



## Syllabus

ENG 120-FA116: Introduction to Creative Writing  
 Time & Place: Wednesdays, 9-11:55 am, L112  
 Prerequisites: Successful completion of ENG 111  
 Instructor: Lauren Smith  
 Office: S003  
 Instructor Telephone: 989-686-9496  
 Division Telephone: 989-686-9159  
 E-mail: [laurensmith3@delta.edu](mailto:laurensmith3@delta.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30 pm  
 Tuesdays 10:30-11:30 am  
 Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 pm  
 Thursdays 6:00-7:00 pm  
 \*\*\* And by appointment. Please ask! \*\*\*

Welcome to English 120, a course that will help you to develop your creative voice. I'm honored to have this chance to work with you.

Some aspects of writing—and all kinds of creative expression—will always remain a mystery. Its spark is impossible for mere mortals to catch. But what are we to do then, if we want to improve our writing? Are we asking to do what can't be done?

Absolutely not. While we all have natural gifts, we also have practicable skills, and great writing usually has a number of recognizable traits: image, voice, story, setting, and character. Along with celebrating the wonder of writing, the purpose of this class is to introduce you to the hallmarks of strong creative craft.

I hope this class will be enjoyable, challenging, and inspiring, and I promise to do everything I can to make it so. I look forward to getting to know you!

### *Required Materials and Tools*

1. A notebook, preferably one with a cool cover (see *Writing Down the Bones*).
2. Consistent access to a printer and/or photocopier. Three times during the semester, you will be supplying the class and me with copies of your work.

3. A Delta e-mail account.
4. Familiarity with Delta's eLearning platform.
5. Pens and/or pencils with which you especially like to write.
6. A spirit of collegiality.
7. *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg (available at the Delta bookstore and for purchase online).
8. A sincere belief in your ability to grow as a writer.
9. At least two places to save your written work (PC, flash drive, web-based e-mail, etc.).
10. A sense of humor.

Check your Delta e-mail and eLearning twice a week. Should you have any trouble using eLearning or your e-mail, contact the e-learning department: [elearning@delta.edu](mailto:elearning@delta.edu), <https://elearning.delta.edu/>, 989-686-9088. They're very helpful.

### *Tentative Schedule*

Depending on how things go, I may make changes to our schedule. You will know about any changes ahead of time.

Date	Topics/Activities	Deadlines
8/31	Introductions	
9/7	<i>Writing Down the Bones</i>	
9/14	<i>Writing Down the Bones</i> and Elements of Craft: Image	
9/21	Elements of Craft: Voice	
9/28	Poetry	Workshop
10/5	Poetry	Workshop
10/12	Poetry/Fiction	Workshop
10/19	Elements of Craft: Setting and Story	Reading Critique #1 due
10/26	Fiction	-Workshop -Exercise Notebook Collected
11/2	Fiction	Workshop
11/9	Fiction/Nonfiction	Workshop
11/16	Elements of Craft: Character	
11/23	No F2F Class: Thanksgiving Holiday	
11/30	Nonfiction	Workshop Reading Critique #2 due
12/7	Nonfiction	Workshop
12/14	Nonfiction/Closing Thoughts	Workshop Exercise Notebook Collected

12/16 (F)	Reflection and Revised Piece due
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### *Assessment*

Original Pieces (3)	30%
Exercise Notebook	25%
Participation	15%
Revised Piece	15%
Reading Critiques (2)	10%
Reflection	5%

### *The Creative Writing Workshop and Original Pieces*

During many class meetings, we will hold "writing workshops." If you haven't participated in a workshop before, here's how it works:

First, a writer shares with a group a piece of original writing. It may be a few poems, a short story, or some nonfiction. For longer pieces, it's best if the group can read and write comments on it in advance (we will talk in class about how to comment). Then, the group discusses the piece, naming its strengths and weaknesses and making recommendations for what to do next. During the discussion, the writer stays silent, and the group speaks about him or her in the third person. This can be a strange experience at first, but it helps to keep the workshop productive. Participants tend to be freer with their feedback, and writers more able to listen with an open mind. Finally, the group hands back to the writer their copies of the piece, and the writer takes the workshop into account when he or she revises.

In this course, you will write original material in three genres, and the class will workshop your writing three times. You will know well in advance when your workshop day is. For poetry, you can bring copies of your poems the day of your workshop. There is a copier in the LLIC for students. For all pieces, you should make 20 copies.

