

Fall 2021

ENGLISH 3241-101: Crafting the Short Story

TTh 9:30 – 10:45 AM

Wehr Life Science 108

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Office Hours: TTh 12:30 PM – 2 PM or by appointment

This section of “Crafting the Short Story” blends together literary study and the creative writing workshop to produce what I hope will be a singular and formative intellectual experience for its students. The first segment of the course is built around the approach to the short story outlined by Ann Charters’s anthology *The Story and Its Writer* (10th edition), which combines a vibrant anthology of twentieth-century short stories with writerly reflections on the mechanics of short story construction and the craft of creative short story composition. After that, students in this class will write, workshop, and revise their own short stories. Students will share their stories with me and their peers in a supportive workshop environment, receive both due praise and constructive critical feedback, and then craft revisions of their stories that they feel proud of for their final portfolio. Along the way we will also be looking at, and writing, flash fictions (very short stories of under 500 words).

LEARNING GOALS

Marquette Core Curriculum: Cognition, Memory and Intelligence: Guiding Questions

How do we process interactions with the world around us? How do we acquire knowledge? How do we make memories? How does language influence how we think? How do social interactions change how we think? How do we imagine things and events we’ve not experienced? How do new technologies change how we think? Why and how do the answers to these questions change over the course of one’s life? How does lifestyle, injury or disease affect these processes? What is artificial intelligence, and how is artificial intelligence in computers and machines different from human intelligence?

Students choosing this theme will study the mind from a variety of perspectives, including: neurocognitive processes of early childhood and adult brain development, mental disorder, trauma and PTSD; language acquisition, speech pathology, and the cognitive operations of multilingualism and translation; artificial intelligence, machine learning and data science; and reflections on and representations and understandings of the workings of the human mind in history, theology, philosophy, literature and languages, and communications and media studies.

English Department Learning Outcomes

- Articulate how the imaginative constructs of poetry, drama, and prose (fiction and nonfiction) illuminate fundamental questions of human experience.
- Define critical theories/methods of reading.
- Identify rhetorical tactics within texts.
- Analyze the function of rhetorical tactics within texts.
- Argue for interpretations and evaluations of texts.
- Reflect on the validity of personal bases for evaluating texts in light of textual, historical, and cultural evidence.
- Construct well-written texts in a variety of genres and/or media.
- Deliver effective multi-media presentations.
- Demonstrate effective strategies for collaboration with peers.

ENGL3241, “Crafting the Short Story” Learning Outcomes

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of the short story, including character, plot, setting, image, and authorial voice;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which various short stories have been produced;
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to diverse short stories;
- Produce an original short story and revise it in accordance with constructive peer feedback, as well as provide constructive and helpful feedback on peers’ stories;
- Use literary study as a means to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss short stories on the levels of both form and content.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONAL EMERGENCIES

Everyone at Marquette recognizes that this is an extremely difficult time which may be filled with different sorts of uncertainty as we move forward with the academic year. Your safety, health, and well-being are our primary concern and we want to be able to support you in any way that we can.

The university also understands that you may be facing personal obstacles that may make it difficult to meet your typical academic goals. Please refer to the Student Resources page on the Marquette COVID-19 Response webpage for information and resources on basic needs such as housing, food, financial aid, and medical and mental health; the webpage also offers information on official University communications, access to technology, and student services. Faculty and staff are also here for you.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your situation outside of class, please don’t hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. You are not alone.

COVID-19 POLICY

Everyone in this class will be expected to follow the current COVID-19 policies in effect on campus, including current guidance on masks.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The only required textbook is Ann Charters's *The Story and Its Writer* (10th edition). The ISBN-13 for this book is 978-1319105600. You should have this book by the second day of class if you can; please let me know if you are having trouble getting access to any of the readings.

Additional readings and course materials may occasionally be made available via D2L; we will also use D2L to distribute your short stories during the workshop portion of the class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Seminar and Workshop Participation	25%
Sandbox Posts	10%
Flash Fiction	10%
First Story	15%
Second Story	15%
Final Portfolio	25%

I'll look at each of your stories twice this semester. The first time will occur during the workshop portion of the course, during which you'll receive helpful comments from me and the other members of the class. You'll revise these stories and hand in a second, improved draft with your final portfolio on Wednesday, December 15.

