

ENG 284, Cecil

Course: ENG 384 Craft of Prose — Autumn 2019

Course title: Concision and fragment in prose: Cutting it short to make it work

Instructor: Daniel J. Cecil

Class Time: MW 1:30 – 2:50 pm

Class Location: RAI 109

Office Location: Padelford 405A

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 4:00-5:00 pm

Email: cecild@uw.edu

Course Description:

How does a writer still create interesting, moving, and *prescient* work that fits into the attention span of the digital age? How do we capture the *modern* experience using an art form that seems, at this juncture, a bit archaic?

We will be looking at how the ultra short short story, concision of language, and the use of fragment in prose can be used to create prescient, lively work that stick in a way longer stories fail to do, and in ways other genres cannot attempt. This is a subject I'm exploring in my own artistic practice and one I look forward to diving into with you. Some of the things we will cover in the next ten weeks will include:

- What are some “forms” of the short-short story (flash, “micro”, the parabolic, prose poem, collage, etc.)
- How does word choice propel simple sentences into the stratosphere, creating poetry in prose (don't tell the poets)
- How fragments and the use of collage can be used to create meaning from seemingly disparate parts
- How contemporary language of the Internet, and its frenetic (almost schizophrenic) voice, can be captured in the short story (and why that's necessary)
- Revision, revision, revision ...

What will be expected of you:

This course will be heavy on reading and the practical. We will discuss exemplary work sometimes line-by-line, so be prepared to have a close reading under your belt before coming to class. You will also write your own experiments in concision and fragmented story and will be workshopped.

A Word (or 360+) on Our Workshop Style:

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the concept of workshop or have at least seen a workshop on television, or in the movies. If you've seen Lena Dunham on *Girls* toil away at the Iowa Writers Workshop, you know what's up.

Our workshop, however, will run will be run a bit different.

How so? We will employ a variation of Liz Lerman's *The Critical Response Process*. I've posted two short readings that explain what this means to Canvas, but here is a short synopsis:

- All members of the class will be required to read the submitted work for that week (I will break you into small groups to keep your reading focused on one or two stories)
- Those responding to the reading will be required to formulate a statement of meaning they believe the text is trying to communicate to the reader
- Those responding to the reading will also be required to write down three questions they would like to ask the writer. These are not yes/no questions, nor do they betray any opinion regarding the piece; these questions will act as neutral jumping off points for discussion. For example: "What kind of texture were you going for when making this cake?" instead of, "Why is this cake so dry?"

This workshop style is interesting because it asks the reader to focus on the "encoding" of the story rather than the "decoding." I'll discuss these concepts in class, but in short, I'm asking the reader to consider: What kind of *infrastructure* is the writer working within/for? Specifically, within what unique *articulation* is the writer working? Chicano magic realism? Black afro-futurism? White guy realism? 4th Wave Feminist Bey Fan Fiction?

I believe this workshop technique, if done correctly, allows the writer to "defend" their work on a philosophical/ideological/prose level, while at the same time asking them to deeply question their work. At this early stage of your writing career, ideology can be potentially poisonous (depending on your sensitivity to it) and can influence your work before you're able to make a stand behind your prose style and message. Removing as much opinion from the room as possible allows your work to find stable footing.

CANVAS

We will use Canvas for all assignment submissions. If you have not used Canvas before, and have any problems submitting, please email me your questions (my email is at the top of the syllabus). I will explain in class how workshop assignments are handled, since it is a bit different from normal Canvas assignments.

Word of Caution (about writing stories about classmates, assignments, or teacher)

Don't do it. Don't write stories about your fellow classmates. Don't write them about the assignments. And please don't write them about me. That sucks. Sucks sucks sucks. Feelings often get hurt. Certainly, everything is ripe for satire, but out of respect for your fellows and to ensure a healthy learning environment, I ask that you refrain from doing any such thing. Stories that appear to lampoon anyone in the classroom or the assignment at hand will receive a failing grade for that assignment, and you may be asked to leave. Continuing these antics will earn you a failing grade in the course.

