

# Creative Writing

## ENGL 71

Spring 2026 Section 80 Fully Online 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/15/2026

### Contact Information

Instructor(s):	Johnny Damm
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Email:	john.damm@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	M/W 9:15-10:15 (In-Person and Zoom by appt.)
Class Days/Time:	Online/ Asynchronous
Classroom:	Online

### Course Information

#### Section-Specific Course Description

Developing as a writer requires a commitment to two inseparable activities: reading and writing. We read in order to discover what we most value in writing and to get a glimpse of the full range of possibilities in the current literary scene.

So, these will be the two activities of this class. You will read and discuss contemporary writers of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction—analyzing the writers' craft and how it might apply to your own work. In parallel, you will be practicing and experimenting with writing—completing regular writing exercises in most classes. Finally, you will produce your own polished work of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction and, in workshop, critique the work of your peers.

## Course Format

This is an **asynchronous online course** with two Canvas course modules required to be completed each week. As such, the course requires a computer, access to Canvas, and reliable internet connectivity.

### Canvas

All course materials such as syllabus, readings, handouts, notes, and assignment instructions can be found on the [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](http://sjsu.instructure.com) at <http://sjsu.instructure.com>. Most importantly, we will be having discussions and critiquing each other's work through Canvas. Please set your Canvas notifications so that you receive announcements, which will be sent out regularly. You are responsible for monitoring Canvas throughout the semester. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU on [Spartan App Portal](http://one.sjsu.edu) <http://one.sjsu.edu> (or other communication system as indicated by the instructor) to learn of any updates. For help using Canvas, see the [Canvas Student Resources page](http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student_resources) ([http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student\\_resources](http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student_resources)).

## Course Description and Requisites

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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

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You need to complete the online modules in the allotted times, participate in all online class activities, and be courteous to your peers and to your teacher.

### Generative AI Policy

THE USE OF AI FOR ANY STAGE OF CLASSWORK IS 100% PROHIBITED.

This course is designed to train students in creative writing. Feeling stuck at times—struggling to find the right words, being unsure about structure, etc.—is an essential part of the writing process. As with any training, you have to do the work yourself in order to improve. For this reason, any use of Generative-AI is an impediment to the goals of being a better writer and a creative thinker.

### Academic Dishonesty

All students are responsible for knowing and observing University policies regarding academic dishonesty. See University policy: "Academic Integrity".

**Note:** All writing assignment must be created exclusively for this class. Submitting work that you completed for another class (whether college or high school) is a form of plagiarism and is required to be reported as such.

## Program Information

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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.

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#### Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

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

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

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

## Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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### 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

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You aren't required to buy any books, but you will be assigned reading for almost every module. All readings are PDFs available through Canvas and linked through your syllabus.

### Readings

All readings are PDFs available through Canvas and linked through your syllabus. Included authors:

Poetry: Danez Smith, Hanif Abdurraqib, Morgan Parker, W. Todd Kaneko, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Colette Arrand, Fatimah Asghar, Christopher Soto, Jenny Zhang, Timothy Yu, CAConrad, Raquel Salas Rivera, Layli Long Soldier, Ashraf Fayadh, Jayy Dodd, Terrance Hayes, Mónica de la Torre, Claudia Rankine, Jos Charles, Jordan Abel, Marilyn Chin, Vanessa Angélica Villarreal, Jay Besamer, Nikki Wallschlaeger, Jennifer Tamayo, Bhanu Kapil, Simone White, Eileen Myles

Fiction: Lydia Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, Ursula K. Le Guin, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, Clarice Lispector, Tommy Orange, Casey Plett, Sandra Cisneros, Jaime Cortez, Ling Ma, Amparo Dávila, Sabrina Helen Li

Creative Nonfiction: Jamaica Kincaid, Joe Brainard, Joseph Han, Kiese Laymon, Carmen Maria Machado, Hanif Abdurraqib, Valeria Luiselli, Shamala Gallagher, Julia Madsen, Brandon Shimoda

## Course Requirements and Assignments

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Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

### Writing Assignments

*Poems:* Three poems. Two will be workshopped, and an additional third will be included in your portfolio.

*Short Story:* One piece of short fiction

*Essay:* One piece of creative nonfiction.