Early portfolios will not be penalized for coming in before the due date or even before finals week. Organize your end-of-the-semester crunch in whatever way works best for you.

Additional details on all assignments are available on D2L.

GRADING

Grades for written assignments in this course will follow the rubrics that have been made available as an appendix to this syllabus. Please consult them to see what is expected of you.

Grades are not awarded on an artificial curve or in competition with each other. There is no reason that every student cannot receive an A in this course.

UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Your makeup posts and sandbox posts will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

- Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
- Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
- Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting. Students who miss class on a given day will be expected to make that work up via a post on D2L in order to have the absence excused.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **four unexcused absences** over the course of the fall semester. Upon the fourth unexcused absence, you may receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present in class is insufficient for an “A” in class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Most of your written work in this course is published using D2L's forums. You should compose your work in a word processing programming, not in your browser, and then copy and paste it into the appropriate discussion forum when the post is finished. Composing your work in a word processing program will make it easier for you to save a copy of the work on your own hard drive, as well as prevent you from losing your work if your browser crashes, resets, or otherwise fails to successfully upload the material.

Both of your short stories should be approximately eight-to-ten pages, typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-firststory.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, the name of the assignment, and the workshop date in a header on the first page.

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

WORKSHOP

Workshop is this class's entire reason for being. A writing workshop is the sharing of a draft of a story with a receptive group of other writers. It is a time when we evaluate where our work is headed and consider other people's suggestions on how to improve it.

A workshop is not:

- The exhibition of a finished, perfected work of art;
- A time to do homework for your other classes;
- An excuse to be nasty to each other.

On workshop days, we will have two or three stories to look at. You will come to class with at least one typed page of comments for each story, both positive and negative, which you will give directly to the story's writer at the end of class (either on a physical piece of paper or via the D2L forum). You'll also participate in our group discussion about the story. We will spend our class time on workshop days looking in detail at the day's stories and sharing our thoughts and responses with the class.

Each student is responsible for posting their story on D2L at least one week before your scheduled workshop.

You are not required to follow anyone's suggestions for your work, and certainly not mine. But you are required to *listen* to other people's comments, compliments, and constructive criticism. Students should expect to remain silent while their story is being workshopped. They should also expect to be the first person to share their thoughts on the other story or stories being workshopped that day.

EXTENSIONS

Although the work in this course have a sufficiently long timetable to allow you to plan and complete all assignments in a timely manner, and although the ability of your classmates to workshop your story in time for class *depends* on you posting your story in that timely manner, I nonetheless recognize that emergencies do happen, especially in the context of the pandemic. **If you find that you will not be able to make your deadline for workshop, please contact me as soon as you can to arrange an alternative due date.** There is no need to concoct an elaborate story to justify this, or to lie to me; simply tell me the truth about what's going on and we can work out an alternative that works for you. We have several spillover slots at the end of the semester to give us at least a little bit of wiggle room.

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often, while they are still in process; save backup copies of essential documents like your short story, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive. Even just periodically emailing your story-in-process to yourself will prevent you from losing your short story to a computer crash at the last minute.

SANDBOX POSTS

During the literary study section of the course, I will ask you to post a freeform response in the designated "sandbox" forum once a week. This does not have to be a formal written post, but can

also take the form of a podcast, short video, a work of art or music, a short story or fan fiction, a comic, or more; any response of any sort is fine, provided it is thoughtful and substantial. By the end of the weekend, I will ask you to respond to at least two other sandbox posts. The idea is to respond collectively to the material we are studying together in a way that is not stifling, anxious, or overstructured by academic expectations that cannot really apply to this odd and altered educational context; my hope is to strip away grading strictures that can only be dysfunctional in the current moment and foster instead more multifaceted, more generous, and hopefully richer intellectual encounters, driven by your interests.

D2L FORUMS

This course will make extensive use of the D2L forums at <http://d2l.mu.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L also features an online forum that will help us facilitate our discussions and our workshops.

The D2L discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion or by the workshop format to share their opinions with the class.

Before class on Thursday, every student is required to take the following actions:

- * **upload a picture either of their face or a representative symbolic image to their D2L profile;**
- * **take the entrance survey;**
- * **post an “About the Author” about themselves in the designated forum.**

Students will post one sandbox response each week during the literary section of the course.