Required materials

- Pen, notebook, course readings (printed is best)
- \$\$\$ for printing when necessary

Reading List

All readings are available on Canvas as Word Docs and PDFs. It is your responsibility to download and print copies of the stories for your personal use. I highly recommend bringing a copy of the text, with your notes, to class for use during discussion.

Grading

Participation 15%

- Daily in-class writing assignments
- Engaged discussion of reading
- Attendance (Each class missed is 2 points off your final grade)

Short Experiments 25%

- Weekly 1-3 page writing assignments
- Typed, double-space, 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Four required, one optional

Portfolio 30%

- A selection of three edited short stories
- Typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- To be workshopped by a jury of your peers

Writing Conference 5% (TBD)

- Meeting with me at some point in the quarter
- Discuss your manuscript, revisions, and vision for the piece

Workshop 25%

- Lead discussion on one of your classmate's manuscripts
- Present your manuscript to the workshop
- Attendance (You will lose 10 points for missing a workshop, unless excused)

GRADING SCALE

Grading creative writing is a difficult thing. How to do so effectively is endlessly debated in the academic community because, well, assessing creative writing can be subjective as hell. I've included a grading rubric on Canvas that outlines how your writing will be assessed in class. It's a generally accepted method and I've found that 99.99% of my students understand and appreciate the clarity the rubric provides.

Here's a breakdown of how the overall grade for the class is determined:

0.0-2.9: a student who does not finish all the work; varies depending on lack of effort

3.0: a student who does all the work adequately, but whose stories lack originality.
Alternatively: a student whose stories make me cry or laugh out loud, but who is obviously not putting in their full effort in other areas of the class.

3.3: a dogged and determined student who completes all the work with enthusiasm and visible effort, but whose stories lack originality, feeling, a kernel of creative energy.

3.5: a student who participates consistently and whose writing has a suggestion of something profound, buried beneath words that must still be chipped away.

3.6-4.0: an enthusiastic and insightful student who not only expresses thoughtful, incisive opinions and critiques but also shows creative potential in their own work and the potential to flourish in the creative writing track.

LATE WORK

I do not provide feedback for any manuscripts turned in late. No exceptions. Late assignments will also receive a one-point deduction from the final grade. Clemency may be granted if I am contacted 12 hours before the due date. Requests made after this time will not be considered.

ELECTRONICS

Use of computers in class is allowed, if you stay on task. Yes, I can see you giggling at funny videos. Yes, I know when you're chatting to a friend. Mobile phone use is strictly prohibited, and wearing headphones during class will result in points deducted from your final grade.

TARDINESS

I arrive to the classroom on time—I expect the same of you. Arriving late is disrespectful to your classmates, especially during workshop. I will allow a 5-minute buffer, but after that, each 5-minute delay counts as a point deducted from your participation. I keep good records.

CLASS CANCELLATION POLICY

In the *highly* unlikely event that I would ever have to cancel a class, I would let you know by 8:00 am the day of class. However, if I am ill or have an emergency, it is most likely that you would simply have a substitute that day. If for some reason (also *highly* unlikely) that I am not present when class begins, please wait for twenty minutes before leaving.

But for real, I take lots of vitamins, so don't expect any sick days.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We will be using Canvas to submit all our papers unless I specify otherwise for an assignment.

All assignments (unless otherwise noted) should be typed per MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines. This includes (but is not limited to):

- 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Standard Margins

- Double-spaced
- Page Numbers w/ Last Name

Accommodations

If you need accommodation of any sort, please let me know so that I can work with the UW Disability Resources for Students Office (DRS) to provide what you require. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials. More information about accommodation can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/students/drs/>.

Religious Accommodations

“Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy (<https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form (<https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>).”

