

Creative Writing

ENGL 71

Spring 2026 Section 05 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/25/2026

Contact Information

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| Instructor: | Ume Ali (OO-me ah-LEE) |
| Email: | ume.ali@sjsu.edu |
| Office Hours: | W 12 - 1pm FOB 213 or Zoom (by appointment) |
| Class Days/Time: | MW 9:00 - 10:15am |
| Classroom: | BBC 221 |
| Prerequisites: | Completion of GE Area A2 Written Communication |
| GE/SJSU Studies Category: | GE Area C2 Humanities |

Course Description and Requisites

Examinations of works of poetry, creative nonfiction and short fiction as expression of human intellect and imagination, to comprehend the historic and global cultural contexts, and recognize issues related to writing of diverse cultural traditions. Students will also write poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction.

Satisfies 3A. Arts (Formerly Area C1).

Grading: Letter Graded.

* Classroom Protocols

Conduct

Writing can be an extraordinarily vulnerable exercise. Compassion is one of the most important aspects of a writing workshop. This class is a safe space to experiment with voice, style, and subject matter. We are here to support each other's writing journeys and help build each other's confidence as well as reach writing goals. Be respectful of each other in your critiques and be respectful of yourself.

AI Policy

AI usage to compose any written work or portions of essays will result in an automatic zero for the assignment, without the possibility to redo the assignment.

≡ Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;

- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Goals

English 71 GE Learning Outcomes (GELOs)

Upon successful completion of this GE course, students will be able to:

1. Decipher and understand the form and content of assigned literary works;
2. Comprehend the historical and cultural contexts of assigned literary works;
3. Recognize the accomplishments of and issues related to writing by men and women representing diverse cultural traditions;
4. Acquire through both individual and collaborative/workshop efforts of a written and oral nature the skills necessary for reading, discussing, analyzing, interpreting, and—most importantly— emulating and writing works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction;
5. Communicate such skills with clarity and precision;

6. Develop an appreciation of literary works as expressions of human intellect and imagination, and as representations of diverse human cultures;
7. Develop the ability to write literary works that express intellect and imagination and that represent diversity in human cultures;
8. Respond to literature through clear and effective communication in both written and oral work;
9. Read and respond to texts with both analytical acumen and personal sensibility;
10. Appreciate how literary works illuminate enduring human concerns while also representing matters specific to a particular culture;
11. Write works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Through this course, students will:

1. Appreciate the wide breadth of contemporary writing in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction;
2. Express themselves creatively in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction;
3. Associate reading as a crucial component to writing;
4. Consider writing as contributing to a larger community both inside and outside the university;
5. Place their own creative output within the larger contemporary writing community.



Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area 3A: Arts

Across the disciplines in Area 3 coursework, students cultivate and refine their affective, cognitive, and expressive faculties by studying works of the human intellect and imagination. Area 3 courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. In their intellectual and subjective considerations, students develop a better understanding of the interrelationship between the self and the creative arts and the humanities in a variety of cultures.

3A (Arts) courses emphasize the integration of history, theory, aesthetics, and criticism. Performance and studio classes may be credited toward satisfaction of this subject area if their major emphasis is the integration of history, theory, and criticism. Audition-based courses will not be approved for GE.

GE Area 3A Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a 3A course, students should be able to:

1. identify aesthetic qualities and processes that characterize works of the human intellect and imagination;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such works;
3. analyze the role and impact of the creative arts in culture and on the interrelationship of self and community; and

4. research and apply relevant aesthetic criteria and/or artistic conventions in effective written responses to works of art.

Writing requirement

3A classes require a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

Required Texts

No textbook. Links to free online and digital texts will be provided throughout the semester.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Course Requirements

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, you are expected to spend a minimum of 45 hours for each unit of credit (normally 3 hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, and completing assignments. These activities and assignments include:

1. Response to Readings (RR)
2. Poetry Portfolio
3. 1 Short fiction piece
4. 1 Nonfiction essay
5. Process papers (peer critique, literary event paper, reflections, drafts, and revision notes)
6. Engagement (journal, workshop comments, overall participation in class and online)

Reading Responses:

Each week students will be assigned a playlist of craft articles and creative pieces for class discussions. Typically, playlists will go live on Friday. Students should arrive at Monday's class having read all of the playlist items. Unless otherwise noted, reading responses must be posted as a reply to the playlists by Wednesday. Responses must include interpretations of creative pieces, analysis of stylistic elements, and must be roughly 300 words.

Poetry Portfolio:

You will produce a portfolio which consists of 2 revised poems, including all drafts and revision notes, to show the progress you have made in subsequent versions of your final pieces. Each poem should include its own reflection (roughly 200 words) in which you discuss the specific changes you made and the significance of said revisions. In other words, justify your creative process. Part of this will also be submitted to the department for assessment.

Fiction Story (max 500 words):

You will produce a short story whose genre, style, topic, voice, etc will be all of your own choosing. You will also provide a 300 word explanation of the specific craft elements you are employing in your writing, as well as a justification for how those chosen stylistic elements are effective to your piece.