LAPTOP POLICY

As Marquette moves towards a paperless learning environment, in-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. becomes ever more important for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. **Please do not abuse this privilege or distract your fellow students.** I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. Except in unusual cases of personal emergency, cleared with me at the start of class, no use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once the evening before a scheduled class meeting, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

CONFERENCES

All students are asked to meet with me in at least two short one-on-one conferences in my office, via Zoom, or at an appropriately socially distanced outdoor location, once before Fall Break and once after. Weekly signups will be available on D2L.

Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work-in-progress in excess of this requirement as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or email me to set up an appointment.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to any of the above.

WRITING CENTER

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process.

Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting the Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building). ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at ods@marquette.edu.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette’s academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate excuses. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. Because you will all be sharing your creative work, you will all be vulnerable emotionally. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here. Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** impact your class participation grade.

A workshop, more than anything else, is a group of friends. This is important: you’re all friends now. Treat each other that way.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open. I put this statement on every syllabus, but I think it is especially important in a semester that is likely to be as chaotic and disorienting as this one. Please, keep me in the loop about what is going on with you in the world outside our classroom, and help me to make this class as successful as it can be.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

The full workshop schedule will be generated and posted after drop/add ends.

T	Aug 31	FIRST DAY OF CLASS in class: Six-Word Stories
Th	Sep 2	Grace Paley, “Samuel” TSAIW appendix: “Reading Short Stories” in class: How to Build a Workshop Community
T	Sep 7	PLOT Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” TSAIW: “Plot” plus TSAIW casebook on O’Connor

Th	Sep 9	CHARACTER James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” plus TSAIW casebook on “Sonny’s Blues” TSAIW: “Character”
T	Sep 14	POINT OF VIEW: 1ST PERSON John Updike, “A&P” Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” TSAIW: “Point of View” optional: TSAIW casebook on “The Yellow Wallpaper”
Th	Sep 16	POINT OF VIEW CONTINUED: 3RD PERSON John Cheever, “The Swimmer” Ernest Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants”
T	Sep 21	SETTING AND TIME William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery” TSAIW: “Setting”
Th	Sep 23	METAPHOR Franz Kafka, “The Metamorphosis” TSAIW: “Theme”
T	Sep 28	STYLE Raymond Carver, “Cathedral” TSAIW: “Style” plus TSAIW casebook on Carver
Th	Sep 30	FLASH FICTION Raymond Carver, “Popular Mechanics” Lydia Davis, “The Mother” Jaimaica Kincaid, “Girl” David Foster Wallace, “Everything Is Green” plus TSAIW casebook on very short stories
T	Oct 5	SAMPLE WORKSHOP AND DISCUSSION <i>sample story</i> : Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron” Reading: Tom Bailey on the Writer’s Workshop [D2L] DUE: “flash fiction” / very short story, 500 words max / bring four copies printed out to class
Th	Oct 7	WORKSHOP 1, 2
T	Oct 12	WORKSHOP 3, 4, 5
Th	Oct 14	WORKSHOP 6, 7
T	Oct 19	WORKSHOP 8, 9
Th	Oct 21	FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

T	Oct 26	WORKSHOP 10, 11, 12
Th	Oct 28	WORKSHOP 13, 14
T	Nov 2	WORKSHOP 15, 16, 17
Th	Nov 4	WORKSHOP 18, 19
T	Nov 9	WORKSHOP overflow, 1b, 2b
Th	Nov 11	WORKSHOP 3b, 4b
T	Nov 16	WORKSHOP 5b, 6b, 7b
Th	Nov 18	WORKSHOP 8b, 9b
T	Nov 23	WORKSHOP 10b, 11b
Th	Nov 25	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS
T	Nov 30	WORKSHOP 12b, 13b, 14b
Th	Dec 2	WORKSHOP 15b, 16b
T	Dec 7	WORKSHOP 17b, 18b, 19b
Th	Dec 9	WORKSHOP overflow
W	Dec 15	FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE BY 10 AM

FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH

On Facebook (page): www.facebook.com/marquettefame

On Facebook (group): www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194

(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

On Twitter: @MarquetteENGL

While our ability to see each other in person is still somewhat constrained this semester, there will be opportunities for department events and virtual meetups that will be advertised through these outlets. I hope you can attend!

