Department of English

Stockholm University

**Creative Writing in English**
(15 credits)
Spring 2025
**Teacher**: Prof. Adnan Mahmutović
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## Course description

Welcome to Creative Writing in English. In this course, you will have the opportunity to develop your writing skills in a series of seminars and workshops. The theory segment will start with "reading like a writer" sessions in which we will analyse major elements of craft: characterization, show-don't-tell, openings & endings, structure, setting, and style. You will write a number of exercises during the course and one short story, which will be workshopped in the second half of the term. It is crucial to come to the seminars well prepared and be active.

## Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- Account for the contents of the course literature;
- Display the ability to use basic theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field;
- Apply these concepts;
- Display a good understanding of written English;
- Write prose which shows an understanding of basic principles of narrative art
- Critique other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work

## Grading

The course adopts the 7-grade SU scale (A–F).
To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examination assignments [not done all examination assignments=no grade].
To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must complete and pass all the examination assignments, and thus demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level (see "Course grading" below).

## Course activities

The course consists of the following activities:

- Seminars (including pre-seminar preparations and assignments).
- Workshops (including any pre-workshop instructions and assignments);
- Before each seminar or workshop, students are expected to finish the assigned reading, do any accompanying tasks, and discuss the texts and tasks in groups. Students should be prepared to discuss the readings and tasks at the seminar;
- Students are expected to complete all the tasks assigned by the teacher.

## Examination

The course utilizes written and oral assignments, which are assessed according to the above-stated ILOs (see grading criteria). Written assignments cover 100% of the final course grade (employing A-F scale) and the oral assignment is graded pass/fail.

a. **Written assignments (A-F grading scale)**

- a creative project (up to 3,000 words) (60%)
- a reflection (1,000 words) (30%)
- written critique/feedback on other students' stories (10%)

b. **Oral assignment (pass/fail)**

- oral critique/feedback on other students' stories (workshop)

## Course format and requirements

The course has the form of seminars and workshops, which are intended to be active, hands-on opportunities for students to practice the acquired skills. For this reason, the students should bring the assigned text(s) to every seminar. Minimal obligatory attendance is 80%. The three presentations and five written assignments outlined in the schedule are also part of the course requirements.

## Required readings and viewings

Stephen King, *On Writing*
Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*
Anne Fine, *Goggle Eyes*

**A portfolio of materials available from Athena**

Earnest Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"
Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
An excerpt from Wallace Stegner's *The Sense of Place*
David Jauss, "Who's Afraid of Big Bad Abstraction?"

**Note:** You should find one short-story collection that you like, by a writer who can serve as a model. Use examples from this collection in different assignments.

## Schedule

*Please note that there may be occasional changes to dates/times and rooms. Check Time Edit for updates.*

| Unit | Seminar readings and activities |
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| **Introduction – Ideas About Writing** | **Read:** Start reading King's *On Writing* and read Prose Ch. 1<br>**Assignment:** Write 1-200 words on one book you love. Be very specific. What appeals to you as a reader. |
| **Character development** | **Key ideas:** CHANGE vs. CHANGELESSNESS<br>**Read:** Prose Ch. 6 and O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Keep reading King's *On Writing*.<br>**Prepare:** We will mainly focus on Grandma. Who is she, what are her motivations, what are her illusions, how does she develop, and how is her character defined in relation to the murderer and her family? Pay attention to diction and the structure (plot). How does the lack of information affect your reading?<br>**Assignment** (submit on Athena)**:** Write a scene (ca. 300 words) in which Grandma is trying to buy the last two tickets for the premiere of *Barbie*. I want to be able to recognize Grandma but also see how the change of time and place affect her character. |
| **Character, conflict, narrative voice, and story structure** | **Key ideas:** CHANGE vs. CHANGELESSNESS<br>**Read:** Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life …" and Francine Prose Ch. 5<br>**Group presentations (ca. 20min):**<br>**Group 1**: Analyse the main character(s). Who are they and what drives them? Are they round or flat? Do they change and how? If they do not change, does that mean they are flat characters?<br>**Group 2**: Analyse secondary characters. Are they fully fleshed out or flat? Do they change or remain the same? How are the main characters fleshed out in relation to them and vice-versa?<br>**Group 3**: Analyse the structure. Is it character-driven or plot-driven, or both? Is the main conflict of the story also the conflict for the character(s)? If not, then how do the conflicts work together? Do both drive the story?<br>**Group 4**: Analyse narrative voice. Similarities and differences. Imagine what other narrative voices can be used effectively and what would absolutely not work. Try and rewrite a paragraph using a different narrative voice. |
| **Plotting** | **Key ideas:** CONFLICT, STRUCTURE, SCOPE, CLIMAX, RESOLUTION<br>**Read:** Prose Chs. 5 and 10 and the PP presentation.<br>**Assignment** (submit on Athena)**:** Write your plotline/storyline (one sentence); list your characters; state the main conflict; write an extended synopsis (max 200 words). I will make them available to everyone. Read all submissions and prepare for a discussion. |
| **Show-don't-Tell** | **Read:** Anne Fine's *Goggle-Eyes*, David Jauss' "Who's Afraid…," Francine Prose Chs. 8 and 9.<br>**Group assignment (15 min):** Each group should find a few scenes in Fine's novel that are good examples of showing. Rewrite and turn them into "telling." |
| **Dialogue** | **Key ideas:** DICTION, FLOW, REALISM, ARTIFICE, CHARACTER<br>**Group work:** Find some crappy dialogue, from a book or a film. Rewrite together until it feels right. You will perform/show the bad dialogue as well as your own rewrite so everyone can hear the difference. Then show PP slides of your changes and explain what you did. 15-min per group. |