Nonfiction Essay (max 500 words):

You will produce a personal narrative essay. You will also provide a 300 word explanation of the specific craft elements you are employing in your writing, as well as a justification for how those chosen stylistic elements are effective to your piece.

Process: The process of writing is just as important as the finished product. As such, drafts, revisions, peer critiques and reflections for each genre piece, as well as the literary event paper count towards process points. Each student is required to attend at least one literary event during the course of the semester (events can be found at the Center for Literary Arts [website](#)). After you attend the event, please write a paper discussing the significance of the event. More details will be provided.

Engagement: Students will respond to in-class writing exercises in a composition notebook. This will also be where you brainstorm ideas for your creative pieces. I will collect the journal twice during the semester for grading purposes. Students will also earn engagement (or participation) credit for actively engaging with the reading material, with their peers, and with their own writing. As this is an in-person course, participation **will primarily be based on your attendance, your writing efforts, and your willingness to contribute to class discussions and workshops.** You are not expected to be correct or accurate. Our classroom environment should be a safe place where we all can inquire and speak with impunity, as long as there is honesty and an eagerness to learn. If you're absent, you can't participate at all.

Small Group Workshops

Students will share their creative pieces for each genre in small group workshops. unit we will have Small Group Workshops. You will submit your poem electronically on Canvas and complete workshop feedback as edits on a docx.

While workshopping:

- Listen to your classmates and be careful not to interrupt. It is frequently difficult to formulate responses in front of peers, and even slight interruptions can derail the thoughts of the person speaking.
- Focus your comments on the work and never on the author. It should be as if we're discussing a manuscript that arrived with no name on it.
- It is not acceptable to issue insults or to praise sarcastically. Likely, some of the work we read will not meet your exact taste. That should not prevent you from delivering a sound analysis of its strengths and areas of improvement.

If your manuscript is being workshopped:

- Remain silent until the conclusion of the discussion. Do not nod or shake your head to questions raised about your piece. If we cannot determine what was intended by a particular passage, this should alert you to something that's not yet being communicated in the writing. Let this feedback guide your revision.
- Take notes. Even if what we're saying does not sound useful in the moment, later on you may read through our comments and discover one or two to be of value.

Peer Feedback

Peer feedback is written prior to the workshop, 200 words of your understanding of a peer's work, with special focus on specific craft strengths of the piece, as well as areas of improvement.

When critiquing a manuscript:

- Read it once without marking it, while asking yourself what the author is trying to accomplish, and how the piece might improve and become what it seeks to be. Then go back and read it again, annotating it to show what works well and what doesn't work so well.
- List the elements of the manuscript that are working well. Compliment parts that are effective or that elicit a particular emotional reaction from you.
- Question the way in which the work proceeds. What isn't quite clear? What needs more development?

Assignments

All assignments should be typed in 12-point font, one-inch margins, in Times New Roman font, and MLA format. For example, if you are writing dialogue in a scene, please refer to the MLA style for appropriate spacing rules etc.. All assignments will be submitted on Canvas.

✓ Grading Information

Minimum Grading Policy

This course uses the minimum grading method of assessment. This means, the minimum score for all assignments is 50%, and no zeroes will be given (as long as work is submitted). Hopefully, this encourages us to attempt and submit all work (regardless of quality). Notice that **process papers** (outlines, drafts, revisions) are worth 40% of the final grade. This is intentional so that we put more effort into revision rather than worrying about one big final submission grade. For example, a crappy first draft of a short story earns an automatic 5/10, completing it well (according to the rubric tbd) may earn the remaining 5 points for a total score of 10/10. Revising the story and improving it, earns another 10 points. The whole point of minimum grading, then, is to place emphasis on improvement rather than assigning a weighty grade to an end product.

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|-------------|--|--|--|--|
| 5 pt Rubric | | | | |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|

| Points | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2.5 |
|----------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------|
| Description/Criteria | Completed assignment according to prompt. Clear, focused, organized, insightful response. | Mostly clear, additional details/insight would be helpful. | Some engagement with prompt, some ideas presented. Could more be more focused, main idea needed. | Minimal or missing work. |
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| 10 pt Rubric | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| Points | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| Description/Criteria | Excellent, thoroughly completed work. Clear focus. Responded to all parts of prompt, organized response in logical manner, with a beginning, middle, and end. | Very strong ideas. Additional details/insight would be helpful to overall response. Good focus. Structure could be more intentional, thoughtful. | Additional detail/insight would be helpful to strengthen presentation of ideas. Responds to the prompt, though response can be structured in a more organized and coherent manner. | Shows some demonstration of understanding the prompt, response seems to address some components of the prompt while missing aspects. Some thoughts and insights presented. More clarity/focus needed. | Minimal engagement with the prompt. Some scattered thoughts. Response needs focus/clarity. | Did not attempt, complete, or address the prompt. |
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Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

***The schedule is tentative and subject to change at any given time. It is the student's responsibility to check Canvas for updated assignment deadlines and assigned work.