MARQUETTE LITERARY REVIEW

I hope all students in the class will consider getting involved with the *Marquette Literary Review*, a truly excellent outlet for student creative work on this campus. Stay tuned for updates from me and from Professor Sorby for details on how to submit as an author and how to get involved as an editor.

APPENDIX 1: FICTION WORKSHOP GUIDE

The First Read

The first time, pay close attention to the characters and structure of the story. Consider such questions as:

1. Has the writer presented a strong opening scene? Does the story begin in the right place?
2. Is there a good mix of scene and summary? Is there an overuse of summary?
3. Does the action flow logically from scene to scene? Did any scene confuse you?
4. Is viewpoint established and consistent? Does the story switch perspectives?
5. Are there scenes, actions, or pieces of information that could be eliminated or combined without damaging the story? Are there any “missing” scenes you’d like to see added?
6. Were there any scenes you felt the writer really nailed? Be sure to let them know.
7. Does the story come to a believable conclusion? Are all storylines and loose ends resolved? Is this a strong ending for this story?
8. Are the setting and time period well-developed and appropriate for this story?
9. Are the characters all unique and believable? Does each one feel like a real, fleshed-out, three-dimensional person?
10. Is the dialogue believable? Do the characters in the story talk like people actually talk?
11. Do the characters’ actions make sense, given what you know about them as people?
12. Which characters and character moments were your favorite?
13. Are there “extras” cluttering the scenery that the writer could eliminate or combine? Are there any minor characters you would like to hear more from?

Be sure to make plenty of positive as well as constructive comments in the margins of the story. We’re here to help each other become better writers, but there’s always room in a workshop for pats on the back.

When you’re done with the first read, take a break. Go for a walk, watch some TV, get some coffee, take a nap, etc. Let at least a few hours go by before you pick up the story again.

The Second Read

Now you’re going to be reading the story on the level of style. You’ll still be paying attention to character, structure, and plot, and feel free to mark any new thoughts you have about these topics. (Sometimes the problems with a particular scene are much more apparent on a second read.) But on this second pass you’ll be focusing on the little details. Look for things like:

1. especially strong description
2. over-description (“purple prose”)
3. missed opportunities for sensory description and scenic detail
4. dull word choices, clichés, and common phrasings
5. awkward or confusing sentences and phrases
6. wordiness or repetition
7. stilted or unbelievable dialogue
8. strong dialogue
9. grammar issues like sudden tense changes or subject/verb agreement
10. inconsistent point of view
11. any other sentences or paragraphs that worked particularly well, which the writer might use as a guide for later revision
12. any other opportunities for stylistic improvements

In the second pass, you’re paying very close attention to language, working with the writer to perfect their draft.

The Final Task

After you’ve read the story a second time, it’s time to type up a short, half-to-one-page letter to the writer, letting them know your overall response to the story: what you thought really worked and what you think they should focus their revision time on. Be sure to include both positive and constructive comments here, as well.

APPENDIX 2: SHORT STORY GRADING RUBRIC

Criteria	Excelled	Met	Developing
Overall Goals	Uses the elements of the short story to tell a story that surprises, moves, inspires, informs, and/or entertains its readers.	Uses the basic elements of the short story to produce some emotional or intellectual reaction in the reader.	Contains the basic elements of a short story, including a narrative with a beginning and an end.
Responsive to Workshop Criticism	Makes significant changes in response to peer criticism, and/or demonstrates significant consideration of a proposed revision even if it was not ultimately adopted.	Demonstrates some evidence that the story has been revised and altered in response to workshop criticism, and/or provides some explanation for why the proposed revisions were not made.	Demonstrates little evidence that the story has been revised and altered in response to workshop criticism, and/or provides little explanation for why the proposed revisions were not made.
Writing Skills	Pays obvious attention to sentence structure, format, style, grammar, spelling and punctuation, with grammar, spelling and word choice that clearly articulates the ideas being expressed.	Pays some attention to sentence structure, format, style, grammar, spelling and punctuation, including limited grammar, spelling and word choice errors, but not to a level that significantly detracts from the ideas being expressed.	Pays limited attention to sentence structure, format, grammar, spelling and punctuation, including grammar, spelling and word choice errors frequent enough to detract from content and muddle ideas.
Clarity, organization and style	Consistent clarity of thought, appropriate vocabulary, well organized with style appropriate to the story.	Clear and organized with generally consistent and appropriate style.	Inconsistent in clarity, organization, format, and/or style.

