace it with precise, concrete language
* edit for rhythm and pleasurable sounds—even in stories and essays
* do correct grammar, but sentence fragments and contractions have purpose—especially when writing in colloquial voice or dialogue
* cut *everything* unnecessary to the poem, essay, story; nothing belongs just because “I wrote it”—this means cutting extra syllables, not just paragraphs and sentences

Once you are satisfied with your working copy and it *fills* 8 to 12 pages, **save this file and** **include it with your submission.** Note that 7½ pages is not 8 pages.

1. Create a separate file and compose a short writer’s memo for *each* piece within the portfolio draft. Arrange the memos into the same order as their counterparts in the portfolio. With each memo, describe the process of revising this piece, the difficulties and pleasures you encountered in re-seeing and honing it, and your sense of how this project has changed and what it does and does not achieve. Do you have a specific question about this piece in its current form? How to execute a specific move? **Save this and include it as a second file to attach to your submission.**

**CHECK**

Before submitting this lesson to Western Online, please take a moment to re-read the sequence instructions above, making sure you have completed all work as instructed. Make sure you’ve formatted your work according to the instructions in the course syllabus overview (for example, all work—including poems—are double spaced). Make sure your name, course number, lesson number, and date are on page 1 of your work. Incomplete work will be penalized, and you will not have an opportunity to complete and re-submit it for a revised grade.

LESSON 8

Revised Portfolio / Editing and Polishing

**OVERVIEW**

This lesson asks you to continue the revision process in response to feedback on your portfolio draft; to engage fully with editing and proofreading/polishing your language throughout your portfolio; and to conclude your experience in the course with one final reflective writer’s memo.

**SEQUENCE**

1. Read your instructor’s feedback on lesson 7 fully and carefully.
2. Revise those pieces that may still need work in terms of shape, form, arrangement, and content (deleting or adding scene, re-arranging the structure); if this significantly expands or shortens the portfolio, you may need to drop a weaker project altogether, or add another draft written during the class, to **maintain an 8- to 12-page portfolio**.
3. Think now about your portfolio as a manuscript—as taking your reader on a journey. How does this journey begin and end? How would you like to order the pieces in your finished portfolio? Do they belong in the order that you wrote them, or is there another kind of story you would like to tell through their arrangement? Would you like to give your portfolio a meaningful title (or is “Portfolio” enough)?
4. Continue editing and proofreading your projects, reading each piece out loud, searching for missing words, homonyms, and typographical errors. Attend to the colorful lines and squiggles in your software—indicators of grammar and punctuation errors. Of course, sometimes creative license is allowed in creative writing—but these usages should be purposeful, not accidental.
5. Most of us need a critical eye—at least one trusted reader who is skilled in grammar and punctuation—to help us notice and see the mistakes we overlook because our brain sees what we intended, not what’s there in black and white. Have at least one friend, parent, house mate, etc. read your portfolio for errors, circling or highlighting all the parts that need more attention. Know that you can also use the WWU Writing Studio (<https://library.wwu.edu/rws/forms/send-us-a-draft>), including online resources, for help. The staff there will not edit your portfolio for you, but they will help you find the patterns of errors that your make, so you can be on the lookout for them and know how to fix them.
6. After your portfolio has been revised, edited, polished, organized, and titled, create a final 1-page writer’s memo: describe your process of completing the portfolio (the difficulties and joys you encountered along the way) and reflect on your sense now of what this portfolio shows about your way of understanding and voicing the world. **Save your 8- to 12-page portfolio and 1-page final memo in one document and submit it.** Congratulations! 😊