ENG 284 Course Calendar

WEEK 1	Getting to know you. Getting to know all about you.	HOMEWORK
September 25	<p>First day of instruction</p> <p>Discussion of syllabus. Meet and greet.</p>	<p>Read:</p> <p>Excerpt from Life is Shorter by David Shields and Elizabeth Cooperman</p> <p>John Redding Goes to Sea by Zora Neale Hurston</p> <p>Date Book by Genevieve Hudson</p>
WEEK 2	Getting Characters Moving and Creating Moving Characters — Briefly	
September 30	Discussion:	The Transcendent Power of Triangular

	<p>Intro to <i>Life is Short, John Redding, Date Book</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p>Fiction by Chigozie Obioma</p> <p>20/20 by Linda Brewer</p> <p>Wallet by Allen Woodman</p>
<p>October 2</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>The Transcendent Power, 20/20, and Wallet</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p>The Elements of Literary Style by John Keene</p> <p>Elevator Pitches by Jonathan Lethem</p> <p>The Orphan Lamb by Amy Hempel</p> <p>Exercise #1 due Friday October 4 by 11:59 p.m.</p>
<p>WEEK 3</p>	<p>Impressionistic</p>	
<p>October 7</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>The Elements of Literary Style, Elevator Pitches, The Orphan Lamb</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p>Mode of Literary Impressionism by Richard M Berrong</p> <p>The Old Dictionary by Lydia Davis</p> <p>Girl by Jamaica Kincaid</p>
<p>October 9</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>Modes of Literary Impressionism, The Old Dictionary, Girl</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p><i>Instructions May Vary: The Empathetic Appeal of the Parable</i> excerpt by Daniel J. Cecil</p> <p>Before The Law by Franz Kafka</p>

		Exercise #2 due Friday October 11 by 11:59 p.m.
WEEK 4	How do you say ... parable?	
October 14	Discussion: <i>Instruction May Vary, Before The Law</i> In class exercises.	<u>Selection from 99 Stories of God</u> by Joy Williams <u>The Voice Immitator</u> by Thomas Berhard
October 16	Discussion: <i>Selection from 99 Stories of God, The Voice Imitator</i> In class exercises.	<u>Received Rituals Involving the Microwave</u> by Jace Brittain <i>Skin Deep</i> by Walter Abish <u>On the Many Ways and Reasons to Mix Poetry and Prose</u> by Lucy Ives Exercise #3 due Friday October 18 by 11:59 p.m.
WEEK 5	<u>And now for something completely different.</u>	
October 21	Discussion: <i>Received Rituals, Skin Deep, On the Many Ways</i> In class exercises.	<u>Dream Lives of Debris</u> excerpt by Lance Olsen <u>Not Every Sentence Should be Great But Every Sentence Must be Good</u> by Cynthia Newberry Martin

<p>October 23</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>Dream Lives of Debris, Not Every Sentence</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p><i>Eight Tiny Stories, Translated from the Emoji</i> by James Hannaham and John W. Bateman</p> <p><i>Should There be an Emoticon for Everything?</i> By Sophie Haigney</p> <p>Exercise #4 due Friday October 25 by 11:59 p.m.</p>
<p>WEEK 6</p>	<p>Writing like the Internet</p>	
<p>October 28</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>Eight Tiny Stories, Should There Be an Emoticon</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p><i>The Communal Mind</i> by Patricia Lockwood</p> <p><i>The Rise of the Fragmented Novel</i> by Ted Gioia</p> <p><i>Excerpts from Bluets</i> by Maggie Nelson</p>
<p>October 30</p>	<p>Discussion: <i>The Communal Mind, The Rise of the Fragmented Novel, Excerpts from Bluets</i></p> <p>In class exercises.</p>	<p>No readings. Begin preparing your manuscript.</p>
<p>WEEK 7</p>	<p>GET WRITING</p>	
<p>November 4</p>	<p>No class</p>	<p>Prep your manuscript</p>
<p>November 6</p>	<p>No class</p>	<p>Read your classmate's manuscript.</p>

WEEK 8	WORKSHOP	
November 11	Two workshops	Read your classmate's manuscript Read craft essay TBD.
November 13	Two workshops	Read your classmate's manuscript Read craft essay TBD.
WEEK 9	WORKSHOP	
November 18	Two workshops	Read your classmate's manuscript Read craft essay TBD.
November 20	Two workshops	Read your classmate's manuscript Read craft essay TBD.
WEEK 10	WORKSHOP	
November 25	Two workshops	Read craft essay TBD.
November 27	No class for Thanksgiving travel	
WEEK 11	Bringing it all together	
December 2	Revision class.	
December 4	Last class. Donuts. Unwind.	

Final portfolio manuscripts due: December 6, 2019 at 11:59 p.m.