APPENDIX 3: GERRY'S PHILOSOPHY OF WORKSHOP RESPONSE

I want to make two global comments about the way I tend to respond to stories in a workshop:

(1) I treat the stories as fiction, even when they seem to have autobiographical elements. I'd invite you all to do the same both as readers and as writers; try to disassociate what the characters in the story do from the writer as a person, even if (especially if?) the character has some of the same characteristics as the author! Treat them like characters, because once they enter the realm of fiction that's what they are. By the same token, don't feel like you're constrained by what "really happened" when making decisions about your own story, if you did begin in an autobiographical place; it's fiction, you're not constrained by the truth! And sometimes to get at the emotional truth of a story you have to change what "really happened" to tell a better story.

(2) I tend to suggest other possibilities for missing scenes or new endings. I do this for at least three reasons:

- a) I get excited by the stories and excited by possibilities I see to make them better;
- b) I think it's important to not get precious about different element of the stories and to be unable to see them as changeable/revisable;
- c) it helps to get a conversation going.

That said, while *I* think these are the missing scenes or the possible new endings, my suggestions are not *directive* in the sense that I am ever ordering you to do what I suggest. Of course not! It's your story. What I ask you to do in the revision stage is to think about the points being raised and explain, in the reflective essay, how you addressed them (which could very well be deciding "No, I'm right and Gerry/the class is wrong, I'm leaving it the way it was"). Keep in mind also that sometimes your readers identify the problems but not necessarily the solutions; I've often had people write me back with ideas for changes to address the issues I raised that were much better than what I'd come up with! If I'm telling you to take a closer look at the ending, that means the ending doesn't quite work for me yet and it's something you should think about a little bit more; it doesn't necessarily mean that my idea about how to fix it is the right one.

APPENDIX 4: FINAL PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES

Congratulations! You're nearly at the finish line. Your work on the portfolio is much more independent than your work in the previous weeks of the course—the solitary, even lonely work of a writer in revision. Your job now is to integrate the comments you received in workshop with your own artistic vision.

Taking into account in the feedback from the other members of the class and from me, you will now revise each of your three major creative pieces in this course—your flash fiction and your two short stories— and produce a new version. You should also produce a short, one-to-two-page reflective essay on each piece describing both what first inspired the story and what drove your process of revision, laying out the changes you decided to make after receiving feedback and why.

For some people, this will mean adding to your story, adding those key sensory details and overlooked missing scenes that will help flesh out the emotional journey of your characters. For others, it might mean cutting from your story, eliminating unnecessary characters or scenes that distract from the main arc. You may even find yourself doing both jobs at the same time.

You are not required to make any specific changes to your story just because I or other members of your group suggest them. (In the end, after all, it's your story; you are the author here, and you get the final say.) When your readers identify a problem, they are simply calling your attention to a moment that didn't quite work for them—but they might not be right about the reason why, or might not have the only solution. You are simply asked to receive the criticism with an open mind, and explain how you thought to improve the story after seeing the response from readers. Take their comments under consideration, but remember that in the end the story is yours, and you alone are the ultimate decider of what works for your vision and what doesn't.

Remember also that revision is serious work; revising your story may take you as long as it took to originally write it, or even much longer! Writers often go through many, many drafts of a story before they are feel it is “ready.”

Of course, every story is different, and will require different levels and types of revision as appropriate. As a general guideline, however, you should imagine spending at least several hours revising the story, at a minimum. A revision that simply changes a few words here and there is probably not a sufficient response to your workshop experience. Make your story the best it can be, a work you can be truly proud of.

Good luck!

Please note that the reflection essay does not need to be a tremendously ambitious piece of writing; it's primarily a way for me to see what you were intending when you first wrote your story, what you got out of the workshop experience, and how that drove the revision of your story. Think of it as something like the edit log on Wikipedia; you're explaining what changes you made and why you made them. As I mentioned above, some of that might be about the changes you *didn't* make—the places where someone suggested something and you went a different way instead. In short: tell me about your story, in both its original form and in its revision. What was your reaction to the workshop? What did you decide to change? How do you feel about the story now?

When your work feels finished—or at least as finished as it is going to get!—upload the full portfolio to the designated folder on Dropbox.

And that's it! You're done with the course.