For fiction and nonfiction, it's a little more complicated. You need to distribute in class copies of your work the week before your workshop. **If you do not make this deadline, it will be your responsibility to get copies to the class and to me in a reasonable amount of time.** If you don't get your material to the class in time for your workshop, you will not be able to earn points for that original piece. Each is worth 10% of your grade.

Lengths of work will vary. You will write 3-5 poems and 3-10 pages of prose for fiction and nonfiction (typed in Times font, double-spaced with regular margins). While a prose draft

needn't have an ending (although if it does, great!!), the reader should feel as though some kind of story is underway.

You will not receive a grade on original pieces; the idea of grading creativity is ridiculous! At this stage in your writing career, it's about effort. For each original piece, you can earn a check, a check-minus, or a zero. A check is for completing the assignment in full, a check-minus is for completing it partially, and a zero is for incompleteness. If you are absent the day of your scheduled workshop, the maximum you can receive for that piece is a check-minus. We will try to squeeze you in the following week, but that may not be possible.

On any workshop day, I may collect your copy of your peers' work so that I see evidence of your marginal comments.

### *Exercise Notebook*

In some ways, writing is like physical exercise; the more you do, the stronger you get. And it's wonderful to discover that not everything you write has to go somewhere or lead to something. Sometimes we write just for practice or to generate ideas. Each week, I will give you a creative writing exercise to complete in your notebook. Close to the middle of the semester, and again at the end, I will collect your notebook to make sure you are keeping up with them. I will probably ask you in class how the week's exercise went, and if we have time, we might listen to a few aloud in class.

### *The Revised Piece*

You will revise one workshoped piece (a series of poems, a story, an essay) and hand it in to me at the end of the semester. Which piece you revise will be up to you. I will ask, however, that we have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your selection and the class as a whole.

The goal is to make this piece as finished and as perfect as you can. Again, you will not be graded on art, but on work. You should hand in a rough draft along with your polished draft.

### *Participation*

Perhaps more than others, creative writing classes need strong participation from everyone. Imagine how awkward you will feel, for example, if we are workshoping your piece, and no one has anything to say! In order to get the most out of this class, we must build a supportive, active community of writers. In our conversations, let's aim for honesty, tact, civility, and fun.

If you ever have questions about your class participation, let me know.

### *Reading Critiques*

Each week, we will be reading the published work of professional writers; we can learn a great deal by studying models. You will write 2 two-page critiques of assigned readings. A solid critique doesn't just respond—it identifies. What does the work do well? How does it seem to be lacking? In your critiques, consider some elements of strong writing: image, voice, character, setting, and story. You will receive more instructions as the due dates approach.

### *Written Reflection*

At the end of the semester, you will write a brief reflective essay. You can write about any aspect of your experience in the class: your progress, your process, the workshops, the readings, etc. The goal of this reflection is to figure something out on paper. A successful reflection will be thorough, candid, and clear.

### *Class Matters*

#### **Contacting Me**

I am on campus Monday through Thursday, and I have office hours each day. You can stop by my office hours or make an appointment. I check my e-mail and voicemail at least once a day, and I will respond to any message within two days. You can also befriend me on **Facebook** (search under my Delta e-mail address). If you do, feel free to use any privacy settings that make you comfortable. Our use of Facebook won't be "social"—we will not be poking each other or playing Bejeweled Blitz. Instead, you can post class-related questions on my Wall, and I will respond there. I may occasionally post class announcements there, but only after I've e-mailed them and/or posted them on e-Learning. In other words, Facebook will offer you one more way to get a hold of me.

#### **A Room for Elephants: Our Class & Diversity**

Delta College values diversity. We welcome and appreciate differences in identity, expertise, experiences, ideas, and opinions. In this class, we will use the diversity among us to advance our learning and to empower each other.

We walk around in bodies labeled male and female. We fill out forms that ask us to identify our race(s). Daily, we confront the reality of money and what it can do

to/for us. These issues crop up all the time, and ignoring them keeps us from growing. They're personal, though, and sometimes we're uncomfortable talking about them. Keeping quiet about them makes them worse. It makes them "elephants in the room."

In this class, I would like to make room for these elephants. A college is a place for dialogue between people, so it is both good and appropriate for us to talk about the things that matter the most to us. I encourage you to approach these elephants with empathy and respect.

### **Absences**

Life happens, and you must make choices. As a result, you are entitled to **two absences**. I do not judge your choice to miss class and therefore do not separate the reasons you might miss. "Excused absences" don't exist in most college classes. You make your own decision for missing class and accept the consequences, which might mean missing points, having to get assignments from peers, making up missed time on your own, etc.