| Week | Date | Monday | | Wednesday |
|------|-------|---|--------|--|
| | Jan19 | | Jan 21 | Welcome Module (due 1/25) |
| 1 | Jan26 | First 71 Class Meeting! Introductions & Ice Breaker Syllabus | Jan28 | Poetry 101 Understanding Poetry Poetic Terms |
| 2 | Feb2 | Discussion: Image Poetry Playlist section I (please read all poems in the first section), Astigmatism by Amy Lowell (Practice RR) | Feb4 | Discussion: Image Poem Playlist (continued) (continue elements of poetry discussion) Due Friday 2/7: First RR (reading response) |
| 3 | Feb9 | Discussion: Image Playlist section I (continued) Seen and Unseen Activity Due Tue 2/11: Image Poem Draft | Feb11 | Small Group Workshop |
| 4 | Feb16 | Asynchronous class Discussion: Birches by Robert Frost Visual Explication in Groups | Feb18 | Asynchronous class Begin Protest Poetry Unit Read BEFORE class: Protest poetry craft essays + Section I (Canvas) |

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| 5 | Feb23 | <p>Discussion: Playlist Section I</p> <p>"The Opposites Game" Brendan Constantine</p> <p>https://boykeats.tumblr.com/post/660807071903711232</p> <p>Social issues brainstorm</p> <p>Due: RR#2</p> | Feb25 | <p>Discussion: Second half of Protest Poetry Playlist</p> <p>Portfolio Assessment</p> <p>Due Sun: Protest Poem Draft</p> |
| 6 | Mar2 | Workshop | Mar4 | Poetry Celebration! Visual Design Activity |
| 7 | Mar9 | <p>Begin Fiction Unit</p> <p>Discussion: A Short Story Theory</p> <p>"How to Write Flash Fiction" in Canvas Modules</p> <p>Flash Fiction and Plot</p> <p>Readings: Kincaid, Chopin</p> | Mar11 | <p>Discussion: Fiction Craft + The Lottery by Shirley Jackson</p> <p>How to Let Plot Guide Your Short Story</p> <p>Basic Plot vs Voice</p> <p>Due: The Lottery lesson plan (groups)</p> |
| 8 | Mar16 | <p>Discussion: Symptoms by Ross Wilcox</p> <p>Characterization</p> <p>The Likable Loser (300 word story)</p> | Mar18 | <p>Discussion: A Temporary Matter by Jhumpa Lahiri</p> <p>Pacing in Short Fiction</p> |
| 9 | Mar23 | <p>Discussion: Pacing/Setting</p> <p>A Temporary Matter by Jhumpa Lahiri</p> <p>The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman</p> <p>Pacing, flashback</p> | Mar25 | Due: RR 3 for A Temporary Matter by Jhumpa Lahiri |
| 10 | Mar30 | SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK | Apr1 | SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK |

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|----|-------|--|-------|--|
| 11 | Apr6 | <p>Discussion: Narrative Voice</p> <p>Readings: The Husband Stitch by Carmen Maria Machado</p> <p>Embrace the Nelson</p> | Apr8 | <p>Discussion: Unreliable Narrators</p> <p>"What is an unreliable narrator?" MasterClass</p> <p>"In a Grove" by Ryunosuke Akutagawa</p> <p>Due Friday 4/11: Narrative Plot</p> |
| 12 | Apr13 | Due: Fiction Draft | Apr15 | <p>Fiction Workshop</p> <p>Small Groups</p> <p>Fiction reflection</p> |
| 13 | Apr20 | <p>Excerpt from "The Gangster We Are All Looking For" by Le Thi Diem Thuy</p> <p>Fragmented narratives, nonlinear narratives</p> <p>Pacing, flashback</p> | Apr22 | Due: Fiction Final |
| 14 | Apr27 | <p>Begin Nonfiction Unit</p> <p>In Class: "Chop Suey" and Inner Story Activity</p> <p>Discussion: Our therapists will tell us... by Max Hunt</p> | Apr29 | <p>Discussion: Nonfiction (continued)</p> <p>Readings: "Intro to CNF"</p> <p>"Why I Write"</p> <p>"Mother Tongue" Amy Tan</p> |
| 15 | May4 | <p>Discussion: Steps for Effective Nonfiction Writing</p> <p>"What I learned from a fitting room disaster" by Scaachi Koul</p> <p>"Voice in Creative Nonfiction" by Sue Silverman</p> <p>"What is reflection in Nonfiction?" by Signe Jorgenson</p> <p>Due: RR#4</p> | May6 | <p>Due: Nonfiction Draft I</p> <p>Discussion:</p> <p>"Me Talk Pretty One Day"</p> <p>"How I Found Poetry in Childhood Prayer"</p> |
| 16 | May11 | <p>Nonfiction Workshop I</p> <p>Due: Student Journals</p> | May13 | <p>Due: Nonfiction Final</p> <p>Due: Poetry Portfolio</p> |