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| **Setting & Senses** | **Key ideas:** SPACE, TIME, HISTORY, EYES-NOSE-EARS-TONGUE-SKIN<br>**Read:** Excerpt from Stegner's "The Sense of Place"<br><br>**Assignment** (submit on Athena)**:** Find a story in which you like the use of the setting. Analyse what the author does. What techniques are used? |
| **Mini workshop** | This is a preparatory workshop where you will discuss, in smaller groups, your story idea, plot, characters, or anything else you need to discuss. |
| **Deadline** | Submit your short story on Athena by 5 May. |
| **Workshop** | Submit your story on Athena under assignments. Format your story like this:<br>- Times New Roman, 12p, 1.5 spacing, 0.75cm indent.<br>- Dialogue lines: Frida said, 'What a moron.'<br>- For thoughts use italics: Frida thought, *What a moron*.<br><br>You will receive the stories at least a week ahead of your session. You will only participate in one smaller group. After the workshop, you must email your comments to each student in your group as well as myself. As a form of practice, when you submit your story, write a submissions letter, as you would to a proper journal:<br><br>Dear Adnan,<br><br>I would like to submit my story "Me and my dynamite" for your consideration. It deals with … (storyline in no more than 50 words). I am … (not more than 50 words about yourself).<br><br>I'm looking forward to your feedback. Thank you for considering my work.<br><br>Regards,<br>Alfred Nobel |

Deadline 9 June: Final draft of the story and a reflection (1000-words) on the main changes in the story and what elements of craft you developed in the process. Retake deadline 15 August.

## Grading criteria

| | A | B | C | D | E | Fx | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **excellent skills in** | **very good skills in** | **good skills in** | **satisfactory skills in** | **adequate skills in** | | |
| **Overview of material** (ILO 1) | accounting for the contents of the course literature | accounting for the contents of the course literature | accounting for the contents of the course literature | accounting for the contents of the course literature | accounting for the contents of the course literature | The student has displayed some, but not all, of the skills of the level of the criteria for E. | The student's work does not demonstrate the achievement of the course outcomes at a minimally adequate level. |
| **Discussion** (ILO 2) | displaying the ability to use theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts | displaying the ability to use theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts | displaying the ability to use theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts | displaying the ability to use theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts | displaying the ability to use theoretical concepts, analytical models and methods in the field, and applying these concepts to literary texts | | |
| **Craft** (ILO 3, 5) | writing prose which shows understanding of basic principles of narrative art | writing prose which shows understanding of basic principles of narrative art | writing prose which shows understanding of basic principles of narrative art | writing prose which shows understanding of basic principles of narrative art | writing prose which shows understanding of basic principles of narrative art | | |
| **Workshop** (ILO 6) | critiquing other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work | critiquing other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work | critiquing other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work | critiquing other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work | critiquing other students' creative work in a constructive manner in order to help them improve their work | | |
| **Expression** (ILO 4) | expressing themselves in English | expressing themselves in English | expressing themselves in English | expressing themselves in English | expressing themselves in English | | |

## Oral examination grading criteria

| | Pass | **Fail** |
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| **Content** | The feedback to the fellow students (in the workshop) is clear, constructive and concise. It demonstrates an understanding of the key issues of craft discussed in the course. | The feedback to fellow students (in the workshop) is unclear and unconstructive. It demonstrates a lack of understanding of the key issues of craft discussed in the course. |
| **Organization and language** | The feedback is well-structured and easy to follow. | The feedback is poorly delivered, and the language used is incomprehensible. |