The English Division has adopted a shared policy for **Instructor-Initiated Drop for Lack of Attendance**: "Your English Division instructor will drop you from this course if you miss, for any reason, in excess of 2/15 of your classes for this course. For this particular course this semester that means in excess of two class periods." **This means that upon your third absence, I may drop you from the course.**

I encourage you to use your two absences wisely. Consider the following: one day, you wake up with the flu. You feel terrible, and you know you can't make it to class. You decide to use one of your absences. On another day, you don't feel as "up" for class as you normally do—you had a late night, there's some personal or family drama, etc. You decide to use your remaining absence. Then, later in the term, your car breaks down, or you have to go to a funeral. Understandably, you don't come to class on that day, but you have no absences left! All of a sudden, your enrollment in class is in jeopardy! Looking back, it would have been better to suck it up on the middle day and come to class.

It is polite, though not necessary, to inform me of absences. **I will always attempt to work with you on attendance, providing you are willing to communicate with me.** Please visit me during office hours or schedule a time to meet when we can have a conversation about your needs and college expectations. While I love e-mail, this is often a talk best had in person.

## **Shadow Attendance**

As you probably know, it's possible to attend a class—or any important event—physically but not mentally. The body is present while the mind is elsewhere. This kind of "shadow attendance" is bad for learning. **To prevent this situation, you may not nap, use your smartphone, cellphone, or electronic tablet in class.** If I notice you are not "with it" or your attention is directed at something other than what we're doing, I may deduct points from your participation grade. I may also ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes.

Late arrivals and early departures are also harmful for learning. If you are more than fifteen minutes late for class, I may mark you absent. If you leave class fifteen minutes early, I may mark you absent. If you absolutely must arrive late or leave early, please speak with me ahead of time. Depending on the situation, you still may lose credit for the day's attendance.

**If you miss class and e-mail me asking what we did while you were absent, I may not respond. I will also be unlikely to talk with you at the beginning of next class about what you missed.** When I enter our room, I am focused on getting us going, and that's where my attention needs to stay. Moreover, I may not have with me any handouts I gave out last time, and asking me for them at the beginning of class is an easy way to irk me! Most of what I hand out I put on eLearning. If you happen not to see a handout you're looking for on eLearning, feel free to ask me about it after class or during a break.

## **Conduct**

Should anyone in class behave in a way that lessens the learning of others, I may apply Delta's "Disruptive Student" policy. Disruptive behavior might include things like uncooperativeness; purposeful distraction (making loud noises, giving dirty looks, etc.); eating; cell phones repeatedly un-silenced; physical or verbal aggression; or offensive language. The consequences for disruptive behavior can be temporary or permanent removal from the class.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism, or cheating, is wrong and a serious academic offense. If you plagiarize, you may fail this class or be expelled from Delta. We'll spend time in class discussing what plagiarism is and developing strategies for avoiding it. You can read more about the College's policies on this subject: [www.delta.edu/english/integrityofacademicwork.aspx](http://www.delta.edu/english/integrityofacademicwork.aspx).

## Weather Cancellations

If the weather is poor, visit the Delta website, listen to Delta's radio station (90.1 fm), or check local TV channels to learn if the College is closed. You can also call 1-989-686-9179 or 1-800-686-9179. I may also decide on my own to cancel our class—if I do, I will e-mail you, post a notice to our website, and leave word with the English Division.

## Disabilities

If you have a documented disability which affects your academic performance, and need an academic accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services in D102. The telephone number is 686-9330. Mike Cooper, Disability Services Director, D-WING, D102, 989-686-9322.

*And now, some inspiration...*

*"I can write better than I think. I like to write not to [spurt] thoughts but to transfigure them through labor and care and the pressure of putting them down on paper where they can't be taken back. I am not a particularly smart or imaginative man, but I find that after much suffering and several drafts I'm sometimes capable of producing smart and imaginative prose. Writing [...] not only brings out the best in me—it brings out **stuff I never would have dreamed was there.**" ~David Foster Wallace*

*"In a sense, we are all crashing to our death from the top story of our birth to the flat stones of the churchyard and wondering with an immortal Alice in Wonderland at the patterns of the passing wall. This capacity to wonder at trifles—no matter the imminent peril—**these asides of the spirit**, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness" --Vladimir Nabokov*

<p>"Syllabus" is the Latin word for list. I reserve the right to edit this "list" at any time, to make changes to the course that may help you to learn better.</p>
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