Your pieces are due to Canvas three times during the course of the semester. Late submissions will not be workshopped.

*Creative Wildcard:* One poem/poem sequence, short story, literary essay, or hybrid form of your choice. Throughout the semester, you will regularly complete writing exercises in class—encouraging you to try new forms, techniques, etc. Your creative wildcard—which will be included in your final portfolio but not workshopped—should be drawn from these exercises or inspired by our outside reading. This piece should be free of errors but doesn't need to be as polished or revised as the other work: use this submission to demonstrate your openness to experimentation and (previously) unfamiliar modes of writing.

## Workshop Requirements

For each day of workshop, you must fully annotate and critique in Canvas the work of your peers assigned to you. You are required to both mark on the text (suggestions, errors) and to write a developed critique as a comment in Canvas. This critique should be one to two *full* paragraphs, a minimum of 100 words. You will be typically be critiquing 6 works of your peers on workshop weeks, so you must be careful to budget enough time to do them properly. Additionally, you are required to be active in class discussion, regularly sharing your critiques with the class as a whole. No late critiques will be accepted.

## Reading Assignments

Alongside reading and critiquing the work of your peers, you will be reading the work of outside writers, with a substantial number of pages assigned every week. These readings will provide the material for our discussions of craft and form; they provide the framework for the discussion of *your* work. So, completing all the assigned reading is absolutely crucial.

## Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, you will turn in a portfolio that consists of edited/ final versions of your creative work; a collection previous drafts will also be turned in separately. It is crucial that all pieces be substantially revised from their earlier, workshopped drafts. The quality of your revisions will be a significant factor in your portfolio grade.

## Assignment Word Count and Learning Goals

Assignment	Word Count	GELO
3 Poems (two drafts each)	Varies	4,5,7,8,11
1 Short Story (two drafts)	1,500-2,000	4,5,7,8,11
1 Literary Essay (two drafts)	1,500-2,000	4,5,7,8,11
1 Creative Wildcard	Varies	4,5,7,8,11

Workshop Critiques	100-200 each	3, 4, 5, 8, 9
Revised Portfolio of Work	Varies	4,5,7,8,11

## Final Examination or Evaluation

As the culminating activity for this course, your final portfolio will be due during our assigned final exam period.

## ✓ Grading Information

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### Grade Weights

Final portfolio grade: 60%

Poems: 17%

Story: 17%

Literary Essay: 17%

Creative Wildcard 9%

Participation (Module Completion): 25%

Participation (Workshop Critiques): 15%

Due to the workshop format, neither your creative pieces nor your workshop critiques can be submitted late. Late critiques will not be accepted, and creative pieces submitted late to Canvas will not be workshopped. The pieces you submit to workshop will not receive a grade; they will only be graded as part of your revised final portfolio.

If you do not turn in a piece to workshop, but then submit that piece to your portfolio, your non-workshopped pieces will receive an automatic 50% deduction from that portion of your final portfolio grade.

### About Grades

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. Courses graded according to the

A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC shall replace D or F. In such cases, NC shall also substitute for W (or Withdrawal) because neither grade (NC or W) affects students' GPA.

A (92-100); A- (90-91); B+ (88-89); B (82-87); B- (80-81); C+ (78-79); C (70-77); C- (70-71); D+ (68-69); D (62-67); D- (60-61); F (<60)

## University Policies

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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

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*This schedule is subject to change with fair notice.*

	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
	Jan 26-27	Course Introduction; Creative Introductions
	Jan 28-30	<p>Poetry Day 1: (Un)Defining Poetry</p> <p>Reading: Poetry Reading 1 (Danez Smith, Hanif Abdurraqib, Morgan Parker, W. Todd Kaneko, Aimee Nezhukumatahil, Colette Arrand)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Poetry &amp; Pop Culture/ Poetry &amp; Now</p>
	Feb 2-3	<p>Poetry Day 2: "Tell It Slant"</p> <p>Reading: Poetry Reading 2 (Fatimah Asghar, Christopher Soto, Jenny Zhang, Timothy Yu, CAConrad, Raquel Salas Rivera, Layli Long Soldier, Ashraf Fayadh, Jayy Dodd)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Compression</p>

	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
	Feb 4-6	<p>Poetry Day 3: Form &amp; Formlessness</p> <p>Reading: Poetry Reading 3 (Terrance Hayes, Fatimah Asghar, Mónica de la Torre, Layli Long Soldier, Claudia Rankine, Jos Charles, Jordan Abel)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Power of Fragment, Mismatched Parts</p>
	Feb 9-10	<p>Poetry Day 4: Writing the Self</p> <p>Reading: Poetry Reading 4 (Marilyn Chin, Vanessa Angélica Villarreal, Jay Besamer, Nikki Wallschlaeger, Jennifer Tamayo, Bhanu Kapil, Simone White, Eileen Myles)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Image and Circling</p>
	Feb 11-13	Workshop: Poetry Group 1 & 2
	Feb 16-17	Workshop: Poetry Group 3 & 4 / Endings
	Feb 18-20	<p>Peer Review Break: Questions, Etc.</p> <p>No Reading</p> <p>Craft Talk: Finding Your Reader/ Learning to be Your Editor</p>
	Feb 23-24	Workshop: Poetry Group 5 & 6 / Line Breaks
	Feb 25-27	Workshop: Poetry Group 7 & 8 / Writing Questions
	Mar 2-3	<p>Fiction Day 1: (Un)defining Fiction</p> <p>Reading: Fiction Reading 1 (Lydia Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, Ursula K. Le Guin)</p> <p>Craft Talk: The Question of Conflict</p>

	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
	Mar 4-6	<p>Fiction Day 2: Tell It Slant &amp; Character</p> <p>Reading: Fiction Reading 2 (Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, Jaime Cortez)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Show <i>and</i> Tell</p>
	Mar 9-10	<p>Fiction Day 3: Character, Character, Character</p> <p>Reading: Fiction Reading 3 (Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, Clarice Lispector, Tommy Orange)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Conflicting Traits &amp; the Power of Fragment</p>
	Mar 11-13	<p>Fiction Day 4: Dialogue, POV, &amp; Form</p> <p>Reading: Fiction Reading 4 (Casey Plett, Sandra Cisneros, Ling Ma)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Dialogue, Revisiting the Power of Fragment &amp; the Question of Conflict</p>
	Mar 16-17	Workshop: Fiction Group 7 & 8
	Mar 18-20	Workshop: Fiction Group 5 & 6 / Update Survey
	Mar 23-24	<p>Peer Review Break: Writing from the Unconscious &amp; Weirdness in Fiction</p> <p>Reading: Fiction Reading 5 (Amparo Dávila, Sabrina Helen Li)</p> <p>Craft Talk: Techniques Fiction Shares with Poetry</p>
	Mar 25-27	Workshop: Fiction Group 3 & 4 / Endings
	Apr 6-7	Workshop: Fiction Group 1 & 2

	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
	Apr 8-10	CNF Day 1: (Un)defining Creative Nonfiction & Writing the Real  Reading: CNF Reading 1 (Jamaica Kincaid, Joe Brainard, Joseph Han)  Craft Talk: Fiction Techniques and 'True Stories'
	Apr 13-14	CNF Day 2: Memoir  Reading: CNF Reading 2 (Kiese Laymon, Carmen Maria Machado)  Craft Talk: Self as Character and The Power of Fragment
	Apr 15-17	CNF Day 3: Writing Your Obsessions  Reading: CNF Reading 3 (Hanif Abdurraqib, Valeria Luiselli)  Craft Talk: Observation, Research, & Reportage
	Apr 20-21	CNF Day 4: Finding Poetry in the Real  Reading: CNF Reading 4 (Shamala Gallagher, Julia Madsen, Brandon Shimoda)
	Apr 22-24	Workshop: CNF Group 3 & 4 / Thinking About Revision
	Apr 27-28	Workshop: CNF Group 5 & 6 / More on Revision
	Apr 29-May 1	Workshop: CNF Group 1 & 2 / Revision Tips from Famous Writers
	May 4-5	Workshop: CNF Group 7 & 8 / Revision, Revision, Revision
	May 6-8	Group Writing Exercises & Recording A Short Video
	May 11	Celebrating Your Work!
Final	May 14	PORTFOLIO DUE Thursday, May 14 by 9:45 pm

